The Affront of the Aspiration Agenda: White Working-Class Male Narratives of 'Ordinariness' in Neoliberal Times

Garth Stahl [1]

1) University of South Australia, Australia

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

The Affront of the Aspiration Agenda: White Working-Class Male Narratives of 'Ordinariness' in Neoliberal Times

Garth Stahl

University of South Australia, Australia

Abstract

This article draws on accounts of white working-class boys (age 14-16) from South London in order to explore how they reconstitute their learner-identities within the 'raising aspirations' rhetoric. The current dominant neoliberal discourse in education, which prioritises a view of aspiration that is competitive, qualification-focused, and economic, shapes the subjectivities of these young males though there exist nuanced strategies of resistance. In an era of high modernity where youth feel increasing risk, the identities of young people are subject to tremendous change where traditional class and gendered boundaries are being subverted, reimagined, and reconstituted. Focusing on academic engagement as an identity negotiation, this research critically considers where young men enact strategies to construct themselves as 'having value' in spaces of devaluing where they reconcile competing and contrasting conceptions of aspiration.

Keywords: aspiration, reconstitution, habitus, identity work, Bourdieu, social class

El Agravio de la Aspiración: Narrativas de los Hombres Blancos de Clase Obrera sobre "Lo Ordinario" en Tiempos Neoliberales

Garth Stahl

University of South Australia, Australia

Resumen

Este artículo se basa en relatos de chicos blancos de clase obrera (14-16 años) del Sur de Londres con el objetivo de explorar cómo se reconstituyen sus aprendizajes-identidades dentro de la retórica 'elevando aspiraciones'. El actual discurso educativo neoliberal dominante, que da prioridad a una visión de la aspiración que sea competitiva, centrada en la cualificación y en la economía, da forma a las subjetividades de estos jóvenes varones, aunque existen estrategias matizadas de resistencia. En la era de la alta modernidad, donde los jóvenes sienten cada vez un mayor riesgo, las identidades de los jóvenes están sujetas a un cambio tremendo que implica una subversión a los límites de clase social y género, y a la vez se reimaginan y reconstituyen. Centrándonos en la participación académica como la negociación de identidad, esta investigación considera de forma crítica en qué espacios los jóvenes protagonizan estrategias para construirse a sí mismos como "sujetos de valor" en los espacios de devaluación en los que concilian la competencia con las diferentes concepciones sobre la aspiración.

Palabras clave: aspiración, reconstitución, habitus, identitidad laboral, Bourdieu, clase social

T he study of the interconnectedness between masculinit(ies) and aspiration has drawn on a range of theoretical frameworks and constructs from hegemonic masculinity, intersectionality, subjectivity, and pluralities to the socio-psychological. However, as Howson (2014) notes, there exist many pitfalls when applying conventional theories of aspiration to masculine identity construction. The research serves as an attempt to move beyond narrow conceptions of aspiration (e.g. motivation, expectations, goal-orientation) to a social analysis using the tool of habitus which highlights the influence of social context, distinction, and negotiation. Working-class masculinities and femininities are often subject to the processes of inscription and classification which work in the interests of those with power (Skeggs, 2004, p.4); however, these inscriptions are not uni-directional and often involve constant negotiations. As long as the discourse of aspiration relies on the proxies of education and occupation, the young working-class boys in this study will always be defined as having low or modest aspirations when my participants have powerful identifications with a very specific concept of a 'good life' (cf. Stahl, 2012; 2015).

First, the article explores the white working-class phenomenon in light of the 'raising aspiration agenda' which embodies an intense neoliberal ideology where 'good qualifications are equated with a good job'. Second, through the use of Bourdieu's (2002) habitus, I investigate how the aspiration agenda shapes (and re-shapes) the subjectivities of twenty-three white working-class boys in South London (ages 14-16), specifically in reference to a counter-habitus of egalitarianism evidenced in the boys' attention to 'loyalty to self' as well as average-ness, ordinariness and 'middling' (never wanting to be the best or worst). Within the current pervasive neoliberal discourse, which prioritises a view of aspirations that is competitive, economic, and status-based, I argue the boys use strategies to reaffirm and traditionalize certain modes of masculinity and masculine identity.

The White Working-Class Phenomenon

It is widely documented that white working class boys continue to be the lowest attaining groups in the United Kingdom exam system (Strand, 2008;

2014). Comparatively, this ethnic group remains less socially mobile compared to other ethnic minorities of similar class backgrounds (Platt, 2007; Demie & Lewis, 2010). Furthermore, policy makers have cited a "deeply embedded culture of low aspiration" (DfEs, 2004) as the primary cause of underachievement and of anti-social behaviour as witnessed in the August 2011 riots in London, Manchester, and Birmingham (Gove, 2011). Framed by extensive neoliberal policies and discourses, social mobility continues to be a high priority in the Coalition government, where Michael Gove aims to create schools that are "engines of social mobility providing every child with the knowledge, skills, and aspirations they need to fulfil their potential" (The Cabinet Office, 2011, p. 36). In fact, a recent White Paper entitled *The Importance of Teaching* (2010) asserts, "Good teachers instil an ethos where aspiration is the best reason for children to avoid harmful behaviour" (p. 29), equating aspiration as a simple antidote to complex problems. Within these policy documents, low achievement and anti-social behaviour is often considered a natural link to what is widely considered a lack of engagement with boys in schooling and also a 'poverty of aspirations' amongst working-class males. However, policies and reports focused on boys and schooling often ignore the complexities of masculinity, instead legitimising and reinforcing "essentialist understandings of gender…based on the presupposition that there are natural and normal behaviours, dispositions, and attitudes that are either male or female" (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2007, p. 15).

Strand and Winston (2008) focused their quantitative study of different pupil groups' educational aspirations and intended qualifications in the United Kingdom, ultimately finding "white British boys and girls displayed aspirations for less professional jobs" (p. 263). In this study, the white British did not necessarily have a negative attitude toward schooling, but instead tended to view education as insignificant for their vocational goals (Strand and Winston, 2008, p. 264). My research seeks to develop a nuanced view of white working-class male identity in order to understand some of the barriers commonly associated with white working-class culture in educational contexts, such as lack of aspiration, parental attitudes toward school, insufficient work ethic, and poor attendance (Evans, 2006; Demie & Lewis, 2010). Through my analysis, I explore how high levels of so-called 'disaffection' towards education in white working class communities

actually represent certain struggles to establish a 'self of value' within the confines of limited repertoires of social and cultural resources. My interest is in how white working-class boys make sense of the resounding aspiration rhetoric in their school contexts and how it shapes their subjectivities (Gillborn & Kirton, 2000; McLeod, 2000). Such identity negotiations around aspiration have the potential for tremendous psychic costs as working-class students contend with 'finding' or 'losing' their working-class identities (Reay, 2001; 2005).

Current Neoliberal Ideology and Aspiration Rhetoric

In November 2010, Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove declared that he wanted the United Kingdom to become an "aspiration nation" (Richardson, 2010). Andy Burnham, Shadow Education Secretary at the time, reflected this desire at the other end of the political spectrum by addressing the Labour party conference with a plea for "aspiration, aspiration, aspiration" (Vasagar, 2011). Despite a plethora of policy rhetoric aimed at addressing inequality, the UK remains low in the international rankings of social mobility when compared to other advanced nations (Blanden and Machin 2007). The reasons for social stagnation are primarily economic. While the second half of the twentieth century saw a rise of middle-class employment culminating with a boom in the Thatcher years, since then the growth in middle-class occupations has stalled considerably. According to the TUC, in 2001 low-paid service sector work made up 42% of labour-market occupations while 'high skill' white-collar work made up less than 40%, and that percentage is set to fall in the wake of severe austerity measures in the public-sector (Blanchflower, 2012). The data from the Office for National Statistics (2012) shows there are limited opportunities for all those who aspire to professional and managerial jobs, so even if the boys in this study did pursue white collar employment, such an aspiration is in many ways thwarted before it even begins. However, the stagnant economic situation in the UK has not deterred politicians on both sides of the political divide from espousing an aspiration mantra which, of course, conceals the much larger issues at play.

In a time of robust neoliberalism influencing classroom discourses and how students are constructed as having 'value', it is imperative that we consider the entwined relationship between the aspiration agenda and how these young men construct their identities as learners (Stahl, 2012). This article intends to show how these ideologies, which have tremendous implications for pedagogy, structure students' sense of aspiration and learner identities. The discourse of aspiration is a discourse of social change; the process of 'aspiring' (and performing aspirations) is a "relational, felt, embodied process, replete with classed desires and fantasies, defences and aversions, feelings of fear, shame and guilt, excitement and desire" (Allen, 2013b). Neoliberal ideologies of competition which reflect the dominant culture are pervasive within the discourse communities of schools where aspiration is rendered an "unequivocal good" (Allen, 2013a).

In the United Kingdom, schools are increasingly expected to create a neoliberal subject, the "entrepreneur of self" who espouses the values of "self-reliance, autonomy and independence" in order to gain "self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth and self-advancement" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 252). The current policy discourse surrounding aspiration indicates pupils are increasingly judged as having 'bought in' or 'bought out' depending on whether or not they accept the 'socially mobile' rhetoric prevalent within our current educational system. Ball and Olmedo (2012) argue:

> The apparatuses of neoliberalism are seductive, enthralling and overbearingly necessary. It is a 'new' moral system that subverts and re-orients us to its truths and ends. It makes us responsible for our performance and for the performance of others. We are burdened with the responsibility to perform, and if we do not we are in danger of being seen as irresponsible. (p. 88)

Existing within this new moral system, subjectivities are in a process of interpellation where competing and contrasting definitions are resisted, strategized, adopted, and subverted. Building on Foucault, the idea of subjectivity as a processes of becoming focuses on "*what we* do rather than on *what we are*, that is to say, the work of the care of the self" (Ball & Olmedo, 2012, p. 87). Reay (2001; 2009) has shown that in attempting to 'upskill' through entering higher education (and entering into a rigorous competition in order to do so), working class students face a struggle to

preserve their identity and make sense of feelings of inferiority and fear. Within the constant policy-driven attention to upward mobility, researchers have maintained a small but consistent spotlight on the 'identity work' surrounding the injuries of class (Reay, 2001; Wexler, 1992; Hattam & Smyth, 2003), highlighting the very real challenges for disadvantaged groups.

Furthermore, within policies governed by neoliberal ideology (Raco, 2009), the 'aspiration problem' has become increasingly individualized, as aspiration itself is regarded as a personal character trait "where policy documents often associate low aspiration with other personal qualities such as inspiration, information, self-esteem and self-efficacy" (Spohrer, 2011, p. 58). There is very little doubt, as Wilkins (2011) articulates, that low attainment is "transposed or re-coded into a matter of personal sin (i.e. a private psychological propensity or 'attitude' particular to the individual), and, therefore attributes social disadvantage to a lack of principled self-help and self-responsibility" (p.4). Clearly, this has consequences when considering how masculine identities are formed in relation to education and the expectation of social mobility (Burke, 2010; Phoenix, 2004; Connell, 1998). According to the neoliberal perspective, "'Underachieving' boys appear to be unable—or worse, unwilling—to fit themselves into the meritocratic educational system which produces the achievement vital for the economic success of the individual concerned and of the nation" (Francis, 2006, p. 193). De-socializing and de-contextualizing educational achievement perpetuates the invisibility of larger structural inequalities.

Harvey (2005) argues that current iterations of neoliberalism function as a political, economic and ideological system that gives considerable credence to the market as the best, most efficient platform for distributing public resources. This macro-level structural framework attributes greater consideration of individual duty than government responsibility (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005). Within neoliberal discourses the self is not fixed but is rather constantly made and re-made as people, functioning as 'entrepreneurs of the self', must constantly construct themselves as having 'value' against risk and uncertainty. Neoliberal ideology privileges the reflexive modernisation thesis. Archer and Francis (2007) write that in the neoliberal reading "there are no foundational aspects of selfhood such as 'race' or gender that preclude an individual

from taking up the opportunities available to them – failure to do so simply reflects an individual lack of enterprise" (p.19). Therefore, within an education system governed by neoliberalism and the aspiration agenda, subjects are quickly defined according to their level of adaptation.

In a time of high modernity, neoliberalism privileges both individual attainment and individuality. If individualization is understood to be a process of undoing traditional ways of life where networks and boundaries of class (Beck, 1992) and gender are being reimagined (Adkins, 1999, p. 122), and identity is increasingly 'hybridized', 'multiracialized', 'pluralized', and 'entangled', this research considers the identity work undertaken to reconstitute, reaffirm, and retraditionalize historically embedded modes of masculinity and masculine identity through policing acceptable boundaries (Stahl, 2015). As students are re-coded according to the neoliberal prerogative, we must make sense of the negotiations surrounding the acceptance and resistance of such codes. Within a risk pervasive world, the expectation of change and adaptation is always present where students enact practices and strategies when they confront this discourse.

Habitus as a Tool to Explore Identity and Aspiration

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1992) seminal work offered a set of 'thinking tools' which have been used to untangle explanations of class, aspiration, status, and power in pedagogic contexts. Bourdieu (1984) describes habitus as "a structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world—a field—and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world" (p. 81). Habitus, as socialized subjectivity, allows for structure and agency as well as the individual and the collective, in which the significance of habitus is in relation to how it is constituted by the field (Grenfell, 2008, p.53-61). For Bourdieu, habitus also "contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.127). Working-class students do not aspire highly because, according to Bourdieu, they have internalized and reconciled themselves to the "limited opportunities that exist for those without much cultural capital" (Swartz, 1997, p. 197; cf. Connolly & Healy, 2004).

Young working-class males in my research often come to see the aspiration toward academic success as a symbolically legitimated form which not only falls largely beyond their grasp but also beyond their desire (Stahl, 2012; 2015). The process of internalization of possibilities, I argue, is a process of resistance and acceptance, ever evolving.

Through the use of habitus, I seek to draw attention to the identity work around detraditionalization and the reaffirmation of normative masculinity. As a set of durable and transposable dispositions, the habitus is not 'set' but evolving, as the field too is in constant flux. Being the product of history and experience, habitus:

> May be changed by history, that is by new experiences, education or training (which implies that aspects of what remains unconscious in habitus be made at least partially conscious and explicit). Dispositions are long-lasting: they tend to perpetuate, to reproduce themselves, but they are not eternal. (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 29)

Habitus is where one's perceptions and conceptions are conditioned by the structures of the environment in which they are engendered; yet the habitus does not operate identically for all people and is deeply dependent on capitals and field.[1] Habitus shows the "embodied dispositions" (Nash, 1990) that are "inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group, and the school" (Mills, 2008, p.80). Schools serve as a "productive locus" which gives rise to "certain patterns of thought" (Nash, 1990, p. 435). To show how a logic of practice is created and maintained for the white working-class boys in my study, the focus of the research is not only where the prerogatives of the school influence the boys, but also where the habitus of the boys serves as a counter-narrative to rebuff the neoliberal rhetoric.

Having the capacity to unearth some of the underlying tensions between identity and the dominant culture around aspiration, I employ Bourdieu's theoretical tool of habitus to allow for the interpretation of the specific and cultural practices that may produce certain 'ways of being' in classroom contexts to further my understanding of my participants' conceptualisations of aspiration. In understanding my participants' learner and social identities, the tool of habitus not only allows for agency and choice, but also recognizes that choices are limited, restricted by socio-economic

positioning and wider societal structures, and that habitus predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) assert that through the habitus of students, "the level of aspiration of individuals is essentially determined by the probability (judged intuitively by means of previous successes or failures) of achieving the desired goal" (p. 111).

My research problematises the current policy where dis-identification with middle-class normative aspirations is largely interpreted as 'disaffection' and a deficient sense of social mobility. Through analysis of the subjectivities of these working-class boys, we are able to see how the neoliberal discourse shapes their learner identity and subsequently their aspirations. We need to understand both how these working-class young men articulate identities within a middle-class aspiration rhetoric permeating the school culture and also the strategies they enact to reaffirm a sense of value and police normative boundaries of acceptable modes of masculinity. Masculinities are deeply contextualized, coming to the forefront through social interaction where they are "actively produced, using the resources and strategies available in a given milieu" (Connell, 1998, p. 5). Through narratives of (dis)identification with the prerogatives of neoliberalism, these young men constitute themselves as having value in contexts where they are often devalued; often times the responses can be read as excluding themselves from what they are already excluded from (cf. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992).

Methodology

The South London school-based ethnography was conducted with twenty-three white working-class boys (ages 14-16) who were preparing for their GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education which completes compulsory education). In an effort to enforce discipline and motivate students, each school site espoused the neoliberal rhetoric where the attainment of good grades would lead to a successful middle-class job. Within schooling, failure to attain five GCSEs was consistently depicted by educators as a pathway to a lack of employment and 'living on the dole'. The study involved semi-structured questioning and focus groups, as well as classroom and extracurricular observations, in three school sites in South London over nine months. The questions were composed thematically

around broad themes: life history, schooling experience, masculinity perceptions, social class experiences, power and aggression, and influences. It should be noted that aspiration was not initially a theme of the project but emerged as a key theme through discussions. The data discussed in this article are drawn from the interviews, and it was essential to the research that the meanings of aspiration were drawn from my participants, rather than imposed by the researcher.

The use of semi-structured questioning ensured the same questions were covered with each student while maintaining flexibility and the opportunity for further probing. Through semi-structured interviews, I was able to explore vague or inadequate responses to certain questions (Renold, 2001). Identities and subjectivities do not simply reveal themselves in interviews; they need to be developed reflexively, and interviewers need to consider their positioning carefully in the interview process (McLeod, 2003). In their work on masculine identity, Wetherall and Edley (1999) argue, "When people speak, their talk reflects not only the local pragmatics of that particular conversational context, but also much broader or more global patterns in collective sense-making and understanding" (p. 338). Through the interviews the words of the boys reflect an interplay between working-class masculinity, the neoliberal rhetoric and egalitarianism.

Findings: An Egalitarian Counter-Habitus to Neoliberal Ideology

The neoliberal ideology inherently carries with it a class-based expectation, as "to play their part in the neoliberal scenario, the newly responsibilized citizens must be unequivocally middle class" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 252). The middle-class self is primarily upwardly mobile, economically comfortable, able to navigate different discourse communities through adopting new selves, has a keen understanding of what counts within certain fields, and, consequently, is able to marshal resources to position themselves advantageously (The New London Group, 1996). In contrast, a working-class masculinity typically values anti-pretentious humour, solidarity, dignity, honour, loyalty and caring, and pride and commitment to employment (cf. Winlow, 2001; Skeggs, 2004). The findings represent a mediation between these to contradictory fields. Within the habitus, my participants developed a narrative centred on egalitarianism as defined by

'fitting in', where everyone has an 'equal say in the world', and where 'no one is better than anyone else' or 'above their station' (Lawler, 1999; Reay, 2001; Archer & Leathwood, 2003; MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster, & Simpson, 2005). As a strategy of reconstitution, the data shows how white working-class boys embody an egalitarian habitus, alternative to the middle-class self, which has been mediated through their historic working-class communal values (cf. Reay, 2003; 2009).

As a disposition in the working-class habitus, egalitarianism, I argue, is a product of the creative and inventive capacity of the habitus, as habitus also has a structuring force (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Egalitarianism, as a strategy to address the tension between the competing fields of the aspirational culture of the school and the working-class communal values of the home, is how the boys create a sense of value and how they gain a sense of where to invest their energies as they adjust "virtualities, potentialities, eventualities" within their social space (Bourdieu & Passeron 1992, p. 135; cf Connolly & Healy, 2004). As a foundational aspect of their social and learner identities, egalitarianism contributes to the way in which they make sense of their own positionality within school contexts.

Egalitarianism is, of course, a falsehood; it represents the boys' efforts to contest/ignore/subvert inequalities in recognition and distribution, and it becomes a means of maximizing their capacity to negotiate potential failure. Egalitarianism also allows for an analysis of positional suffering where the affective dimensions of class (envy/deference, contempt/pity, shame/pride) are constructed and reconstructed in a milieu where the legitimization of an authentic working-class identity is either endangered or non-existent. As Sayer (2002) suggests, the working classes are caught in a bind that produces "acute inner turmoil as a result of the opposing pulls of both wanting to refuse the perceived external judgements and their criteria and wanting to measure up to them – both to reject respectability and to be respectable" (p.415). For working-class students in education, of whom the majority feel "powerlessness and educational worthlessness" (Reay, 2009, p.25), embracing 'success' grounded in middle-class aspiration requires challenging identity negotiations and re-appropriations, which means for many working class boys the losses would be greater than the gains (Reay, 2002).

In comprehending the prevalence of egalitarianism within the data, it should be noted that in the UK, inequalities (class, gender, and 'race'/ethnicity) are not disappearing but instead becoming increasingly obscured by a neoliberal and meritocratic rhetoric. As a result, young people often come to "see themselves as individuals in a meritocratic society, not as classed or gendered members of an unequal society" (Ball, Maguire, & Macrae 2000, p.4) which influences the processes through which they comprehend their sense of aspiration, their abilities, and their own positionality. It was not that the boys openly identified as working-class, in fact they resisted class labels for the most part[2], but instead egalitarianism functioned as a form of mediation. To be clear this process of negotiation occurs within pejorative and complex discursive practices surrounding blurred working-class/under-class representations and celebrity in the United Kingdom, the 'rough and rude' 'chav scum' (cf. Skeggs, 2004; Tyler, 2008; Allen & Mendick, 2012). The next two sections show how the egalitarianism functions and how the boys constitute themselves as subjects of 'value'. Through these two data sets, I explore how social structures shape agents' subjectivities and how the habitus of individuals "resist and succumb to inertial pressure of structural forces" (MacLeod 2009, p.139).

Loyalty to Self: 'I Don't Try to Act like Something I'm not'

Integral to the identity formation of the working-class boys in this study was the consistent references, both through interviews and focus groups, to the participants' discomfort in acting like something they were not. 'Loyalty to self', which was deeply engrained in the habitus, became a way of expressing the egalitarian narrative. Furthermore, 'loyalty to self' had strong inflections of authenticity as well as dignity, centred upon "high ethical standards of honour, loyalty and caring" (Skeggs, 2004, p. 88). As previously mentioned, these values are well-documented aspects of working-class communities (Charlesworth, 2000), specifically with white working-class women (Skeggs, 2004) and men (Winlow, 2001) in the north of England, and especially with youth cultures experiencing the impact of de-industrialization (Brann-Barrett, 2011). In my study, 'being yourself' was consistently valued; adopting what was perceived as a false identity

was consistently detested. In response to the question: 'How do you want people to see you?' the boys responded:

> Someone that can take a laugh, someone who's not going to be annoying, not someone who thinks I'm something that I'm not. (Tommy, Year 11)
> Like how I am. I'm not like…how I act. I don't try and copy anyone. Just be yourself. (Terry, Year 11)
> Just for what I am. I don't try to act like something I'm not. (Tom, Year 11)
> Obviously I want people to like respect me for who I am. That's what I want for people, that's what I want from anyone. Respect me for who I am. (Charlie, Year 11)

'Loyalty to self' influences how the boys construct their learner identities. To perform an identity and embrace adaptation, which they perceived as inauthentic, was an affront their egalitarian habitus. While 'loyalty to self' was strong in the data, this is not necessarily the case with all working-class students. Identity shifts can be both manageable and tenuous. The dexterity of identity shifting with working-class youth, as a capital, has been noted in several studies regarding student engagement in the classroom, such as Prudence Carter's work (2006) with 'cultural straddlers' and Wilkins's (2011) small case study work on the code-switching between learner identity and social identity among a group of primary school boys. Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009) assert that the high-achieving working-class students at an elite university "displayed the ability to successfully move across two very different fields with what are seen to be classically middle-class academic dispositions, a versatility that most had begun to develop in early schooling" (p.1105). The ability (or desire) for my participants to shift identity was not apparent in my observations and interviews; instead my participants actively employed strategies holding close to what they perceived to be an authentic self:

> I don't want them to see me as a certain person, I just want them to see me as who I am. Just for who I am, innit. Like me trying to act like someone… like a personality. I'm my own person. I don't follow no one, innit, I'm just by myself. (Alfie, Year 11)
> I just want people to see me for like me. If you get what I'm saying…I dunno like…I don't want to be seen for something I'm not. (George, Year 10)

While the middle-class self may be adept at operationalizing capitals within fields and navigating different discourse communities, the working-class habitus observed in this study resists this fluidity and the adoption of identities they perceive as 'fake' or inauthentic. 'Loyalty to self' as a salient identity boundary also influences the ever-powerful peer groups where the boys gauge whether other boys are genuine and do not exhibit any 'two-faced' or 'snake' behaviour. When I asked Terry how he saw the boys whom he related to, he said, "People like me that ain't showy and that. People that don't mind and that they'll do anything" (Terry, Year 11). Terry cites how he looks for individuals who "ain't showy," who he perceives as authentic and who remain 'loyal to self'. With boys, the peer group often has a tremendous influence on their learner identity (Mac an Ghaill, 1994).

The difficulties that arise in operating at the boundary of different fields suggest that, in order to be successful, my participants must continue to reduce their affiliation to 'loyalty to self' and accept the aspiration rhetoric of change embodied in an institutional habitus (Atkinson, 2011). The dialectical relationship between the institutional habitus of the school and the boys' egalitarianism habitus is crucial to understanding how egalitarianism is formed (and continually reformed), and also the degree of dexterity working-class students are able to enact in order to maintain a certain subjectivity. In her research on white working-class boys, Ingram (2011) found the institutional habitus had the capacity to develop versatility within her participants, but versatility did not always foster reflexivity or the ability to shift effortlessly between fields (p. 300).

In considering social and learner identities, and how individuals act in different fields, I asked Charlie and Ryan: "Do you want people outside of school to see you in a different way than in school?" Holding true to their perceived authentic self, the boys articulated:

> Charlie: No, I want them to all be the same way. I'm not two-faced.
> Me: Do you act different outside of school than you do inside of school?
> Ryan: Yea.
> Me: How so?
> Ryan: In school I'm much better behaved.
> Me: So you'd say you're more yourself…
> Ryan: Outside, yea. (Charlie, Year 11, Ryan, Year 10)

The neoliberal ideology inherently carries with it an expectation to be middle class (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 252) with the ability to adopt new selves, dependent on context, in order to position oneself advantageously. The habitus, while generative, is also permeable to the neoliberal rhetoric, and Ryan wants to represent himself as what Carter (2006) calls a cultural straddler who is strategic, able to 'play the game', and embrace the cultural codes of both school and home community. While Ryan recognizes the need to be fluid and adopt better behaviour that is conducive to his learning, this is very much a representation, as many members of staff would have disagreed by citing how Ryan brings in laddish elements which are counterproductive to his learning and the learning of others (Francis, 1999). While the neoliberal ideology may contain an expectation to be middle class, an alignment with the middle class self often requires middle-class resources.

In contrast, Charlie upholds his egalitarian 'loyalty to self' and wants to be seen as the 'same way' whatever the context. Even though it may not influence Charlie as much as some of the other boys in the study, his resistance to enacting a 'good' learner identity is usually relayed through expressions of frustration. Charlie does want, at least, to meet a minimum standard of educational success as he expressed in further interviews. For my participants it is not a simple resistance to a middle-class identity; it is both a resistance and anxiety around change, adaptation, and performativity.

Average-ness, Ordinariness and 'Middling': 'I Don't Want to be the Best…Just Normal.'

The current dominant neoliberal discourse, which prioritises a view of aspirations that is competitive, economic, and status-based, shapes the subjectivities of these young males. For the boys in this study, egalitarianism in the habitus represents an internalization of objective structures, but it is simultaneously shaped by the external forces/structures of the school. Through the second data set which examines 'averageness, ordinariness, and middling', I will attempt to show how egalitarianism is also strengthened as a result of conflict and disjuncture between the school and the family/community. Within my analysis, there are echoes here of the

relationship between 'emotional work,' aspiration, and communal values as well as the guilt associated with moving beyond one's place (Reay, 2003; 2009). While these working-class boys are clearly caught up in contemporary processes of individualization, "such processes are both ameliorated and framed by an overreaching sense of, and commitment to, collectivity and 'the common good'" where the pursuit of education is framed by a strong sense of communitarian and a loyalty to one's peer group as opposed to individualistic, entrepreneurial self-motivations (Reay, 2003, pp. 305-306).

Power relationships are internalized in the habitus as categories of perceptions, and these processes of categorizing become essential to how the boys' view themselves as learners. In the desire of working-class individuals to 'fit in' rather than 'stand out' (Skeggs, 2002), the boys' egalitarianism shapes their student identities with education, pushing them to reaffirm their habitus and articulate a desire to be perceived as average and ordinary (Stahl, 2012). Neoliberalism as an ideology gives priority to the individual pursuing his/her self interests over considerations of the collective or common good. In response to the question, "Could you tell me about what type of student you consider yourself to be?" the boys rebuffed the neoliberal 'best of the best' rhetoric:

> Probably just an average student. Just fit in with the others. (Thomas, Year 11)
> Average. (Frankie, Year 11)
> I'm not bad. I'm not good. I'm not loud. I'm not quiet. [laughter] So it's hard I don't know what to put myself in. (George, Year 10)
> Charlie: Basically I just hang around with all the other average kids. We just go play football together, go sit down behind the library outside…sit there and talk.
> Me: What irritates you?
> Charlie: Like people like – they'll be fine to your face but then they'll go around your back and start chatting a load of crap. (Charlie, Year 11)
> …I just stay with average people, really. (Tom, Year 11)

Bourdieu's theory of human action stresses that dispositions are generated through not only the internalisation of structures, the institutions and social spheres within society, such as family, school, and media, but

also that of human agency. The boys' habitus generates ways of viewing the world and how these can be shaped in reaction to new experiences of and within the world. Ordinariness, or average-ness, reveals another dimension of egalitarianism. As a counter-narrative to the neoliberal rhetoric, ordinariness and average-ness are arguably forms of resistance and 'sense-making' to the neoliberal achievement ideology. While an anti-aspirant egalitarianism is vibrant in the data, the boys also internalize elements of the neoliberal achievement ideology espoused within the school environment, through statements such as "I don't aim to be the number one, but I want to do my best" (Luke, Year 11). 'Middling,' never wanting to be considering the best or worst, becomes a process of mediation between the qualification-focused expectations of the school and the boys' socio-economic positioning. Influenced by neoliberalism, my participants engage in a constant practice of sense-making surrounding the achievement ideology to establish a tenuous a sense of value, "Just average really. Get my head down and do what needs to be done and I get out as soon as I can" (Tom, Year 11). As part of an internal process of making sense, my participants centre their 'identity work' around egalitarianism within their habitus and their desire to not be a part of the neoliberal rhetoric of 'best' and 'worst' but to instead achieve an 'average' level of education.

Average-ness, as a strategic process by which the boys balance their working-class masculine identity with a prevailing neoliberal learner identity, is primarily class-based. While I have argued egalitarianism is a strategy to subvert neoliberal expectations of change in relation to aspiration and working-class identities, average-ness also overlaps with masculine identity construction and the hegemonic. Gender as a social practice (ie. performance, 'process,' or project) toward understanding one's identity occurs individually and in relation to other's identities (Connell, 2005; Renold, 2004). In Phoenix's (2004) work on neoliberalism and masculinity, she found boys pursue a "middle position for themselves in which they could manage what they saw as the demands of masculinities, while still getting some schoolwork done" (p. 234), which suggests that the egalitarian discourse may not be exclusive to one's class but also influenced by gendered subjectivities.[3] When asked "Do you want to be the best student in your lesson?" the boys responded:

> No, not really. (Thomas, Year 11)
> I don't mind. It would be nice but if everyone's doing good answers then it's fine. (Tom, Year 11)
> I just want to sit there and learn. I don't want to be the best…the best. Just normal. I just want to be the one who sits there and learns. And meets the…And meets the standard… (Connor, Year 10)
> I just try my best. (Alfie, Year 11)

Archer and Yamashita's (2003a; 2003b) study of working-class masculinities in higher education found men often internalized their educational 'failure' in a process of knowing their own limits, and my participants also had to contend with their own constraints. Most of my participants saw their aspirations as adequately fulfilled by a drive towards 'middling,' and this aligns with the work of Savage, Bangall, and Longhurst (2001) where, "What seemed to matter more for our respondents was being ordinary" (p. 887). According to Savage (2005) 'middling' could be a strategy to resist the dominance of cultural capital where by labelling themselves as "ordinary, people claimed to be just themselves, and not socially fixed people who are not 'real' individuals but rather social ciphers" where they are "devoid of social distinction" (p.889, p.938). The boys' habitus, with a balance between individual agency and sensitivity to societal restraints, shapes how my participants construct their learner identity. In the words of the boys, we see how they negotiate a space for their emerging subjectivities within the neoliberal discourse:

> Yea, I do want to be someone that stands out but I don't want to at the same time…I want to be standing out so people see me as a smart person, but I don't want to be like someone who's like…embarrassing… and that. (George, Year 10)
> Tom: Not necessarily the best, I just want to achieve. I just want to get as good as I can. If someone else is better than me, I'll just try as best as I can.
> Me: So for you it's more of like a personal thing?
> Tom: Yea, I wouldn't want people to know I'm doing the best. Like teachers and that obviously. I wouldn't want teachers to keep telling everyone I'm the best and rubbing it in their face. Like I'd keep it personal. (Tom, Year 11)

We must remember that practices are not simply the result of one's habitus but rather of the relations between one's habitus and one's current circumstances and past circumstances (Grenfell, 2008, p.52). The theoretical tool of habitus places emphasis on the structuring forces of life experiences and conceptualizes dispositions as the internalisation of the schemes that these experiences produce. The tension between habitus and field is where identity is formed (Reay, 2010). The subjectivities of 'ordinary' or average shape the boys' learner identities and, thus, the aspirations of the boys (Stahl, 2012; 2015),

> Me: Do you ever want to be the best student in your lessons?
> Ben: No.
> Me: That's quite a firm 'no'.
> Ben: Nah, I want to be in the middle. I want to be the same – not in a bad way and not in a good way. I don't want to be the best student, I want to be in the middle…If you want to be the best boy, the best boy, then everyone would rely on you and stuff like that. And if you were the bottom boy no one would want to rely on you or anyfink [sic]. So if you're the middle boy some people want to rely on you and some people won't, so basically you're in the middle. (Ben, Year 10)

In gender theory, it has been argued that the "presence of a competitive performance-oriented culture generates anxiety, especially among boys whose gender identity needs to be based on achieving power, status and superiority" (Arnot, 2004, p. 35). In considering the theoretical construct of hegemonic masculinity, the boys do not orient themselves toward gaining status and superiority in the classroom, as to do so would conflict with their egalitarian habitus. Deeply contextual, the hegemonic is rendered through actions, behaviors, and discourses and remains a prominent force within identity construction as boys use the various strategies to preserve hegemonic masculinity and secure status (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Howson, 2014). However, the hegemonic masculine identity in this case study is one infused with traditional working-class values of non-dominance, grounded in 'averageness', and does not need to become empowered through education. My participants hegemonic is to resist the hegemonic commonly found in masculinity studies. Within his discussion of the peer group, Alfie holds to the disposition of

egalitarianism: "No one is dominant like… I think everyone is the same. Everyone has got their own opinion about people and no one listens and does what other people say" (Alfie, Year 10). While clearly some forms of masculinity embrace competitive, status-based neoliberalism (Connell, 1998), the data supports the argument that a working-class masculinity has the capacity to resist dispositions commonly ascribing to 'everyone is the same.'

Discussion

This research builds on a substantial body of work which argues that school 'failure' and 'success' is bound up with the process of students doing 'identity work' (Smyth, 2006; Wexler, 1992). In considering how neoliberal discourses shape and reshape identities, we see how an egalitarian habitus is enacted to navigate 'ability' and 'authenticity' when these identity markers have been confounded within neoliberal constraints. Considering how white working-class boys' habitus is positioned within the field of the school and how field influences their learner identities, the data allows us to gain insights into the interworking of symbolic violence.[4] The boys gradually internalize structures and constraints mediated through their working-class communal values; thus, in essence, reproducing their own subordination.

The internalization of new experiences and schemes of perception can lead to the internalization of conflicting dispositions. The dialectical confrontation between habitus and field (other than the field of origin) results in a degree of accommodation where the habitus accepts the legitimacy of the new field's structure and is in turn structured by it, thus enabling a modification in the habitus. The newly reconfigured habitus is arguably made up of conflicting elements; as the data shows the boys want to do well but they do not want to do too well. While the boys' sense of egalitarianism is primarily concerned with their positioning within classroom contexts, it should be noted egalitarianism, where 'no one is better than anyone else' or 'above their station', has limitations when extended beyond a learner identity. Outside of school, these young men engaged in hierarchical boundary maintenance in othering subordinate males, ascribed to traditional gender roles, and were often homophobic.

The neoliberal governance of educational policy results in schooling becoming entrenched in the 'best of the best' rhetoric of qualifications and competition which suits a middle-class self adept at understanding what counts while assembling and deploying resources in order to ensure one's own success. The learning of skills and gaining qualifications, grounded in an aspirational discourse, is frequently equated with access to high status or high income. Recent educational research in this area has focused on neoliberal policies and how they have the potential to shape identity (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Wilkins, 2011). Francis (2006), citing Beck (1992), argues that, in post-industrial societies, our young males "can no longer expect 'a job for life', but must rather expect to 'upskill' and remake themselves for a succession of jobs in an insecure market-place" (p. 190). There remains an entwined relationship between neoliberal educational practices focused on the "four Cs – change, choice, chances and competition" which shape gendered and classed subjectivities as well as aspiration (Phoenix, 2004, p. 22). Essential to the formation of a specific subjectivity, both strategies of 'loyalty to self' and 'averageness' work in concert to reconstitute normative identity practices and reaffirm the egalitarian habitus.

Conclusions

The boys' sense of egalitarianism, which enables the social world to be read and understood, remains a counter-habitus to the neoliberal performativity and their perception of academic success/failure. Egalitarianism allows them to construct themselves as 'valuable' within an educational environment where they often lack the capitals to succeed. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue people "know how to 'read' the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made (by opposition to everything that the expression 'this is not for the likes of us' designates)" (p. 130). I have attempted to highlight the nuances of white working-class boys' learner identities and so-called 'underperformance' where they are judged upon how they make sense of conceptions of change around a middle-class identity. As long as schooling continues to have a narrow view of what constitutes success, white working-class boys will have to endure "an intolerable burden of psychic reparative work if they are to avoid what

Bourdieu terms 'the duality of the self'" (Reay, 2002, p. 222), where there exists a challenge surrounding a reconciliation of the contradictory life worlds.

Notes

[1] It is essential to remember habitus is creative, inventive, and generative, but only within the limits of its structures; after all, the process is bounded and "the individual is always, whether he likes it or not, trapped – save to the extent that he becomes aware of it" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.126).

[2] The boys did not identify using class labels, yet it is difficult as a researcher not to make definite assertions. There is complexity here as some of the boys were confused by conventional labels such as 'working class' and 'middle class' yet, at the same time, were aware of slang such as 'posh' and 'chav'.

[3] Coles (2009), in his analysis of the role of masculinity within the habitus, argues that masculinity is an unconscious strategy where habitus enables masculinity to be transposable and adaptable, while allowing for individual differences between how men perform it. Phoenix (2004) has argued that masculinity is a process, or a strategy, that: "mitigates the tenets of neoliberalism" (p. 244).

[4] In their analysis of symbolic violence, Connolly and Healy (2004) state:

> In essence it represents the ways in which people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them. It is an act of violence precisely because it leads to the constraint and subordination of individuals, but it is also symbolic in the sense that this is achieved indirectly and without overt and explicit acts of force or coercion. (p.15)

References

Adkins, L. (2000). Objects of innovation: Post-occupational refexivity and re-traditionalisations of gender. In S. Ahmed, J. Kilb, C. Lury, M. Mcneil, & B. Skeggs (Eds.), *Transformations: Thinking through feminism* (pp.331). London: Routledge.

Allen, K. (2013a). 'Blair's children': Young women as 'aspirational subjects' in the psychic landscape of class. *Sociological Review, 61*(4), 1-20. doi: 10.1111/1467-954X.12113

Allen, K. (2013b, April). *Coalition policy and 'aspiration raising' in a psychic landscape of clas*s. Presented at Journal of Youth Studies Conference, Glasgow University.

Allen, K., & Mendick, H. (2012). Young people's uses of celebrity: Class, gender, and 'improper' celebrity. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 34* (1), 1-17. doi: 10.1080/01596306.2012.698865

Archer, L., & Francis, B. (2007). *Understanding minority ethnic achievement*. Oxon: Routledge.

Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2003). New Times—Old Inequalities: diverse Working-class femininities in education. *Gender & Education, 15*(3), 227-235. doi: 10.1080/09540250303861

Archer, L., & H. Yamashita (2003a). "Knowing their limits"? Identities, inequalities and inner city school leavers' post-16 aspirations. *Journal of Educational Policy, 18*(1), 53-69. doi: 10.1080/0268093032000042209

Archer, L., & Yamashita, H. (2003b). Theorising inner-city masculinities: 'Race', class, gender and education. *Gender and Education, 15*(2), 115–132. doi: 10.1080/09540250303856

Arnot, M. (2004). Male working-class identities and social justice: A reconsideration of Paul Willis's Learning to Labor in Light of contemporary research. In N. Dolby, G. Dimitriadis, & I. P. Willis (Eds.), *Learning to Labor in new times* (pp. 231). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Atkinson, W. (2011). From sociological fictions to social fictions: Some Bourdieusian reflections on the concepts of 'institutional habitus' and 'family habitus'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 32*(3), 331-347. doi:10.1080/01425692.2011.559337

Ball, S., Maguire, S., & Macrae, M. (2000) *Choice, pathways and transitions post-16*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Ball, S., & Olmedo, A. (2012). Care of the self, resistance, and subjectivity under neoliberal governmentalities. *Critical Studies in Education, 54*(1), 85-96. doi:10.1080/17508487.2013.740678

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: SAGE Publications.

Blanchflower, D. (2012, 30 July). Let's call up Vince to get us out of this mess. *The Independent*, p. 45.

Blanden, J., & Machin, S. (2007). *Recent changes in intergenerational mobility in Britain*. London: Centre for Economic Performance at LSE.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social critique of the judgement of taste*. Oxon: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (2002). Habitus. In J. Hillier, & E. Rooksby (Eds.), *Habitus: A Sense of Place* (pp. 27-34). Aldershot: Ashgate.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.C. (1992). *Reproduction in education, society, and culture*. London: SAGE Publications.

Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brann-Barrett, M. T. (2011). Same landscape, different lens: Variations in young people's socio-economic experiences and perceptions in their disadvantaged working-class community. *Journal of Youth Studies, 14*(3), 261-278. doi:10.1080/13676261.2010.532328

Burke, P. J. (2010). Masculinity, subjectivity and neoliberalism in men's accounts of migration and higher educational participation. *Gender and Education, 23*(2), 169-184. doi:10.1080/09540251003674139

The Cabinet Office. (2011). *Opening doors, breaking barriers: A strategy for social mobility*. London: The Cabinet Office, Her Majesty's Government.

Carter, P. (2006). Straddling boundaries: Identity, culture, and school. *Sociology of Education, 78*(3), 304-328. doi: 10.1177/003804070607900402

Charlesworth, S. J. (2000). *The phenomenology of working class experience*. Cambridge: University Press.

Charlesworth, S. J. (2004). Reflections on working-class space, being, and experience. *Space and Culture, 7*(3), 327-342. doi: 10.1177/1206331204266198

Coles, T. (2009). Negotiating the field of masculinity: The production and reproduction of multiple dominant masculinities. *Men and Masculinities, 12*(1), 30-44. doi: 10.1177/1097184X07309502

Connell, R. W. (1998). Masculinities and globalization. *Men and Masculinities, 1*(1), 1-23. doi: 10.1177/1097184X98001001001

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinitie*s. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society, 19*(6), 829-859. doi: 10.1177/0891243205278639

Connolly, P., & Healy, J. (2004). Symbolic violence, locality and social class: the educational and career aspirations of 10-11 year olds boys in Belfast. *Pedagogy Culture and Society, 12*, 15-33.doi:10.1080/14681360400200187

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. International *Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*(3), 247-256. doi: 10.1080/09518390701281751

Demie, F., & Lewis, K. (2010). White working class achievement: An ethnographic study of barriers to learning in schools. *Educational Studies, 33*(2), 1-20. doi: 10.1080/03055698.2010.506341

Department for Education and Skills [DfES]. (2004). *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*. London: Author.

Department of Education. (2010). *White Paper: The Importance of Teaching*. Lonodon: Author.

Evans, G. (2006). *Educational failure and working class white children in Britain*. Palgrave: MacMillan.

Francis, B. (1999). Lads, lasses, and (new) labour: 14-16-year-old students' responses to the 'laddish behaviour and boys' underachievement' debate. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 20*(3), 355-371. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1393252

Francis, B. (2006). Heroes or zeroes? The discursive positioning of 'underachieving boys' in English neo-liberal education policy. *Journal of Education Policy, 21*(2), 187-200. doi: 10.1080/02680930500500278

Gillborn, D., & Youdell, D. (2000). *Rationing education: Policy, practice, reform and equity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Gove, M. (2011). *Speech to the Conservative Party Conference. Presented at the Conservative Party Conference*. Manchester, U.K.

Grenfell, M. (2008). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*. Durham: Acumen.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hattam, R., & J. Smyth (2003). 'Not everyone has a perfect life': Becoming somebody without school. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 11*(3), 379-398. doi: 10.1080/14681360300200180

Howson, R. (2014). Re-thinking aspiration and hegemonic masculinity in transnational context. *Masculinities and Social Change, 3*(1), 18-25.5. doi: 10.4471/MCS.2014.40

Ingram, N. (2011). Within school and beyond the gate: The complexities of being educationally successful and working class. *Sociology, 45*(2), 287–302. doi: 10.1177/0038038510394017

Kenway, J., & Kelly, P. (2000). Local/global labour markets and the restructuring of gender, schooling, and work. In N. Stromquist, & K. Monkham (Eds.), *Globalisation and education: Integration and contestation across cultures* (pp. 173-195). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lawler, S. (1999). 'Getting out and getting away': Women's narratives of class mobility. *Feminist Review, 63*(3), 3-24. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1395585

Lingard, B. (2011). Policy as numbers: Ac/counting for educational research. *Australian Educational Researchers, 38*(4), 355-382. Doi: 10.1007/s13384-011-0041-9

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1994). *The making of men: Masculinities, sexualities and schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

MacDonald, R., Shildrick, T.,Webster, C., & Simpson, D. (2005). Growing up in poor neighbourhoods: The significance of class and place in the extended transitions of 'socially excluded' young adults. *Sociology, 39*(5), 873-891. doi: 10.1177/0038038505058370

MacLeod, J. (2009). *Ain't no makin' it.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

McLeod, J. (2000). Subjectivity and schooling in a longitudinal study of secondary students. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 21*(4), 501-521. doi: 10.1080/713655367

McLeod, J. (2003). Why we interview now: Reflexivity and perspective in longitudinal studies. *International Journal of Research Methodology, 6*(3), 201-211. doi: 10.1080/1364557032000091806

Mills, C. (2008). Reproduction and transformation of inequalities in schooling: The transformative potential of the theoretical constructs

of Bourdieu. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 29*(1), 79-89. doi: 10.1080/01425690701737481

Nash, R. (1990). Bourdieu on education and social and cultural reproduction. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 11*(4), 431-447. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1392877

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review, 66*(1), 60-92. Retrieved from: http://www.pwrfaculty.net/summer-seminar/files/2011/12/new-london-multiliteracies.pdf

Office for National Statistics. (2012). Graduates in the labour market 2012. London: Office for National Statistics.

Phoenix, A. (2004). Neoliberalism and masculinity: Racialization and the contradictions of schooling for 11-to-14-year-olds. *Youth Society, 36*(2), 227-246. doi: 10.1177/0044118X04268377

Platt, L. (2007). Making education count: The effects of ethnicity and qualifications on intergenerational social class mobility. *The Sociological Review, 55*(3), 485-508. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2007.00715.x

Raco, M. (2009). From expectations to aspirations: State modernisation, urban policy, and the existential politics of welfare in the UK. *Political Geography, 28*, 436-444. doi: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2009.10.009

Reay, D. (2001). Finding or losing yourself? Working-class relationships to education. *Journal of Education Policy, 16*(4), 333-346. doi: 10.1080/02680930110054335

Reay, D. (2002). Shaun's story: Troubling discourses on white working-class masculinities. *Gender and Education, 14*(3), 221-234. doi: 10.1080/0954025022000010695

Reay, D. (2003). A risky business? Mature working-class women students and access to higher education. *Gender and Education, 15*(3), 301-317. doi: 10.1080/09540250303860

Reay, D. (2005). Beyond consciousness?: The psychic landscape of social class. *Sociology, 39*(5), 911-928. doi: 10.1177/0038038505058372

Reay, D. (2009). Making sense of white working class educational underachievement. In K. P. Sveinsson (Ed.), *Who cares about the white working class?* (pp. 22-28). London: Runnymede Perspectives.

Reay, D. (2010). Identity-making in schools and classrooms. In M. Wetherall, & C. Talpade Mohanty (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of identities* (pp. 277-294). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2009). 'Strangers in paradise'? Working-class students in elite universities. *Sociology, 43*(6). doi: 10.1177/0038038509345700

Reay, D., David, M. E., & Ball, S. (2005). *Degrees of choice: Social class, race and gender in higher education*. London, Institute of Education.

Renold, E. (2001). Learning the 'hard' way: Boys, hegemonic masculinity, and the negotiation of learner identities in the primary school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 22*(3), 369-385. doi: 10.1080/01425690120067980

Renold, E. (2004). 'Other' boys: Negotiating non-hegemonic masculinities in the primary school. *Gender & Education, 16*(2), 247-265. doi: 10.1080/09540250310001690609

Richardson, H. (2010, 24 November). *Gove puts focus on traditional school values*. BBC News. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/education-11822208

Savage, M. (2005). Working-class identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the affluent worker study. *Sociology, 39*(5), 929-946. doi: 10.1177/0038038505058373

Savage, M., Bangall, G., & Longhurst, B. (2001). Ordinary, ambivalent, and defensive: Class identities in the northwest of England. *Sociology, 35*(4), 875-895. doi: 10.1177/0038038501035004005

Sayer, A. (2002). What are you worth?: Why class is an embarrassing subject. *Sociological Research Online, 7*(3). Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/3/sayer.html

Skeggs, B. (2002*). Formations of class & gender*. Nottingham: SAGE Publications.

Skeggs, B. (2004). *Class, self, culture*. London: Routledge.

Smyth, J. (2006). 'When students have power': Student engagement, student voice, and the possibilities for school reform around 'dropping out' of school. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 9*(4), 285-298. doi:10.1080/13603120600894232

Spohrer, K. (2011). Deconstructing 'aspiration': UK policy debates and European policy trends. *European Educational Research Journal, 10*(1), 53-62. doi: 10.2304/eerj.2011.10.1.53

Stahl, G. (2012). Aspiration and a good life among white working-class boys in London. *Journal of Qualitative and Ethnographic Research, 7*(8-9), 8-19. Retrieved from: http://www.academia.edu/2084242/Aspiration_and_a_Good_Life_A mong_White_Working-Class_Boys_in_London

Stahl, G. (2015). *Aspiration, identity, and neoliberalism: Educating white working-class boys*. London: Routledge.

Stahl, G., & Dale, P. (2013). Success on the decks: Working-class boys, education, and turning the tables on perceptions of failure. *Gender & Education, 25*(2), 1-16. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2012.756856

Strand, S., & Winston, J. (2008). Educational aspirations in inner city schools. *Educational Studies, 34*(4), 249–267. doi: 10.1080/03055690802034021

Strand, S. (2014). School effects and ethnic, gender and socio-economic gaps in educational achievement at age 11. *Oxford Review of Education, 40*(2), 1-20. doi: 10.1080/03054985.2014.891980

Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture and power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: The Chicago Press.

Tyler, I. (2008). Chav mum chav scum. *Feminist Media Studies, 8*(1), 17-34. doi: 10.1080/14680770701824779

Vasagar, J. (2011, 28 September). *Andy Burnham calls for Ucas-style applications system for apprenticeships. The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/sep/28/andy-burnham-ucas-apprenticeships

Wetherall, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism & Psychology, 9*(3), 335–356. doi: 10.1177/0959353599009003012

Wexler, P. (1992). *Becoming somebody: Toward a social psychology of school*. London: The Falmer Press.

Wilkins, A. (2011). Push and pull in the classroom: Competition, gender, and the neoliberal subject. *Gender and Education, 24*(7), 1-17. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2011.606207

Winlow, S. (2001). *Badfellas: Crime, tradition and new masculinities*. Oxford: Berg.

Garth Stahl is a Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of South Australia

Contact Address: Direct correspondence to Garth Stahl, School of Education, University of South Australia, Mawson Lakes Campus, G2-24, 2471 Adelaida, Australia, email: Garth.Stahl@unisa.edu.au