

*Who might be admitted to University?
Following the fate of young people in changing
times*

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Introduction

- Paper reports on a qualitative study of white young people and educational and occupational aspirations in their last year of compulsory schooling in the UK.
- Also involves interviews with parents so the young people's unfolding lives are located within families and a locality and beyond as the wider context matters greatly.
- Research is continuing. Second interviews currently being done with young people and parents. Will try to do again next year. Have also generated a new 'wave' of more disadvantaged young people.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Study parallel to earlier work on middle-class reproduction explored in book *Class Practices, How Parents Help Their Children Get Good Jobs* (2004). Influenced by Goldthorpe and theory of mobility and immobility.

Class stability can be explained in relation to a conceptualisation of class in terms of opportunities and constraints associated with the ownership or non ownership of economic, cultural and social resources.

The advantaged middle class mobilise their resources to circumvent downward mobility. Macro level regularities can be explained with reference to micro-level family practices, strategies and tactics

Theoretical Underpinnings

Earlier research involved case studies of doctors (upper middle class) and teachers (lower middle class) and, for the most part, there was clear evidence of middle class reproduction.

That said, I emphasised that outcomes were not inevitable , considerable work is required by parents and success is not always guaranteed, especially for the less able. . This is why there is so much public anxiety.

In work, noted the similarities between Goldthorpe's theory and Bourdieu's notion of class in terms of economic, cultural and social capitals. Both talk of stability and key role of family.

Studying working-class reproduction

Interest is now in working-class reproduction, the processes by which it occurs. How and why, description and explanation

Research located in a run down white working-class town which is part of larger city. Now small EM population.

Area central to the industrial revolution, dominated by over 40 cotton mills in early 20th century. Engineering works etc.

Industries long gone and major employers are food factory, call centres, low level office and shop work.

Working class cultural feel dominates the town. Labour town although BNP presence in area which is not insignificant.

Studying working-class reproduction

Access to young people are parents made through PFI school at the edge of town. Possible Hawthorne effect but lots of schools been involved in initiatives under Labour Govt.

Next to poor 'council housing' estate famously associated with some murders in the 1960s and back in the news last year after elderly neighbour with disabilities died, in part, from long-standing harassment from local young people.

Decision to replace falling high school away from estate. Desired effect to get greater social mix. Achieved but few highly educational professionals to be found here. In sample.

Failing School No More? GCSE Results 2005-10

	05	10	NA
% achieving 5 A-C*	35	63	69
% achieving 5 A-C* (including English and Maths)	17	47	51

NA = National Average

Sample of Young People and Parents

- Interviewed 27 young people – 15 young women and 12 young men – in final year of school. Year 11. Aged 15-16. Just before exams. Making choices re college etc.
- Interviewed 16 parents, mother and/or parents and have interviews with both parents and children in 12 families.
- Parents in a mix of occupations. Some working class semi and routine manual employment. Some self employed but usually without employees, and not especially affluent.
- Also had some examples of managerial middle class or parents had enjoyed worklife mobility through experience. Highly educational professional middle class absent.

Boys, business and money

- The young men often in top streams, academically able, surrounded by like-minded young people and also had strong reinforcing messages from school. Parents also pushing them of course.
- They invariably did well in GCSE results and they went onto college and onto academic track – A levels – with a view to going to university and into high level job. Key was to go into business and make lots of money!
- Focus usually on one route. Conveyer belt. Example in paper of young working-class lad thinking about university and law but also straight into army. Did not do well and yet to follow up.
- Mother did not see university as 'the thing' to aspire too. Aspirations for job that 'happy in' and 'get paid' for was important. Views influence by own working life and succession of not very happy experiences.

Lads and the vocational track

- The young lads from more working-class families were more likely to envisage going down the vocational track in further education. Getting a skill - to become an electrician for eg - highly valued. Practical
- Long known that skilled manual work highly valued. Form of upward mobility from semi and unskilled manual work within working class and also source of higher levels of job satisfaction and better pay.
- Also critical is that acquiring an accredited skill can lead onto self-employment and again, this was highly valued by interviewees and parents. Be your own boss, so autonomy, capacity for even better levels of pay.
- Not an easy route to obtain. FE courses provide basic skills and also need to find an apprenticeship or some sort of attachment to another skilled person. Parents well aware that labour market of their youth long gone.

Young Men and Public Services

- Another valued route was course leading to a national diploma in public services. Course prepares young men to join police, fire service, ambulance service.
- Regarded as a good job in terms of secure job, well-paid job, good terms and conditions of employment including pension. Public service provides status. Taps into masculinity?
- Another example of practical work but not just a job but with opportunities for career advancement. Contrasted with negative views of 'office work' and 'pen pushing'.

Family and Education

- Got to acknowledge that difficulties within families do have a considerable impact on educational attainment and these are class related in that family formation is clearly shaped by class.
- School was dealing with a range of such issues, of parents struggling with depression, drink problems, sometimes drugs, issues of domestic violence etc, Social suffering as Bourdieu would say.
- One such example in the paper was of a young man in care, removed from the family home because of domestic violence issues. Issues spilt over into school life. Educational success falls by the wayside.
- Young man in care with aspirations to be a famous singer. Did poorly in exams but could get onto part-time course in music. Combine with work in a restaurant. Would he ever move beyond hotel and catering?

Girls Going On and On

- As work by colleagues like Ingrid Schoon are showing, young women's educational attainment levels are high and most of the young women were on destined to take the academic route through FE and then into HE
- Often from the more 'middle-class' families as with the successful young men. In top streams, attainment levels were high and evidence of high aspirations held by them and their parents, including fathers.
- Highest achievers aiming for top traditional professions. A professional (rather than managerial) career highly valued for young women re security, pay, flexibility re combining work and family commitments.
- That said, still evidence of traditional female semi-professional occupations being considered with able young women being attracted and directly into careers in teaching and nursing by family, friends, school etc.

University or not?

- Not to say that all the young women would go to university. Again, parents did not always see it as critical. From own experiences, attached importance to work-life mobility, work experience, promotion.
- Another way of forging a career – with career rather than a job being important to parents once again. Ambivalence about value of degree as more young people obtain them . Assessment of labour market going on.
- Evidence of more vocational type or newer A levels being pursued by the young women from `working class backgrounds`. Notions of being more practical than academic often invoked in this context too.
- Why will be interesting to explore here is whether there will be evidence of the more middle class girls going to pre-92 universities and working-class girls going to post-92 universities doing new subjects like drama.

Women and the vocational track

Number of young women doing additional courses in hairdressing and other beauty related activities. (In UK, average high street will have tanning and beauty shops where young women are to be found.) Highly feminised

One example of young women with plans to do a course in media makeup (and, indeed, you can pursue this to degree level at a new university). Parents guided by young people's interests, less directive themselves.

Strong emphasis on being happy in job and certainly more glamorous job than caring work, cleaning work, factory work which many of the mothers were engaged. Monetary concerns loom earlier for more working class kids.

Concluding Remarks

Early analysis of transitions of young people making choices and decisions about further study or work.

Descriptive account of unfolding lives and you can clearly see the effects of class and gender on how their lives unfold.

Working-class reproduction in evidence but it is not inevitable and need to think more about attainment and relationship between that and class.

Need to relate back to capitals. Can see the effects of economic, cultural and social capital at work implicitly rather than explicitly at this stage.

Need to think more about working class cultural capital. Not a question of 'poverty of aspirations' but different values and level related to class.