

Becoming Aspirational Citizens: How Young People Create and Develop Aspirations Through Their Lived Experiences

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Context

- Increased emphasis on HEI's to provide effective, targeted outreach programmes to *'raise awareness, aspirations and attainment among people from disadvantaged backgrounds'* (OFFA 2015)
- £136.1 million spent on outreach activity in 2016-17 access agreements (OFFA 2017)
- Why aspiration?
 - Aspirations are a key precursor to future attainment and life outcomes (Social Exclusion Task Force 2008) and are highly correlated with background (Harris 2010)
 - Low aspirations lead to low achievement
 - Some people from poorer backgrounds have depressed aspirations, affecting their ultimate job prospects
 - Raising aspirations will break this cycle and lead to improved social and economic outcomes (St Clair and Benjamin 2011)

Aspirational citizenship

The aspirational citizen *'eager to take on greater responsibility for themselves and the well-being of their communities'*
(Raco, 2009. p.436)



Doxic aspirations

Aspirations become based on desirable futures of populist ideologies (Zipin et al. 2015)



Deficit model

An implication that groups of individuals and communities fail to recognise the value of HE participation (Burke 2012)

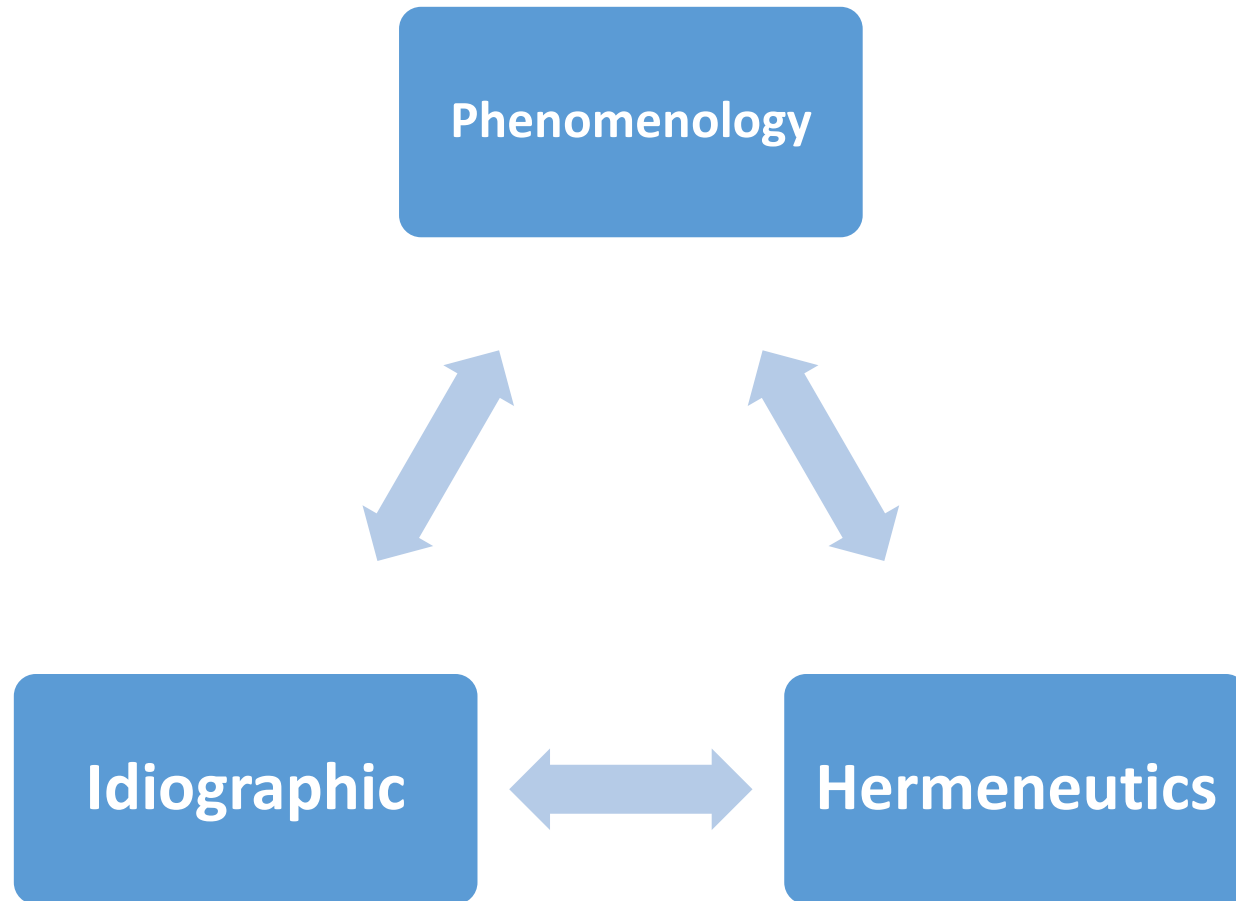
Can also be conceptualised as putting the blame on non-participants for the divide and placing responsibility on the learner to do something about it (Tight 1998)

Existing evidence base

- Evidence base often been subject to critical review (e.g. Gorard *et al.* 2006)
- Immense challenges of providing robust evidence
- Often looking at direct relationship between aspiration and outreach
- Framed within the deficit model of low aspiration
- A social capital approach
- Need for more research that looks at individual lives to provide the context by which aspiration is set - *'how does it feel?'*

Most people kind of expect that we're be like perfect children ...we're kind of just expected to always like think about what we're going to do when we're older. Like you have to think about it now like rather than just like your 14 years old your still a child you don't have to think about all these crazy things. They just expect us to like act like adults even though we're barely teenagers (Sophie 1-20)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)



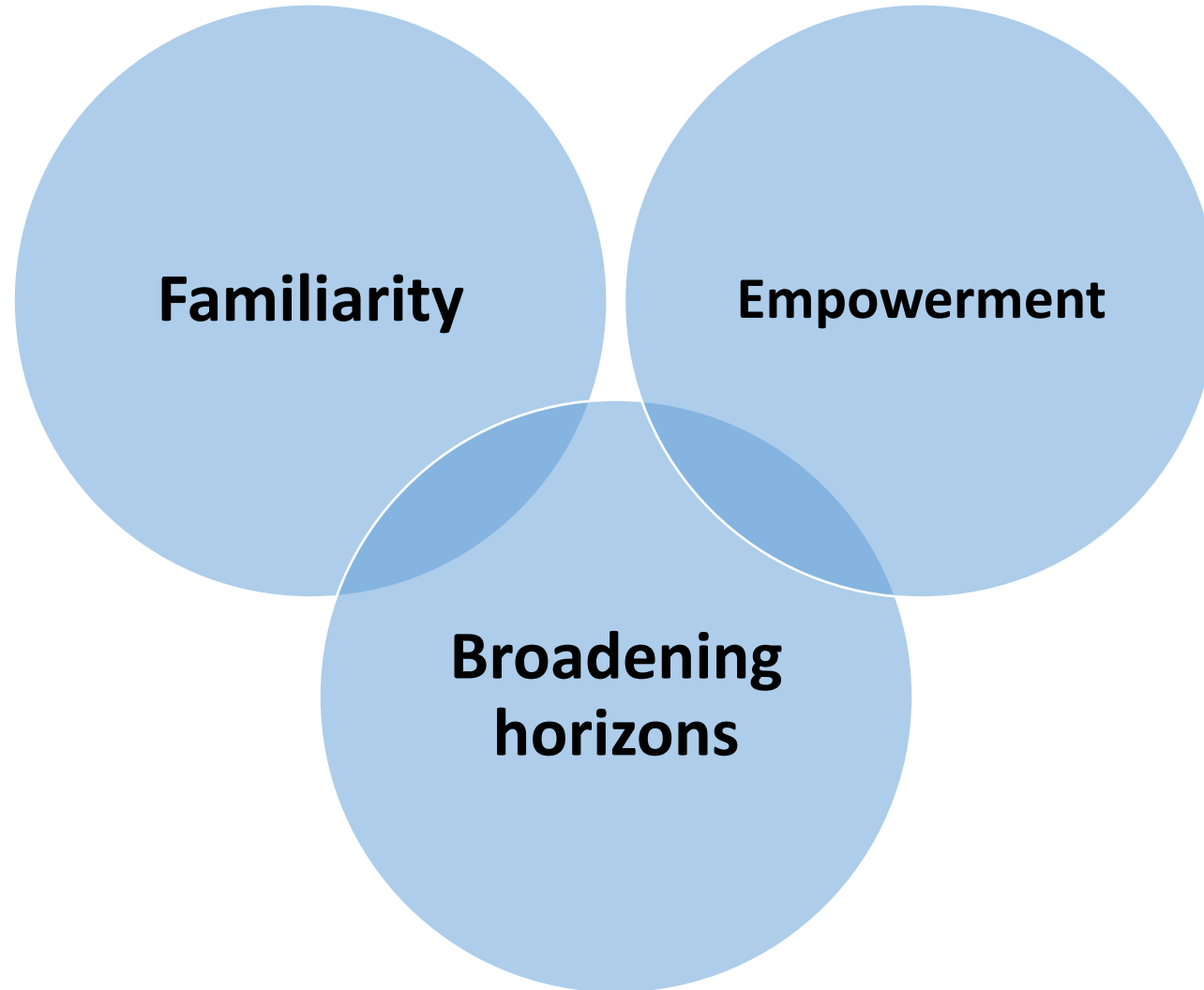
Its aim is to explore how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds and to understand the meanings particular experiences hold for the participants (Smith 2011)

Sample

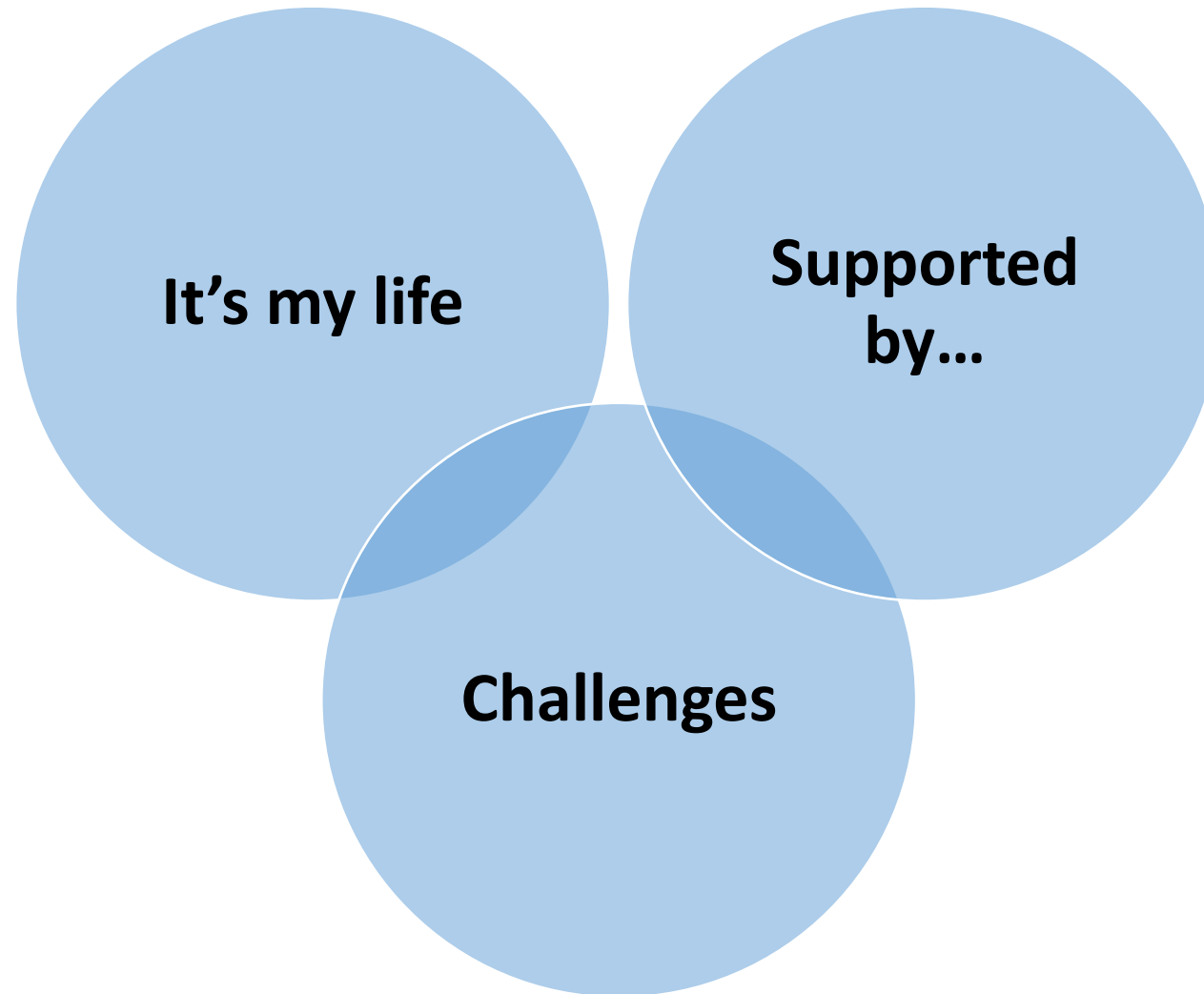
- Five young people (3M 2F)
- All attend same school located in south of England
- All live in a Low Participation Neighbourhood
- Four one-on-one interviews with each young person
- Interviews spread over years 9 and 10
- Interviews explored experiences, perceptions and reflections on their current life and possible future selves

	Del	John	Megan	Pete	Sophie
Home life	Lives with mum and 2 sisters	Lives with parents and 2 younger siblings	Lives with parents, 2 younger sisters and 2 older sisters. 4 siblings have moved out	Lives with parents and older sister. Also has older brother	Lives with dad and older brother
Hobbies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hanging with friends • Music • Xbox • Spending time with his animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xbox • Football • Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watching movies • Hanging around with friends • Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Football • Xbox 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance • Music
Main career aspiration	Vet	Commercial airline pilot	Broad ranging. Many associated with caring /making lives better	Professional footballer	Dancer/forensic scientist
Some other aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE aspiration • Happiness most important thing in life • To see/ do more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE aspiration • Travel • To be happy and to earn enough money to live 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE aspiration • To write a book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE aspiration • <i>'to do what you want to do... because it's your life'</i> • Hopes for material wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE aspiration • Happiness over material wealth

Findings – 3 Super-ordinate themes



Empowerment



Empowerment

It's my life:

*I'm **determined** to get a good grade when I leave school, I'm **determined** to go on to 6th form maybe college instead, I'm **determined** to go to university, I'm **determined** to do things I want to do (Megan 4-15)*

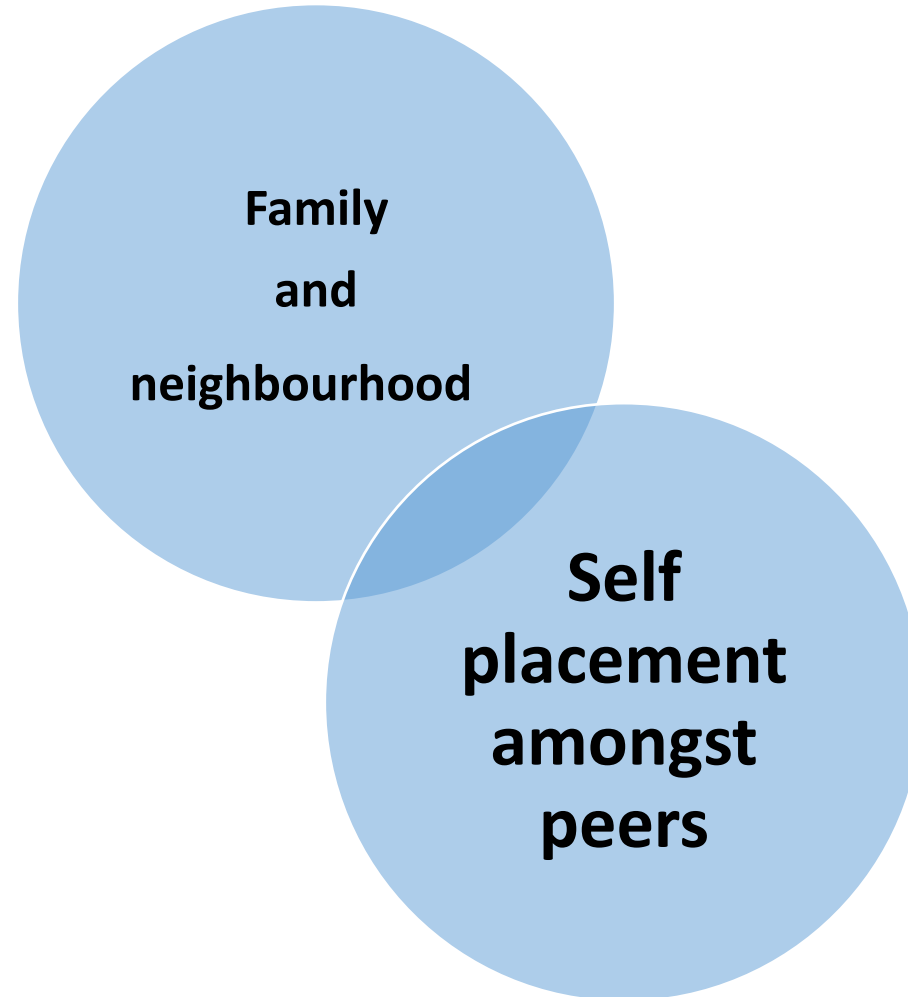
Supported by:

The school always goes on about how much if you get really good grades then you can get like really big houses and really good cars and like a really good job (Sophie 3-14)

Challenges:

Um sort of like when I wanted to be a teacher my dad would sort of encourage me out of it and so oh no that's not a very good job and stuff like that...he just says it's not a very good job, you don't have a lot of money and it just like say a kid makes false allegations about you then your whole careers ruined (Megan 1-12)

Broadening horizons



Broadening horizons

Family and neighbourhood:

You get a lot of teens that are like 14 years old and just walking around smoking and stuff like that and they don't have the right sort of attitude to go to like university simply because of like how they act (Megan 4-6)

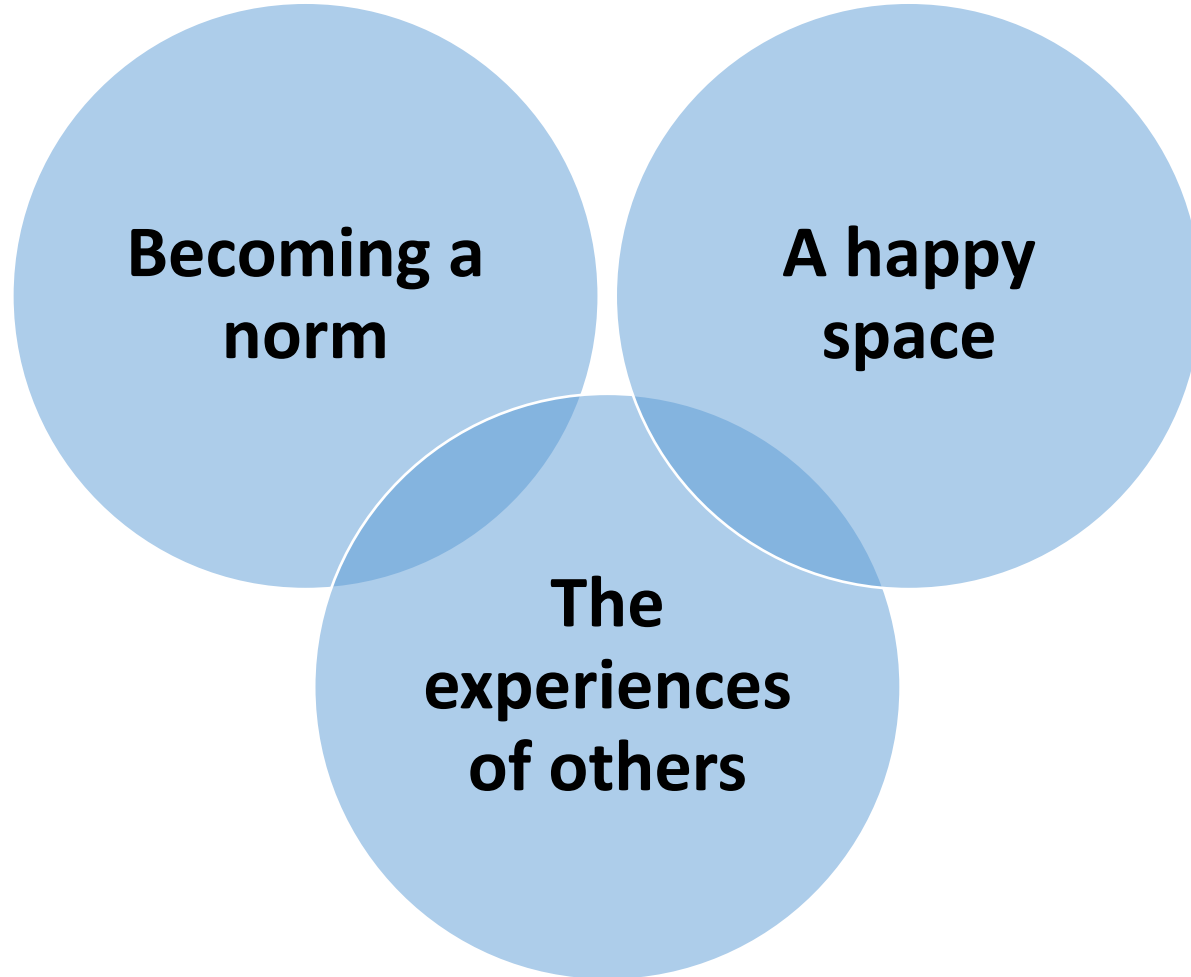
Well I hope that I won't start drinking and smoking like they do but yer (Pete 3-16)

Self placement amongst peers:

They just they're the type of people with the bad attitude oh why do we need uniform, why do we need to learn this, it's not relevant to our life but it's like everything you do is relevant to your life so (Megan 3-7)

Yer a lot of people even in like, because I'm in top set for all my classes, but even people in my sets, a lot of them don't care, they just mess around and they get sent out of class basically every lesson and they don't really see the point (Sophie 3-8)

Familiarity



Familiarity – Becoming a norm

*I've never enjoyed school, I don't think I've ever wanted to go, there's never been a time where I'm really excited to go to school. I've never wanted to go but there's just a part of me that just goes anyway because I've just grown up just **thinking got to go to school today. It's just been a part of my life**, so I think if I didn't go to school that would be a lot better because I don't enjoy it (Sophie 3-17)*

The link between familiarity and career aspirations:

I had a cat which I used to spend like all of my time with and used to be like my best friend I guess, had to get her put down because she had cancer. That kind of made me want to be a vet even more because I wanted to help animals I guess (Del 3-17)

EB: What interests you about counselling, is there anything that you do in your life that could be an example?
Well a lot of my siblings have been through like some like psychiatrists and stuff like that maybe (Megan 4-5)

Familiarity – Becoming a norm

Familiarity becomes all consuming:

EB: And when do you think you need to make, you said I haven't really thought about like past GCSEs?

I probably have to think about it now would be a good time but I probably wont

EB: Why not?

Because technology takes over my life (John 4-13)

EB: So, now picture what you think life will be like in 10 years

probably going to university or like or just sitting at home doing nothing

EB: Ok! Why are you sitting at home doing nothing then?

Er because just sitting at home doing nothing or playing on the Xbox or something

EB: Why do you think your life might be like?

Because I kind of enjoy playing the Xbox (Pete 1-5)

Familiarity – Becoming a norm

Familiarity through pleasure:

*I don't know why I started enjoying dance but from kind of primary school I've always liked to dance but I never really realised it until secondary school that dance is just makes me **happy** when I'm dancing like if I've got me friends with me and we're in dance class and we just dance and it just makes me feel **happy** to just move around to music it's just something that makes me feel all **happy** about myself and like if I'm sad I'll just dance and if I'm **happy** I'll dance anyway it's just a really nice thing to do (Sophie 3-13)*

Familiarity starts to breed confidence:

It means that at a young age I'm already quite good at flying, it's not real but it's the closest I'll ever get at the moment and its success that I can actually fly a plane (John 1-11)

Familiarity – Becoming a norm

Familiarity can also breed contempt:

Every day I probably spend about sometimes it's just like 10-20 minutes but other times if I just want to practice the songs I know or learn new songs I can be for like an hour or two... like at lunchtimes I go to practice guitar with some of my mates and I sometimes play piano (Del 1-14)

Note the change of tone:

I kind of I like learning new songs but I just get bored of it and I don't really feel motivated to do it (Del 4-10)

I don't know, just kind of not motivated anymore, don't really care about it I guess (Del 4-21)

Familiarity – A happy space

Taking them away from day to day life:

EB: what's like a typical family meal you have...?

*...we'll sit at the dining table which is **annoying** because I have to turn my Xbox down because my Xbox is like right next to the dining table that's why **I'll be glad** when I get my room so **I won't have to turn it down** I can just leave it on when I go and eat dinner (John 2-16)*

I am happy when I listen to music because whenever like my parents are like shouting at home or whatever I just listen to music and it like cheers me up

EB: When you say shouting, what at each other?

*No just like at my brother or sister or me and then like I just listen to music and like **blank it all out** and then like music **cheers me up** (John 2-10)*

*Well kind of it's like an 18 game so you can kind of guess what stuff you can do it's an open world game so you can get in cars, run people over, **you can do like anything**, you can get in a jet, fire missiles at anything (John 4-4)*

Familiarity – A happy space

A reaction to boredom:

Then I'll probably just like say because we've got two bunnies now, I'll just get them out in the garden and mess around with them or bring them inside (Del 2-19)

EB: How much time would you say you spend then reading?

Well recently I've been reading a lot more so I don't know about an hour a day maybe

EB: Is there any reason why you think you've started to like reading more recently?

I guess I just got bored so I started reading (Megan 2-10)

Transformative qualities:

Like when I'm like upset or anything I can just like dance and it makes me feel like so much better (Sophie 1-7)

Familiarity – The experiences of others

There is no experience quite as compelling as the experience of your immediate family, and more broadly, those in your socio-economic and spatial neighborhood (Ray 2006, p.7)

Contamination (Tough 2009)

Well if like, if you was like brought up with a family that was like in jail of something then you might like get influenced by them or something and then they'll make you do like bad decisions, get yourself into trouble and stuff (Pete 2-6)

Your friends doing different things so like they could play football and you're like oh I'll join in playing football so you play football and then you're like I'm going to try and do what they do because you like what they do so you might try and do their job (John 4-14)

Familiarity – The experiences of others

*I don't really take inspiration from watching things or reading things. Mainly it's just I see other people doing things like in person and I really just want to like **aspire** to doing what they're doing. At the moment, so people will come in with dance workshops with us and they'll tell us how they've been like big dance companies and that sort of thing like **aspire**s me to think like could be me in a few years and its mainly just like real people talking about it not on books or DVDs (Sophie 4-7)*

EB: When you say your sisters been there in what sense has she been there?

Work experience as well

EB: Oh ok, she went to the same?

Yer and she went to another place as well

EB: Oh, that's funny, so how's that helping, how do you think that might help you then?

It helped me decide because I knew that that place was defiantly going to be good, well she thought anyway (Del 4-3)

Familiarity – The experiences of others

Competition

Everyone else kind of always wants to be on the same level as me, then once they've got to the level that I am, I'm just like pushing myself to be even better than them so it's kind of like a race between people to see who can get like the highest mark in a test or something (Sophie 2-5)

The familiarity of family experiences does not necessarily mean the young people seek to follow

They say it's good, it's a good job because my dad's he's a maintenance engineer at the moment but I don't really want to do that

EB: Ok, why don't you want to do that?

Dunno, it just seems boring. I don't mind going to work with him every now and then but I couldn't do it every day (John 1-10)

Del rejects mothers profession - he 'wouldn't be able to handle it' (4-23)

Pete only one who aspires to parental job

Conclusions

- No 'poverty' of aspiration
 - 'Lofty' ambitions (Archer *et al.* 2010)
 - All with HE aspirations
 - Aiming for 'middle class' jobs
 - General desire to do well in life
- Aspirations are a very complex web of emotions, influences, experiences, familiarities, dilemmas....
- The real issue is not that they have low aspirations but how do they accomplish their aspirations
 - The capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004)
 - The aspirations gap (Ray 2006)
- Possibilities to develop a range of opportunities which recognise and encompass the wider everyday experiences of these young people to provide a more nuanced and bespoke approach to supporting young people in embracing and nurturing their aspirations

Thank you and questions