1. Non-Technical Summary

A 1000 word (maximum) summary of the main research results, in non-technical language, should be provided below. The summary might be used by ESRC to publicise the research. It should cover the aims and objectives of the project, main research results and significant academic achievements, dissemination activities and potential or actual impacts on policy and practice.

‘From the coal face to the car park? (2007-2009)
Yvette Taylor (PI) & Michelle Addison (RA, 12 months)

1. Background

This research adopted a multi-dimensional approach to explore women’s lives (n=97) in the North East of England in the context of de-industrialisation and the transition to a service sector, leisure based economy. It investigated the emergence of ‘new’ femininities in a situation of industrial ‘degeneration’ and regeneration, investigating what has hitherto been under-researched when compared with attention that has focused on boys’ and men’s experiences of these social processes. In interviewing women across the age range (16-85 yrs) the main concern was whether gender and class inequalities are eroded and/or recreated and to what extent change incorporates actual, material, shifts or ‘imagined’ subjective movements, away from ‘old’ ‘traditional’ identities towards new, ‘mobile’ (dis)positions. Both gender and class are highlighted as relevant in the reclamation and contestation of social space (workplace, home space, leisure space), in the transformations from and continuations between the ‘past’, ‘present’ and imagined ‘future’. This research drew on a wide range of literature and frameworks; sociological work on social transformation and division; feminist frameworks regarding gender inequality and identity; youth studies approaches on transition and ‘social exclusion’, as well as methodological literature regarding the practice of a ‘public sociology’.

2. Objectives

All objectives were addressed and met by the research.

- To examine the ways that de-industrialisation has impacted on women’s lives in the North East: How do women themselves negotiate, benefit from or struggle with such transition? Are some women able to ‘move’ and claim resources in the reclamation of wealth, are others ‘fixed’ and excluded from such processes and how do gender and class affect this?

- To offer a contribution to the field of class analysis, exploring class beyond that which can be measured and quantified but which still retains a crucial focus on the material. To interrogate material, subjective and spatial aspects of class as also intersecting with theories of gender and ‘new femininities’, contributing to the theorisation of classed femininity and transition, extended across the age range.
3. Methods
In total, 97 interviews were conducted with white women from different class backgrounds: sixty-six women self-identified as working-class, twenty-two as middle-class and nine were reluctant to state or could not name their class position (see report).

4. Results
Where the themes of mobility and transformation occupy centre stage in many sociological accounts, referencing ‘movement’ of people and places in ‘new’ times, this research points to the ways that gender and class may be reconfigured:

- Women are differently placed, and place themselves, within processes of transition with middle-class women more able to ‘get ahead’ in ‘new’ times, while working-class women still strive to ‘get by’. This queries the move towards and assumed fit into a ‘feminised’ labour force, which has been highlighted in foregrounding male failure/‘crisis’.
- Transformation and continuation are marked on, and indeed embedded, in the landscape, where regional efforts on regeneration can be conceptualised against the backdrop of de-industrialisation and (urban) re-branding; the ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ sit uneasily in these (re)imagingings, evident in accounts of (not) ‘fitting-in’.
- Such re-constitutions are suggestive of different forms and consequences of social transformation, negotiated in classed and gendered (dis)identifications where, for some, their presence was marked as distinctly out of place, as opposed to others who could more easily claim a movement and placement compatible with the sense of regional change and mobility.

5. Significant Academic Achievements

Publications
Books
- Taylor, Y. (ed. forthcoming, 2010) *Our working-class lives: classed connections and intersections (Title TBC)* Ashgate

Journal Articles
- Taylor, Y. and Addison, M. (2009) ‘(Re)constituting the past, (Re)branding the present and (Re)imaging the future: Women’s spatial negotiation of gender and class’. *Journal of Youth Studies*, Special Issue Young People, Class and Place

Newsletters
- ‘Fieldwork Completed’
- ‘Girls just want to have fun’

Conference Papers/Seminar Series
The project overlapped with the postgraduate and early career seminar series ‘Our Working-Class Lives’ (2005-2007) organised by PI.

- ‘(Re)constituting the past, (Re)branding the present and (Re)imaging the future: Women’s spatial negotiation of gender and class’. *European..."
6. Activities

This research has practical as well as academic interest. PI/RA engaged in a two-fold dissemination strategy to target both academic and practitioner audiences (including Regional Development Agency One NorthEast) to a) inform and deepen the academic debate on the complexities of gender and class inequality in the context of social transformation b) to inform and provide guidance to practitioners with regard to the classed and gendered effects of economic development and regeneration. Researchers established a ‘user group’ including relevant local organisations, which met on three occasions; powerpoint presentations were given, discussion generated and feedback submitted on each occasion, useful in research design, delivery and impact. The project website is available at: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/research/sociology/womanslivesnortheast.html

7. Impacts

Successful academic dissemination is underway and will be continued: practitioner dissemination via ‘user group’ relevant to local policy formation; media response (TyneTees); one edited collection arising from the overlapping Seminar Series and one monograph based on the project; one journal article is forthcoming and several more are anticipated (see ‘dissemination’). Having received relevant training throughout (see report), the RA is now undertaking an ESRC 1+3 studentship supervised by PI.