

Chris's 'Choices'

The Negotiations of a White Working-Class Male for his Future in Education and Work

Alex Blower



- Contextualising participation in HE for white working-class students
- Introducing the study
- Chris and his family
- What are the lessons when developing practice with/for BTEC students?



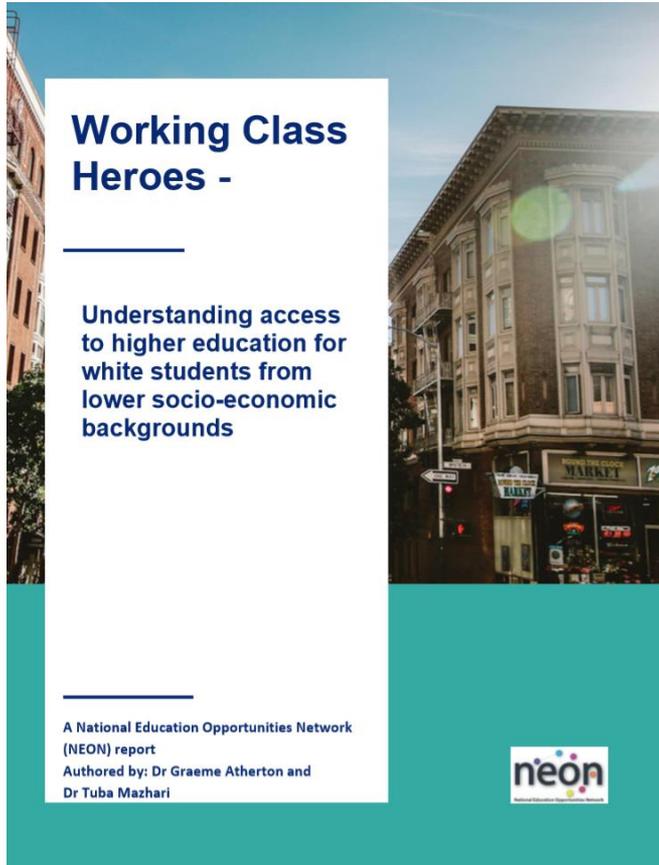


'White British disadvantaged boys are the least likely of any large ethnic group to go to university. We need to ask ourselves why that is and challenge government, universities and the wider system to change that'
(Damian Hinds, 2018)



There is evidence from the Institute of Fiscal Studies, UCAS and, more recently, the Department of Education which shows that white young people in receipt of free school meals (FSM), are the least likely, next to those from gypsy/roma backgrounds of any group, to enter HE. The progression rates were 17.6% for females and 12.2% for males in 2016/17, as opposed those of Chinese pupils from free school meal backgrounds which is 79% and 64% respectively

These low levels of participation are undoubtedly related to the relatively poor achievement of these groups in compulsory education. In 2016-17 only 17% of students from white FSM backgrounds achieved Level 5 in GCSE Maths and English, as opposed to 35% of students from Asian backgrounds in receipt of FSM and 29% of Black young people from such backgrounds (NEON, 2019, p.9)



- Most white students from LPN attend larger 'post 1992' universities
- Big differences in levels of participation for white students from LPN exist by HE provider
- Big differences in the chances of white students from LPN being accepted exist by HE provider

'White students are found in the highest percentages in further education colleges'



**But how and why is this the
case?**



'Most basically we are interested in recording and presenting the 'nitty gritty' of everyday life, of how the 'meat is cut close to the bone' in ordinary cultural practices, and presenting them in ways which provide maximum illumination for readers (2000, p.12)



How are institutional practices deployed at West Midlands High School to develop the expectations of white working-class students for their future in education and work?

How do white working-class males draw upon the resources to available to them when deciding what is possible for their future in education and work?

How can the expectations of white working-class males for their future in education and work be shaped by the experiences of their social networks?





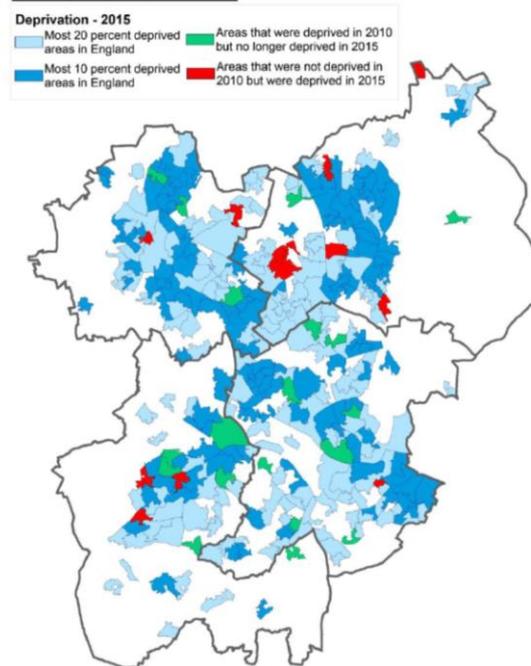
The 2015 Indices of Multiple Deprivation show that 42.5% (303 LSOA's) of the Black Country is classed as deprived (in the top 20% of the most deprived areas in England) this represents some 502,086 residents.

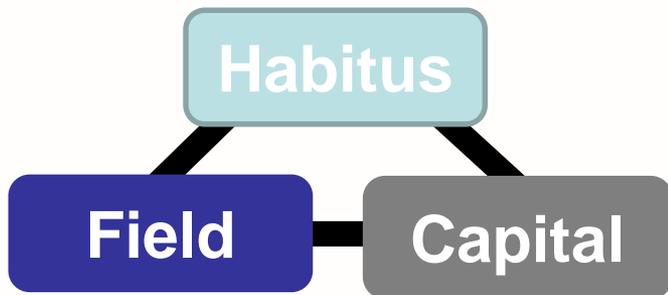
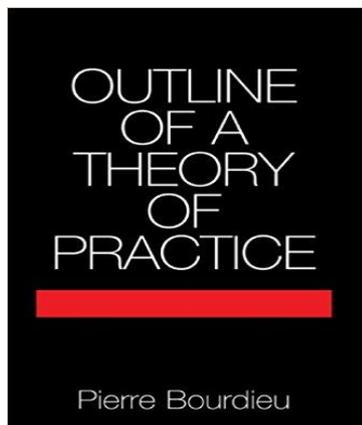
Furthermore, 19% (220,223 residents) of Black Country LSOA's are in the 10% most deprived areas in England.

13 LSOA became deprived from 2010 to 2015 (red areas on map).

19 LSOA's moved out of deprivation from 2010 to 2015 (green areas on map).

DEPRIVATION - CHANGE





Horizons for Action

Within a field, people make pragmatically rational decisions within their culturally derived horizons for action, at turning-points. These turning-points are both preceded and followed by periods of routine, which themselves are located within the field and the macro-context (1997,p.41)



Participants	School Roles	Method of Data Collection
Mr CJ	Head teacher	Semi structured interview
Miss B	Head of Sixth Form	Semi structured interview
Miss D	Teacher and Ex SLT	Semi structured interview
Mrs DJ	Behaviour Lead (KS3)	Semi structured interview
Mr Jamerson	PE Teacher and ex Assistant Head	Semi structured interview
Mrs Pol	School careers advisor	Semi structured interview
Mr D	Teacher	Semi structured interview

- Participant observation interviews with teaching staff at the West Midlands High School



Participants	Methods of Data Collection	Network Members Interviewed
Chris (year 10/11 student)	Participant Observation 2 interviews	Mom and Gran
Vince (year 10/11 student)	Participant Observation 2 interviews	Mom and 2 cousins
Mr D (staff member and ex student)	1 Interview	Mom, Dad, Wife, Mentor

- Participant observation and semi structured interviews with core participants and members of their social network



How did Chris, a student who framed study at a local college of Further Education as the most likely option, negotiate his educational expectations for the future?



Hopes and Expectations







- Chris's turbulent experience of schooling, one in which he was often the victim of harassment by his peers, left him disinclined to be at school for any longer than he was compulsorily required to do so
- Chris framed either an apprenticeship or study at a local college as the options which featured most strongly within his *horizons for action*.
- A fear of failure in exams, Chris reflected, had been a constant companion during his time at school, causing him high levels of anxiety from a young age.
- Within the interview Chris expressed high aspirations for his future career, citing multinational organisations as potential employers. However, this misaligned with his immediate plans



How did the experiences of Chris's mother and grandmother shape which trajectories featured strongly within his *horizons for action*?









- After initially failing her exams Judy's transition in to work after completing her NVQ was reliant on locally available opportunities.
- Restrictions on geographic mobility meant that without a means to access them, opportunities present within nearby towns and cities such as Birmingham were not present within Judy's *horizon for action, which had consequences for Chris*.
- Intergenerational difference in expectations for Chris's future based on their own experiences of work in the locality.
- The practices described by Chris's familial network when reflecting upon their hopes for Chris's future, are bound within experiences of gender and class-based inequality spanning three generations
- A mixture of concern for Chris's wellbeing and the resources available within the family, meant that often Judy and Margret viewed the teaching staff at West Midland High School with suspicion. Efforts geared toward protecting Chris from harm.



Future decision making is complex, geographically situated, and enmeshed within the sociohistorical experience of not only the student, but also with multiple generations of friends/family.



- Social, cultural and economic resources required to frame HE participation strongly within Chris's *horizons for action* were not easily available either at school, or within his social network.
- Sociohistorical context of the family played a significant role in their hopes for Chris's future. Differed between mother and grandmother.
- College was not framed as different route to university, but rather a vocational alternative to university.
- Chris's aspirations were high, but a mix of harassment at school, low academic confidence and lack of opportunity meant that he expected to end up at college.

Questions/comments?