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investigating social mobility and social reproduction

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Abstract

The United Kingdom's Coalition government has introduced education policy that is focused on increasing the opportunities to promote and advance social mobility for all children within state education. Raising young people's aspirations through school-based initiatives is a prominent theme within recent policy texts, which are focused on improving educational outcomes and thus advancing social mobility. This article draws on qualitative data from paired interviews with 32 students in two academies to first investigate if our participants' aspirations indicate a desire for intragenerational social mobility and second, to explore our participants' perceptions of the influences of their family background on their aspirations for the future. Analysis of our data highlights the mismatch between our participants' aspirations for the future and the government's constructions of what they should aspire to, as articulated in policy texts. By investigating aspirations, as part of a wider project to understand social mobility qualitatively, our data shows the important role of family in shaping our participants' varied and diverse aspirations that are frequently at variance with government policy.

Keywords: aspirations, social mobility, social class, education policy, success

Introduction

Successive governments in the United Kingdom (UK) have adopted policies designed to promote and advance intragenerational and intergenerational social mobility (HMG, 2009: HMG, 2010: HMG, 2011). Intragenerational social mobility reflects status changes in an individual's life, contrasted with intergenerational social mobility, which refers to status changes over multiple generations. The current Conservative government has followed the Coalition and New Labour in emphasizing the need to reduce inequality and increase social mobility. Michael Gove, Education Secretary 2010-2014, perceived the key barrier to social mobility through education is a result of low aspirations held by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Gove, 2011a, unpagged). His successor, Nicky Morgan, supports Gove's approach to raising social mobility and stated in a speech to the Leicestershire law society that:

It's vital that our policies consider all aspects of inequality in the workplace. Just as damaging can be a lack of social mobility or opportunities for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds (Morgan, 2015: 1).

The policy text informing the recent social mobility agenda, *Opening Doors* (HMG, 2011: 28), sets out the former Coalition government's commitment to ensuring that all young people have maximum opportunity to reach their potential in the education and labour market and to ensure that they do not suffer from 'frustrated aspirations' as a consequence of their family background. *Opening Doors* (HMG, 2011: 6) constructs engagement in education as key to raising young people's aspirations:

The education system should challenge low aspirations and expectations, dispelling the myth that those from poorer backgrounds cannot aim for top universities and professional careers.

The current Conservative government's commitment to raising aspirations includes the provision of financial support for the foundation years, primary and secondary school years, transition years and adulthood, to ensure that everyone can experience social mobility and fulfil their individual potential

(Hoskins and Barker, 2014). Policy texts encourage the view that young people should have high aspirations and continually strive to climb the mobility ladder to pursue careers above and beyond those of their parents and extended family. Policy texts assume that relatively low progression rates into further and higher education are due to a poverty of aspirations amongst disadvantaged, working class young people (Archer et al, 2007). In such an analysis, policy makers easily dismiss the presence and effect of structural inequality, and individual failure is constructed as a fair and justified outcome of a meritocratic education system.

Policy-makers assume many young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, lack the right sort of academic aspirations and familial support to achieve high status future employment. The CentreForum Think Tank Annual Report (2016) has suggested that White British pupils are less academically successful than their minority ethnic peers due to a lack of parental support. The authors claim that academic aspirations alone will not guarantee success (Perera et al 2016). Rather, the authors contend that the key to success is a group of behaviours that support aspiration, such as 'parents attending parents' evenings at school, talking to their children about subject options, supervising homework, ensuring that the family eats together and has regular bedtimes' (Guardian Education, 2016).

Opening Doors (2011: 56) suggests that secondary schools need to run "day-long programmes that aim to broaden horizons and tackle the poverty of aspiration that holds back too many young people". Opening Doors also claims that schools rather than families should be the central sites for aspiration formation for young people, particularly for those from a working class background.

This paper presents an analysis of the aspirations for the future reported by 32 young people to discover the extent to which their aspirations indicate a disposition towards intragenerational social class mobility and to extend understanding of their perceptions about the influences of their family background on their aspirations for the future. The paper draws on qualitative

data drawn from paired interviews with 88 students in two high performing academy schools. The wider study compared and contrasted the aspirations for the future held by 15-18 year old students in A and B groups in both schools. The A group sample consisted of high performing A* students and the B groups consisted of a cross section of the rest (A-E) to establish if differences in aspirations and outcome persist, despite the universal success alleged to occur in high performing academy schools. We then looked for family influences that might account for differences, which is the focus of this paper, and for the school characteristics (e.g. setting/ streaming/ pedagogy) that compound such effects, although these are not discussed in this paper (see Hoskins and Barker, 2014 for a discussion).

The 32 young people discussed in this paper were selected as they talked in some considerable depth about their aspirations for the future, when compared with the larger cohort. Analysis of their aspirations enabled us to identify five key areas: personal happiness, job satisfaction, making a difference, status and wealth (individually defined below). Discussion of these five areas has enabled us to tease out the participants' perceptions of the role played by their families in shaping their aspirations for academic or vocational education pathways.

Researching aspirations

Understanding the role of aspirations in young people's hopes, plans and choices for the future arguably remains a significant issue. However, conceptualising and defining aspiration is problematic and contested. As Jones (2011: 10) notes, aspiration 'has been redefined to mean individual self-enrichment: to scramble up the social ladder and become middle-class'. Aspirations are an important element of the political project aimed at remaking the working classes as middle class (Allen, 2014). Such an approach is not new; over a decade ago Gewirtz (2001) argued that aspirations were conceptualised as a significant area where working-class families could be remade as middle-class in terms of tastes and dispositions. In our study, we viewed aspirations as socially constructed and historically situated, yielding insights into the hopes, plans and dreams for the future reported by

participants. In this paper, we argue that our participants' family background and family antecedents significantly shape their aspirations for the future.

Researching aspirations has been a significant strand of sociological research over the past two decades. Archer et al (2007: 79) suggest that aspirations are important because they 'reflect something about the individual in question [and] also provide a degree of impetus and drive for current behaviours and future actions and choices'. Government policies intended to raise working class young people's aspirations, such as Aim Higher and Opening Doors (HMG, 2011), construct an agentic and individualistic view of young people's ability to achieve their plans for the future, and assume that it is a simple matter of choosing an appropriately high status pathway, working hard and remaining motivated and success will follow. But research by Allen (2014), Brown (2011) and Ball et al (2000) has shown that disadvantaged young people do hold high aspirations for the future, but tend to lack the reified social, economic and family capital to fulfil their potential. These authors highlight the denigration of the aspirations held by working class young people and they illuminate the tension between individual agency and the operation and impact of wider social structures that can constrain and limit disadvantaged young people's chances of fulfilling their aspirations. The impact of social structures, particularly social class background and accompanying relative material poverty, can exert a defining influence on what is and what is not possible for many working class young people, however high their aspirations might be (Allen, 2014).

Yet a government held deficit view of economically disadvantaged young people's aspirations has persisted, despite a plethora of research questioning and challenging these negative constructions (see for example, Croll, 2004: Devine, 2004: Laureau, 2004: Power et al, 2003: Reay, 2006: Reay et al, 2013). Crozier et al (2008) contest the deficit view of disadvantaged young people's aspirations and illuminate the generally high aspirations for professional careers held by many of the working class young people in their sample. The issue facing many disadvantaged young people is the process of translating their high aspirations for the future into a lived reality. Reay et al

(2005) have shown that young people, despite reporting their high aspirations, are frequently constrained by degrees of choice that relate to the policy context, their family circumstances and in particular, their parents' occupations.

Our wider study explores how the recent educational policy context in England has shaped and influenced our cohorts' aspirations for the future and in this paper we highlight the influence of their families in this process. We asked our participants about their aspirations to discover the extent to which their plans, decisions and reflections on their future employment, academic and vocational goals are favourable to achieving intragenerational social mobility.

Theoretical framework

We wished to understand the tension in many of our participants' stories between individual agency, shaped by cultural and familial factors, and the wider impact of economic, social and structural factors. The interplay of the individual with their environment, including family, community and school, was revealed by the various assumptions, dilemmas and complexities described by our participants. In our study, we used the concepts of habitus and field to deepen our understanding of the reproduction of class inequalities and of the impact of social class on prospects for intragenerational social mobility (Bourdieu, 1977: 1984: 1990: 1993).

Habitus refers to 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices' (Bourdieu 1977: 72). The term characterizes the recurring patterns of social class, social mobility and class fractions – that is, the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress and manners – that are inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, particularly in early childhood (Mills, 2008). These classed patterns are formed of individual and shared group dispositions. The dispositions (capacities, tendencies, propensities or inclinations) that constitute habitus are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation in

early childhood, formed from the family milieu as a complex mix of past and present (Mills, 2008).

However, utilizing habitus theory as a 'conceptual tool to be used in empirical research' (Reay, 2004: 439) was problematic. Habitus is a widely contested concept (Reay, 2004; Nash, 1999; Tooley & Darby, 1998) and there are limitations involved with deploying it. We encountered three limitations: first, there is the issue of the extent to which habitus is agentic as opposed to structural and deterministic. Mills argues that "it is ironic that habitus has been subject to widespread criticism on the basis of its 'latent determinism'" (2008: 80). Yet a recurring criticism of habitus is its perceived potential for determinism (see for example Calhoun et al, 1993). Reay (2004: 433) has countered the determinism argument by suggesting that habitus "generates a wide repertoire of possible actions, simultaneously enabling the individual to draw on transformative and constraining courses of action" (Reay, 2004: 433). Nash (1999: 76) asserts the 'habitus provides the grounds for agency, within a limited arena of choice, and thus is a theoretical escape from structuralist determinism'. As such we have attempted to provide an agentic reading of habitus where individuals are able to *transform* their lives, enacting individual agency within the parameters of a structured social world.

Second, habitus theory cannot satisfactorily account for anomalies in choice making processes reported by participants whose stories are not straightforward examples of social reproduction. We have drawn on the notion of 'disposition disruption', which we use to refer to the discordance produced when trying to explain the respondents' atypical dispositions with habitus theory. The notion of disposition disruption was developed by one of us (Hoskins, 2012) in earlier work and we use it here to provide a way of exploring atypical dispositions.

The final limitation relates to Bourdieu's shifting definitions of his key concepts. For example, Nash (1999: 176) notes that 'structure is one of the many concepts Bourdieu is reluctant to define' and warns that 'anyone who attempts to discover consistency in his usage will be disappointed'. A further

example is the term 'dispositions', which, as Jenkins (1992: 76) notes, 'might be no more than 'attitudes', and indeed have often been understood as such'; thus, using habitus is problematised by the variation in definitions. We have attempted to address this issue by providing information about how we have conceptualized and used habitus theory in this research.

Despite these limitations, drawing on habitus theory has enabled us to identify and explore patterns of familial social reproduction and disruptions to those patterns within our sample. Although not discussed in this paper, habitus also enabled us to explore the role of education and educational processes in shaping social reproduction and aiding the transmission of class advantage, and the contribution to social stability (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

Sample

Two highly effective case study schools, with comprehensive but above average intakes, were chosen because they match policy-makers' expectations for the conditions believed to improve aspirations and foster social mobility. An 11 – 16 (South Park) and an 11 – 18 (Felix Holt) school were selected to facilitate comparisons and contrasts between final year students' aspirations for the future as they prepared for public examinations at age 16 and age 18. We acknowledge that the differences in age groups between the two schools could be a limitation of the study as aspirations can alter between the ages of 16-18. However, we were capturing 16+ and 18+ perspectives because we know aspirations change, but it turns out not significantly and only an adaptation to the results achieved over time when students became pragmatically rational (Hodkinson et al., 1996). We did not aim to consider the influence of age differences on aspirations. Rather, we have focused on examining the extent to which an individual's dreams for the future reflect a desire for social mobility or social reproduction.

South Park and Felix Holt (pseudonyms) are state-of-the-art academies, prototypes for a new generation of high performing schools. Felix Holt is in an outer London suburban town and South Park is in a rural area but receives students from a wide and sometimes suburban area. South Park was 'good'

and Felix Holt was 'outstanding' prior to conversion to academy status and both schools were extensively praised by Ofsted and achieved exceptionally good results. The former Coalition government official discourse claimed that the academy regime can address the 'poverty of aspirations' held by underrepresented young people (HMG, 2011: 56); such a sentiment is reflected by the current Conservative government (Barker and Hoskins, 2015). The two academies, much admired in their respective neighbourhoods and highly praised in recent Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) Reports, are believed to offer capable and committed students excellent access to good examination grades, good universities and good opportunities for social mobility.

Sample characteristics for the wider study with 88 participants are detailed in Table 1 (p. XX). The sample in both schools was comprised of one group of very able students and another group representing the rest of the ability range with their estimated grades varying from A to E.

Insert table 1 here: Sample demographics

The sample criteria also included a gender balance as we sought equal numbers of boys and girls. Senior teachers at each school were requested to identify one group of very able students, defined as those expected to achieve A* and A grades in all subjects (group A), and another group representing the rest of the ability range, defined as those expected to achieve A to E grades in their examinations (group B). These samples were designed to compare and contrast the aspirations of A* groups (at both schools, regardless of social background) with A - E variety groups (also at both schools, also without attention to social background). Students were invited to self identify their social class background according to the typology of advantaged, average and disadvantaged; the 32 participants discussed in this paper represent a variety of class backgrounds.

We did not seek to explore the impact of the participants' ethnicity on their aspirations for the future so ethnicity was not included as a variable. This is

because social class operates differently in Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups and 'low aspirations' are not reported as a key issue for these groups – rather they experience more external discriminatory factors (Crozier et al, 2010: Crozier, 2005). Our focus in this research was on teasing out white working and middle class issues. The schools are located in predominantly white neighborhoods. Thus we choose to focus our attention on the influence of social class and gender, and intersections between these aspects of identity, as they occurred in our participants' stories.

If Gove's hypothesis about education were correct, there should be few differences in aspirations towards upward mobility and even outcomes, since he maintained that all students, regardless of gender, social class and ethnicity, should respond in similar ways to the high performing climate created by these prototype academies.

Insert Table 2 here: Sample Table

In sum, sample construction was purposive in seeking students to match defined criteria, but also opportunist because we invited senior teachers at the schools to select participants and accepted changes to those listed for interview on the day in light of operational requirements and the non-attendance of some individuals.

Interviews

We conducted our study qualitatively to challenge existing knowledge of social mobility and its associated processes, and so that we might begin to understand the situated and contextual complexity of aspirations as they influence social mobility¹. We conducted semi-structured paired interviews with 88 student participants to gather rich, detailed and descriptive accounts of their aspirations, experiences and expectations for the future (Bold, 2012: King and Horrocks, 2010: Bassegy, 1999). The paired interviews were used to

¹ See Hoskins and Barker (2014) for a discussion of the advantages of researching social mobility qualitatively.

put participants at ease with the interviewer. Like Evens and Houssart (2007) our pairs were based on the teacher's pragmatic decisions about who was available. The paired interviews provided space and time for the respondents to discuss relevant issues not raised directly by the interviewer (Rubin and Babbie, 2009). This space and time led to discussions that highlighted further areas for investigation and contributed to the co-construction of their stories (Hartas, 2010). The meanings the participants 'attach to their environment and relationships' was explored (May and Williams, 1998: 8) and questions were designed to elicit the participants' perceptions of their present circumstances and future plans and to capture their understanding of their experience.

Ethics

The study was carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's [BERA] (2011) ethical guidelines. Participants were interviewed with their parents/carers' consent and were assured of their right to anonymity and their right to withdraw at any time. They were advised that data would be held securely and confidentially, and that their identity would be protected. Anonymity has been ensured by removing identifying factors and by the use of pseudonyms.

Aspirations

Following thematic data coding of the paired interview transcripts, we identified five recurring areas of aspirations for the future amongst our participants. These areas of aspiration are defined below to indicate how we have constructed these themes. These definitions are based on our participants' discussions of the future and linked to existing research into these areas of aspirations.

Happiness: the pursuit and accomplishment of individualised goals and aspirations. These goals related to future employment and aspects of private life, such as having children, in almost equal measure, a theme highlighted by Brown's (2011) work.

Personal satisfaction: related to future employment above all else. Participants desired a future career that is challenging and stimulating, where every day is different and the work is demanding and testing. The aspiration for satisfaction was similarly identified in Allen's (2014) research with young working class women.

Making a difference: the desire to make a positive, measurable impact on place of work and in some instances the wider local community. This was a gendered aspiration with girls citing it as important, as noted in research by Skelton and Francis (2009).

Status: to gain high status employment that provides a degree of power and autonomy. It represents a desire for various forms of upward social mobility. Easterbrook (2004) identified the desire for status as more important, to a number of young adults in America, than the pursuit of wealth.

Wealth: the accumulation of economic security, wealth and material advantage through a chosen employment pathway. This desire resonates with work by Biressi & Nunn (2013), which questions the links between 'education, enterprise and popular culture'.

Each of these aspirations is now discussed with examples from the data to illustrate the ways in which these hopes, plans and dreams for the future were articulated, inflected by family influences and represent, or not, a desire for intragenerational social mobility.

Personal and professional happiness

When we asked our participants, 'what constitutes your future success?' a significant theme across the two groups and the two schools related to the participants' future aspirations for personal happiness above all other potential gains. Aspiring to be happy in the future resonates with research conducted by Brown (2011) and Archer et al (2013), amongst others, who similarly found that young people in their sample sought future happiness above all other concerns. McLeod (2007) also identified the importance of future happiness in

her research exploring future aspirations held by socially excluded young women.

Striving for happiness was cited as important by seventeen in our sample. Desiring happiness related to their future professional and personal lives and they were very keen to obtain future employment and personal circumstances that would make them happy. The desire for happiness was, however, articulated differently across the A and B groups at each school as evidenced in the following sections.

In the South Park A group four students, all from advantaged family backgrounds, sought happiness in their future work life. Jason told us that 'in the future, it is having a job that I enjoy [...] and I can get a good life from'. Noah explained that 'as long as I've worked hard and feel I've been successful and enjoy the job, that's success... but not liking the job is what I fear and so for me pay is much less important than enjoyment of the job'. Isabella's aspirations for the future would be 'job satisfaction and happiness... You need enough money to pay for your house and family and a small surplus'. Isabella explained that seeking to focus on making money alone or to achieve personal gain was not as important to her as seeking happiness. Sean similarly felt that being happy in his employment would be an important aspect of his future success.

All of these A group students self identified as being from advantaged family backgrounds and their parents hold some form of professional employment. All of these students are aspiring to future professional occupations as indicated in table 2. These students emphasised the important and defining influence of their families on their aspirations for the future, as opposed to their teachers and schooling. They all described their family background as happy and felt valued and supported economically, educationally and emotionally. These participants' middle class background influenced their dispositions to "generate practices and perceptions" (Bourdieu, 1993: 5) about what constitutes a desirable future. Their habitus and disposition towards paid employment, produced by their family milieu, highlight the importance of

having enough money to live on, coupled with future happiness in their professional and private lives. The parallels in these four students' dispositions suggests they share a similar habitus, where the emphasis is on gaining a professional occupational status together with a satisfying experience of work (Bourdieu, 1990). Perhaps the middle class early childhoods they have experienced has resulted in their habitus becoming internalized in dispositions that do indeed 'generate meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions' because it is a 'general transposable disposition which carries out a systematic universal application', which was 'inherent in the learning conditions' experienced by these four participants in their early childhood (Bourdieu, 1984: 166).

In the South Park B group six students had similar aspirations to secure happiness as an important part of their future success. Despite their very different family backgrounds, Jasmine and Anna both desired future happiness in their professional and private lives, but they translated the aspiration for happiness in very different ways. Their desire for happiness was strongly influenced by their family milieu. Jasmine told us that her family life is advantaged:

We have not been affected at all by the recession... we are not financially badly off. [...] My mum says don't do it (work) for the money, do it for the love of it. She believes if you enjoy it you should do it, not because it pays well. I think it is a good outlook for life, if you don't enjoy it, you shouldn't do it.

Anna's family had influenced her thinking too and Anna felt that she would much rather 'do something I enjoy... I'd sooner do something I enjoy rather than something I don't'. In contrast to Jasmine, Anna explained in her interview that her family is 'quite disadvantaged, we don't get as much money as others' and that she has experienced some hardship as a result. Anna's aspiration for the future is to work in childcare and Jasmine hopes to become a Special Educational Needs (SEN) teacher. Despite their very different family backgrounds both students desire happiness and future employment that represents social reproduction rather than intragenerational mobility. These students were both influenced by their families, although in very different

ways, over and above their teachers. These two students hold aspirations for future employment that are at variance with government policy texts encouraging young people to cultivate aspirations to strive ever upwards.

Freddie and Gavin wanted to secure personal happiness, as this would be an important marker of their future success. Nathan had a vision of achieving 'a perfect job, for example as a film director. I want to direct good films, make good money and have the perfect family life'. Isaac wanted to pursue a job in animal management that he acknowledged might not pay well, but would make him happy. He told us that there is 'no point living a future you hate every day... it's much better to have a job you like instead of moaning all the time about your work'. With the exception of Nathan, these students all had working-class parents employed in semi-skilled occupations and their families had struggled financially in the recent recession. Despite the financial struggles they had experienced, these four students reported happy home lives, which had been a defining feature of their childhoods, and they wanted to reproduce this happiness in their future lives, highlighting the importance of growing up in a happy home. The similarity in their dispositions show 'an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour', which inclines them to seek to reproduce their family milieu (Bourdieu, 1990: 77).

South Park's A and B group students' aspirations for happiness in the future reflects their desire to reproduce the family milieu they experienced in their formative years. Despite their varied social class backgrounds, the social class of their families seems to be as significant as its stability and reproduction.

Two students in the Felix Holt A group told us that personal happiness was important for their future. Andrew explained that for him 'success will be measured in terms of how I feel. [...] How are you successful if you are not happy?' Andrew had a supportive family background and told us his family, especially his mum, have been a big influence on him and that he 'couldn't have asked for more' support. Rachael was keen that her future would incorporate a challenging career that uses foreign languages because this

would make her happy: 'to me success is about being happy in what you are doing and having a new challenge every day'. Rachael's family milieu was supportive and nurturing:

I come from a middle-class family, quite privileged in terms of things I get from my parents and I find no barriers, only opportunities, thanks to family members.

Her parents, like Andrew's, work in professional occupations and they have influenced her aspirations and dispositions towards the future in socially reproductive ways.

Four of the Felix Holt B group students, who all defined their family backgrounds as average, thought of happiness as an integral component of their future success. Holly explained that she wanted to secure a job:

...in the zoo industry... I'd like to be comfortable enough to live and perhaps to move out of my house [...] To be successful in the future it is important to be happy and to be comfortable with where I'm at in my life.

Tania also aspired to gain employment that would make her happy. Lauren wanted to gain a good degree and secure employment. She also wanted work that would make her happy: 'I don't necessarily need to be too comfortable but I want to make enough so I can have the necessities of life but the main thing is to be happy'. Dean was keen to gain secure employment that provided a degree of financial security but happiness and enjoyment were more important to him than getting to the top.

There are similarities and differences between the A and B groups within each school and between the two schools in terms of family background, values and culture in relation to the theme of happiness. These accounts can be read in multiple ways and could be taken as a reflection of the optimism and naivety of youth, the value and importance of a secure and happy family life, or as evidence of a rejection of neoliberal individualism. But regardless of the plurality of possible meanings and interpretations what is striking is the variance between our participants' aspirations and those articulated by policy texts (HMG, 2010: HMG, 2011). The government focus on freeing young

people from their constraining family milieu, so they can unleash potential and break down barriers to high status, high mobility careers, is at variance with our participants' talk about their future plans. The data suggests that these aspirations for personal happiness may be an obstacle to social mobility. Indeed, in all of these accounts social reproduction is inferred. These participants are not seeking to move beyond their parents' occupations in terms of objective status. Subjectively, similarly to Brown's (2011) and Allen's (2014) participants, they need to feel that there is an emotional value to the work they are planning to do in the future, not just an economic or status value. This point is further exemplified in the following discussion of the importance of job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction

Six participants reported that achieving job satisfaction was an important element of their future success. Kintrea et al (2015: 666) have recently shown how aspirations for job satisfaction were important to participants in their two-stage survey exploring 'the relationship between young people's aspirations towards education and jobs'. The desire to have a job that pays reasonably well but also delivers a level of satisfaction is significant for some young peoples' future self narratives.

The desire for job satisfaction in our study was more apparent amongst the students at Felix Holt, with only Sean from the South Park A group telling us that 'having an interesting job is quite important' in terms of his future success. Sean told us that his parents had discussed the importance of job satisfaction with him and had attempted to impress upon him the value of a job that would provide satisfaction as well as financial security.

Two students from the Felix Holt A group sought job satisfaction. Adele explained that she wanted to secure a job that provided satisfaction: 'I want to know I'm going to learn something different, something new each day.' Adele identified satisfaction as an important dimension of her future success. Graham wanted access to a job that would provide satisfaction and told us that 'salary is really not too important for me; I'm going into a programming-

based job, could go into loads of areas, e.g. game design, software development, robotics – I'd be interested in all of those'. He was keen to ensure that his future would be spent in a job that was interesting and stimulating rather than one that would provide wealth, status or upward mobility.

Three students from the Felix Holt B group talked about the importance of job satisfaction. Nick was excited by the idea of a job that would require him to live on the edge: 'I want to be doing something not in an office, but meeting interesting characters, I want new experiences all the time [...] that would provide me with job satisfaction which is important to me'. Claudia had similar aspirations for a job that would enable her to be 'doing something satisfying and it needs to be out of the ordinary ... This would make me feel I was fulfilling my potential'. Molly told us that she was not making plans for five years time but hopes to be in an enjoyable job: 'I want a mature and satisfying job that's interesting'.

All of the Felix Holt students who talked about the importance of job satisfaction are privileged and have parents with high status occupations, including as an accountant, engineer and insurance underwriter. The participants' aspirations and dispositions are circumscribed by the satisfaction experienced by their parents in relation to their own professional lives. The desire for job satisfaction is in turn reflected in our participants' dispositions and desires for the future (Bourdieu, 1993), thus suggesting a degree of social reproduction in their aspirations. For example, Claudia's father is a policeman who enjoys his job and gets a lot of satisfaction from serving his local community. He is a significant role model for Claudia and his experiences have inspired her to seek job satisfaction; her dispositions are prompting choices for the future that lead towards social reproduction. Nick's father is an engineer and he works in a highly professional environment that he finds demanding and satisfying. Like Claudia, Nick's habitus and dispositions are influenced by his father's positive experiences of work and the subjective value he attaches to his employment (Bourdieu, 1977).

Our participants' desire for occupations that could provide opportunities for job satisfaction is rooted in their family milieu. Aspirations for job satisfaction and professional and personal happiness are entirely absent from policy-makers' expectations of young people, as evidenced in their omission from policy texts. The government pays little attention to the importance of working in a challenging and stimulating environment and policy texts instead assume that upward mobility, and associated financial mobility, higher status and access to power, will motivate young people over and above all other concerns (HMG, 2011). The theme of job satisfaction reinforces the divergence between the government's view that all young people should seek intragenerational social mobility and the aspirations identified by our participants, which point towards social reproduction anchored in family cultures and networks.

Making a difference

Three students from South Park A group, one in the Felix Holt A group, and one member of the Felix Holt B group aspired to future employment that would enable them to make a positive difference and have a positive impact on their environment. Making a difference was a gendered theme, as identified in other research studies (see for example Skelton and Francis, 2009). Four of the five participants who hoped to make a difference in order to feel successful in the future were females. They resemble the 'good girls' appearing in studies exploring the operation and impact of femininity on school-age girls who are selfless, caring and nurturing and seek to bring happiness to those around them as a way of realising their own happiness (Walkerdine et al, 2001; Francis, 2000; Skelton and Francis, 2009). Zoey told us that: 'as long as I've made a contribution to the world, even if it's tiny, I'll feel I've been successful'. Emma sought to make a difference for herself, but also to make her family feel proud of her. Ellie explained that she wants to 'get to the place where you want to be, feeling you mean something to other people, the world'. She was keen to pursue a career that could enable her to make a positive difference to people's lives.

In the Felix Holt A group only Rob said he wanted to pursue a future career that would make a difference, although his interpretation of this was different

to the females in our sample. He had grand plans for making a difference! He explained that 'since I was very young, I've always been more interested in positively influencing the future of humanity rather than getting rich myself'. Rob was highly committed to pursuing a future in science. His parents were in professional occupations with his father working in IT and his mother as a teacher. Their influence on him shaped his aspirations for the future, as they wanted him to find work that would enable him to make a positive societal difference. Holly was the only member of the Felix Holt B group who wanted to make a difference, in her case by working 'in the zoo industry... doing something in relation to conservation is important to me, building up and breeding rare species and then introducing them into the wild'.

These examples illustrate the diversity of the 'making a difference' theme. They also illustrate the variety of dispositions within our sample and suggest that the combination of family values and individual aspirations provides space for agency and difference despite the reproductive impact of structural equalities and inequalities. These stories challenge the prevailing view of young people in policy texts (for example, HMG, 2010: HMG, 2011) as highly individualistic and potentially motivated only by their own relative gain. Whilst making a difference is a somewhat gendered and feminised aspiration held by girls who want to give back, it does also indicate that not all young people have the same goals and desires for the future and not all young people are as individually focused and self-centred as they are often represented, resonating with Mendick et al's (2015) findings.

Status

A small number of students in our sample defined their future happiness in relation to maintaining, obtaining and securing future status and power. Only students at South Park (in both the A and B groups) referred to gaining status. All those aspiring to secure future raised employment status were white males from advantaged family backgrounds.

Alaster told us that he is 'excited by the opportunity of getting into medicine, and the status it will confer... It's a very different profession from those pursued

by my family who are very old fashioned and normal, my Dad's a salesman'. Alaster is an interesting participant in our sample as his aspirations for the future provide evidence of disposition disruption as he wanted to obtain higher occupational status than his family. Disposition disruption for Alaster can be interpreted as a desire for social mobility. He aspires to achieve objective intragenerational social mobility of the type envisaged in *Opening Doors* (HMG, 2011).

Elijah was also keen on gaining a high status job, but this was to emulate the considerable professional success of his parents and thus achieve social reproduction. He is interested in pursuing 'a technical job, like economics, or even international relations... I want to do something that has a high profile and I want to study difficult subjects. For me success will eventually mean being a professional in one of these careers'. Elijah's parents both have high status professional careers – his father is a professor and his mother is a researcher. Bourdieu argues that habitus emerges through primary socialisation, that is:

a practical evaluation of the likelihood of the success of a given action in a given situation which brings into play a whole body of wisdom, sayings, commonplaces, ethical precepts (that's not for the likes of us) (Bourdieu, 1977a: 487).

As Bourdieu (1977: 72) points out, it is the "structures constitutive of a particular type of environment [...] that produce *habitus*". Thus, structures present in the environment an individual experiences, are socialised into and embody, play a crucial role in producing an individual's habitus. Elijah's habitus and dispositions are influenced by high status academic achievements that are an important dimension of his family milieu and have shaped his desire to achieve an elevated status in his own future. He identifies a professional career as something appropriate and attainable.

Julian, from the South Park B group, wanted a job with status. His family background influenced his preference. He told us that 'from a young age I've wanted to be a policeman... My granddad was a policeman which influenced me a lot and I really like the idea of working up the ranks to a higher status

position...’ Julian told us about his aspiration to climb the career ladder and gain a senior position, and he possesses the valued forms of social and cultural capital including access to networks (Putnam, 1995), cultural resources and experiences and appropriate family values, that could assist him in his pursuit of status.

These participants’ desire for status, particularly Alaster’s, may not represent a conscious wish for intragenerational social mobility but they are nevertheless consistent with Gove and Morgan’s stated desire to produce a more meritocratic and socially mobile society. These participants’ commitment to gaining status and power in their careers indicates an ambition to achieve individual outcomes through the pursuit of status and advantage for individual benefit.

Wealth

The final theme discussed in this paper relates to the participants’ aspirations to achieve economic wealth. Four of the Felix Holt B group and one of the A group students were keen on finding careers that would deliver economic wealth. They were motivated to ensure their future financial security partly because they had all experienced financial hardship at home. Tania wanted to become socially mobility, to ‘move up and get the money associated with veterinary’. Similarly Dave felt that for his future success ‘earning money is very important to me’. Simon is keen to ‘make a comfortable amount of money, not sure about going to the very top, not the way I work, but I wouldn’t complain if I did!’. Darren had his sights on a successful football career and was motivated to achieve the associated financial rewards. Kylie, an A group participant, told us that ‘I don’t know what I want to do as a job, but I know I want to be well off’. Whilst they were not all necessary clear about the job they wanted to do, they were keen to secure high earnings.

Darren and Tania’s aspirations for the future display a degree of disposition disruption as they were aiming to achieve mobility. For Tania, it was social and economic mobility, for Darren it was economic mobility. They told us it was important to them to move upwards and secure greater financial rewards

than their parents. As with Mendick et al's (2015) participants, Darren and Tania reflected the sentiment that hard work and desire will be enough to secure the financial rewards they are seeking. Like those participants in our study who sought upward mobility and status, they fully believe that success and failure rests entirely with the individual rather than with the sorts of bonding and bridging social capital facilitated by the middle classes who have access to particular networks and resources, and gain, for example, high status internships, privileged academic pathways and secure employment prospects (Putnam, 1995). This inevitably leads them to emphasise their individual agency, over and above all other elements of becoming successful, including the influence of their families. Being an agentic, choosing subject was the root of their belief in the meritocratic possibilities provided by their state education.

One participant from South Park B group openly discussed his desire to make as much money as he possibly could and acknowledged that he was very motivated by the desire to accumulate wealth in the future. Ross told us that:

I would like my Dad's money... I suppose I'd like to do better than my parents and definitely want to earn more money and get the qualifications I need to be able to carry on.

Like Darren, Ross was keen to move beyond his parents' economic position and so achieve intragenerational economic rather than social mobility. Despite his view that there are no obstacles in his path, the likelihood of him achieving the wealth he desired was uncertain, as Ross was predicted C grades in his forthcoming examinations. Despite this grade constraint, he presented as highly ambitious and displayed a keen sense of individualism - that resonates with the work of Giddens (1991) - in relation to his future success.

Ross's desire to secure a level of wealth and employment mobility that would take him beyond his parents' present occupational status is in keeping with the government's conception of intragenerational social mobility (HMG, 2010: HMG, 2011). Ross articulated individualised goals for his future (Giddens, 1991) that centre on economic and professional mobility and are in line with Gove and Morgan's aspirations for young people. Ross may be constrained in

the early stages of his career if his actual examination grades are as predicted, but his motives may well carry him forward in other directions. He seemed completely untroubled by such potential constraints.

Conclusion

The neoliberal assumption behind government constructions of raising aspirations and freeing young people from 'frustrated aspirations' assumes that most people wish to get ahead, escape their family backgrounds and improve their relative status and prosperity. However, our paper has shown that our participants' aspirations for the future are overwhelmingly influenced by family derived habitus and dispositions constructed through early childhood socialisation and family background, norms and values, as identified by Bourdieu (1977: 1984: 1993). The discussion of aspirations presented here highlights the contrast between an individualistic, policy text view of aspirations compared with the aspirations articulated by real children from real families. By investigating aspirations, as part of a wider project to qualitatively understand social mobility, our data has shown that our participants are influenced by their family backgrounds in myriad ways. Yet, the data also reveals the important, often decisive, role of family in shaping habitus and dispositions, which translate into aspirations for the future that reflect social reproduction rather than a desire for intragenerational social mobility. We found only a few examples of disposition disruptions, where participants were seeking to rise up beyond the occupational status achieved by members of their family.

Three of the five areas of aspirations discussed in this paper – that is personal happiness, job satisfaction and making a difference - illustrate the extent to which the participants' expressed desires for the future that contrast with the assumptions made by policy texts. However, there were also some examples of goals and aims that resonate with government policy, including the desire for status and the desire for material wealth. These examples provided some evidence of disposition disruption between the young people and their parents, but these were mentioned by a small number of participants and their inclusion was important to exemplify the range of responses we encountered.

This paper has shown that whilst status and wealth are important to some of the participants, most disavow these as goals for years to come and very few of them expressed a hint of dissatisfaction with their family background or lifestyle. The idea of rising beyond parents and family, in terms of professional position, status and/or wealth, was almost entirely absent from the interviews and very few participants expressed a desire to climb occupational ladders. Where there was evidence of the desire for wealth, it tended to reflect a wish to ensure their future financial security, a motive that originated from experiences of financial hardship. Our sample's aspirations seem to be woven into their family environment, and in general match their academic ability. The students' reflections provide, therefore, a large number of examples of the transmission of family habitus and dispositions, and evidence of social reproduction rather than aspirations for social transformation. Vocational and academic aspirations alike seemed to be embedded in the family environment (Barker and Hoskins, 2015). Their views tended to highlight the contrast between the neo-liberal emphasis on wealth creation through individual aspiration and enterprise and the desire to be happy, make a difference and experience job satisfaction.

For most participants the key to future success was sufficient money to do interesting things and to take part in enriching activities. Very academically able participants (i.e. group As) were particularly strong in expressing a desire to be part of an inclusive community, rather than to live in a privileged 'bubble'.

Female and male students were equally likely to stress personal happiness and family priorities and also contentment with intrinsically rewarding careers. Female and male students also stressed happiness and intrinsic work fulfilment rather than a desire to acquire wealth for its own sake, and often described themselves as interested in money only in so far as it enables choices. However, the majority of students who aspired to make a difference to other people's lives are female and those aspiring to gain status are male, indicating some gendered differences that need further research.

Some young people certainly saw themselves as lone agents whose fate depended on their own agency and efforts (Giddens, 1991). They believed hard work and ability would be rewarded proportionately, and that they could realize their dreams (Mendick et al, 2015). But although status and wealth were important for some students, few were concerned primarily with individual advantage.

To sum up, family backgrounds and histories influenced our participants' aspirations far more than their school or teachers (Hoskins and Barker, 2014). Our data shows that our participants' aspirations overwhelmingly follow their individual family histories, evidencing many instances of social reproduction. This overwhelming desire by most of our participants to secure familial social reproduction suggests that policy-makers intending to increase intragenerational social mobility by raising aspirations through school based and teacher led initiatives need to think carefully about the feasibility and likely success of such an approach. Policy-makers also need to reconsider policy attempts to remake the working classes as middle class through raising their aspirations; this view is patronising and 'othering' towards the working classes and evidences the sense of superiority embedded within many of those at the top of established hierarchical class structures (Gewirtz, 2001: Reay, 2006). Within our sample the family milieu was the central site for aspiration formation and family background and family networks were the key ingredient that influenced the majority of our participants' aspirations for their future.

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