



Williamson, Angharad (2015) *Individual insecurities: an examination of 'status anxiety' in relation to individualisation* [MRes.]

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*Individual Insecurities: An Examination of 'Status Anxiety' in Relation to Individualisation*

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BY

1002546

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PART REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF:

MRES SOCIOLOGY & RESEARCH METHODS

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

SEPTEMBER 2015



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Course Co-ordinator: [Dr. Matthew Waites](#)

Date of Submission: [Due 01/09/2015 – Submitted](#)

Word Count: [15,735](#)

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Firstly, I wish to thank the project's supervisor Dr. Matt Dawson, for all his support throughout this project. His advice and constant encouragement proved to be simply invaluable. As such the project would not have been the same without his dedication.

Finally, I wish to give thanks to the participants who took part in this research. In giving up their valuable time, these individuals helped to shape the project and make it what it has become today. I am also grateful for the trust they placed in me and the sheer enthusiasm with which they entered the project. I am hopeful therefore that they will enjoy the result of their hard work and our combined efforts, just as I have.

This project aims to assess the impact of a phenomena known as status anxiety (De Botton, 2005), which involves a consideration of ideals of success and the impact which these have on individuals within society. Since this is a somewhat poorly elaborated concept, it is argued that its application to the wider debate surround individualization theory is needed, so as to ground it in a more academic discussion. In doing so it is hoped that the emotional impact of status anxiety and living within an individualized second modernity can be assessed. In order to achieve this, the works of Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck were consulted, in addition to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu so as to allow for a discussion of inequality. Overall ten university students were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview technique, regarding their feelings towards success and the future. From these discussions it was clear that these individuals felt a need to plan and control their lives, whilst ultimately taking responsibility for their own failures and successes. However, the roles of gender and class were also found to be highly influential within this discussion. Overall, it can be seen that individualization and status anxiety can combine to form an effective analysis of the emotional impact caused by notions of meritocracy, responsibility for the self and the pressure of constructing one's own identity in a time of detraditionalization.

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When considering success and what it is to be successful, it is easy to become confronted by the question; what does this really mean? If you were to ask Google, as so many of us do when unsure about something, it would give you the following 'motivational' quotes from seemingly successful individuals<sup>1</sup>:

*"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." (George Bernard Shaw)*

*"Accept responsibility for your life. Know that it is you who will get you where you want to go, no one else." (Les Brown, motivational speaker and former Ohio politician)*

*"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door" (Milton Berle, American comedian and actor)*

Whilst there are perhaps many who would see these statements of how to achieve success as being accurate, I personally could not help but feel uneasy when reading them. Immediately noticeable is the sense of pressure; the onus on the individual to go out there and just get success, as if by putting in 100% of your effort, success is the only logical outcome. It seems then that there is no room for failure, and you alone are responsible for your own destiny. Certainly the notion that you, on your own, have the power to achieve your goals can be said to produce a sense of encouragement. However, the pressure which this could potentially place on individuals within society must surely also be considered. Is success and its image within society truly a motivational concept, or is it a source of misery and anxiety for many who do not perhaps 'fit in' with it? In short, what impact does this really have on us?

The answer can somewhat be found in De Botton's concept of status anxiety (2005). Status anxiety is defined by De Botton as being the "worry...that we are failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society and that we may

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations used here were taken from the following URL: <http://www.keepinspiring.me/famous-quotes-about-success/>



as a result be stripped of dignity and respect” (2005:3-4). This, he argues, creates an “inner drama” (De Botton, 2005:4) within the individual, who toils over their ability to “convince the world of [their] value” (De Botton, 2005:5) and in doing so avoid failure. In this sense, “anxiety is the handmaiden of contemporary ambition” (De Botton, 2005:95) as individuals strive for success, motivated by a fear of non-conformity and failure. In addition to this, De Botton argues that this feeling can be antagonised by many factors, such as “newspaper profiles of the prominent and the greater success of friends” (2005:4).

Whilst status anxiety certainly allows for the examination of the emotional impact of societal conceptions of success, it is perhaps somewhat simplistic; it frequently fails to discuss the cause of status anxiety in any great detail, stating that it simply stems from societal notions of success and “the feeling that we might be something other than what we are” (De Botton, 2005:46). Certainly it must be acknowledged that De Botton is by no means a sociologist or actively involved in any academic field, therefore perhaps explaining the poorly elaborated nature of his work. In this sense, it simply cannot fully examine the complexity of emotion potentially felt by the individual affected. Therefore, it is proposed that it be situated within a discussion of individualization, a field which examines the notions that the “self is [no longer] a passive entity” (Giddens, 1991:2). In this manner, status anxiety can be placed within a discussion of second modernity (Howard, 2007) and the processes of individualization associated with it, thereby creating a discussion concerning how it comes about and its true impact.

As will be demonstrated in the following literature review, these two concepts can shed light on each other in the most interesting ways, and individualization too can benefit from the use of status anxiety as a concept. Using material from three key individualization theorists: Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman, this study will examine the notion that “we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves” (Giddens, 1991:75), in the hopes of ascertaining the true nature and effects of status anxiety and individualization.

### *The Mysteries of Modernity: Globalization and Individualization*

Writers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck in particular have generated a great deal of insight into what has been deemed a “second modernity” (Howard, 2007:28). For these theorists, society has entered into a new phase, bypassing the “first modernity” (Howard, 2007:27), which was characterised by the role of traditional categories such as class in providing individuals with a clear identity or pathway in life (Beck, 1992). Instead, second modernity is increasingly influenced by elements such as the specialization of work and the breakdown of traditional social categories, leading to the availability of multiple lifestyles (Howard, 2007).

For Beck, this is represented in his analysis of society as the World Risk Society (1992). Giddens however terms this progression of modernity to be “late modernity” (1991: 3) or “high modernity” (1991:4), two terms which he uses interchangeably throughout his work *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991). For Bauman, this time represents the “era of liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2000:12), a time which is characterised by “fluid global powers” (2000:12) and the nature of identities as being “fragile [and] vulnerable” (2000:83). Therefore, these three authors each have their own version of second modernity which frequently share particular themes and assertions. For example, all of these theorists see the phenomena known as globalization to be integral to second modernity.

For these theorists, globalization refers to situations where “capital is increasingly global” (Bauman, 2000:29). In addition to this, the spread of “global consequences” (Beck, 1992:22) due to the linking of the job markets, financial markets and ecological risks ultimately results in a situation where “events at one pole of a distanced relation often produce divergent or even contrary occurrences at another” (Giddens, 1991:22). In addition, Giddens argues that social systems are “*disembedding*” (1990:17) and instead are becoming subject to “*reflexive ordering and reordering*” (1990:17). Therefore, a certain level of “flexibility” is demanded of the individual within society, so as to adapt to these changes (Bauman, 2001:24). This is a crucial element of the primary component of second modernity: Individualization.

### *Individualization: The Centre Piece of Second Modernity*

Within Sociology, individualization theory has become a “discursive field” (Howard, 2007:3). Characteristic of this view are notions of “self-regulation and improvement” (Howard, 2007:5), materialism and “choice and reflexivity in identity” (Dawson, 2012:307). In this manner, the primary focus of Beck, Giddens and Bauman is on identity and its construction in the second modernity. A reoccurring idea throughout these writers works is that identity has become “transformed” (Dawson, 2012:306) in the sense that individuals must now make “day-to-day decisions on how to live” (Giddens, 1991:14) which will ultimately manage their own identity construction. Therefore, one’s identity in this “post-traditional” (Giddens, 1991:2) modernity is created almost entirely through one’s “own doings and neglects” (Bauman, 2001:6). Within second modernity “certainties have been replaced by choice, fluidity and fragmentation” (Howard, 2007:28), allowing for the spread of individualization, thus affecting how involved individuals must become within the creation and management of their own identities.

This is primarily due to the gradual degradation of seemingly ‘traditional’ elements within society. As is stated by Bauman, this new phase in society’s existence has led to the “frailty of all boundaries” (2002:13) which has in turn created a “terror of boundlessness” within individuals (2001:44); individuals no longer have consistent roles or clearly marked identity pathways which they can adhere to. Far from allowing them to feel a sense of freedom or “emancipation” (Howard, 2007:8), individuals can instead fall prey to anxiety concerning their future. Indeed, as is stated by Bauman, “freedom...would come with a price tag...the price in question is insecurity” (2001:44). Giddens too states how this uncertainty over identity construction can result in significant “anxiety produced by the fear of transgression” (1991:64) when individuals are in this manner forced to engage with “a diversity of open possibilities” with little guidance (1991:73).

This is perhaps clearest of all within Beck’s work on risk society, as the primary focus of this analysis is on insecurity itself and the spread of uncertainty. For Beck, within the “global transformation of modernity” (2007:286), traditional categories such as class, gender and the family simply become “zombie categories”

(Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:203) which no longer serve a clear purpose and are used “for want of a better alternative” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 30). In this sense they “lose their lustre” (1992:88) and individuals have no predisposed pathway through which to construct themselves. Therefore, all three theorists conclude that the “self is [no longer] a passive entity” (Giddens, 1991:2).

For all of these writers, this change can be seen as predominantly articulated through the examination of life biographies which individuals create for themselves. This perspective on the three authors is used to great effect by Cosmo Howard in his edited work *Contesting Individualization* (2007). In his chapter entitled ‘Three Models of Individualized Biography’, Howard (2007) outlines the various perspectives held by each of the three writers in detail, creating three models of biography: Giddens and the “*Trajectorial Biography*” (Howard, 2007:30), Beck and the “*Experimental Biography*” (Howard, 2007:39) and Bauman and the “*Disposable Biography*” (Howard, 2007:35). The distinctions made here by Howard, allow the divergences in opinion between the writers to be highlighted in an efficient and logical manner.

Beginning with Giddens and his “*Trajectorial Biography*” (Howard, 2007:30), it is clear that individuals embark on a “trajectory of development” in which they must be consistent (1991:75). Within this process the future is seen as “essentially open” (Giddens, 1990:50) but also “conditional upon courses of action undertaken with future possibilities in mind” (Giddens, 1990:50). Therefore, identity becomes “reflexively organised” (Giddens, 1991:5) and ultimately the responsibility for its construction lies with the individual. Whilst situating his discussion within that of Janet Rainwater’s (1989) concerning self-therapy, Giddens explores how the individual has “cognitive awareness” concerning their lifespan, both past, present and future (Giddens, 1991:75).

Individuals therefore select and essentially hand-make their own life course through constant reflection and consideration concerning themselves: in this sense “[they] have no choice but to choose” (Giddens, 1991:81). This concept is discussed further by Howard, who suggests that Giddens envisages individuals engaging in reflexive life trajectories and the creation of their own biographies in order to combat the uncertainty created by the conditions of modern life (Howard, 2007:25). Therefore, individuals engage in planning following reflection and are highly future

focused (Giddens, 1991). This process is thereby “born of [the] anxiety” which is created by having no clear pathway through life (Giddens, 1991:64).

There are certainly similarities between Giddens’ model and Beck’s model of the “*Experimental Biography*” (Howard, 2007:39). In his work with his wife, Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Beck discusses the so-called “do-it-yourself biography” which individuals are faced with (2002:3). However, Beck states that the biography “does not necessarily happen by choice” and “does [not] necessarily succeed” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:3). This too is noted in Howard’s work, who acknowledges that for Beck individuals are ultimately bound within the “ambivalence and pain” (Howard, 2007:29) of modern life, unable to ever fully realise themselves. If individuals are bound to rarely succeed, but still live within the confines of a “your own life – your own future” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:24) attitude, then it is easy to see how this could potentially become highly destructive to the individual and their outlook on life.

Beck essentially sums this uncertainty up by stating “are today’s winners anyway not tomorrow’s losers?” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:47). This does however, certainly situate itself clearly within the notion of risk society, where “unknown and unintended consequences” plague the lives of all (Beck, 1992:22). Therefore, within the “social structure of the second modernity” (Beck and Willms, 2004:101), fear concerning the construction of the self is imminent (Howard, 2007:29). Whilst this outlook is perhaps less optimistic than that of Giddens, it is possible to see the clear links between the notions, in that both writers see the pain and tumult caused by uncertainty and pressure on the individual to remain in control of their own life.

As is stated by Howard, Bauman’s outlook is perhaps gloomier still, however it is certainly in keeping with his notion of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). Howard suggests to us that Bauman believes that individuals are made to “embrace biographical discontinuity” (Howard, 2007:35) since the spirit of globalization lies in the importance of “flexibility” (Bauman, 2001:24). In this sense, everything becomes “until further notice” (Bauman, 2003:10) and uncertainty rules. Considering this, an individual’s biography, or life trajectory, simply cannot be linear; a fact which Bauman argues makes individuals possess considerable “indifference to long-term life

projects” (2001:52) thereby developing “short-sightedness” overall (2001:52). In this way, the character of “the nomad” (Howard, 2007:36), and its ability to adapt to change, becomes highly valued. In some sense this could be said to provide freedom and choice to the individual, something which is theorised by Lash (1993). However, it’s pervading notions of risk, uncertainty and “the future as a threat” (Bauman, 2001:53) are also extremely clear.

Bauman also examines the issue of inequality with regards to identity and the resources required to “do-to-yourself”, as Beck puts it (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:3). For Bauman, whilst individuals are at liberty to construct their own narratives, they are limited in the extent to which they can do this by the resources which they possess (2000). Bauman therefore states that those endowed with “fewer resources” ultimately have “less choice” in the way in which they can adapt and reflexively organise their identities (2000:33). In this sense, resources such as power and income can ultimately affect a person’s ability to adapt within second modernity and create their own life biography. Giddens and Beck certainly do not acknowledge this in the same way, but what is the significance of engaging with a discussion of the unequal distribution of resources, or inequality, within the context of individualization?

### *In a World without Class: The Problem of Completely Letting Go*

In allowing for the consideration of inequality, material or otherwise, Bauman can be seen as a starting point from which to consider social divisions such as class and gender, within a discussion of individualization. A main flaw within the individualization debate has been its inability to account for the “varying structural locations” (Atkinson, 2010:1.3) of individuals within society, due to its assertion that individualization is a “uniform feature of modern life” (Nollman and Strasser, 2007:94). For example, Beck states that the world has moved “*beyond* class society” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:30), leading to the “*dissolution* of lifeworlds associated with class and status group subcultures” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:31). However, in relation to risk and its distribution, Beck does state that some individuals can “purchase safety and freedom from risk” (Beck, 1992:35). This can certainly be said to link into Bauman’s argument concerning the importance of

resources when considering the construction of an individual's identity and their ability to be "flexible" (Bauman, 2001:24). These perspectives could therefore present the initial link to a discussion of class within the individualization debate.

To gain more insight into this, it is possible to look to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, as is referenced by Bauman himself when he highlights Pierre Bourdieu's work entitled *Distinction* as an "eye-opening study of contemporary culture" (Bauman, 2001:68). Within this work, Bourdieu aims to break with "*linear thinking*" concerning the conceptualisation of class as being bound in any traditional sense. Instead, Bourdieu argues that taste is a "symbolic expression of class position" (1984:175). In this sense, class identity can be seen as being driven not only by economic aspects such as occupation or income, but also by cultural aspects, creating a more "integrated approach to socio-economic class and culture" (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004:41). Bourdieu emphasises this point by discussing the "tastes of luxury" and the "tastes of necessity" (1984:177), suggesting that by becoming distant from necessity alone, individuals experience "freedom...stemming from possession of capital" (1984:178), a similar notion to that of Beck and the purchase of distance between the individual and risk (1992).

However, for Bourdieu the concept of capital encompasses far more than just financial factors alone. Bourdieu (1986) argues that elements such as cultural capital and social capital are strongly influential factors in the creation of class identity, and therefore features which influence the structure of inequality within society. Cultural capital in particular is perhaps, for Bourdieu, the most important when examining class distinctions as it "helps to shape the class body" (1984:190). For example, cultural capital can be objectified within material goods such as a piece of art, or institutionalized within an academic qualification (Bourdieu, 1986). However, in order to understand Bourdieu's notions of capital to their fullest extent, they must be examined in relation to his concepts of 'habitus' and 'field'.

The habitus is a means by which individuals produce and reproduce "objective meaning" (1977:79). This therefore leads to the development of a "group or class habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977:80), creating a "system of dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1977:85) within that specific group. This in turn helps to shape the individuals "social trajectory" (Bourdieu, 1977:86), a particularly interesting concept when combined

with Beck, Giddens and Bauman's notions of the creation of an individual's biography or trajectory. Habitus thereby acts as the "generative and unifying principle" within social groupings such as class (Bourdieu, 1998:8).

On the other hand, the field for Bourdieu is a unit of social space, each one defined by its own "specific logics" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:98). They are not "the product of a deliberate act of creation" (Bourdieu and Waquant, 1992:98), but instead are unconsciously created through the individuals who engage in them, thus producing and reproducing them simultaneously. An individual must have a specific type of habitus in order to fit into, or succeed in, a particular field. In addition to this, the distribution of capitals and the field are "tightly interconnected" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:99), in the sense that an individual's capital structure can serve to provide him or her with "power over the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:101), depending on what is valued within said field.

With regards to individualization, Bourdieu's theory allows for the consideration of aspects of the social within individualization theory (Howard, 2007). When combining the notion of reflexivity with the concept of the habitus, it is possible to see how individuals must engage in reflexive thinking in order to create the habitus required to break into certain fields. However, it is also important to understand how this process can be in many instances limited by the capital which they possess, which is frequently expressed through group or class formations. Therefore, when assessing the impact of individualization theory, we must be cautious to pay attention to aspects such as inequality and to do so in a theoretically well-grounded manner, as is discussed by Alexander, who rejects the notion that individualization is simply a "blanket development" (1996:138). However, it is also important to consider other social divisions that are present within society and can still affect the distribution of the effects of individualization, such as gender (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003:133).

### *The Role of Gender: Tradition vs Second Modernity*

Within individualization theory, gender is frequently embedded in the consideration of detraditionalization, as is discussed by Giddens and Beck. Giddens



states that divisions between men and women are “placed in question” (1994:106) as traditional notions in which “women’s identities were defined so closely in terms of the home and the family” are broken down (Giddens, 1991:216). Beck expands on this point, stating that women are increasingly “released from direct ties to the family” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:55) and instead “flee from housework to a career” (Beck, 1992:112). Therefore, women are seemingly “removed from the constraints of gender” through the process of individualization (Beck, 1992:105). In this sense, marriage and family are no longer the woman’s sole route to “economic security” and “social status” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:90).

Beck sees women as being subject to many “contradictions” within second modernity (1992:112), in the sense that their traditional role is highly opposed to their new opportunities and expectations. With regards to men however, Beck states that individualization simply “*strengthens* masculine role behaviour” (1992:112), since the values it perpetuates can be said to coincide with pre-determined masculine stereotypes. Men can even be said to be “freed from the yoke of being *sole* supporter of the family” (Beck, 1992:112), since women are now free to enter the labour market as well. Therefore, whilst women become trapped between “no longer” and “not yet” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:54), men are not only reinforced in their roles, but further freed to pursue the future of “open possibilities” (Giddens, 1991:73). Therefore, the inequalities between men and women have “by no means been eradicated” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:54).

Whilst this does contradict Beck’s earlier assertion that gender and the family are “zombie categories” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:203), it is still an important observation. However, this again perhaps places “overemphasis on the expressive possibilities thrown up by processes of detraditionalization” (McNay, 1999:95). This is where Bourdieu again can be of “increasing significance” (Adkins, 2004:191) to a discussion of individualization, as Adkins states that the reflexivity associated with individualization points to a “refashioning” of gender, rather than its complete obliteration (2004:192). Using Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, Adkins assesses the movement of women into “traditionally non-feminine spheres of action”, such as the labour market, as being somewhat problematic (Adkins, 2004:199). In this manner, there is a distinct misfit between the female habitus and the fields into which women are increasingly engaging in.

Expanding slightly, McNay (1999) suggests that this is not “emancipatory” (1999:95), but instead produces a conflict within women as their unconscious feminine habitus “cannot be easily reshaped” (McNay, 1999:103). Seeing the habitus as a “mode of knowledge” and as being “pre-reflexive” (McNay, 1999:100), McNay demonstrates how traditional notions of the female role are incorporated firmly within the female habitus, thereby producing a direct conflict with their new choices in life. Therefore, women are not so much freed as they are confused by the paradoxical relationship between habitus and field that is set out before them. In this manner, combining Beck’s original theory with Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and field, it is possible to see gender as a vital category when considering the potentially unequal spread and impact of individualization.

However, following the establishment of the need to engage with a discussion of inequality within individualization, the main question is how can we assess its impact and spread given these considerations? Indeed, as is stated by Beck we must assess each “group, milieu and region to determine how far individualization processes...have advance within it” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:5), something which he has seemingly failed to achieve thus far. Making use in particular of Giddens’ (1991) discussion concerning anxiety induced by individualization, the answer, it is argued here, can be seen to lie in the concept of Status Anxiety.

### *Status Anxiety: The Importance of Being Important*

The concept of status anxiety is relatively unknown within the academic world, and was conceived of by author Alain De Botton in 2005. However, its lack of academic grounding does not necessarily detract from the overall concept. De Botton describes status anxiety as being the “worry...that we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society” (2005:3-4) and that as a result we risk being “stripped of dignity and respect” (2005:4). This can certainly be said to bear likeness to Robert Merton’s strain theory, particularly within his discussion of “cultural goals” (Merton, 1957:132) and the “institutionally prescribed means of striving towards [them]” (Merton, 1957:133). However, De Botton takes his analysis in a slightly different direction. He states also that the feeling of status anxiety can be worsened by aspects such as “recession, redundancy,

promotions...newspaper profiles of the prominent and the greater success of friends” (De Botton, 2005:4). As such, this risk of failure and the constant requirement for self-evaluation and self-control in order to avoid such failure, creates “inner drama” (De Botton, 2005:4); in this sense “anxiety is the handmaiden of contemporary ambition” (De Botton, 2005:95). He further suggests that in order to avoid failure, individuals within society attempt to develop within themselves four “cardinal virtues” of creativity, courage, intelligence and stamina, believing that these will allow them to be successful (De Botton, 2005:193).

In relation to this, De Botton frequently links the concept of status anxiety to the notion that society is “practically trusted to be ‘meritocratic’” by the individuals who live within it (2005:193). Indeed, he frequently references Michael Young’s work *The Rise of Meritocracy* (1961), in which he states that “we have failed to assess the mental state of the rejected” (Young, 1961:15). Within this “satirical” (Young, 1994:88) book concerning the meritocratic world as a dystopia, Young discusses the fact that this type of society would be based upon a principle of hard work and good performance creating reward and success; in this sense, equal opportunities *should* be had by all. Whilst this idea is certainly tenuous, De Botton takes it further to state that meritocracy is what people *believe* in, thereby creating an environment in which the poor are blamed for being poor; in this sense “to the injury of poverty, a meritocratic system [adds] the insult of shame” (De Botton, 2005:91).

With regards to individualization, this certainly presents links to Bauman, who states that the poor then become “objects of resentment and anger” within society (2001:76). This therefore causes notions of meritocratic success, and consequentially failure, to permeate throughout society, thereby resulting in pressure on the individual since failure is seen to be one’s own fault. Here it becomes clear that by situating De Botton’s argument within that of individualization, it is possible to unlock its true value. There are also many more links between status anxiety and the notions of Beck, Giddens and Bauman, especially concerning the individual’s responsibility for their own progression and life trajectory. Giddens in particular notes that in being faced with so many different possibilities and with such great responsibility for the self, individuals fall prey to “anxiety produced by the fear of transgression” (1991:64). Similarly, De Botton states that this feeling of status anxiety can at the very least “inspire sorrow” (2005:5). However, not only does status

anxiety situate itself well within a discussion of individualization, it further helps to make it relatable and empirically testable. It achieves this by engaging with the notions of success and failure; two concepts which are very much part of everyday life.

If Giddens is correct in theorising that the “popularity of futurology” (1991:29) has become a key feature of individualized second modernity, then considerations of success and failure, and how to achieve future success, must play an important role in the life of the individual. This is particularly important when considering the “risk consciousness” (Beck, 1992: 34) developed by individuals, during this time where identity construction is the individuals responsibility. If this is the case, then a discussion of the conceptualisation of success and failure, as suggested by De Botton (2005) can make the claims of individualisation theory more relatable and therefore easier to analyse empirically within society, something which has not been done often enough within the individualization field (Dawson, 2012).

Status anxiety also reiterates the issue of social divisions and how this can affect the spread of the phenomena. De Botton (2005) examines, albeit simplistically, the ways in which class can alter the impact and effect of status anxiety. In particular, De Botton references Marx’s conceptualization of class and notion that the dominant class spreads an ideology throughout society of how to live, how to behave and, ultimately, how to become successful (De Botton, 2005:214). In this manner, the inequality between the classes spreads “the feeling that we might be something other than what we are”, thereby creating “dissatisfaction and envy” (De Botton, 2005:46) within individuals.

Therefore, in combining status anxiety with individualization, and further utilising Bourdieu, it is possible to go some way to overcome the major flaws of individualization theory and status anxiety at the same time. By not solely lumping the classes into simply ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ as De Botton (2005) does, we can hope to gain a much wider perspective of class and perhaps a more ‘fluid’ conception of class, to borrow a term from Bauman. Therefore, the use of Bourdieu’s conceptualization of class as being “not...something given but...something to be done” (1998:12), seems highly appropriate so as to avoid “fictitious regroupings”

(Bourdieu, 1998:10), created by the researcher in a world where ultimately everyone is striving to “occupy a point or to be an individual” (Bourdieu, 1998:9).

Certainly, when situating status anxiety within an academic argument, it becomes clear that it can be a useful tool for assessing the extent of individualization, whilst using terms that individuals can relate to and understand. However, it is important to state that De Botton (2005) remains woefully neglectful of gender roles and divisions within his work. This provides an even greater justification for situating status anxiety within individualization theory, as by combining the two the issue of gender and gender inequality can be brought into the foreground. In this manner, a definition of status anxiety can become even more detailed and applicable to society.

### *Assessing Anxiety: What is it to be successful?*

Clearly then, status anxiety can be situated within the sociological debate surrounding individualization. The notions of the self as a “*reflexive project*” (Giddens, 1991:32), and the attitude that individuals succeed or fail by “their own doings and neglects” (Bauman, 2001:6) certainly tie in with De Botton’s argument that we always have to try to “convince the world of our value” (2005:5). However, the limitations of the individualization debate could serve to severely limit our ability to fully research the effects of a phenomena like status anxiety, since it fails to take into account differentiation within society; as is stated by Dawson, individualization theory has always been “somewhat problematic” (2012:307) as it has largely failed to engage with genuine empirical research. Perhaps then, their lack of engagement with empirical research is the reason for their woeful neglect of class, as well as their brief discussion of gender. This paper aims to go at least some way to attempt to solve this problem, by actively engaging in empirical research concerning the process of individualization, and also adopting what Dawson refers to as an “interactionist” approach to individualization (2012: 309). By using status anxiety as a lens through which to study individualization, and making use of Bourdieu’s theory to illuminate issues of class and gender, this paper will attempt go some way to simultaneously fill several of the gaps within each theory, whilst showing them to be truly complimentary concepts.

Overall, this study aim's to examine the impact and consequences of status anxiety within modern society, using the theory constructed within the individualization debate. This will therefore more broadly assess the way in which individualization has affected society, by using status anxiety specifically as a lens through which to view the spread of individualization. In doing so it is important to engage in a discussion of inequality, class, gender, success, failure and, perhaps most importantly, the feelings of the individual towards their current place in society and their potential future. Status anxiety has been deemed by De Botton as being highly damaging to an individual's self-esteem and overall mental health but he does state that "the most profitable way of addressing the condition may be to attempt to understand and to speak of it" (De Botton, 2005:5). It is this which this project strives to achieve, within an admittedly small initial sample, so as to hopefully inspire future research which can help to determine why we must ultimately live in anxiety and fear whilst thinking "are today's winners anyway not tomorrow's loser's? And is it not a fear of plunging downward which makes them too tremble for the future?" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:47).

This section will outline the chosen methodology and methods for the aforementioned research project. Given the nature of the research, the participants' subjectivity was taken heavily into account, as well as the researchers' own influence over the research. Therefore an interpretivist methodology was adhered to, making use of Weber's *Verstehen* (1947). In correlation with this, all participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method, using a topic guide (see Appendix 2) which consisted of question themes relating to their future plans, how they felt about success and what influenced them to feel this way. Initially however, before detailing the interview process and the methodology, it is important to clearly outline the research sample.

### *Participants & Recruitment: Students, Stress and the Future*

Given the short time frame allowed for this study it was deemed vital to gain access to participants who would perhaps be thought of as being most vulnerable to feelings of status anxiety, so as to gain rich data within a small time frame. As such, the student population was targeted, in particular aiming to engage with postgraduates and undergraduates who were nearing the end of their university education. It was thought that for these individuals, the future was seen as truly a myriad of possibilities which they would be thoroughly engaged in contemplating, as the security of university life and education was coming to an end. Naturally therefore, this study would focus in on the students' most anticipated concern: finding a job and being successful in this endeavour.

Whilst this is certainly not the sole focus of the research, it naturally forms a large part of the discussion, whilst also creating a platform from which to build a more comprehensive examination of status anxiety and notions of success and failure. Additionally, job insecurity and the impact of occupation upon identity construction is something noted often by Beck in particular. Beck states that within the contemporary risk society, individuals are often made to feel insecure by features of the job market and employment, with "flexibilization of working hours" and

“underemployment” ultimately leading to the “generalization of employment insecurity” (Beck, 1992:143). In this sense, “standard biographies” of individuals come to incorporate insecurity and worry concerning the potential loss of work (Beck, 1992:149). It is clear that given the need that individuals possess to be reflexive and in control, an element that is completely out of their control, such as the job market, is sure to worsen any anxiety concerning the construction of identity and ultimately the development of a clear life trajectory.

Furthermore, De Botton (2005) states that instances of status anxiety can worsen during times of great change, for the individual or for society as a whole. This includes several heavily economic or career based factors such as “recession, redundancy, promotions, retirement, conversations with colleagues in the same industry, newspaper profiles of the prominent and the greater success of friends” (2005:4). Many of these, as can be seen, are engrained in employment conditions surrounding the individual themselves. Therefore, it is perhaps prudent to note that during the time of this study, the individuals interviewed had experience of the recent “Great Recession” (Bell and Blanchflower, 2010:R3) within the United Kingdom, from which the country is still in recovery.

As is stated by Bell and Blanchflower (2010), this was considered catastrophic, “particularly for the young” (2010:R3) who struggled even more to find work. They also found that this presented potentially devastating consequences for young individuals within society, as they became “depressed” and suffered from “permanent scars” created by “low levels of happiness” (Bell and Blanchflower, 2010:R4). Additionally, and perhaps importantly for this particular piece of research, Bell and Blanchflower also stipulated that this was “not just a blue-collar recession” (2010:R7) alone, and that those from middle class backgrounds, who were perhaps more likely to have a university education, suffered as well.

In this sense then, we can see that employment, and a student’s reflexivity and thought process concerning future employment, could play a vital role in their feelings of security and, ultimately, in their feeling successful within society. Perhaps summarising the point in greater clarity, Beck makes it clear that occupation is a crucial consideration, when he states that often the question first asked of an individual is “what are you?” (1992:139) and the individual questioned will ultimately



respond “with all the certainty in the world with their occupation” (1992:39). Occupation is therefore clearly a strong component of identity construction. Therefore, the subjects of choice for this research have been deemed, and justified as being, postgraduate and undergraduate students approaching their final years of study.

Whilst this would allow for the research to gain access to some of the individuals who are perhaps most affected by status anxiety, it also would be a convenient sample for the researcher to study. Therefore, balancing the short time frame along with the need for clear and in depth data, the student population became the chosen research population. It was thought that between 10 and 15 participants would be sufficient for this particular research, and the final number of participants would be dictated by the researches natural theoretical saturation point (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However, as is stated by Bryman (2012), finding this point can be extremely demanding and challenging for the researcher, particularly when there are severe limitations to the time allotted for the research. Therefore, a balance between saturation of knowledge and time keeping was struck, thus limiting the participants to 10. In this sense, a slightly looser, more adaptable definition of theoretical saturation was constructed for the purposes of this research.

With regards to the recruitment of the students, I made use of my own position as a University student and made use of a snowballing technique (Morgan, 2008). Having prior knowledge of University libraries, common rooms, halls and unions meant that several locations for recruitment of participants could be easily established. In order to do this posters (see Appendix 1.1 and 1.2) were created and placed in several University of Glasgow locations such as the library and halls of residence. This was all carried out after getting permission from the various sites, either directly face-to-face or via email. It was thought that from the few participants gained from this technique, several more could become involved through these initial participants, thus engaging in a snowballing technique. It was originally thought that posters would be placed in other universities throughout Glasgow, in order to gain a more diverse sample. However, following the recruitment of the first few participants it became clear that the participants were drawing more upon their social networks, either outside of their own university or through clubs/societies, rather than engaging with their classmates. Therefore, rather unintentionally, the sample became a lot

more diversified since it had naturally come to include students from across Glasgow, including Strathclyde University, Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Glasgow.

With regards to the snowballing technique itself, many issues can be presented to the research (Morgan, 2008). Studies engaging in this method can often exclude large portions of the target population, simply because the participants can only be aware of the research if told about it by the original “informant” participant (Morgan, 2008:817). This could certainly be said to be an issue with any snowballing sample, however given that the research only includes 10 participants overall, this would present the same issue anyway. Since the participants did make use of their own social groupings, many of which were built whilst at university within clubs which spanned across various universities, this presents slightly less of an issue in terms of excluding various different *types* of students from different backgrounds and with different experiences. Again, in selecting a student only sample this study does limit itself somewhat anyway, so the use of snowballing becomes less of an issue within this context. However, as has been said, this sample can be easily justified as a logical choice for this project, particularly since time was extremely limited and the research was conducted during a period where most students were on leave for the summer holidays.

Therefore, overall this research sample consisted of 10 students, 4 females and 5 males, who were all between the ages of 21 and 25. This included a mix of postgraduates and undergraduates, all of whom were no more than 1 year away from the completion of their university education. They attended a range of Glasgow based universities, including The University of Glasgow, Strathclyde University and Glasgow Caledonian University. Overall, many of the participants made their self-elected class identities clear, with 4 participants identifying as ‘working class’, 4 identifying as ‘middle class’ and 2 identifying as ‘upper-middle class’. Therefore, the research sample can be said to have been almost as diverse as it could have been, given the circumstances.

### *Methodology: Interpreting Interpretivism*

Given the subject matter at hand, it was deemed vital to engage in a more interpretivist methodology, so as to be able to fully understand and represent the participants' subjective voices. Furthermore, it was hoped that participants could gain from the research in that they could perhaps "collect [their] thoughts and develop new ways of seeing [themselves]" following on from their participation (Arksey and Knight, 1999:128); indeed, interviews can be "cathartic" (Arksey and Knight, 1999:128). Again, this emphasises the need for full subjectivity and engagement with the participants own individual biography.

As such, an interpretivist framework was adhered to. As is referred to by Loseke (2013), interpretivist methodology deems the distinction between the natural world and the social world to be of the highest importance. As such, the roles of meaning and "meaning-making" (Loseke, 2013:23) in the social world must be considered in detail. This entails a highly subjective and reflexive stance on the research, something which is even more important when considering the purpose of the research and its nature. Therefore, Weber's *Verstehen* (1947), which denotes an empathic understanding of the research topic, whilst also placing considerable emphasis on the subjectivity of the participant and their experience, was utilized. Combining interpretivism and *Verstehen*, the research allowed for an in depth discussion of status anxiety, whilst concentrating firmly on each participants own individual perspective, background and life story. Therefore, this research appreciated all participants as "meaning-making creatures" (Loseke, 2013:24).

The use of this methodology also draws attention to the role of the researcher within this process of meaning-making, and within the creation of the research project; essentially then, the researcher takes on the role of a "material body through whom a narrative structure unfolds" (Bruner, 1986:150). As is stated by Alvesson and Skoldberg, qualitative research in particular requires "critical self-exploration" on the part of the researcher, since contact with participants can be highly personal and is frequently on a face-to-face basis (2006:6). Therefore, in considering the participants to be subjective, it is also important to examine the researcher as subjective as well, with a particular background, motivation and perspective. The

researcher ultimately has control over the research aims, the data collection and, perhaps most importantly, the data analysis, therefore granting them the ability to create meaning from the participants comments. Therefore, it was deemed extremely important to be aware of the potential dangers of the researcher's power over the research outcome, since ethically as well, it is vital that each participant is represented as clearly and realistically as possible.

In particular, my own position as a student must be acknowledged. In this sense, I was an "insider" to the researches chosen population, which could certainly have had an impact upon the information I had access to and how I interpreted it (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:55). There are many arguments as to whether a position as an insider can make for a "better or worse researcher" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:56), however it is widely believed that provided the researcher engages in much "self-reflection" and is aware of their position, it can prove to be quite useful (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:56). In this sense, my being a student could have provided me with a "depth and breadth of understanding" within this population (Kanuha, 2000:444). It also could have potentially allowed me to be accepted more freely by my participants and could have made them feel more comfortable talking to me, as I was in a similar position to them (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:58). However, it can also be said to have a negative effect in some instances. For example, it could result in the participant making "assumptions of similarity" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009:58) between myself and them, thereby causing them to not explain something in great detail. This could potentially lead me to infer meaning on their statements from my own experiences, something which must be controlled for and avoided wherever possible.

Considering this, it was thought that making use of interpretivism and *Verstehen* (Weber, 1947) would be particularly useful, as it places an emphasis on meaning and meaning creation. As is stated by Arksey and Knight (1999), it is important that, in order to avoid any bias or misinterpretation by the researcher, mutual understandings of the participant's perspective are reached. In this sense, during the interview process, great care was taken to establish rapport with the participant in order to work together to gain clarity concerning the participants expression of their perspective. This involved the use of probe questions during the interview process (which will be detailed at a later stage), paraphrasing to generate

understanding and the use of an extremely clear Plain Language Statement (see Appendix 3); in this manner, I “declare[d] [my] interests” (Homan, 1991:42) clearly, and attempted to create an atmosphere of “intersubjective reflection” (Findlay and Gough, 2003:8).

All of these things, it is hoped, combat my sole influence over the research and help to make it a far more interactive opportunity for both participant and researcher. This can certainly be seen in the selection of semi-structured interviews as a method, as will be discussed below. However, it also highlights some of the main ethical concerns of the research itself.

### *The Interview: Subjectivity, Understanding and Individuality*

It was decided that the interviews would be semi-structured, in keeping with the interpretivist nature of the research and the desire to minimise the researcher’s total control over the research process. Semi-structured interviews incorporate an element of “discovery” (Gillham, 2000:72) into the research process, not just for the participant but for the researcher too, thus preventing the researcher from becoming too focused on any one particular theme or allowing any bias to shape the questions asked. As is stated by Kvale (1996), semi-structured interviews provide compromise between gaining consistent information for the research and allowing the subjective perspective of each individual participant to shine through. In this sense, the researcher and participant can go on a “journey” together, making the research more of a collaborative experience, whilst also allowing the researcher to construct “digs” for information, in order to gain greater detail (Kvale, 1996:3-4).

The research is therefore not limited by a definite structure and benefits from a slight amount of flexibility, a factor particularly important when considering the participants in an interpretivist manner. This allows the participants to shape the interview with regards to “what they see as important” (Arksey and Knight, 1999:7). Therefore, the interview topic guide (see Appendix 2) does not act as a definitive list of questions, but as a tool which gives the interviews an element of continuity and helps to keep the research focused. The resulting interview becomes more participant driven, a style frequently employed in some feminist methodology

(Oakley, 1981). This interview style was also selected bearing in mind the researchers own interviewing style, so as to again consider the impact of the researcher themselves on the research outcomes.

More specifically for this particular project, the interview topic guide (see Appendix 2) consisted of question headings concerning the future, the participant's notions of success and the influences which lead them to think in this manner about success and failure. As can be seen from the topic guide, the questions initially began with a discussion of the participants own background, to gain some demographic type data, whilst also asking them questions concerning their desires for their future progress beyond university. These questions acted so as to allow the participant to settle into the interview, whilst also acting as a starting point for a much deeper discussion of their feelings concerning the future and their thoughts concerning success. As has been discussed, the notions of how success and failure can be conceptualised can not only illuminate the individuals feelings concerning status anxiety (De Botton, 2005), but can also serve as a platform from which to view the impact of individualization upon said individual. Thus a large portion of questioning was devoted to discussing the participants view's on what it means to succeed or to fail, and where they believed they had developed this opinion from.

More generally, there can be many issues with using interviews, in particular the fact that people do not always express something verbally that would then be displayed in their actual behaviour (Deutscher, 1996). In addition my own position as a student could have influenced what the participants said to me and how well they explained it. These factors can be extremely difficult to combat, but it is thought that by allowing the participant to shape the direction of the interview to their liking and ensuring that a mutual understanding of meaning is established, this issue can at least be minimized. Most importantly of all, is to ensure the emotional and physical safety of the participants. This was achieved not only through the acquisition of a safe, familiar environment to conduct the interviews in, but also through the researchers own attempts to make themselves "personable" at all times, whilst demonstrating that they are fully "trustworthy" (Arksey and Knight, 1999:39).

This, it is hoped, encouraged the participants to feel safe and secure in the knowledge that the research itself would not only be a good experience for them, but

would also protect their “privacy and dignity” (Frankford-Nachimas and Nachimas, 1996:76). In addition to this, great attention was paid to the participants’ “extralinguistic behaviour” (Frankford-Nachimas and Nachimas, 1996:208), so as to attempt to detect any discomfort, upset or anxiety being experienced by the participants themselves, whilst also engaging in the emotional behaviour expressed at different points during the interviews. This, in particular, was where a consideration of the ethical nature of the research became vital.

### *Ethics: Being Considerate, Compassionate & Clear*

Naturally, the participants’ “protection from physical or emotional harm” (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1998:17) was of the utmost importance. However, this was perhaps of even greater consideration still when acknowledging the nature of the research as analysing something which was potentially emotional, and also extremely personal. Therefore, the utmost care and thought was devoted to creating research and a research environment, which would protect, encourage and even help its participants. This involved strict adherence to the British Sociological Association’s ethical guidelines concerning research conduct (2002). In particular, these stress the researcher’s responsibility to their participants, whilst also specifying the importance of anonymity, confidentiality and privacy for the participants concerned (BSA, 2002). It is these four main points from the BSA that were embodied within the research and in the conduct of the researcher.

In adopting the already outlined interpretivistic methodology, it is thought that several issues concerning interpretation of the participants’ views can be combatted. By placing subjectivity and reflexivity at the core of the research itself, it is hoped that any issues concerning the representation of the participants and their views have been dealt with through full disclosure of any uncertainties or lack of clarity. In addition to this all participants were offered the opportunity to read through their own transcript and discuss it, thus attempting to minimise any false representation. Whilst all participants were offered this opportunity, none wished to do this. However, anonymity, confidentiality and privacy cannot be dealt with in the same manner.

In order to ensure anonymity, each participant was given a pseudonym, and their real name and exact age were not disclosed in the write up. In addition to this, whilst it is known that they all attend Glasgow based universities, their specific university and degree subject were kept private, so as to minimise the possibility of them being recognised within the research as much as was possible. This therefore would made it extremely difficult to identify any single participant from the quotations used within the research write up. However, this is naturally completely impossible to guarantee, and participants were made aware of this before the start of each interview.

Despite this, all measures have been put in place to strive for as much anonymity as possible. In addition to this, the data collected was viewed only by the researcher and stored in a locked filing cabinet or on a password protected electronic device. Even these seemingly simple measures are vital when considering the ethical nature of the research, since they can ultimately ensure the confidentiality of the participants information. This also includes examining the settings in which the research is taking place and attempting to ensure that these are as private and free of disruption as possible (Frankford-Nachimas and Nachimas, 1996). All interviews were conducted on University premises, for the safety of the researcher and the participant, but were done in secure private study rooms, thus ensuring total privacy.

More importantly still was ensuring that the participants had full understanding regarding the research, in order to truly allow them to make a “rational and mature judgement” (Homan, 1991:71) regarding their participation, which was “voluntary [and] free from coercion and undue influence” (Homan, 1991:71). In this manner, the Plain Language Statement (see Appendix 3) detailed the research and the participants were given ample opportunity to ask questions or even to reword a question to their liking, therefore allowing them to be fully “consulted as the gatekeepers to their own privacy” (Homan, 1991:42). In doing this, the participants were able to give informed consent, something which Frankford-Nachimas and Nachimas deem “absolutely essential” (1996:81). In doing this, the Plain Language Statement and Consent form (see Appendix 4) act as elements which ensure ethical conduct. The participants also gave verbal consent at the start of each interview, just so that the researcher could ensure that they had read and correctly understood the plain language statement and its meanings.



Therefore, by fully engaging with interpretivism, *Verstehen* (Weber, 1947) reflexivity, this research has attempted to combat any ethical issues at hand. In addition to this, it is important to note that this project and its methods were approved by the University of Glasgow Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects. Evidence of this can be seen in Appendix 5, which is a copy of the Ethical Approval form granted after the submission of the ethics application for this project.

### *Thematic Analysis: Preparing the Data for Discussion*

Overall then, the interpretivist framework and focus on the subjectivity of the participant remain central to the research. Whilst also considering the role of the researcher in creating and gathering the research, it is thought that the ethical treatment of all participants and data has remained the core value of the project.

Regarding the interview analysis, all 10 interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed (Gillham, 2005). This was carried out by hand and involved the selection of certain “substantive statements” (Gillham, 2000:59) from each interview transcription. Having done this, several prevailing themes emerged as cross-over points between the interview transcripts, and thus became the key themes of discussion. These are outlined and discussed in detail in the following section.

Following thematic analysis, the themes presented themselves as broadly pertaining to four categories: Control, Responsibility, Emotion and Influence. The participants expressed feelings of “concern” (Sean) and “anxiety” (Cara), whilst sharing a view of the future as being potentially “scary” (Annabelle). Predominantly, these feelings related to becoming, what they saw as being a successful person in the future, something which each participant strived to achieve. Each theme, therefore, breaks this overall feeling down to discover the intricate ways in which these emotions are founded.

### *Overview: Reflexive Thinking in Everyday Life*

It was instantly apparent that all participants were engaged in thought regarding the future, as they approached this vital stage of transition from education to career. As was stated by Essie, “you’ve had that structure [of education] for so long and now there is nothing...it can be really hard.” It is perhaps natural then, that these particular individuals would be engaged in a great deal of reflection, as well as forward thinking. This certainly is reminiscent of Giddens’ concept of “fateful moments” where “individuals are called on to take decisions that are particularly consequential for their ambitions” (Giddens, 1991:112).

In addition to this, each participant seemed to grant a great deal of consideration to the skills they possessed, their personality and their own life trajectory. Discussions of finding careers that “suit me and my own personality” (Annabelle), and job prospects ultimately coming “down to who I am” (Ian) demonstrate a great deal of consideration of the self, as can be seen in Giddens’ statement that “the self is not a passive entity” but something to be actively considered and engaged with (1991:2). This can be summed up succinctly by Sarah, when she states that she has “always been thinking about what kind of person I want to be in the future”, suggesting perhaps most importantly of all, that this future self is not set or fixed, it is instead, a “reflexive project” (Giddens, 1991:32). This highlights initially the first of the four themes: Control.

### *Control: Certainty in an Uncertain World*

The importance of control initially expressed itself within the participants' clear need to "improve" themselves (Toby). Almost all participants stated that an element of self-improvement over the long-term must be a firm part of their career. Statements made by the participants place vital importance on finding "more ways of qualifying [themselves] and learning new skills" (Sean) in order to gain "as much experience and practical knowledge as possible, to make you a better person for the future" (Jason). In this manner, the neo-liberal ideologies of "self-regulation and improvement" (Howard, 2007:5) appear to have some potential influence. This can also be seen as being fairly similar to the concepts laid out by Bauman, Giddens and Beck concerning life trajectory and attempting to correspond to a clear pathway in life. Overall, this suggests that the "trajectory of development" is indeed an important consideration (Giddens, 1991:75).

This also suggests an element of risk prevention. In this manner, participants described how being part of a career path which offered them the opportunity for personal growth and development as being "an advantage" in that "it gives you security" (Sarah). As is articulated by Cara, by gaining as many "feathers to your cap" as possible, your chances of failure are thought to be diminished. In order to gain this security and sense of stability, good planning was deemed to be essential. For example, the notion that "planning gives you stability" (Nick) and that most of these plans achieve this by being centred around "acquiring new skills" (Sean).

Indeed, it would seem that these individuals are engaged in the planning of their lives, even in some cases developing a "typical five to ten year plan" (Jason). In engaging in continuous self-improvement, and even ascribing to the notion that "the important thing to me is to make sure that I am getting better than I was before" (Sean), these individuals aim to create their own life trajectory and thereby attempt to gain control back over their lives. It is also important to acknowledge that this process seems to be very much "born of anxiety" (Giddens, 1991:64) concerning the unknown nature of the future, which many describe as at the very least alarming, as previously touched upon.

This does not mean to dismiss the claims of Beck (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and indeed Bauman (2001) that the individual may not always be successful in their attempts to forge their desired life trajectory; individuals are certainly aware of this danger. However, in formulating a plan and gaining as many “skills” and “experiences” (Sean) as possible, it appeared that the feeling of taking control, and being active in attempting to be *in* control, was highly important. All participants were wedged tightly between the desire to plan, and thereby attempt to control, and the need to “have the ability to adapt and overcome blocks” (Jason) or engage in what Ian deemed “expectation management” (Ian). This paradoxical position demonstrates a clear awareness of the possibility of failure and the “realistic” (Annabelle) notion that plans can go wrong, naturally filling the individual with a sense of “anxiety” (Sarah). Therefore, individuals are aware that their planned life trajectory might not “necessarily succeed” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:3) and that “unintended consequences” can still arise (Beck, 1992:22).

It would appear that this process provides the individuals with a level of emotional security or protection. The desire to gain control, through the need for self-improvement and planning, can be seen as being linked to Beck’s notion of “risk consciousness” (Beck, 1992:34). These individuals are aware of the risk of failure concerning their plans for self-development and therefore attempt to manage it by performing a balancing act between planning and so-called realism. In this particular discussion, it is possible that this stems primarily from the “generalization of employment insecurity” (Beck, 1992:143), since much of the interview discussion concerned career trajectories. However, it soon became clear that there was more to it than just career alone, particularly when a discussion of success and failure in relation to status anxiety was developed.

### *Responsibility: Effort and the “It’s all on you!” Attitude*

Following on from the above discussion, it is also important to consider reasons *why* individuals come to feel the need to gain their control back, such as “feelings of individual responsibility” (Mills, 2007:73). Participants frequently discussed how “you are responsible [and that] people have to make effort and make changes to not fail at things” (Sarah). The notions that “no-one can help you really as

much as you can help yourself” (Jason) and that ultimately “if you fail, it tends to be no one else’s fault but your own” (Essie), were frequently expressed by participants. This is certainly reminiscent of the discussion surrounding individualization, whereby if identity is fully constructed by the reflexive individual, naturally the blame for failure is turned “away from the institutions and onto the inadequacy of the self” (Bauman, 2001:5). Within this particular discussion, the individual is seemingly considered to be successful or to have failed through “their own doings and neglects” (Bauman, 2001:6).

This idea becomes even more apparent when examining the notion of ‘effort’ and its meaning with a discussion of responsibility. It would appear that, for these participants, the amount of effort put into something by an individual is related directly to the success of their endeavours:

*“How much effort you put in and how much you work for things is everything. If you want anything you have to go out and get it” (Essie)*

*“If someone is under-prepared, or lazy...and they fail? Then I have zero sympathy for them, I mean, what did they expect?” (Jason)*

This is certainly related to the discussion of meritocracy which De Botton (2005) has, in particular concerning the notion that “today all persons, however humble, know they have had every chance”, or at least believe that they have (De Botton, 2005:91).

Whilst the notion of meritocracy as being a societal reality is almost completely refuted, it still raises some interesting ideas when examined in comparison to the interview data. The idea of meritocracy suggests that individuals within society are assessed on their merits alone and as such individuals should be “accorded a station in life related to their capacities” (Young, 1961:116). When taking this theory into account with that of the themes of personal responsibility and effort in the acquisition of success, it is perhaps becoming clear that individuals are creating their own ideal of meritocracy which, whilst it may not be real, is certainly felt. Perhaps then it is useful to think of meritocracy as being more of a discourse through

which these individuals view their lives and actions. Instead of this perceived meritocracy being organised in terms of capability alone, it appears also to be organised by effort, planning, time devoted and thought given. This still ties in with much of the individualization literature, particularly the notion that Bauman expresses when he states that “the acting person is bound to pay the costs of the risks taken” (2001:45).

In relation to this, De Botton discusses four so-called “cardinal virtues” (2005:193) associated with success, that each individual in society attempts to possess in order to become truly successful: creativity, courage, intelligence and stamina. These valued attributes can be observed in the discussions with the participants themselves, with stamina clearly related to effort. However, and perhaps more interestingly still, some participants acknowledged that even those who put in effort can fail, but as long as some of the other ‘cardinal virtues’ were exemplified in their behaviour, this seemed to be acceptable. This is particularly clear in comments from Jason, who spoke frequently of the need to try hard to be “innovative” and “different”, whilst “putting yourself out there” even when there was a potential risk of failure:

*“...if someone is trying something really bold and have thrown themselves into it, then fair play. It’s admirable to take a risk and believe in something that much, even if they do fail” (Jason)*

Creativity, in trying something “bold”, and courage are clearly valued, so in this sense success and being successful depends on more than just putting in effort alone. In this instance, the possession of these four ‘virtues’ can be seen as granting people a kind of immunity from the stigma of failure. It has more perhaps, to do with the notions of self-improvement and being in control, as these are so strongly related to the four aforementioned ‘virtues’ and are all ultimately collected under the notion of being responsible for your own life trajectory. However, in relation to the themes discussed so far, it is important to consider their ultimate outcome: the pressure and emotional strain placed on these individuals.

## *Emotion: Living Under Constant Pressure*

### *Anxiety: Feeling the Pressure to Succeed*

When discussing their need for planning, control and self-improvement, individuals expressed significant concern over the pressure that this placed on them as an individual to succeed. Combining this with the aforementioned notions of responsibility, effort and meritocracy, participants stated that they experienced significant “panic” (Scott) leaving them feeling at the very least “a bit despondent” (Cara) and at the very worst “really depressed” (Sarah). The severity of this pressure cannot be understated, as several participants even reported experiencing struggles with their own mental health.

Many of the participants expressed the notion that the hunger for success lead them to feel “jealous” (Annabelle) and “envious” (Sean) of others, particularly when the individual saw someone as successful who “didn’t deserve it” (Annabelle). In this sense, the envy experienced by participants made their anxiety worse, as they wondered “well why do they have it and why can’t I have it when I’m trying so hard?” (Essie). Therefore, De Botton’s assertion that “the feeling that we might be something other than what we are” causes us to feel panic, envy and upset, seems to be fairly accurate (2005:46).

This further illuminates the idea that success is potentially defined through comparison to others; as Essie stated “it’s all about comparisons and how that makes you feel” (Participant 10). This, again, can be seen in De Botton’s theory as he sees this as being the starting block of status anxiety which is “transmitted by the superior achievements of those we take to be our equals” (2005:46). As is stated by Giddens too, we frequently define ourselves in relation to others in society, leaving us “continually vulnerable to the reactions of others” in this manner (1991:66). However, it would appear from the interviews that this is just one way in which emotions relate to the feeling of status anxiety.

*Motivation: Can Anxiety and Envy Be Helpful?*

Giving credit to De Botton, he does suggest that the desire for success can really be helpful by “encouraging excellence” and “cementing members of a society around a common value system” (2005:5). However, this has not taken into consideration a more detailed examination of anxiety and envy in particular, as being key emotions within this process; indeed many participants voiced the notion that they found it to be in some ways helpful. Nick in particular described his worrying as “a kind of insurance...it’s a failsafe against the negative stuff that could happen”. In this manner, it seems that being anxious encourages a more reflexive and thoughtful outlook on life, reminding them that “nothing is guaranteed basically” (Ian).

Again, this points to the “tensions, contradictions and paradoxes” (Howard, 2007:9) produced by individualized society, in that individuals must plan and have control, but also remain flexible in the face of uncertainty. However, it would appear that it is anxiety which allows them to achieve this precarious balance, and which forces them to think “realistically” (Annabelle) about life. Some participants even stated that failure, and the anxiety and upset generated by it, can indeed be a useful tool when it comes to being successful:

*“Thinking about failure and things also pushes me, because it reminds me not to be like that or become like that” (Sarah)*

*“...characters are built when you fail...when you fail and you can pick yourself back up...it shows how strong you can be and motivates you” (Essie)*

This can certainly be said to bear the hallmarks of Goffman’s notion of how individuals are able to conceptualise failure so as to “[cast] no reflection on the loser” (1952:454), therefore seeing it within a “new framework” (1952:456). This is a potentially convenient response for these individuals to possess, since they are in a position of uncertainty as to the likelihood of their own success. However, it is still clear that in some instances, anxiety and even experiences of failure can in fact act as a driving force which “helps mobilise adaptive responses and novel initiatives” (Giddens, 1991:13).



Envy was also occasionally seen to provide similar motivation. In discussing his relationship with his brother, Sean states that he “envied” his brother’s success greatly, but then “set lots of goals that were linked” to what his brother did, ultimately inspiring him to achieve the same levels of success. Sean was not alone in seeing the success of others as being potentially inspirational, rather than a purely negative source of “dissatisfaction and envy” (De Botton, 2005:46). Many participants discussed how they liked to surround themselves with people that they could “admire” for their successes (Scott), in some cases defining this success as not just material, but in terms of specific talent or relationship success. Instead, for many success took on a multifaceted appearance, and could even be related to “something as small as finishing a book you needed to read, or running further today than yesterday” (Essie).

In this manner, success could be seen as an everyday feature of life. However, it can also be strongly related to “big decisions” and overall “life goals” (Jason), hinting at its potentially diverse nature. This therefore points to the notion of success as being material alone (De Botton, 2005), is potentially inaccurate for this group. This far more positive discussion led the participants on to thinking of how they personally defined success and the emotions related to this leading to the perhaps surprising discovery that happiness is at the root of all other considerations.

### *Happiness: The Roots of the Tree of Success*

When asked to define success, many participants expressed it as being “generally...defined by how much money you make” (Cara). When combining this view with the idea of the effort based meritocracy, this is reminiscent of the notion that “money is imbued with an ethical quality” and thusly becomes the symbol of the successful person (De Botton, 2005:194). This occurs since it is thought that they must have had to put in considerable effort to become wealthy, or at least possess the “cardinal virtues” (De Botton, 2005:193). However, participants actively distanced themselves from this view, due to it being “superficial” (Scott) and just the view of “society in general” (Essie). Yes, you need “money to survive” (Nick) or to have a “comfortable lifestyle” but that this was not the highest priority (Sean). Instead, finding a career with “opportunities for personal development” (Jason) and where

you could be “happy at work” was far more important (Cara). In this sense, success can be seen as involving self-improvement, planning and also emotional satisfaction.

However, this could be said to be a convenient view point to take, protecting themselves from the reality that they may not get a highly paid role as soon as they have graduated from university. In this manner, by placing their own personal happiness at the root of their job search they can protect themselves against what they deem to be the societal version of success, something which very few could achieve at this stage of life. Despite this, all participants acknowledged in some manner that due to happiness being the key to ultimately *feeling* successful, success must be on some level a personal “feeling” (Cara) unique to that individual.

This is certainly a very open definition, which could be said to reflect the “diversity of open possibilities” (Giddens, 1991:73) available to that individual whilst they are experiencing this “anxiety of transitions” (Howard, 2007:28). Since they are currently attempting to “piece together new lifestyles and self-images” it makes sense for their definition of success to be somewhat more fluid than that of someone in a different position. It could also be said to exemplify the need for “flexibility” (Bauman, 2001:24) within contemporary society, so as to defend the self against feelings of failure and upset. Nonetheless, this is an interesting observation.

Overall, participants did seem to believe that success “ultimately comes down your own happiness” (Nick), however they also acknowledged that this was a very personal and subjective viewpoint. Therefore, it is perhaps even more vital to examine the individual whilst also considering concepts such as class and gender, in order to fully assess the deviations in views of success between individuals.

### *Influence: The Creation of a Vision of Success*

As previously discussed, a key flaw within individualization theory is its “breezy and unsystematic” (Alexander, 1996:133) nature concerning social divisions within society. Therefore this was stipulated as being a key consideration of this project and surfaced primarily when considering how individuals were influenced to think about success. When asked about where they thought their vision of success came from, the answers were fairly uniform in some respects. Many of the

participants involved suggested that things such as “celebrity culture” (Essie), or the “media, including Facebook and twitter and stuff” (Sarah), could be partially responsible for the circulation of society’s generally materialistic view of success. Nick in particular, demonstrated this with the following statement concerning programs on television:

*“...on TV, there’s Benefits Street and the next minute there’s programs about really rich people...it’s like this is what failure looks like, you know, no job, council house, loads of kids who can’t achieve anything...and here is success, huge houses, extravagant lifestyles, about fifty different types of car...”*

(Nick)

What is clear from this is the effect these individuals believe the media to be having on our view of success. However, the interesting element of this discussion is that almost all participants referred to this being something that influenced others and not themselves, again defining themselves as being apart from society as a whole. Whilst it was acknowledged that it was “hard not to feel like that sometimes” (Essie), it was generally stipulated that this did not have an impact on them personally. Instead most of these individuals believed that their own conception of success came predominantly from family and their own personal background. Several participants such as Annabelle and Jason in particular, told stories of inspiration from parental figures who had taught them to “fight to get what you want” (Jason) or who had to work themselves up from nothing and “really drag [themselves] through life” (Annabelle). Seeing your family as successful then, appeared to be the centre of setting up life goals and achievements. However, there were certainly more prominent influences which could be observed, such as class and gender.

### *Class: Background, Capitals & the Development of Goals*

Throughout the interviews, individuals freely declared themselves as belonging to a particular class, whether that be “middle class” (Sarah), “mostly working class” (Nick) or even “probably upper middle class” (Sean) family. Whilst it is impossible to make sweeping statements about class from this small sample size, it’s consideration on the whole has none the less illuminated some interesting points.

On the whole, participants who identified themselves as being middle class or upper middle class, were far less likely to conceptualise failure as being anything other than that individual's own fault. It would seem that they were fully of the thought that one succeeded or failed dependent upon one's own "own doings and neglects" (Bauman, 2001:6). This is perhaps to be expected since one of the main criticisms of individualization theory is that it perhaps adheres to a thoroughly middle class view point (Howard, 2007). However, more interestingly still was their also being somewhat more materially orientated, with Essie making the following statement:

*"...everyone grows up with a certain standard of living that they are accustomed to...and for me, I have been fortunate enough to have quite a high standard of living...I won't take a job that will not let me live like that...or take something that's lower than what I think I am worth"*  
(Essie)

This is very reminiscent of Savage's comment that class is "encoded in people's sense of self-worth and in their attitudes to...others" (2000:107). Therefore, the attitude that they deserved more, and were perhaps capable of more, certainly made itself apparent. However, those who did not identify as being middle class or above, were on the whole more sympathetic to the potential for failure due to elements such as prejudice or discrimination, or just simple "bad luck", such as Cara who self-identified as being working class.

In addition to this, Nick discussed incidence where he had personally felt discriminated against and not allowed to succeed at something due to his working class nature. In his words, there were certain "blocks" placed before him, not all deliberately, which perhaps would "inhibit" him, preventing him from acquiring the same level of achievement as perhaps someone from the middle classes might. In particular, his thoughts on failure were particularly interesting when he stated that,

*"No one just fails just like that, there are always factors to be considered...the way the wind has blown them type of thing...it's seen as that person's fault...like they let themselves down...and that's not right, sometimes things just aren't in your control"* (Nick)

This suggests a significant amount more empathy for failure, not just as the individual's fault, but as being affected by external forces as well. If we are to consider these differences in class attitude through the use of Bourdieu's views on capital formation, there are certainly some interesting links.

This research can certainly be said to correlate with Bourdieu's analysis of a type of "freedom...stemming from possession of capital" (1984:178). Therefore, through the accumulation of various different types of capital, and the creation of their own "class habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977:80), the middle class individuals are perhaps allowing them to have more "power over the field" in which they operate (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:101). In addition to this, Hurst (2013) suggests that elements related to 'intellect' and 'academia' are indicative of a distinctly middle class habitus. Perhaps then, the more middle class students have more accumulated capital and are generally more comfortable within the University system. This in conjunction with their accrued capital would perhaps make them slightly more comfortable entering into this period of transition, since they possess the necessary resources to deal with it effectively and have not yet had to enter a field in which they have struggled.

Therefore, their notion that failure is caused solely by that individual alone is perhaps because they can afford to think like that; in this manner it can potentially be said that "individualization is a luxury" (Howard, 2007:19). In Nick's case, not possessing particular formations of different capitals perhaps makes him feel that he has less control over his life course, and thus cannot be blamed entirely for his failures. Whilst this is certainly speculation at this point, due to the small sample size and contention around the term 'class' itself, it is nonetheless an interesting gateway into perhaps greater research surrounding the conceptions of class and success in conjunction with one another.

Of course, if we are to take Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital on board, this may also suggest that all individuals interviewed possessed significant amounts of cultural capital, having almost achieved their "certificate of cultural competence" (Bourdieu, 1986), or in other words their degree. Naturally this is only one form of cultural capital, but it could potentially account for the great levels of similarity within

their responses, with other capital levels accounting for the differences. Regardless of this, Bourdieu certainly provides an interesting perspective through which to view feelings towards success on a class level.

### *Gender: Constraints, Confusion & Anxiety*

The second divergence in viewpoints came from the two gender groups interviewed. The most obvious initial point was that the female participants seemed a lot more anxious concerning the future than the males. Whilst all participants demonstrated a level of anxiety, the female participants were a lot quicker to indicate the severe impact which it had had on their lives. Cara, for example, stated that she had undergone much mental instability during this time of her life, primarily due to pressure to succeed.

However, the males of the group seemed far quicker to put a positive spin on the feelings of anxiety, stating that they would just “try not to think about it too much” (Ian, Participant 1), or that “if I can overcome this challenge then I will think better of myself...so I take it in a positive way if I can” (Scott). This can certainly be said to give credence to the notion that perhaps individualization “*strengthens* masculine role behaviour” (Beck, 1992:112). However, it could also be interpreted as the female participants feeling simply more comfortable with me, since I myself am female.

However, Beck’s aforementioned discussion regarding females as being “removed from the constraints of gender” through the process of individualization could certainly prove relevant here (1992:105). If women are indeed torn between the more traditional roles, and the new ones offered to them as they are forced to begin to construct their own identities (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 56), then this could certainly explain the increased levels of anxiety displayed. Within the process of individualization, young women are required to be “self-making, resilient, and flexible” (Harris, 2004:6), something which is naturally opposed to their underlying female habitus (McNay, 1999). In this sense, the traditional “ties to the family” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:55) become juxtaposed with women’s new expectation to “make projects of their work selves” (Harris, 2004:18). This sentiment is certainly agreed with by Essie who states that “generally the traditional view is still

there” of “men provide and women care.” Similarly, Sarah articulates the difficulty of feeling “trapped” between conflicting identities, one of which is “the same as men in a lot of ways” whilst the other is more traditional in that “women have to take care of household things...that’s seen as a success for a woman.”

So then from this, it is possible to see that the female participants felt greater levels of anxiety due to their being confused over what success ultimately should be as a women. For example, Sarah stated that she felt pressure to be a “good wife...you know stay at home, look after the children” whilst also “looking after myself and not having to rely on anyone too much...even financially”. This further links in with McNay (1999) and Adkins’ (2004) statements that the female habitus is clashing with the recent inclusion of women in “traditionally non-feminine spheres” or fields (Adkins, 2004:199). It is possible then, that having to balance so many different types of female success is putting unnecessary strain on young women within this group. However, it is still important to bear in mind that all participants, regardless of gender, identified success as being linked to their own personal happiness.

### *Discussing Anxiety: What Does This All Mean?*

Overall then, with regards to the four themes – Control, Responsibility, Emotion and Influence – it can be seen that impact of “ambiguity” (Bauman, 2001:57) and “uncertainty” (Giddens, 1991: 3) in second modernity has driven individuals to develop a certain “risk consciousness” (Beck, 1992:34). Given this, individuals attempt to gain some control back in planning and establishing their own life trajectories. This is carried out in many instances by the desire to seek out opportunities which can improve the self, frequently through the acquisition of new skills. This, it is argued, is driven by the process of individualization, which encourages individuals to think that they alone are responsible for “their own doings and neglects” (Bauman, 2001:6), and thus failure and success reflect directly on the self.

The culmination of these factors, of responsibility on the individual and a perceived meritocratic system, present a great “inner drama” (De Botton, 2005:4), as individuals feel pressure to follow this seemingly single path to success. However,

more interestingly still, individuals within this group are frequently distancing themselves from this “general view of society” (Essie). Instead, they talk of their own personal forms of success, involving everyday activities and ultimately happiness. In this manner, success is broken down into its most accessible form. Given this, it could be argued that, in distancing themselves from this generalised conception of success, they are protecting themselves from “anxiety produced by the fear of transgression” (Giddens, 1991:64).

However, such control over the anxiety they experienced was easier to achieve for some participants than for others; in this sense, the impacts of status anxiety and individualization cannot be said to be uniform across the whole of society. The females of the group in particular seemed to struggle with the “plurality of possible options” (Giddens, 1991:81) placed before them, as their traditional roles became juxtaposed with the demands of success in second modernity. Class also appeared to grant certain individuals a greater feeling of security than others, with middle and upper middle class individuals appearing to feel the strain less, despite conforming more readily to the societal views of success. In this manner, it becomes clear that a successful analysis of individualization and status anxiety should consider such social divisions as class and gender, rather than being considered simply “irreconcilable” (Nollman and Stasser, 2007:81).



Overall then, by situating status anxiety within individualization theory, it can be examined in much greater detail and can be seen as a valuable concept. The use of individualization has allowed status anxiety to become a far broader and considerably more detailed concept, allowing for some determination of its origins within society. Concepts such as the need for “self-regulation and improvement” (Howard, 2007:5) and the “reflexively organised” nature of identity (Giddens, 1991:5), provide much needed support to status anxiety. In this sense, the individualization debate has helped to strengthen status anxiety as a concept, placing it firmly within the academic, empirical sphere.

This impact has not only been one-way. Status anxiety too has gone some way to fill the gaps within individualization itself. In focusing on the “worry...that we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society” (De Botton, 2005:3-4), status anxiety can help to emphasise the emotional impact of individualization and the changes which it has brought about. This is something which is highly important, as all of the aforementioned individualization theorists mention at some point or another during their work the “ambivalence and pain” which can be caused by the processes associated with individualization (Howard, 2007:29). In combining this with De Botton’s assertion that the best way of dealing with status anxiety is to “attempt to understand and to speak of it” (2005:5), it is possible to see how important the two concepts can combine so as to effectively emphasise this point.

In addition to this, status anxiety helps to make individualization far more empirically testable, as it is situated within a discussion of success and failure. By analysing these terms, many different aspects of individualization can be discussed with participants, in a far more relatable way. This can certainly be seen from the detailed and enthusiastic responses given by participants during the interviews themselves, as well as in the quality of the information acquired. Therefore, it is hoped that this can go some way at least to solving the problem of much individualization theory being founded on “no empirical research” at all (Dawson, 2012:307).

However, both status anxiety and individualization failed to fully take into account social inequalities or divisions, such as gender and class. Whilst De Botton does mention this, it is thought that his simplistic notion of 'rich' versus 'poor' is simply not appropriate (2005), as it presents an unsophisticated and naïve conception of class. However it does at least begin a discussion of it within individualization, which frequently failed to take into account any "varying structural locations" (Atkinson, 2010:1.3) of individuals within society. Therefore, in using Bourdieu's discussions of habitus, field and capitals, this study was able to take a more "interactionist" (Dawson, 2012: 309) approach to individualization, and to status anxiety itself. This allowed for a far more detailed discussion of gender as well, something which is only briefly touched on by Beck (1992) and not discussed at all by De Botton (2005). Therefore overall, the inclusion of Bourdieu was vital in making the study far more in-depth, whilst further attempting to manage the flaws of each main concept.

Overall, it can be said that individualization and status anxiety simply cannot be seen to have a uniform impact upon the whole of society. In this manner, the need for an inclusion of a discussion of inequality and differences within society is made even clearer; we cannot afford to think of these social division as simply "zombie categories" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:203). In addition to this, success itself cannot be said to have a single definitive definition, as De Botton appears to argue (2005). This therefore calls into question De Botton's notion that the "distorted picture of our needs" (2005:205) created by consumer society leads us to see success as purely material and monetary.

Individuals do indeed state this as being clear within society as a whole, however they also develop far more subjective and individual notions of success, and actively set themselves apart from society in this manner. This proves De Botton's concept to still be useful, but in desperate need of becoming far more detailed. This, it is argued, can be achieved through situating it in relation to individualization theory and Bourdieu's comments on habitus, capital and field. Essentially, what this entails is the consideration of the utmost subjectivity of individual's views, whilst being consistently mindful of their own personal backgrounds and motivations. This was certainly achieved, through the use of

interpretivism, as well as *Verstehen* (Weber, 1947), which brought this to the foreground within the research itself.

Naturally, there are many flaws with this research project. As previously mentioned, the small sample size and limited nature of the chosen population of study can certainly present problems with regards to generalising any data from this study. Whilst this has been justified, due primarily to time constraints, it does not alter the fact that significant inference cannot be taken from this study. However, this study does still achieve what it set out to do: to situate status anxiety within a discussion of individualization, thereby hoping to start an investigation into the emotional impact caused by individualization itself. As has been demonstrated, the importance of examining inequality within this field cannot be underestimated, and that is why factors such as race, culture and perhaps the effect of community should be targeted for study in the future.

On the whole, this study has achieved its goals within the limitations set around it and has yielded many intriguing results. It is hoped that this could be the beginnings of the inclusion of status anxiety in more academic research, since it has been demonstrated, through this project, to be a truly illuminating empirical tool, as well as an interesting concept. It is in this manner that we may attempt to assess every “group, milieu and region to determine how far individualization processes...have advanced within it” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:5).

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**ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE?**

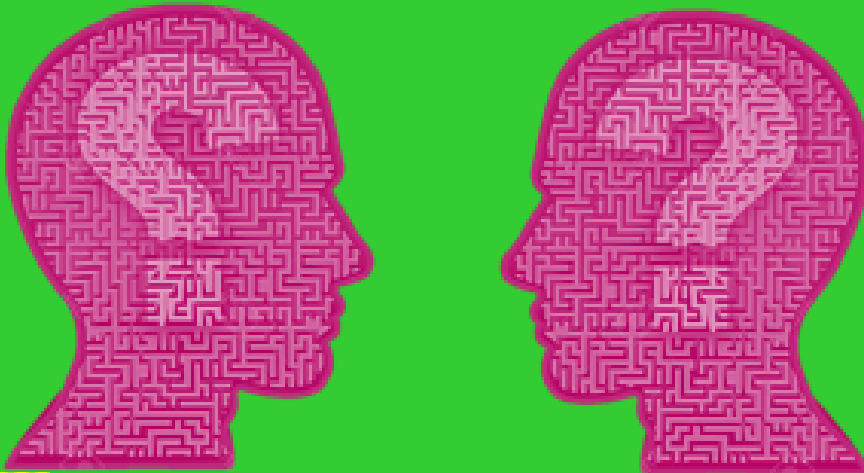
**ARE YOU NEARING THE END OF YOUR STUDIES?**

**IF THE ANSWER IS YES, THEN WE NEED YOU!**

**If you are a student coming to the end of your studies and would be interested in taking part in research concerning your feelings regarding your future plans, then please GET IN TOUCH! This research NEEDS YOU! To be part of this project, and for the chance of getting free coffee, chocolate or cookies, please email the address below with your details! Thank You.**



**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN TAKING PART, OR JUST WANT SOME MORE INFORMATION BEFORE DECIDING, PLEASE TAKE A COPY OF THE RESEARCHERS DETAILS SEEN BELOW AND CONTACT HER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THANK YOU!**



TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH CONTACT:

- 1003346@sheff.ac.uk

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*Individual Insecurities: An Examination of 'Status Anxiety' in relation to Individualisation*

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Interview Topic Guide

*Please give me a brief background to yourself, your life and your education...*

1. Individuals Thoughts/Feelings Concerning the Future:
  - a. What do you want to do in the future?
    - i. How does talking about the future make you feel?
    - ii. How do you feel about the availability of opportunities for you going ahead?
    - iii. What factors do you consider when looking for potential future employment?
      1. i.e. salary, happiness, location...etc.
    - iv. Why are these considerations important for you?
    - v. How do those around you feel?/Do you think others feel the same way?
    - vi. How do you manage any anxiety about the future?
2. Individual Thoughts/Feelings Concerning Success and Failure:
  - a. What do you think about success/failure and how it is defined?
    - i. How does talking about success and failure make you feel?/What thoughts does it bring to mind concerning your own life?
    - ii. How do you define success/failure?
    - iii. Where do you think your perception of these comes from?
    - iv. Do you feel pressure to succeed?
      1. If so, where from?
    - v. Do you feel supported in your attempts to achieve success?
    - vi. Is being seen to be successful important to you?

1. Why?
  - vii. How do you feel when you see others succeed?
  - viii. What do you think when you see others fail?
    1. Why do you think in general people do experience failure?/Who decides if we fail?
  - ix. Do you think others would agree with your thoughts?
3. Linking the two:
  - a. Given the previous discussion, do you think that you will be able to succeed in the future?
    - i. Why?
  - b. How integral is your chosen career in making you feel successful?
  - c. How do you feel about the prospects of gaining employment?
    - i. Does this affect your view on how it is possible to succeed or how people come to fail?



### Plain Language Statement

Title of Project: Individual Insecurities: An Examination of ‘Status Anxiety’ in Relation to Individualisation

Name of Researcher: Angharad Williamson

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

I am conducting this study for my Masters dissertation at the University of Glasgow. This is being carried out as part of the program of my Masters in Sociology and Research Methods. The study intends to examine the impact of ideal notions of success and failure on individuals, such as you, who are currently nearing the end of their university career and perhaps thinking about future employment prospects. This concerns anxious feelings or worries regarding what you hope to do and what challenges you think this might hold. We will also discuss various factors which could impact this such as recession, the prominent success of others and retirement. Therefore, this study aims to understand this process better and to measure its impact upon individuals who are perhaps the most vulnerable to it at this time.

The research will consist of one approximately 45 minute interview per person. The timing is however entirely flexible and should you prefer a shorter interview, this can certainly be arranged. It is important for you to know that the interview is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to answer some questions relating to your thoughts on notions such as ‘success’ and ‘failure’. At any point during the interview should you not wish to answer a specific question please do not feel obliged to. Your comfort and wellbeing is of the highest importance, so if you do not wish to answer please voice this.

The interview will be audio recorded and you will be asked to provide written and verbal consent to involvement in the research process. The recording will be deleted after the project is completed and any transcripts of it will be anonymised. This will be achieved via the use of a pseudonym. Any other personal information, such as your age or location, will not be included in the research at all. The only thing that will appear in the research paper will be a pseudonym. Anonymised quotes might be included in the report resulting from this study. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this then please let me know.

It is also important to note that your participation can be withdrawn at any point before the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2015, should you decide that you no longer wish to take part. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at [1002546w@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:1002546w@student.gla.ac.uk). If you have any concerns regarding the research itself you might also contact my supervisor, Dr. Matt Dawson by email at [Matt.Dawson@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Matt.Dawson@glasgow.ac.uk), or by contacting him at his office by calling 01413305169.

It is also highly important for you to be aware that this project has been approved by the Ethics Committee at the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow. This means that it has been deemed ethical and adheres to the University's ethics rules. However, should you have any concerns or questions regarding the conduct of this project, please contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer Dr Sharon Wright at [Sharon.Wright@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Sharon.Wright@glasgow.ac.uk).

[Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. Please now take your time when considering your participation.](#)



University  
of Glasgow

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College of Social  
Sciences

### Consent Form

**Title of Project:** Individual Insecurities: An Examination of 'Status Anxiety' in Relation to Individualisation

**Name of Researcher:** Angharad Williamson

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.
4. I understand that my name will not appear in the report arising from this research.
5. I understand that anonymised quotes from this interview may be used within this project and I consent to this.
6. I agree to the data gathered from this interview being used for the purposes of a University dissertation and confirm that I fully understand this use.
7. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Participant*                      \_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*    \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Researcher*                                      \_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*    \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

## Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

### NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION OUTCOME – UG and PGT Applications

**Application Type:** New

**Date Application Reviewed:** 24.3.2015

**Application Number:** SPS/2015/450/social science

**Applicant's Name:** Angharad Williamson

**Project Title:** Individual insecurities: An examination of 'status anxiety' in relation to individualisation.

### APPLICATION OUTCOME

(A) Fully Approved  *Start Date of Approval:* *End Date of Approval:*

(B) Approved subject to amendments

If the applicant has been given approval subject to amendments this means they can proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval, however they should note the following applies to their application:

Approved Subject to Amendments without the need to submit amendments to the Supervisor

Approved Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the applicant's Supervisor

The College Ethics Committee expects the applicant to act responsibly in addressing the recommended amendments.

(C) Application is Not Approved at this Time

Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the School Ethics Forum (SEF)

**Complete resubmission required. Discuss the application with supervisor before resubmitting.**

Please note the comments in the section below and provide further information where requested.

**If you have been asked to resubmit your application in full, send it to your supervisor who will forward it to your local School Ethics Forum admin support staff.**

**Where resubmissions only need to be submitted to an applicant's supervisor.**

This will apply to essential items that an applicant must address prior to ethics approval being granted. As the associated research ethics risks are considered to be low, the applicant's response need only be reviewed and cleared by the applicant's supervisor before the research can properly begin. For any application processed under this outcome, it is the Supervisor's responsibility to email [socpol-pgt-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:socpol-pgt-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk) with confirmation of their approval of the re-submitted application.

## **APPLICATION COMMENTS**

**Major Recommendations:**

**Minor Recommendations:**

On the plain language statement there is a reference to Muir Houston and this should now read as Sharon Wright.

Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact your School Ethics forum admin support staff.