

'I'm like you not': Intergenerational mobility of working class students from a cultural-evolutionary perspective

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This retrospective narrative investigation challenges aspects of structural determinism. The biographical data generated in the study revealed that the baby-boomer, male participants were not academically constrained by their working class identities. Interpersonal relationships experienced within an individual's unique communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) had greater influence on the participants' academic achievement than the implied common socialising effects of a working class habitus. The study emphasises the agency of the individual because the educational outcomes of the participants, rather than being dependent on the inferred lack of cultural proficiencies normally associated with the working class, were influenced to a much greater extent by one's attitude. The investigation offers both structuralist and evolutionary points of view in relation to understanding the social mobility of the working class males who participated in the study.

Introduction

A good deal of sociological research is associated with understanding the inconsistency among the educational attainment of different social groups. A specific focus, within recent years, has been the perceived educational underachievement of boys. Studies of Western education, over the last century, have demonstrated that social class in particular has a significant influence on educational outcomes. Students from working-class families have been shown, in the main, to perform below their middle and upper-class counterparts. A consequence of this educational disparity has been the low level of access, among working-class students, to higher education (Bourdieu, 1977; Chesters, 2015; Connell, 1982; Ogbu, 1992; Stahl, 2013; Van Krieken, Habibis, Smith, Hutchins, Haralambos & Holborn, 2005).

The context of this retrospective study is the Australian comprehensive secondary education system of the late 1960s and 70s that developed as a response to the then social democratic critique of educational inequality (Haralambos, 1986). There was a belief at the time that social-class differences in educational attainment could be overcome by compensatory policies. The objective was to address the economic and social disadvantages of lower-class students by removing the social-class influences on their school performance (Connell, 1982; Haralambos, 1986; Van Krieken et al. 2005). Australian studies, such as those conducted by Connell (1978b) showed that, although opportunities to participate in higher education expanded after 1970, many lower-class students were still not accessing tertiary education or attaining formal educational qualifications. It appeared that family background remained a significant influence on the educational outcomes of Australian students during this period of social and educational change (Connell, 1978a; Haralambos, 1986).

The formal educational experiences of the participants in this study were affected by a period in Australia's history that saw a shift towards greater equality in educational opportunity. Social-democratic policies, that addressed educational inequality during the post-war period, were most evident under the Whitlam government between 1972 and 1975. These policies were meant to promote egalitarianism. They were intended to challenge the functionalist principles that had previously informed educational practice (Haralambos, 1986; Welch, 2007). Following the recommendations of the Karmel Report, Prime Minister Whitlam established the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1973. A consequence of this government initiative was the implementation of compensatory education programs that were designed to assist socially-disadvantaged sections of the community (Connell, 1993; Haralambos, 1986; Musgrave 1988; Van Krieken et al. 2005). The Federal Government's abolition of university education fees, around the same time, was a political decision that significantly influenced the decision making and educational experiences of a majority of the working-class individuals who participated in this investigation.

This study examines cultural reproduction theories, particularly those perpetuated by the French sociologist Bourdieu who maintained that the social function of formal schooling was to eliminate the lower classes from higher levels of education. Bourdieu's (1977) thesis, infers that lower-class students are unlikely to achieve academically because they lack the cultural attributes of the dominant classes. It is said that the education system favours the cultural practices of dominant social groups. Bourdieu argued that working-class students understand the cultural divide that exists between formal education and themselves (Van Krieken et al. 2005). The education system is identified as a neutral entity that promotes meritocratic principles and equal opportunity, but Bourdieu (1977) argues that school practices do not support this aim (Van Krieken et al. 2005).

Different theoretical perspectives were used in this study to understand the structure/agency dynamic. One particular focus of the analysis is the interactionist perspective which recognises the subjectivity of individuals and the meanings individuals attach to external stimuli (Stuber, 2006; Van Krieken et al. 2005). The personal narrative accounts of the participants' formal learning experiences are interpreted using approaches that include both social reproduction and cultural evolution theories. The study acknowledges that some of the most important influences on the participants' decision making were at the micro or interpersonal level. It is argued that the participants' personal interactions with others were more important to this study sample's decision making and educational experiences, than macro structural influences. The participants' understanding of themselves, and the way they went about constructing their learning identities, correspond directly with the personal interactions they had within the schools they attended.

Although a retrospective investigation the study nonetheless reflects current concerns about boys' engagement with schooling in Australia. The study continues the research into males' experiences in education, especially in relation to aspects of class and masculinity that have been identified as possible impediments to boys' positive schooling outcomes. While concurring with much of the previous research in this area, the investigation also

offers an alternative perspective to understanding and dealing with the issues, particularly in relation to social mobility. Analysis of the data demonstrates that investigating individual-level micro processes has the potential to unsettle some of the structuralist approaches that have dominated social mobility research in recent times (Savage, 1997). The investigation demonstrates that theories from disparate fields of study, such as sociology and biology, can be integrated to offer what might be considered an unconventional perspective to understanding a traditionally sociological problem.

Methodology

This research uses an interpretive paradigm to examine the subjectivities of the working-class individuals who participated in the study. Drawing definitive conclusions that could align the approach with reductionism is avoided. The theoretical perspectives adopted argue for biography and autobiography as a way of linking epistemology with methodology. This approach to the analysis of the biographical/autobiographical data reflects the important role that narrative has in understanding identity construction (Haynes, 2006). Rather than looking for closure the intention is to leave readers thinking about the prominent and uncertain issues concerning each man's working-class experience (Lindlof, 1995; Mason, 2002; Maykut and Morehouse, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 2001, 2002). Data from the men's stories are intended to help others gain both a historical and broad point of view into how each of the participants developed personally and educationally (Ezzy, 1999). The narratives of the men represent the consciousness of their experiences and reveal each man's distinct voice (Jansen, 2006; Lindlof, 1995). Ricoeur's (1976) theory of explanation, understanding and interpretation informed the analytical process.

Methods

The study specifically examined the role of personal relationships in the educational experiences of the fifteen participants. Data gathered from three focus groups and qualitative in-depth interviews conducted between 2007 and 2008 were analysed and interpreted to identify the individuals' significant educational experiences. A hypothesis was not formulated and there was no intention to either prove or disprove a proposition. Data were collected and synthesised inductively to develop generalisations about the working-class phenomenon being investigated (McMillan, 2004). Criteria for participation in the research were that individuals should be: male, white, a baby-boomer with at least a minimum level of secondary education and at some point in their lives had identified themselves as working class. The data are transcripts of digitally-recorded unstructured interviews. The transcribed emic data have been edited into third person etic reproductions of the originals. The reconstructed individual biographies of each man were read and interpreted using a thematic approach. More details of research instruments and analytical approaches can be found in Chapter Three of the investigation (Lovett, 2011).

Cultural capital

Studies into the effects of cultural and social capital on educational outcomes are many, varied and often contradictory (Goldthorpe, 1983). Bourdieu's (1977) theory of cultural reproduction posits that students from working-class homes are disadvantaged educationally because they do not possess the cultural, social and linguistic competence (capital) that is rewarded by schools. This study considered the relationship among students' various communities of practice; including home and school, and how the characteristics and experiences of those contexts combined to affect an individual's responses to formal learning.

Cultural capital theory was used to explore the influence of social and cultural origins on a student's learning and how individuals developed understandings of the self. It is also suggested that the notion of a single indicator of class position is inadequate and argued that an individual rather than the family is the best unit of analysis for understanding the influence of class on students' formal schooling (Goldthorpe, 1983). Unlike many similar studies in which only a single characteristic such as class or gender has been the focus, this research explored identity construction from a multidimensional rather than unitary perspective.

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of social reproduction asserts that the home environment is an important site for the transmission of cultural capital and the type of capital acquired has a significant influence on an individual's performance at school. While cultural reproduction theory was used in this study for understanding differential schooling outcomes it is acknowledged that it offers only a partial explanation as to the role of social-class differences in educational attainment (Jaeger, 2009; Sullivan, 2001).

Schools work on the assumption that all students possess cultural capital although the amount of capital is contingent upon an individual's social location: the lower on the social hierarchy the more likely it is that a person has less capital. The premise of Bourdieu's work is that students from the poorer classes lack the necessary capital for educational success and as a consequence find school difficult. These students' abilities are said to be culturally, socially and linguistically incompatible with the practices of schools (Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu 1977; 1984; 1990; Jaeger, 2009). Bourdieu (1977) also argues that children inherit the cultural capital of their parents. A student's educational success therefore is aligned with the wealth and social background of his or her parents (Connell, 1993; Lehmann, 2014).

Habitus

Bourdieu's (1993) concept of *habitus* is a theoretical approach used in this research to help understand the effects of class on students' identity construction and learning. Habitus is the means by which the past and present shape one's perceptions of what is acceptable and achievable within society. The habitus is affected by social positioning which also influences an individual's social conduct. Bourdieu's (1993) analogy of habitus relates to

not only knowing ‘the game’ but also being able to play it. The social and cultural worlds of the middle class are allied with the practices of formal institutions such as schools and therefore the middle-class’ knowledge of ‘the game’ gives it an advantage over other groups whose habitus makes them less familiar with the game’s rules (Archer, Hollingworth and Halsall 2007; Niro, 2002; Reay, 2002; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009; Stahl, 2013). Habitus is Bourdieu’s attempt at compromise between the structuralist and phenomenological models of social interaction (Niro, 2002). Habitus orientates rather than strictly determines the actions of individuals. Habitus is simultaneously structuring and generative (Codd, 1990; Reay et al. 2009).

Analysis

Table 1: Participant information

Name	Age	Occupation	Highest educational qualification	Father’s occupation
Andre	58	Accountant	BA	Factory worker
Billy	62	Academic	PhD	Bricklayer
Boris	66	Teacher	MEd	Fitter
Brad	62	Financial planner	BCom	Farmer
Chris	67	Teacher	Dip T	Baker
Clark	58	Manager	BBehSc	Truck driver
Grant	70	Teacher	BSc	Tiler
Gus	65	Civil engineer	Cert Eng	Truck driver
Hardy	66	Teacher	MSc	Mechanic
Jack	62	ASO	HSC	Book salesman
Lou	58	Businessman	BSc	Fitter
Mozza	68	Teacher	BA	Mechanic
Ox	60	Ex-Telstra employee	-	Bricklayer
Pep	58	Economist	PhD	Fitter
Wayne	62	Labourer	HSC	Factory manager

N.B. All names provided are pseudonyms (Lovett, 2011).

This study demonstrates that when particular students did not recognise a teacher’s authority the consequence was confrontation followed by the students distancing themselves from schoolwork or deciding to abandon schooling altogether. The following describes an individual’s reaction to a specific teacher’s authority.

Because Ox disliked Mr W, Ox feels he didn’t learn anything as far as school work was concerned in Mr W’s class. At the age he was in fifth class, ten or eleven, one might think he’d have a good memory of things like that but he doesn’t and Ox believes the reason is because he just didn’t want to do any work under Mr W. He had no interest in schoolwork at that time. All he looked forward to in that class was the end of the year and thinking, “Good I’m finally going to be out of this away from this shit hole and this mongrel bastard of a teacher.”

The effect of an individual teacher in relation to students’ educational outcomes should not be underestimated. Research by Ginnott (1971), Hattie (2012), Jennings and

Greenberg (2009) Lingard (2011) and McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) identified the teacher as the decisive element in the classroom. The teacher's personal approach and moods have the capacity to make or break the lives of the students in his/her charge (Kinder and Harland, 2004). Furlong (1991) gives Ox's experience perspective by suggesting that students are not in the business of rejecting abstract social structures. It is individual teachers carrying out their normal day to day practice who evoke either positive or negative responses in their students.

A person accumulates cultural capital through compliance with the values, beliefs and practices of a specific context. Individuals usually activate compliance or resistance as a response to power (Dahrendorf, 1968). The instances of individual decision making that can either perpetuate or disrupt social reproduction such as those demonstrated by the participant Ox are fundamental to understanding the learning identities of the working-class men involved in this study.

Lareau and Horvat (1999) suggested that Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction does not adequately explain an individual's interactions from the perspective of multiple contexts. In addition to identifying the cultural and social factors that contribute to educational inequality, understanding the ways that help individuals convert limited cultural resources into educational advantage also need to be addressed. Bourdieu is cognisant of the strategies individuals follow in their daily lives but he lacks awareness of the decisions individuals make to activate cultural capital when necessary (Lareau and Horvat, 1999).

The school performances of respondents in this study are attributed to a compatibility with or dissidence for particular individuals rather than being determined by one's social-class position. The decisions the men made regarding schooling and learning were responses to personal interactions with individual teachers, parents and friends as opposed to being governed by the inferred culturally specific practices of schools. Ox's experiences are indicative of this. The social and cultural deficits of a respondent's family although influential on an individual's schooling were not categorical in the decision-making processes of every man.

Compensatory education

This study reveals that multiple influences both inside and outside the home affected an individual's relationship with education and the men's interactions in those contexts helped to shape their personal learning development. Contexts affecting participants' decisions were experienced both directly and indirectly. For example governments at all levels, and of different political persuasions, influenced the immediate and extended contexts of all the individuals involved. Of specific significance to the learning decisions of many participants who went on to higher education were the global compensatory education policies of the sixties and seventies that were taken up in Australia by successive Commonwealth governments. Even after Gough Whitlam's Federal Labor Government was defeated in 1975 by the conservatives, in a constitutional crisis, compensatory programs were not dismantled (Connell, 1993). The compensatory policies adopted by both the major political parties were influential in the homes of most participants during

their adolescence. In conjunction with the guidance of significant others in the respondents' lives these policies helped to determine a number of the men's educational decision making.

It wasn't until Boris got to leaving honours that Mr C and two other male teachers listened to him. Things changed and that's basically why Boris became a teacher. He had a scholarship to get into university because his mum and dad couldn't pay.

After leaving school Billy started a traineeship as a production engineer at TAFE. While at work he received a belated offer of a NSW Teachers' Education Scholarship and decided to accept the offer after being encouraged to do so from a past school teacher who was also a friend.

Clark used to get the tertiary education allowance. There were no fees except union fees. There were lurks and perks left right and centre with the student card etc so it was pretty good going. It was a good time for education and a good time for Australia. There are constraints now that weren't obvious then.

Grant read in the paper one morning that he'd been offered a scholarship at year eleven but his mum and dad told him that it didn't mean a thing because they couldn't afford to send him to uni. He wouldn't go unless he could pay for it himself. It was only through the Teaching Scholarship that tertiary education happened for Grant.

Hardy wouldn't have studied at high school had he not got a scholarship for year eleven and then for year twelve. It was never in the equation until he was granted the Commonwealth Scholarship. After that he received the Teaching Bursary so he went into teaching because it was the only way he got to go to university. He would never have got through otherwise.

[According to Lou...] parents said how lucky their kids were. Parents couldn't afford to send their children to uni so when the kids at that time were given the opportunity to go their parents told them, "Grab it with both hands."

Mozza had his heart set on being a vet but the family didn't have the money. When the opportunity came along he decided on his second choice and became a teacher. There were all sorts of pathways in teaching and that's why he chose to do it. The uni aspiration was always there because Mozza had a grandmother who pushed him very hard. She pushed him because some of her children didn't have the opportunities that had fallen into Mozza's lap due to no skill of his own. It was just the luck of the draw really.

Pep was lucky because he was studying at uni when it was all free and that was a huge leveller. There was no barrier so class background wasn't suddenly going to play a role in who could do different types of careers which was fantastic. Pep probably grew up in the best generation.

"...it was great to be in the Gough Whitlam era." Andre certainly wouldn't have been able to afford to go to university otherwise. Andre got a scholarship and that was the only way he was going to go to uni.

The men in this study were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and the decisions each made to continue his education was in most circumstances contingent on government financial assistance. Compensatory education programs, during the period in which the participants were being formally educated, were directed at students from economically challenged social and cultural groups. Compensatory programs were initially created to overcome the linguistic and perceptual deficits of the socially-marginalised (Bernstein, 1971; Morton and Watson, 1973). The intention was to provide financially disadvantaged students with an enriched learning environment as a way of compensating for the lack of stimulation that was inferred to be connected with their lower-class homes.

It is obvious from the men's experiences that they did have the necessary cultural if not the financial capital to do well educationally. The men's level of academic potential was not dependent on the availability of financial resources; something to which traditional concepts of class are aligned. These working-class men were culturally and intellectually capable before government financial assistance made it possible for them to take advantage of the educational opportunities provided to them. Their academic abilities were not impaired by their families' social position or the thickness of their parents' wallets.

The narrative responses of the men in this study contradict many of the claims and findings from previous research. The men's perceptions of their own academic potential were not constrained by their social-class position. The unique communities of practice in which a working-class individual was engaged and the personal interactions he had within those contexts were of greater significance to his level of academic achievement than the implied common socialising influences attributed to a working-class habitus. To suggest that members of a single social group can all be identified by the same cultural characteristics such as language, view of teachers and attitude to school curricula (Barone, 2006) denies the possibility that someone is capable of constructing a distinct identity and individual decision making.

Bourdieu's (1993) theory assumed that working-class students do not take advantage of the limited educational opportunities that are available to them. Working-class students are said to be co-conspirators in their own educational disadvantage (Barone, 2006; Willis, 1977). This study however supports research by Gambetta (1987) and Goldthorpe (2000) that working-class students are able to accommodate rationally when they are challenged educationally (Barone, 2006; Lehmann, 2014).

The investigation shifts the emphasis from the collective to the individual because the educational outcomes of the participants, rather than being dependent on the academic proficiencies said to be associated with a particular social group, had a lot to do with one's attitude (Wells, 1981). Frankl (1962) argued that an individual can have everything taken from him except his attitude and believed that no matter the circumstances with which an individual is confronted, the attitude he adopts remains the last of his human freedoms. The participants' positive or negative attitudes toward schooling were not developed entirely on the basis of their or someone else's social class. A participant's capacity to do well at school was, to a large extent, attributed to his positive attitudes towards the cultural

practices of schools. Participants who adopted positive attitudes or culturally converged were educationally successful.

Hardy really loved school and didn't miss a day in the twelve years he was there.

Chris used to live in a small town and went to the local state high school. Chris loved school: it was fantastic. He did sport and never had any homework.

Maybe it was the personality Lou had but when someone told him that he couldn't do something he would prove them wrong. A teacher walked around to everybody in the classroom and said "You'll go to university, you'll get to leaving; you'll pass Matric." The teacher came up to Lou and said, "You won't get to leaving." Lou had been horsing around. It was the first time he'd let himself go. He got a 'C' but Lou's attitude changed and by the end of the term he had an 'A' in mathematics.

Conversely when a participant decided not to culturally accommodate, his schooling achievements were less obvious.

The exams were in the auditorium. Ox vaguely remembers it was the English exam. He knew he was going to fail. He knew as soon as he'd finished the paper... Ox obviously had some time left until ...others completed the exam... so he decided to work out his footy tips. As he sat writing out his tips ...a hand came over his shoulder and snatched the footy ticket out of his hand. ... it was the dreaded teacher known as Mr Mickey Mouse. He looked at Ox and said, "You're not supposed to be doing that!"

[Ox's response to the teacher's actions is very emotional.] "You're nothing but a piece of shit and after fucking school I'm going to see you and I'm going to kick the fuck out of you because you're nothing but a fucking asshole." The incident was reported to the Headmaster Mr D who ... said to Ox, "...it's people like you that turn out to be criminals in life. You'll end up robbing banks and doing things like that." Mr D gave Ox a note. "Take this home to your parents. Go home!" ... that was Ox's expulsion from school. Mr D added, "There's no place for you in a school like this."

According to Barone (2006) ambition plays an important role in determining a student's educational achievement and a person's social-class position affects his educational and occupational aspirations. Bourdieu's (1977) social reproduction thesis supports the view that the occupation and educational credentials of a child's parents are decisive in developing a student's own ambition. Pursuing that ambition ensures the intergenerational preservation of a family's social position. Berdie (1956) in Encel (1975) revealed the likelihood of a student going to tertiary education is influenced by a number of factors including: the education of one's parents, a father's occupation as well as low educational and occupational aspirations of family members. Wright, Hedlam, Ozolins and Fitzgerald (1978) showed that adolescents were more likely to attain the Higher School Certificate if their fathers were professionals. Moore (1973) tracked the retention rates of Australian school students and found that middle-class students remained at school longer than their working-class counterparts. Meade (1978) concluded that Australian education was orientated towards weeding out students who were other than middle class.

Important in understanding how students' learning identities are constructed is the way an individual's occupational aspirations and access to economic resources are converted into cultural capital. From the perspective of habitus it could be assumed that students from middle-class backgrounds have higher occupational aspirations than their working-class counterparts (Barone, 2006). Barone adds that a middle-class habitus suggests that middle-class students place greater importance on educational success because there is an expectation that they will be successful at school. The data in Table 1 demonstrate that despite the limited financial resources, general low-level educational credentials and working-class occupations of participants' parents, the academic and occupational aspirations of the men in this study did not go unrealised. The educational experiences of this particular sample of working-class males are aligned with other working-class students who have the ability to overcome perceived cultural challenges (Bilton et al. 1988). Their educational attainments defy the negative schooling outcomes associated with the majority of working-class students who attended progressive comprehensive schools at this time (Halsey, 1980).

Intergenerational discontinuity

The data from this study support the notion of social mobility and therefore challenge assertions of social position by inheritance (Connell, 1978a). Generational variations in the availability of education and occupations are according to Connell some of the obvious reasons for intergenerational discontinuity because historical shifts in demand for certain goods and services can affect people's social opportunities. Connell agrees with already cited research that there is evidence of general correspondence between fathers' and sons' occupations however Connell, in the same way as this study, also acknowledges that intergenerational correspondence is not a given. That social mobility does occur and is more prevalent in Australia than in other capitalist countries (Connell, 1978a) is reflected in the educational and occupational outcomes of the working-class participants in this research.

This study supports Lockwood's (1966) argument that actors' perceptions of society and class structure vary. The men's social experience and the way they responded to it was not a consequence of a shared working-class consciousness. All but one of the working-class participants, in this study, 'experimented with counter-cultural forms of life' (Connell, 1978a, p. 183). The majority of the men were not fixed to a particular social location: they demonstrated an ability to culturally evolve. The most prevalent mode of adaptation for students according to Woods (1983) is something termed 'colonisation' i.e. even though working-class students may be indifferent to the cultural practices advocated by schools they are nonetheless capable of working the system to serve their own interests. The working-class participants in this study showed they were very adept at playing Bourdieu's (1993) 'game'. Gale and Parker (2015) argue that educational and social aspirations are driven by cultural tastes (Bourdieu, 1984). According to this thesis the men's mobility could be perceived as their desire to attain neoliberal-inspired notions of the 'good life' (Gale and Parker, 2015 p. 141).

Cultural accommodation and evolutionary theory

Doctrines of the classic economists often combined evolutionary and sociological reasoning. Veblen for example understood human evolution, as a process of selective adaptation to the environment. Evolutionary ideas, such as Veblen's, developed from those of both Spencer and Darwin (Coser, 1977). According to Veblen (1919) an individual's life history 'is a cumulative process of adaptations of means to ends' (p.236). This study argues that the individualism demonstrated by the participants can be understood from an evolutionary point of view.

The participants' culturally-constructed pursuit of self-fulfilment is analogous with more recent sociobiological theorisations concerning individualism. Sociocultural evolution is relevant to explaining the transgenerational change of individuals within specific collectivities such as social class (Antweiler, 2008). This study questions aspects of the environmental hypothesis (Salter, 2002) because the participants' ability to culturally adapt is inconsistent with certain elements of conventional sociological thought. The premise underlying the research findings is that the social structure and the processes affecting it are evolving not static. An alternate approach to environmentalism is the hereditarian or genetic hypothesis that acknowledges innate differences in ability and downplays the effects of material and social privilege (Salter, 2002). Rather than restrict interpretation to a singular theoretical orientation however this study synthesises environmentalist and genetic theories because principles aligned with both are evident in the research data. The evolutionary approach referred to in this analysis is not related to social Darwinism or any of that theory's spurious claims.

As a concept the relationship between cultural and genetic evolution is not new. Dissatisfaction with Darwinian explanations for human conduct influenced the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976) to further investigate the cultural/genetic correlation. The general law of any evolutionary theory according to Dawkins is that 'life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities' (p. 206). Although not evolution in its purist sense, Dawkins (1988) concedes that cultural evolution has sufficient in common with traditional Darwinism to warrant a comparison of the two theories. Despite the experience and knowledge individuals acquire throughout life none of that experience or knowledge is genetically transmitted to their children. Each generation is a blank sheet on which an individual's personal cultural experiences will be written (Dawkins, 1976).

Sanderson's (2001) Darwinian Conflict Theory (DCT) compares evolutionism and individual competition in order to understand human conduct. Conflict theory suggests the structure of society is the product of competition among individuals to survive and attain success. Class stratification and class mobility, according to Sanderson, are a consequence of one's motivation to acquire status and resources (Salter, 2002). Sanderson (2001) agrees with Dawkins' (1976) assertion that biologically inspired explanations of human social life have often been identified as ineffective for understanding social experience. The learning experiences of the participants in this study, however demonstrate that the men's conduct can be further explained through a combined

evolutionary/environmentalist lens. It was ultimately an individual's personal actions (agency) that facilitated his cultural accommodation although each man's ability to contend with cultural and social difference was both acquired and a consequence of his hereditary disposition. The majority of participants in this study recognised the educational and social advantages associated with cultural accommodation. There is little doubt the participants' educational decision making was influenced by self interest; including a concern for their own personal status and material security: something for which humans are said to be biologically predisposed (Lopreato, 1984). Sanderson (1994 p.68) agrees saying 'Humans are egoistic beings who are highly motivated to give priority to the satisfaction of their own needs and wants...' Sanderson adds that '...self-interest is therefore the starting point for any evolutionary analysis.' Although functionalism similarly recognises that individuals act in relation to their own interests (Alexander, 1982; Durkheim, 1953) this study does not support the view that variations in social status are an inevitable product of innate differences in ability (Sargent, 1989).

Darwin's view of natural selection argues that an individual's characteristics are usually inherited from one's parents although both inheritable and phenotypic variations can occur and potentially affect an individual's ability to survive. Natural selection not only constructs people anatomically and physiologically, but also behaviourally (Sanderson, 2001). Sanderson argues theories of social life must consider aspects of human nature that result from human evolution because people are naturally competitive. Like most individuals the capacity of the participants in this study to sustain themselves long-term in education depended on what the majority believed was their academic survival. The men's motivation to attain educational goals (culturally accommodate) involved a contest for educational resources. Social life, according to Sanderson, is about people's struggle or attempts to adapt. Each participant's self interest had to do with avoiding forms of disadvantage.

For all but one of the men, accommodating to school culture was a means of satisfying their personal needs. The individual (Ox) who did not accommodate to school norms recognised that his future interests would be best served outside the context of formal schooling.

Ox didn't regret having to leave school. He looked forward to the opportunity to be out and not be totally controlled all the time. It was a chance for him to prove that he could achieve something outside of school.

Sanderson (1994 p. 55) stresses that social evolution does not necessarily equate to social progress and may in fact produce progressive, regressive or neutral consequences. Nonetheless being cooperative at the micro level helped a majority of the men better their own position. Social cooperation facilitated cultural accommodation and ultimately contributed to an individual's academic success. Personal conflict between a participant and his teachers on the other hand discouraged an individual (in this instance Ox) from adapting to the culture of school and as such limited his potential for a positive schooling outcome. Sanderson (2001) says that cooperative social relations promote the self interest of the individual rather than the interests of a group or society.

Pep never noticed anything like class distinction at school. Teachers didn't give any preference to particular kids. Pep was always well treated by teachers because teachers liked the kids that did all right and put in some effort.

Gus thought teachers were good. They had his respect. He would never have questioned the teacher or argued with a teacher. Gus thought teachers worked well in his era. A lot of the teachers worked to get what they could out of him, a satisfactory result without going overboard.

When Wayne went to school he just had a good time and enjoyed it. It was about sport and friends.

Schmid (2008) argued that although human conduct has both a genetic basis and evolutionary past, highly variable forms of social organisation make it difficult to accept that an individual's attempts to overcome class disadvantage are exclusive to one's self interest. This study, while recognising the validity of Schmid's concerns, nonetheless agrees with Dawkins (1976) that individuals ultimately have the capacity to contradict that which has helped create them. The social environment in which the baby-boomer participants were raised provided greater educational and therefore social options than were available to their parents. In the tradition of both John Dewey (1938) and Max Weber (1947) the participants demonstrated a propensity to culturally and socially adapt because macro level policies such as compensatory education gave each man that option. Rather than social persistence there was evidence among all individuals within the participant sample of intergenerational: cultural, social and educational evolution.

Conclusion

Investigating the sociological reasons for intergenerational social mobility belongs to a tradition from old Europe. In sociology there has been a long-standing interest in why young men, move away geographically, educationally and occupationally from their families of origin (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005). The capacity of the individual to contradict social convention is something that goes back to the historical period of the great, pre-romantic European writers such as Goethe and Manzoni (Lovett, 2001). The debate, concerning the degree to which the individual is capable of autonomous decision making, has continued in this study. Beck (1982) for example, would argue that changes to social institutions, including education and employment, made the lives of this study's participants less predictable than those of their parents. As a consequence the de-traditionalisation of society, during the 1960s and 70s may have been responsible for the greater decision-making autonomy of these men, when compared to their fathers and mothers. Savage's research (1997) supports an argument that structural change, rather than individual ability, was the main reason for the men's mobility. Bourdieu (1984) is likely to assign the men's mobility to a form of struggle that they overcame intuitively and not by conscious decision making. Gale and Parker (2015) would probably identify the majority of this research sample's higher education and social aspirations as a pursuit of what Bourdieu (1984) called 'good taste'.

This study is more inclined to agree with Dawkins (1976) and Sanderson (2001) who attribute an individual's autonomy of thought and action, to a biological predisposition, that gives one the potential to adapt to and overcome the most adverse social conditions. In sociocultural systems, both agency and evolutionary dynamics have a central role. The most rigid of structural systems are not exempt from contradiction, and within any structural rigidity, people will always have the capacity for individuality and creativity (Dietz & Burns, 1992).

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