We are not here to have fun…we are here to learn: The Social Construction of Classroom Boredom.

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Keith Walker.

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Preface

I grew up on one of the many nondistinctive council housing estates that spawned around the circumference of Liverpool. I slouched with scuffed shoes and shiny knees to a bog-standard comprehensive school along with thousands of other drab greys to an equally uniform future. My careers advisor suggested office work because I was considered bright. Luckily, I was not bright enough and I failed maths. I attended the sixth form to re-sit and there I came across a subject called Sociology. Sociology has been my great working-class escape. I breached the magnolia walls of my estate to study sociology at university and I absconded from the vapidity of glass-eyed office work to teach sociology. To paraphrase one of my participants, sociology has literally saved me from Boredom. So, when I finally came to choose a subject for my sociology Ph.D., classroom Boredom was immediate and obvious. In this sense, my sociological examination of classroom Boredom has emerged from my biography. There is, however, a sociological interest here too. Sociology has long neglected the study of Boredom and has allowed psychological accounts to dominate the field. Psychological accounts are useful and have some validity, but they are also limited and individualised. My research is a modest attempt to wrestle back against the atomisation of experience which psychology has provided. I hope to demonstrate that Boredom is a social phenomenon and, as such, deserves to be understood with all the wonderful articulation that sociology can provide.

Acknowledgements: First and foremost, I would like to thank my partner Kim Johnson and my daughter Georgia. Only the families of Ph.D. candidates can bear testimony to the true horror of living with someone enslaved to an academic keyboard. Without Kim and Georgia's support, I would have crumbled a long time ago. Also, I need to thank my mum and dad for putting up with me and my early sociological and argumentative teenage years. I need to thank my supervisors, Dr. Karen Evans and Professor Susan Pickard. Karen's pragmatic clarity and consistently excellent stewardship have steered a true course despite my eccentric groundings. Sue has provided a source of endless inspiration, encouragement and motivation and I will carry her sunshine with me forever, as well as a love of oat milk cappuccinos.

I also would like to thank Dr. Rachel Heah, a former fellow Ph.D. candidate whose friendship, support and coffee chats concerning Foucault, ethics and the best

conferences to attend where always highlights of my university week. A thank you is also owed to Claire and Peter Williams who gallantly came to my aid with the loan of much-needed writing space. Finally, a mention to Nicola Williamson whose masochistic wish is to read this Ph.D. when completed.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to all those pupils, staring listlessly out of school windows listening to the dry tick-tock of time waiting for release. This Ph.D. is for every bored secondary school pupil.

Abstract

Title: We are not here to have fun…we are here to learn: The Social Construction of Classroom Boredom. Author: Keith Walker

The main objective of my research is to explore how secondary school children used the concept of Boredom to make sense of, and construct, their daily lived experiences in school. My interest is the pragmatic rather than semantic, and the emic rather than etic. This is an examination of the everyday use of Boredom in secondary school classrooms.

My main research method was a researcher-absent focus group. Overall, fourteen researcher-absent focus group interviews were carried out in two waves, with a total of 50 secondary school pupils between the ages of 14-18 taking part over three separate secondary school sites. In addition, three secondary school teachers kept diaries reflecting on their daily teaching experiences during the autumn term of 2018. Transcripts and diaries were analysed using Grounded theory.

This research takes the position that modern Boredom is a sociohistorically situated subjectivity which has its roots in the rational, technological and industrial developments of the last 200 hundred years. Moreover, modern Boredom can act as a sanctuary of self-care into which the individual can retreat and be insulated from a toxic environment.

Contemporary classroom Boredom is a response to neoliberal performance-based education which fosters a toxic 'ontological insecurity' amongst pupils. Boredom is articulated in four stories, endemic, predominant, contingent and non-bored. Furthermore, these stories fracture at the intersection of social class and gender. With historical biographies of low educational achievement and experiencing structural inequalities, working-class pupils describe greater levels of Boredom and use a bored, nonchalant and blasé demeanour to insulate themselves against the toxicity of ontological insecurity. With working-class girls, this process is often invisible. Girls can be just as bored as boys, but gendered narratives disassociate classroom Boredom from femininity and allow working-class girls to invisibly disengage from education. Accordingly, classroom Boredom is a situated subjectivity that can be seen as a form of, albeit self-defeating, resistance to neoliberal performance-based education.

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Introduction

What is classroom Boredom? This research began as an attempt to answer this question from a sociological perspective. In particular, I am interested in exploring how Boredom stories feature in pupils' articulation of their everyday classroom life. I want to explore how stories of Boredom are used by secondary school pupils in their accounts of themselves and their everyday realities as they negotiate life in a contemporary secondary school.

Throughout this work, the reader will notice that the term Boredom is continually capitalised. This is not an error. The concept of Boredom within sociology is so lamentably invisible that I have capitalised the term in an attempt to stress its significance and importance. I believe that Boredom is a key element in understanding modern subjectivity. I will attempt to articulate this position throughout the ensuing research.

An important aim of my research is to tread a light path for a sociology of Boredom. When writing Boredom research, a particular introductory motif, so common as to constitute a cliché, is de rigueur. This is to point out that academic research into Boredom is still in its embryonic stages. For the unfortunate Boredom researcher, there is no reassuringly coherent substantive topic called Boredom studies. The nascent cliché is certainly true within sociology. Accordingly, there are no conveniently accessible sociology of Boredom modules taught in British universities and no academic journals dedicated to the malaise (although there is a very welcome single edition Boredom Studies Reader edited by Gardiner and Haladyn (2017). Indeed, sociological research regarding Boredom is scant and lamentably disconnected. My approach examines Boredom as a socio-historic construct unique to modernity, welcomes, with a critical edge, the interdisciplinary contributions made by psychology, history, literature and philosophy, views the malaise as a construct born within dialogical interaction and highlights the role of Boredom in perpetuating inequality. This is an approach that deliberately problematises many premises from which Boredom research normally begins. Indeed, I argue that the manner in which the 'problem' of Boredom is conceptualised is itself a research issue. Firstly, the assumption that Boredom is primarily intelligible as an individual emotion is critically examined. Instead, I will argue that Boredom is treated *as-if* it is an individual emotion

because of a unique set of sociohistoric conditions of possibility, rationalism, materialism and democratised scepticism, which are themselves emergent within modernity. Secondly, the premise that Boredom is largely negative is also problematised through an examination of its creative, emancipatory and even revolutionary potential. Accordingly, I explore the role of Boredom as a form of self-care. In particular, the manner in which articulating oneself *as-if* dislocated and *as-if* disinterested can insulate individuals from toxic situations. Finally, it is the *use* of Boredom, rather than say its meaning, which is the focus of my gaze. In this sense, Boredom is conceptualised as meaning-making, discursive and indexical. Boredom is a resource deployed when creating oneself and one's situated relationships. I take a constructionist position throughout this research. Accordingly, I will not be depicting Boredom as an 'already-there' entity simply waiting to be unlocked. Rather, I will aim to explore how Boredom is produced and used by school pupils, and their teachers, in their everyday stories. Using pupils' language and teacher diaries as evidence, I hope to illustrate that Boredom is a highly flexible and fluid *social* phenomenon.

In particular, this research focuses on classroom Boredom as it manifests in three contemporary secondary schools; Castle school; Commuter school; and Canal school. To this end, focus group interviews were carried out with 50 pupil participants between the ages of 14-18 who recounted their own stories of Boredom. These stories were then analysed using grounded theory and four distinct Boredom stories emerged. These four stories were labelled as Endemic; Predominant; Contingent: and Non-Bored. The relationships between these stories and particular contexts, namely, school, gender and social class were examined. One particular context, the pedagogical management within Castle school features significantly. This is because this school produced the most severe accounts of Boredom. Castle schoolteacher diaries revealed that aspects of neoliberalism in the form of, managerialism, marketisation and performativity were present. Furthermore, these aspects provided a fertile ground for the narration of endemic and predominant Boredom subjectivities by Castle school pupils. Furthermore, within Castle school, Boredom appeared to operate as a useful rhetorical device, a re-subjectification and a practice of resistance that insulated pupils from a 'failing' subjectivity. In Castle school, I argue that classroom Boredom acted as a protective shield against the violence of neoliberalism that would otherwise condemn pupils into inhabiting a 'failure' subjectivity. Ultimately, I conclude that

articulating oneself as bored is a technology of self-care through which pupils can construct themselves as dislocated and, as such, safe from harm. Classroom Boredom is used in pupils' daily struggle to defend themselves against the imposition of a toxic subjectivity.

The layout of the Research.

Part One: The Literature Review

The literature is review is split into three sub-chapters: *Theories of Boredom; Boredom and Education; Neoliberalism and Boredom.*

Chapter 1: *Theories of Boredom* analyses some commonly cited themes such as on the nature, experience and causes of Boredom. Accordingly, this chapter contains a review of the dominant historical, philosophical and psychological positions on Boredom. The second half of this section introduces sociological theory on Boredom by re-reading some of the classic sociological writings of Durkheim, Marx and Weber, arguing that, although unacknowledged, the malaise has been a core element of sociology since its birth. This is followed by a review of more contemporary sociological approaches to Boredom. Finally, this first chapter concludes by examining the contribution that Foucauldian ideas can make to the study of Boredom. In particular, I will argue that Boredom can be usefully regarded as a socio-historical construct emerging from modernity.

Chapter 2: *Boredom and Education,* moves to analysing primary research evidence concerning classroom Boredom within schools. Taking a chronological narrative structure, this chapter begins with a brief review of the earliest pieces of Boredom research from industrial psychology and then outlines and reviews sociological research into education and classroom Boredom. I illustrate that classroom Boredom's conceptualisation within sociology is continually constructed via the intersection of changes within the socio-political landscape and the discipline itself. Accordingly, contemporary research, conducted over the last thirty years or so, has tended to frame classroom Boredom in terms of its relationship to neo-liberalism. I examine sociological approaches that position classroom Boredom as a form of resistance to neoliberal attempts to colonise emotionality in the pursuit of marketisation. The final section of this chapter asks, 'is it different for girls?' and highlights the absence of

sociological knowledge regarding female classroom Boredom and especially the experiences of working-class schoolgirls. I argue that male knowledge of Boredom has been universalised as the norm and this has rendered bored schoolgirls invisible to the sociological gaze. In attempting to occupy this space, I emphasise research that examines the intersectionality of gender, class and classroom Boredom.

Chapter 3: *Neoliberalism and Boredom* attempts to present a sociological understanding of neoliberalism in relation to education in the UK. Firstly, this uses Foucault's ideas on Neo-liberalism as a means of unlocking and operationalising this oft-slippery term. Secondly, Foucauldian ideas are applied to a UK educational context via the various writings of Stephen Ball. The relationship between neoliberalism and Boredom is made explicit via the primary research of Jackson (2006).

Part Two: Methodology

The main objective of my primary research was to explore how secondary school children used the concept of classroom Boredom conversationally to make sense of, and construct, their daily lived experiences in three secondary schools. I wanted pupils to be able to tell their own stories of Boredom in a setting that would mirror, as far as possible, their own daily prosaic interactions. Accordingly, I developed a form of a focus group that I called a researcher-absent focus group. This, as the name suggests, involved leaving the pupils alone, albeit with a prompt to help structure their talk, to conduct a discussion by themselves. I was interested in exploring the pragmatic rather than semantic, and the emic rather than etic, use of classroom Boredom in an everyday local school setting. The methodology section is split into three sub-chapters.

Chapter 1 provides an account of the processes, procedures and problems involved in conducting this research. This section describes and explains sampling, participants and methodological processes. The section concludes with an examination of my use of grounded theory, the method deployed to analyse the primary data.

Chapter 2 presents an account of my reading journey and the influence on key texts on my methodological decisions. I critically examine the proliferation of quantitative research, the usefulness of qualitative research and the implications of the linguistic turn within sociology. The section then narrows its analysis towards the use of focus

groups with children as participants and then specifically onto the deployment of focus groups within secondary education and with secondary school pupils as participants.

Chapter 3 concludes the methodology by analysing key ethical issues as these relate to research with children as participants.

Part 3: Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis chapter is split into two sub-chapters. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2

Chapter 1 In this section I use findings from my focus group interviews conducted at three secondary schools to explore classroom Boredom within one particular sociohistoric moment. Accordingly, I will illustrate the unique, precinctive, and idiosyncratic ways that classroom Boredom is fashioned. My central argument being that accounts of Boredom will always be situated and, above all, social.

The analysis of my pupil transcripts will outline four pupil-constructed stories of classroom Boredom, *endemic, predominant, contingent, and non-bored*. I will evidence that Boredom appears to be associated with positioning school as a site for performance. Furthermore, I will illustrate that the more severe Boredom stories appear in conjunction with performance motifs and the least severe stories appear in conjunction with learning motifs.

In exploring this relationship between performativity and Boredom further, I will analyse my data in terms of the relationship between Boredom and neoliberalism, the links between Boredom and resistance and the uniqueness of female working-class stories of Boredom.

Firstly, I will argue that performance-based Boredom within Castle School is an outcome of three neoliberalist management technologies; *Marketisation; Managerialism;* and *Performativity*. Furthermore, although my arguments and evidence are invariably based within this school, I argue that it is unlikely that these practices are confined to only this school. I will deploy Foucault's concept of governmentality, with a particular emphasis on neoliberalist governmentality, to argue that pupils at Castle School are invited to valorise spectacle. Accordingly, pupils understand their classroom experiences as meaning-full when these experiences

provided access to high-status performable spectacle. Furthermore, I argue that neoliberalist governmentality also encourages Castle School pupils to regard themselves as the morally responsible and accountable architects of their own performances. Accordingly, not only are Castle School pupils continuously vulnerable to 'failing' but they own the responsibility for this failure. Thus, Castle School pupils find themselves in a potentially toxic ontological precarity. In being bored, Castle School pupils, as with many school children living under neo-liberal regimes, are defending themselves against the tyrannical imperative of neoliberal 'success'. In this sense, I will argue that Boredom can be seen as a useful rhetorical device, a re-subjectification and a practice of resistance that acts to insulate the pupil from the potential harm of a 'failing' subjectivity.

Secondly, I will explore the relationship between Boredom and resistance. Referring to classic sociological studies such as Willis (1977) McRobbie (1991) I argue that the idea that Boredom can be used as a mechanism of resistance is not new. Accordingly, pupils in my research described many creative and innovative responses to classroom Boredom. I marshal these under three labels; imaginative, nonconfrontational and confrontational. These are the behavioural reactions that pupils describe as their responses to Boredom. I will deploy Jackson and Carter's (2011) argument that resistance can take many different forms and that resistance may not have any impact on the actual functioning of the social world. Pupils' daydreams, doodles and disputes appear to provide little more than the pleasure of momentary distraction. However, despite their apparent impotence, I will argue that pupils' Boredom responses can still be regarded as acts of resistance because Boredom provides a liminal third response to the neo-liberal imperative to perform and develop oneself as human capital or face the fear of failure and precarity. Accordingly, I argue that Boredom is a perfect sanctuary of uselessness. I will distinguish between a 'pupil-in itself' as a subjectivity attending to neo-liberal governmentality and a 'child-for itself'. A child-for itself is freed by Boredom to engage in carnivalesque acts that are motivated by momentary pleasure and distraction. Accordingly, pupils' carnivalesque behaviour acts as a rebellious challenge to neo-liberal situational normativity. However, I argue that Boredom-induced carnivalesque responses have no significantly revolutionary impact on the overall performative nature of either the classroom, the school or the education system as a whole. Indeed, in some ways, pupils' carnivalesque resistance acts to

reinforce the very system under attack. I conclude this section examining the links between neoliberalism and Boredom by arguing that because emotions can be used as a means to assess and define situations, in framing experience as-if a purely emotional individual subjectivity, the language of Boredom acts to depoliticise discontent. When Castle School pupils describe, for example, lessons as 'boring' they are inviting an ontological assertion regarding how that lesson should be conceptualised *as-if* this is an emotional event. This is particularly significant as Boredom is routinely dismissed as a trivial emotion. I examine the argument that neoliberalism distorts language in order to corrode opposition and critique whilst normalising its position through the twin processes of 'disarticulation' and 'rearticulation'. Boredom distorts discontentment into a passive technology of individual complaint rather than a technology of revolutionary social change. In this way, the pupils' critique is rendered impotent and depoliticised.

Finally, I examine the intersectional relationship between social class, femininity and Boredom. The girls from working-class backgrounds within this study tended to narrate their Boredom in terms of, what I have coded, 'relationships'. I will then attempt to explain this in terms of the uniqueness of working-class girls' relationship to home, friends and family. I adopt Stanworth's (1982) position and argue that that the apparent lack of engagement perceived in working-class girls should not be used to pathologize working-class culture but instead should be recognised as a structural product of the historically narrow range of opportunities offered to successive generations of exploited working-class women. This manifests as particular working-class female subjectivity constituted when working-class girls have to negotiate an alien middle-class culture whilst inhabiting the comforting familiarity of their community and home. I argue that working-class girls' use of Boredom could easily denote an emotional and subjective malaise experienced when balancing the need to maintain a successful set of community relationships and a desire for educational success. Boredom may be indicative of a female working-class struggle to reconcile the irreconcilable, to achieve success in an individualised, highly competitive neo-liberal educational market, whilst at the same time being loyal to a working-class community which is normatively antithetical to education.

I will conclude this section with an examination of another aspect of classroom Boredom which is unique to working-class schoolgirls' experiences; invisibility.

Invisibility is a concept that denotes the particularly pernicious manner in which many female activities are delegitimised, ignored and 'othered' in patriarchal knowledge regimes. I argue that within male-stream Boredom research, behaviour, language and psychology which can be easily associated with masculinity has been normalised. Characteristics more commonly associated with femininity are often perceived as atypical, denied validity and are rendered invisible. I conclude that girls are just as likely to be bored as boys (indeed slightly more) but, because the form of this Boredom is not male and noisy it is more likely to be ignored.

Chapter 2 is split into four sections. Each of these will examine the four Boredom stories, *endemic, predominant, contingent, and non-bored*, in terms of how these fracture according to social class and gender.

1. Endemic stories: This story is overwhelmingly narrated by working-class pupils. For working-class boys, classroom Boredom is constructed via the intersection of school as a site for performance which is pessimistically framed within working-class expectations of likely failure. Working-class boys' response to expected failure is to deploy a masculine 'silly boy' narrative. For working-class girls, Boredom is characterised by the unattractive, ugly, and dull aesthetics found in school. This emphasis on appearance may be routed in working-class feminine ideals concerning the importance of appearance. The girls' response to Boredom, also emergent within working-class femininity, valorises resilient passivity and leaves the girls appearing indolent rather than confrontational.

2. Predominant story: Both middle-class boys and girls narrate school as an arena for performance. Accordingly, both find school intrinsically boring. However, this is not problematised. Within middle-class educational narratives, a degree of purposeful anxiety is viewed as a necessary cost to inevitable success. Additionally, boys provide imaginary deviancy tales as part of their attempts at hegemonic masculinity which is tempered by middle-class expectations of personal educational success. Within the working-class girls' story, Boredom appears on a being-*with*/being-*without* spectrum. Being-*with* denotes any situation where the girls' experience interpersonal connectivity especially with friends, family and teachers. Being-*without* denotes situations where there are barriers to interpersonal connectivity. Being-*with* is a classed and gendered subjectivity that is communal and altruistic and, as such, is

antithetical to a neoliberal education system that emphasises individualism and competition. The ensuing emotional distress is articulated as Boredom. Working-class boys in this story position school as a site for performance. This at first appears very similar to ideas expressed by their middle-class counterparts. However, working-class boys' story contains indications that they have expectations of failure (rather than success) and it is this anticipation of failure that is the root of their Boredom. Boredom offers them a position of sanctuary insulating them from the potential toxicity of 'failure'.

3. Contingent story: This story does fracture according to social class. All pupils, both boys and girls, position school as mainly an arena for learning. Accordingly, Boredom is positioned as an injustice caused by poor teaching. However, responses to this 'injustice' are gendered. In reaction to Boredom-as-injustice, boys display a form of confrontational hegemonic masculinity. However, for the girls, demonstrative deviance is antithetical to the kind of sensible femininity espoused within this story.

4. Non-bored story: All non-bored pupils position school as a site for learning. Boredom emerges out of predispositions in particular 'intelligent' or 'struggling' pupils. This story accepts the personalisation of responsibility but rejects the performativity inherent within neoliberal narratives.

Part one: Literature Review

Chapter 1: Theories of Boredom.

Does Boredom have a history?

Although there have been many attempts to define the[1]malaise, Boredom remains a somewhat enigmatic phenomenon. Fisher (1993) provides an oft-cited definition where Boredom is ‘‘…an unpleasant, transient affective state in which the individual feels a pervasive lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity” (p396). In another widely cited attempt, Eastwood et al (2012:482) describe Boredom as “the aversive experience of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity”. Whilst Mann and Cadman (2014) see Boredom as simply, “…the result of having nothing to do that one likes, rather than nothing to do per se” (p165). Although it appears true that for most Boredom is ‘an extremely unpleasant and distressing experience’’ (Martin, et al, 2006:193) there is no universally agreed definition of the phenomenon (Raffaelli et al 2017). Commonsensically Boredom is a natural, and therefore ahistorical and universal, response to unstimulating and/or meaningless situations. As such it is easy to assume that humans have always been bored. However, there is no clear ancient antecedent for the term (Bruss 2012).

Surprisingly perhaps, given its current ubiquity, for most human existence people lived without ‘Boredom’. The word ‘Boredom’ only appeared in 1853 (Watt-Smith 2015), the verb ‘to bore’ in 1768 and the noun ‘bore’ a little later in 1778 (Spacks 1995). Perhaps the condition existed but went by another name? Certainly, historical cases of subjective malaise have been recorded. Although Bruss (2012) confirms “…there is no single word ‘Boredom’ in ancient Greek” (p313), within Roman literature, both ‘tedium vitae’, relating to suicidal thoughts and ‘horror loci’, a kind of desperate restlessness, are suggested forerunners (Toohey 2011). Furthermore, during the early middle-ages ‘acedia’ appeared in Christian texts but referred to a noonday-demon stalking hermetic monks in the Egyptian desert (Kuhn 1976). Later, during the renaissance, Robert Burton’s ‘melancholia’, became an affectation of artists. Later still, ‘Ennui’, Boredom’s fashionable continental cousin, emerged amongst the 18th-century literati (Toohey, 2011). However, although these conditions undoubtedly incrementally shade into Boredom, historical examples should *not* be considered as

[1] I have borrowed the term ‘malaise’ from Goodstein (2005). I use this term because it is less burdened with pre-packaged knowledge than the term ‘emotion’ for example.

synonymous with modern Boredom. As Gardiner (2012) points out, when modern individuals declare themselves bored, they are unlikely to be announcing their intended suicide, (tedium vitae), referencing an Egyptian demon, (acedia) or an imbalance of humours, (melancholia). Furthermore, these exotic and romantic ancestors simply do not have modern Boredom's decidedly more prosaic, quotidian and democratised flavour. As Goodstein (2005) clearly articulates, Boredom's alleged ancestors were always distinctive, localised and linked to unique, idiosyncratic and highly educated elites. Historically, to identify and articulate one's experience in terms of a subjective malaise with any coherency, individuals had to have access to highly specialised cultural and literary resources; the kind beyond the reach of a mass non-literate strata. In contrast, modern Boredom is an endemic and highly democratised mass phenomenon. In modernity, everyone can be bored. Accordingly, establishing a 'history' of Boredom beyond the limits of the nineteenth century has proven as elusive as the concept itself.

Philosophy and Boredom.

Boredom's first modern philosopher, and certainly its most pessimistic, Schopenhauer (1969), locates the malaise in relation to an individual's 'will to life' (*Wille zum leben)*. To Schopenhauer, the will to life is a blind, involuntary and primeval energy that transcends reason, logic or rational thought. Indeed, will is so powerfully independent of reason that it fuels desires to the detriment of an individual's best interests. Will drives people into love, marriage and procreation, not because these things are personally rewarding, but because they are necessary for the perpetuation of life. The will to life compels us to construct a personal environment, (occupation, partner and home for example), which, although good for our children, is not necessarily good for us. To Schopenhauer, because desire is driven by the will to life, rather than our interests, desire will always lead to pain. However, the alternative is equally bleak. Boredom is experienced because, when we fail to pursue the pain of self-detriment, we are left with nothing. We are reminded that existence is essentially meaningless and are left staring into the abyss. Stripped of our distractions we are forced to realise that life, in itself, has no real value. We blind ourselves to this miserable situation by returning to the painful illusions of temporary relief and distraction of desire. Indeed, Schopenhauer considered life to be analogous to a pendulum swinging between the bleak extremes of Boredom and pain. Attempting to escape from Boredom and the

emptiness of life, we immerse ourselves into the self-detrimental pursuit of the will to life and encounter pain. Seeking pain-numbing refuge, we encounter meaningless. The desperate pendulum swings on, and on, and on, until death. Although seemingly pessimistic, Schopenhauer does offer some degree of hope. The Boredom-pain pendulum can be usurped if the individual transcends the self-destructive illusionary desires that the will to life compels upon us. Thus, freedom can be attained, but only by negating worldly impulses and withdrawing into a state of monk-like reflective contemplation.

To Kierkegaard, an avid reader of Schopenhauer, 'Boredom is a root of all evil' (2004: 227). By this Kierkegaard asserts that, contrary to scripture, idleness in itself is unproblematic. Indeed, as with Schopenhauer, contentment in contemplative idleness is one of Kierkegaard's highest goals. It is the ability of idleness to drain life of existential meaning that corrupts. To the spiritual Kierkegaard, Boredom is evil because it drains the divine, and even the possibility of divinity, from life. Furthermore, in contrast to Schopenhauer's proposed hermitage, Kierkegaard's route to salvation is to actively engage with the world, seeking the divine in doing so. Ultimately, to Kierkegaard, Boredom can only be vanquished with a re-sacralisation of the world.

For Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, a rational, individualised and thoroughly desacralized modern world created a malaise that is encountered within the individual's interiority. Thus, both philosophers help develop a particular rhetoric of reflection which constructs Boredom via the notion of an internal world stripped of meaning. In these early works, Boredom occurs when the interior 'self' is cut adrift from immanence. Boredom was used by both philosophers to express their critique of a modern and meaningless world that had imposed its emptiness on a soul long abandoned by romanticism. In Sartre's famous phrase, for the first time in history, "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 2003:588). To both Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, simply living in the existential vacuity created by scientific rationality renders encountering the inherent nihility at the heart of modernity inevitable. Nihilism, argues Gardiner (2012), is at the heart of modernity because its foundation, scientific rationality, depicts the world as nothing more than an assemblage of inert 'facts'. In antiquity, we were the chosen children and blessed under the ever-watchful gaze of a sky fretted with wrathful and benevolent Gods. In scientific and rational

modernity, we are alone. We are spinning on an isolated rock in a lifeless and vacuous scientific universe. The universe, as depicted through rational science, is profoundly indifferent to all aspects of human existence and is devoid of any intrinsic meaning. Reassuring spiritual traditions that once rooted the individual deeply within a world brimming with significance and meaning have been hollowed out. Thus, the individual, alone and lost, is left only with the ability to continually chase a fabricated subjective existence. Once s/he falters and stares into the abyss, s/he discovers a void in all its bored and indifferent futility.

Another philosopher, infamously familiar with the abyss, is Nietzsche (2008; 2009). Although Boredom does not feature prominently throughout his work, Nietzsche nevertheless wrestled with Boredom in his early writings. However, in contrast to the pessimism of both Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche narrates Boredom as a positive potential. Indeed, his approach forestalls the findings from empirical experimental psychology (see Mann and Cadman 2014, for example). Nietzsche, perhaps jokingly, posits a god who, suffering from Boredom created men. Although initially entertaining, men themselves lapse into Boredom and so God fills their world with playthings such as animals and, then, women. Furthermore, Nietzsche was critical of individuals who continually strove to expunge Boredom from their realm of experience. He believed that distraction blocks access to the deepest parts of the self. Indeed, when reading the early Nietzsche, Boredom appears as a positive benefit to humanity because it is the spur to creativity, generosity and action. Boredom can even lead us to attend to those who are suffering. Boredom can force us into facing the darkness and in so doing, shine a light of hope.

The bleak ideas of Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard and the brief flirtations found in Nietzsche are significant because they helped establish the existential horizons for the philosophical examination of Boredom. However, it is Heidegger (1995) who provides the most intensive philosophical examination of the subject.

Heidegger (1995) presents three possible ways of accounting for Boredom. These accounts describe progressively intensive and profound existential levels of the malaise; ‘bored by’, ‘bored with’ and ‘one is bored’. ‘Bored *by’* relates to ‘the experience of being’ (dasein) one encounters in a situation where there is little of interest, waiting for a train for example. Heidegger regarded this narration of Boredom

as not only mistaken but symptomatic of a misaligned, but never-the-less commonplace, conceptualisation of the relationship between being and object which naively regards the object as having independent, immanent and causal qualities. Within Heidegger's phenomenology, objects in themselves have no causal power to extend meaning and, accordingly, one cannot be 'bored by' anything. Boredom, as a mood, can only emanate from the phenomenological gaze from within the subject. The second form, 'Bored *with'* relates to being in a situation where one should normatively experience interest, eating and drinking with friends for example, but instead, one experiences an uneasy emptiness. Heidegger regards this account of Boredom more favourably because, although an object is still implied, the account contains less naive causality. When 'Bored *with*', although Boredom is related to an object, Boredom emanates from an individual's reflective consciousness of the object and, as such, the 'bored *with*' account has more phenomenological authenticity compared to the causal naivety implied in 'bored *by*'. In this sense, rather than an individual being 'bored *by*' a book, s/he is 'bored *with*' reading the book. In the latter account, the subject has a more active and, therefore, authentic role in meaning construction. 'Bored *with*' encourages a recognition of the phenomenological origins of Boredom through the synthesis or interweaving of the self and the object. Finally, '*one is* bored' is the most profound type of Boredom in which the individual experiences a complete disengagement between being and the world; one becomes 'held out into the nothing' (p299). The twin concepts of being 'held out,' or 'left behind' (p120) are central to Heidegger's ideas on Boredom and relate to the experience of a temporal dislocation. When '*one* is bored' time is experienced repressively. The clock hand slows because the individual senses a disconnection from all local meanings, including time itself. To Heidegger, this type of Boredom is akin to homesickness in the sense that one wishes to feel 'at home' in a temporal situation but cannot.

While influential, Heidegger's work has not escaped critique. Goodstein (2005) points out that Heidegger's 'grammar of Boredom' (p281) misrepresents the malaise as a kind of universal and ahistorical spiritual discontent because, although Heidegger presents Boredom as 'the fundamental mood' of the modern era, he fails to render the relationship between Boredom and modernity explicit. In doing so he abstracts subjectivity from its historical context and fails to account for, what Goodstein believes is, Boredom's unique relationship with western modernity and its relative

absence beyond this particular stage. Using the historical specificity of his own examples, Goodstein illustrates that Boredom cannot be anything other than a uniquely modern experience. Take for example Heidegger's use of a train station. The waiting traveller is trapped by a mechanised and standardised *modern* technology. Furthermore, the traveller's Boredom emerges out of an inability to engage in a meaningful pastime. The concept of leisure, even the enforced leisure endured in a train station, and the need to 'fill' time with entertainment only emerged, argues Goodstein, as a result of the industrial revolution and the separation of the twin temporal spheres of 'work' and 'leisure' (see also Spacks 1995). In addition, a central theme within Heidegger's account of Boredom is the individual's relationship with time. However, Heidegger uses a concept of time rooted within an experience of temporality framed within modern 'clock time'. Indeed, Heidegger makes extensive use of clock time to illustrate the plight of the hapless traveller…

> *We are sitting, for example, in the tasteless station of some lonely minor railway. It is four hours until the next train arrives. The district is uninspiring. We do have a book in our -rucksack, though-shall we read? No. Or think l through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock-only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Then we go out onto the local road. We walk up and down, just to have something to do. But it is no use. Then we count the trees along the road, look at our watch again---exactly five minutes since we last looked at it* (p93)

This lengthy extract is included in full because it illustrates Goodstein's critique perfectly. It is littered with the motifs of modernity. The 'tasteless station', an allusion to modern functionalist architecture; the use of a book as a pastime, an activity only commonly accessible as a result of mass production and the development of 'leisure'; finally, the continual reference to clock time as defined by minutes and hours. Despite Heidegger's approach to Boredom as a universal and ahistorical malaise, he inadvertently illustrates both the historical specificity and the correlates of modernity that accompany its manifestation.

Finally, an insightful conclusion which neatly rounds off this brief review of the philosophy of Boredom by illustrating the horrific power of banality is provided by

Heidegger's student Hannah Arendt (2006). The subject of Arendt's analysis, Adolf Eichmann, was, to the post-war world, a monster. Indeed, as Hitler's bureaucratic architect of the final solution, and with the blood of millions of people on his hands, he *had* to be a monster. However, Arendt shows how, on the contrary, Eichmann was not motivated by evil, sadism or indeed any grand spiritual, political or philosophical paradigm. Put simply, Eichmann was bored. He applied for administrative positions out of Boredom, fulfilled his banal bureaucratic tasks with apathetic indifference to their effects and was motivated simply by a daily desire to avoid tedium. Bored impassivity and an absence of will were the mundane monsters that led Eichmann to facilitate unimaginable evil. Arendt's work is significant not only because she instigated a motif which constructs Boredom as fuel to violence, crime and deviancy, but hers is also a sobering reminder that often, it is within the over-looked, the mundane and the boring that horrific profundity can be found.

Psychology and Boredom.

In 1911 Frederick Winslow Taylor established an approach that heralded the deployment of scientific motifs in the study of factory work. Taylor's approach was designed explicitly to improve economic efficiency (Shafritz et al. 2015). The fundamental principle underlying Taylor's approach objectivised workers as constituent elements within a broader factory machine. Workers were simply cogs in a wheel. The key to Taylorism was breaking down work into monotonous, repetitive and quantifiable measurable tasks. Intentionally, workers had little or no conceptualisation of the finished product. An unfortunate, but unsurprising, effect of Taylorism was an increased alienation, anger and Boredom amongst workers (Davis 2015). Within the earliest psychological research concerning the study of factory workers (Vernon 1926; Wyatt 1934 cited in Hill & Perkins 1985) social scientific gaze was drawn into the management of this toxic brew. Put simply, bored workers were less productive and so psychology's ensuing obsession with *Boredom as an ailment in need of a 'cure* was born.

As the 20th century developed, psychological research split into two camps, one focusing on the measurement of an individual state of Boredom and the other focusing on the contextual correlates of Boredom in specific situations. A major development occurred in the first of these two camps during the mid-1980s with the development

of the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) (Farmer and Sundberg 1986). Implemented via a questionnaire, the BPS quantifies the individual's propensity to experience Boredom. However, As Mercer-Lynn et al (2014) argue, the concept 'propensity' is opaque. It is unclear whether, for example, 'propensity' is a permanent disposition that individuals carry with them in all situations or merely a heightened susceptibility triggered by contextual correlates. In more recent and highly cited research, Pekrun (2006, see also Pekrun et al 2007 and also Pekrun et al 2010) sought to unite context/propensity approaches under the 'value-control' theory of Boredom. Today, value-control theory locates Boredom within a spectrum of 'achievement emotions.' These are "…emotions tied directly to achievement activities or achievement outcomes" (Pekrun (2006: 317). Furthermore, achievement emotions are viewed as either 'activating' in the sense that they promote engagement and performance (enjoyment and pride for example) or 'deactivating' in that they lead to disengagement and so undermine performance (Pekrun et al 2007). Within this framework, Boredom is regarded as a negative, deactivating and activity-related emotion that emerges mainly from a negative cognitive appraisal of a situation. Pekrun's (2006) 'control-value' theory argues that individuals experience Boredom when they perceive little agentic control over outcomes, the activity may be either too easy (low demand) or too difficult (high demand), coupled with a perception that activities have neither intrinsic nor extrinsic value. In this sense, Boredom is the outcome of reciprocal causation (Pekrun et al 2014) and the synthesis of situation and propensity.

For over a century Psychological Boredom research has produced a scientific and objective discourse that centres on the statistical analysis and the quantification of experience. This discourse has been carefully assembled from the outcomes of assessment instruments and laboratory experiments designed to quantify observed changes to manipulated subjective states. However, despite this tireless quantification, commitment to objectivity and rhetoric of rigour, psychologists bemoan their own inability to produce a satisfactory conceptualisation of Boredom. In his extensive review of psychological Boredom research, Vodanovich (2003) lamented psychology's failure to develop anything like an acceptable definition, let alone a unified theory of Boredom. He called for assessment advances, an increase in the use of observable behavioural criterion and the development of meta-analytical research concerning Boredom scales to identify and unify reliable correlates. Vodanovich and

Watt's (2016) updated review documented precisely these advances and described a bewildering proliferation of Boredom measures and assessment protocols identifying no less than 16 distinct Boredom scales. However, Vodanovich and Watt now call for an end to the development of an increasingly confusing, contradictory and confounding array of measures, assessments and scales. Instead, they advocate an interdisciplinary approach based on existing work to unify a collective agreement on the nature and assessment of Boredom. In short, despite a century of measurements, experiments and quantification, within psychology, "…the definition, function, and correlates of Boredom are still poorly understood" (Raffaelli et al 2017:2451).

Boredom and Sociology

Sociology has yet to develop anything like a coherent approach to the study of Boredom. Indeed, according to Darden and Marks (1999) Boredom has been largely ignored and 'disvalued' within the discipline. Boredom's invisibility is surprising given the concerns of the founding fathers of the subject, after all Durkheim's 'anomie', Marx's 'alienation' and Weber's 'de-sacralisation' all relate to subjectively experienced malaise born from modern social discontents.

Durkheim and Anomie

Durkheim developed the concept of anomie throughout his writings, but the concept is most prominently used within two works: *The Division of Labour* (1984) and *Suicide* (1951). In the former, Durkheim presents the division of labour as the primary source of social solidarity in modern societies. When in its 'normal' state, the division of labour exists as a series of complex, but interdependent, relationships which act as a unifying force solidifying a dangerously individualised society. However, the division of labour can become anomic when, following a period of rapid social change, the mechanisms for communicating and delivering conformity and cohesion simply cannot keep pace with the rate of upheaval. As a result, social relationships become unregulated and disintegrated. Individuals become socially isolated as their lives become dislocated from socially accessible meaning. In his later work *Suicide*, Durkheim moves away from his original structural conception and presents anomie more as an interpersonal phenomenon. In this new conceptualisation, anomie relates to a deficient regulation of desire. Durkheim believed that rapid social change also corrodes the ability of individuals to restrict their human desires within realistically

attainable parameters thus leaving individuals with aspirations as insatiable as they are unattainable. Thus, unfettered social change exposes individuals to a subjectively experienced malaise or in Durkheim's words ''a perpetual state of unhappiness'' (pp 243).

The concept of anomie was adapted to the peculiarities of early twentieth-century American culture by Robert K. Merton (1938) in his classic essay, *Social Structure and Anomie*. To Merton, Anomie occurs when there is an imbalance between normative cultural goals/aspirations and the socially approved mechanism for regulating, controlling and attaining these goals. In early twentieth-century America, 'goals' translated as consumerism, the accumulation of wealth and the 'American Dream'. Focusing on deviance, Merton argued that American anomie occurred because cultural goals were disproportionately accented at the expense of the means of their attainment. In this anomic situation, individuals pursue one of several possible adaptations. It is the mode of adaptation that he termed '*Retreatism*' that is of particular interest to the study of Boredom. Merton believed that retreatism is likely to emerge from individuals who originally subscribed to both cultural goals and their legitimate means of attainment as equally high in value. However, after encountering recurrent systematic failure, and finding illegitimate 'innovation' unpalatable, the individual becomes '*shut off*' (p677) from both legitimate and illegitimate means of attaining cultural goals. Accordingly, an individual escapes, retreats or drops out of society. In Merton's words, these individuals,

> *"*...the psychotics, psychoneurotics, chronic autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts drop-outs... are, strictly speaking, *in* the society but not *of* it"
>
> (Merton 1938 p.677 original italics)

Thus, 'retreatism' is a disengagement from both *any* normative cultural goals and *any* means of attainment. In retreatism, the individual will be physically present but socially absent. Being disconnected from the present s/he will be unable to access the normative meaningfulness of any given situation. Lepenies (1992), for example, notes that Merton regarded both acedia and melancholia as merely the traditional terms for retreatism. Furthermore, Lepenies explicitly deploys Merton's retreatism in his own wide-ranging historical examination of melancholia and Boredom in Western Europe.

Lepenies' anomic Boredom occurs as a consequence of indifference and inertia brought about by the stifling process of civilisation. In Lepenies' analysis, a drift into melancholia and Boredom corresponded to a gradual devalorisation of traditional cultural goals as self-evidently meaningful. This is coupled with increasing inhibition in the means of attaining these goals because of an intensification in civilising control and constraint.

Marx and Alienation

Byron (2016) argues that the concept of 'Alienation' is most prominently discussed in the writings of the so-called 'early Marx' (Marx 1975; Marx 1959). Specifically, Marx positioned alienation as a corruption of the 'species spirit' which inevitably occurs within a capitalist political economy. The species spirit is characterised by a desire to share the fruits of spontaneous and creative production. Accordingly, the species spirit leads us to engage in, what Marx termed, 'species activity'. Species activity manifests through self-directed work and production that enhances the wellbeing of others and, reciprocally, provides fulfilment for the individual craftsperson. In practical terms, this could be baking a cake, knitting a scarf, or simply fixing a shelf. Furthermore, Marx (1975) believed that satisfaction is also experienced within the creative process because the self-directed nature of species activity allows the individual to express his or her own unique sense of self. In baking a cake, for example, a simple amendment to the recipe allows the baker to add a signature nuance. In short, humans will tend towards productive creativity with the effect of increasing intersubjective happiness. Marx outlines this process thus…

> "*Species-activity and the species-spirit whose real, conscious and authentic existence consists in social activity and social enjoyment. Since the essence of man is the true community of man, men, by activating their own essence, produce, create this human community, this social being which is no abstract, universal power standing over against the solitary individual, but is the essence of every individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth*."
>
> (Marx, 1975, p265)

Here Marx establishes that creation and production are aspects of 'species activity' and serve both as a means of solidifying intersubjective happiness whilst

manifesting self-identity and thus exercising the ‘species spirit’. In this way, Marx considered activity, production and creativity to be essential to human wellbeing. From this position, it is easier to understand Marx’s ideas on Alienation.

Marx (1959) initially outlined the dimensions of his theory of alienation in his essay ‘Estranged Labour’. As outlined above, being able to creatively produce communally enjoyed objects is essential to human wellbeing. However, two features within a capitalist economy frustrate the species activity/spirit praxis and produce alienation. Firstly, *workers’ labour is driven by alien and extrinsic forces*. Capitalist products do not emerge from within workers’ spontaneous creativity. All production is controlled and standardised through externally imposed directives. The nature and design of products, their assemblage process, and the speed of production are all imposed onto workers. All consciousness is removed from the production process and the body becomes automatized and alien accordingly. Hence, neither process nor product can be ‘owned’ by workers. In this way, workers cannot imbue their labour with self-expression. Indeed, the greater the labour, the greater the alienation from the species spirit. Accordingly, workers will only begin to feel any sense of wellbeing at the point when capitalist production ceases. Hence, “…labour is shunned like the plague.” (p30). Finally, *the purpose of production is no longer the communal good*. Instead of servicing a communal need, a product is simply a means to an extrinsic end; profit. As long as the capitalist class can secure profit then the potential communal usefulness of the product is irrelevant. Therefore, workers cannot seek solace in the reciprocal communal good that their labour contributes to.

The synthesis of these issues leaves workers alienated from their ‘species being’. Workers relate to their ‘life activity’ as an alien object, their own bodies as alien and their community members as the ‘other’. There are no human needs served in this process; only the profit of capital. The worker is left, estranged, alienated and, essentially, bored.

Weber and Disenchantment.

During a lecture at Munich University in 1918 entitled *Science as a Vocation,* Weber (1946) outlined his ideas concerning the *'disenchantment of the world*’ (p16). Disenchantment relates to an epistemological shift from a ‘magical’ to a

'rational' conceptualisation of the world which emerged from the discovery of, what Weber refers to as, the tools of science. The first of these tools is the conceptualisation of the world as a knowable and singularly truthful form. Weber believed that this first tool was quite ancient being alluded to in Plato's cave story. In Plato's story, the metaphorical philosopher reveals the singular truth of the sun to his more 'savage' companions. However, it was not until modernity developed the second tool of science, a reliable method of investigation in the form of the rational experiment, that the '*true being*' (p8) of the world could be known. The rational experiment allowed reliable, verifiable and singular factual truth to be made quantifiably clear. Furthermore, Weber maintained that the discovery of these two scientific tools instigated a uniquely modern epistemology based on '*intellectualist rationalization*' (p6). Rationalization relates to the way that modern social and economic life is increasingly ordered in a bureaucratic fashion as characterised by efficient, rational calculation and informed reasoning. Gradually, the cold calculability and instrumentalization of bureaucracy displaced traditional forms of governance based on intuition and emotions. Significantly, by demonstrating successful outcomes, rationalization gradually corroded magical explanations of the world until, "*…principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play. This means that the world is disenchanted*" (p7). The concept of disenchantment, therefore, is the inevitable supplanting of an inefficient enchanted view of the world as a spiritual and magical garden tended by gods, in favour of an efficient disenchanted view of the world as the indifferent constellation of inert facts rationally described by science.

Weber believed that, although undoubtedly not without technological and economic benefit, rationalization, bureaucratisation and disenchantment have brought about significant existential problems for humanity. These are most clearly exemplified in the concluding section of his most famous work, '*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*' (Weber 2005). In this work, Weber argued that capitalism emerged as a result of the peculiarities of the Calvinist religion. Whereas historically, work and investment were limited by their utility in producing wealth sufficient for purchasing material comforts, access to power and so on, Capitalism, on the other hand, required wealth accumulation for its own sake. Weber illustrated how a Calvinistic spiritual ethic led to a materially ascetic lifestyle, the perception

of work as a divine calling and, significantly, the accumulate wealth as a symbol of predestination to heaven. The combination of these three elements created the perfect 'spirit' for the development of rationalised capitalistic enterprise. However, as Weber details, the spiritual meaningfulness of the Calvinist work ethic has long since gone…

> "…*victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer …the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs*." (p124).

Weber concludes *The Protestant Ethic* with an uncharacteristically polemical critique of capitalist culture. He criticises the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy in which modernity has imprisoned its citizens and mercilessly expunged the '*spontaneous enjoyment of life'.* Whereas the Calvinist, Weber concludes, '…*wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so'* (p. 123). Leaving the reader in no doubt of Weber's distaste for the lassitude, vapid mundanity and sheer crushing Boredom of modern capitalist culture, Weber provides a quotation from Goethe, '*Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilisation never before achieved*.' (p. 124). The spiritual meaningfulness of life that Calvinism provided has, instead, been supplanted by the inexorable power of empty consumerism, the desire to produce wealth for its own meaningless sake and ultimately, Boredom.

Georg Simmel and the Blasé demeanour.

Georg Simmel lived through some of the most dramatic changes of the industrial revolution. These included the seeing the city where he spent most of his life, Berlin, more than double in population between 1875 and 1907 (Goodstein 2005) He witnessed the growth of the city's sprawling urbanisation, the development of Germany's criss-crossing railways and saw Berlin become the metropolitan capital of the European industrial revolution. However, in two of his major works, Simmel (1978; 1997) chronicled the human cost of this economic and industrial expansion. This cost came about in the form of a dramatic paradigm shift in the human existential narrative. Just as there were dramatic changes within the socio-economic landscape, Germany's change from a rural and agricultural society to an urban and industrial one, Simmel believed that there were corresponding transformations

within Germany's epistemological landscape, the collapse of the traditional, spiritual, and intuitive, and the rapid ascension of the modern, material and rational. Within Simmel's writings, this paradigm shift led to a new, thoroughly modern form of self-reflection, one based on detached scepticism, which, in turn introduced a new way of knowing the self and its relationship to the world.

Quite simply, Simmel (1997) argues that metropolitan, city and urban living overwhelms the individual's emotions and senses. Under the constant glare of lights, the barrage of noise and the sheer volume of passing humanity, the city dweller is forced into a sanctuary of sensory withdrawal as an act of self-care. Accordingly, the typical urbanite erects a protective emotional disconnection in the form of, what Simmel calls, a blasé attitude. The urbanite's blasé attitude is characterised by a valorisation of disinterest, and a sovereignty of reason over emotion and objectivity over subjectivity. Furthermore, Simmel goes on to argue that, the blasé demeanour constitutes *the* major building block of the modern scientific and rational episteme. To Simmel, reason, detachment, and atomised objectivity are merely unintended consequences of urban living. Born out of a need to protect oneself from sensory onslaught modernity's disinterested, rationalist and objective scientific epistemology was born. Furthermore, Simmel (1978) examines the role and function of money in terms of its relationship to social life. He uses money as a vehicle to problematise and critique the increasing objectification and quantification of value, worth and meaning. Simmel's analysis illustrates how existential questions, indeed the very form that these questions take, are formed within socio-histrionic parameters. The pre-industrial consumption of bread, for example, was once a *socia*l problem, one that required negotiation and interface between a community of familiar individuals within a complex framework of local interactions. The modern consumption of bread, on the other hand, is reduced to a quantified *technical* problem, money. Simmel uses the mundane and the everyday to illustrate that profound questions of meaning are rendered intelligible via social context.

In my reading of Simmel, Boredom can be understood as an unintended consequence of the epistemological paradigm shift which occurred as Europe moved into industrial and urban modernity. City living led to a sceptical and blasé sociohistoric 'blunting' of the urbanites' capacity to articulate subjectivity beyond

a rational material paradigm. This blunting facilitates a corresponding erosion of traditional value, a gradual dissolution of meaning and an evacuation of essence. Accordingly, within modernity, the flavour of existence has been diluted, its volume turned down and its colour faded to an omnipotent and washed out grey. Boredom is the ultimate expression of industrialised and urbanised progress.

Herbert Marcuse and the Great Refusal.

To Marcuse (1964;1974) dialectical tensions exist between the macro function of an exploitative consumerist society and its detrimental effects on the emotional individual. Marcuse argues that it is essential for the continuing functioning capacity of capital that individuals become skilled in marketable dispositions. These dispositions revolve around the ability to subsume the individuals' own pleasure desires to the repressive order necessary for capital. This is very much a reworking of Freud's (2002) own analysis. However, whereas Freud argued that some constraint and repression are inevitable parts of civilisation, Marcuse argued that capital enforces an excessive and unnecessary '*surplus-repression'* (Marcuse 1974:35). Surplus repression exacts an unnecessary psychological price on the individual. Social repression becomes individual cognition through the development of the 'performance principle' (p35) – which Marcuse argues has now replaced Freud's reality principle. The Performance principle is akin to Weber's idea of a work ethic in that work and employment are perceived as moral endeavours; activities that a 'good' person 'should' be doing. The performance principle leads individuals to recognise, interiorise, and legitimise the 'need' to accept self-control to facilitate their development of employment skills. However, this repression, by its excessive and surplus nature, has a detrimental effect on the capacity of the individuals to engage in the acts of spontaneity through which the self may explore its social world and so develop. Boredom emerges accordingly. False needs motivate us to chase an object of desire in the hope of happiness, the promise of pleasure and the 'Goodlife'. However, needs become false when the object of desire, and/or the means taken to reach that object, actually results in discontent. To Marcuse, false needs emerge in an, what he terms, advanced industrial society which is ripe with imaginary potentials and brimming with promises of a seductive illusion; 'the satisfying something'. The satisfying something could be the ecstasy of a new car, the slimmer perfection of the beach body or a more contented mindful mind. The seduction of the 'satisfying

something' is so intense that despite the daily experience of unhappiness its pursuit brings, individuals keep returning to the fantasy in the hope that this time, 'a change is gonna come'.

"*The people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi, split level home, kitchen equipment*" (1964:11)

Furthermore, needs become false when the chance of the individual attaining the object is impossible and so the relationship remains one of noxiously unrequited fantasy, or attaining the object is all too possible, but the object itself is toxic. For pupils, an object of desire could be a university acceptance, a 'passed' course, or even an exam grade. However, Marcuse argues that the object in-itself is largely irrelevant. This is because attachment is less focused on the object, and more focused on the cluster of promises that are magnetised by that object. Specifically, false needs occur in the affective relation of attachment between individuals and the object of their desire. Indeed, it is the imagined affective aspect embedded within these promises that is so alluring and, in particular, their alchemical power to turn misery into mirth. Furthermore, the individual's relationship with an object's 'cluster of promises' can have highly profound implications for her/his subjectivity, self-knowledge and sense of worth. Embedded promises can be imagined as entwined and indistinguishable from the potentiality of the individual and so subjectivities are formed within the object's pursuit, potentialities and promises. Thus, despite being a source of discontent and malaise, false needs provide a stable existential continuity of self-knowledge which answers the individual's questions concerning ontological insecurity; what it means to live at that moment and a sense of what existence might be like in the future. In short, a meaningful, but not necessarily happy, life can be found in the pursuit and the attainment of 'the satisfying something'. Conversely, argues Marcuse, the absence of pursuit and attainment leaves the individual bereft and adrift in a world stripped of hope and meaning. In this way, the concept of false needs helps explain why individuals cling to beliefs and patterns of behaviour which, whilst glittering with golden promises of a good life, actually threaten personal and social well-being. Put simply, the promise of a good life 'later' allows us to suspend the cruelty of the 'now'.

Marcuse argues that a significant element of maintaining our toxic attachment to false needs is presented in terms of 'the language of total administration' (1964:88). Here

Marcuse details how language itself acts to close down critical thinking. Marcuse argues that when language is used rationally, i.e. when concepts are tied to real material conditions, words can be used to provide an authentic understanding of the world. However, language in advanced industrial societies operates irrationally in that concepts are not only divorced from the reality that they purport to describe but actually operate to disguise the true nature of phenomenon and implant instead a meaning that both suppresses discontent and acts to promote the interests of advanced industrial society. He provides examples such as 'luxury-fallout shelter', 'harmless-fallout' and 'clean-bomb' to illustrate the manner to which irrationality has become normalised. In these examples, he points out that syntactical technologies, the use of the positive terms first and the negative terms second, and the use of the hyphen to physically draw opposing words together 'as-if' they are linked, are methods which act to normalise, detoxify and disguise acts of state-organised mass murder. His argument is that language needs to be recognised as a powerful epistemological device, as an essential element in how reality is structured, hence… "It is the word that orders and organises…" (1964:89). In this sense, there are no concepts or ideas which do not further the repressive power of the whole. Marcuse evokes Orwell's concept of newspeak to illustrate the detachment of language from reality where despotic regimes are pronounced 'democratic', military operations are labelled as 'peace-keeping' in such a way that renders alternatives meaningless. Indeed, it is the language of rebellion and protest that suffers the most in this totalising discourse. Marcuse asks, "How can such protest and refusal find the right word…?" (p93).

Sociology: Beyond the Classics.

Although the above positions represent different dimensions of sociological thinking, they all share one common feature. Classical sociology characterised the development of modernity as profoundly contradictory. On one hand, modernity could achieve astounding technological, scientific and economic 'progress' but on the other, the price to pay for this 'progress' was inherently detrimental to subjective and emotional well-being. Thus, the classical sociological discourse is constituted by a discontented lamentation for a woefully inadequate and meaning*less* present whilst at the same time providing a yearnful mourning for a romanticised and meaning*ful* past. However, the classical sociological writers are not alone in this discourse.

Elias (1992), for example, presents modern clock-time as emblematic of a subjugation unique to industrial civilisation. To Elias, the tyranny of clock-time represents the ultimate mode of control over individual spontaneity and the stultification of instincts and natural drives. Furthermore, the process of civilisation is the gradual interiorisation of technologies of regulation and suppression. Clock-time ensures that homogeneity becomes an all-pervasive constraint whilst concurrently appearing to be a natural and normal part of life or as Svendson (1999:118) laments, "we are not in charge of time, that we are subject to time". Similarly, Thompson (1967) argued that the development of clock-time during the industrial revolution led to the concepts of work and leisure time as separate social as well as temporal spheres; leisure time needing to be spent wisely in fruitful activities thus opening up a 'space' for a subject malaise, i.e. Boredom, to emerge. Other writers more explicitly address the emergence of Boredom as a part of the emotionally crushing effects of advanced industrial society. Spacks (1995), for example, argues that a coalescence of factors contributed to the emergence of Boredom as a thoroughly modern malaise. Shifts in the central organizing concepts of social life came about as a result of industrialisation. These concepts included secularisation and the decline of the sacred; the rise of 'work' and 'leisure' as separate spheres; and finally, a growing acceptance of an 'inner realm'. Early social science 'discovered', and literature narrated, complex inner worlds which were constituted by entities such as the equally novel 'emotions', 'motivations' and 'desires'. Thus, inviting an increasing desire to reflect on one's own experience through the prism of these newly realised sensibilities.

The relationship between European modernity and the concept of an inner realm is a central aspect of Taylor (1989). He constructs a philosophical genealogy to illustrate how the peculiarity of modern interiority slowly emerged. Firstly, Taylor establishes the historical strangeness of modern European interiority through a comparison with ancient classical philosophical writings. Taylor describes how Plato, for example, distinguishing between desire and reason, posits that it is preferential to always pursue reason, which Taylor defines as the love of the good. However, Taylor points out that Plato's concept of reason is *not* dependent on interiority. Indeed, words denoting an inner realm never appear in Plato's writing. Instead, argues Taylor, Plato perceives reason as the ability of the individual to appreciate the order of the *outside* world. Reason is not an aspect of interiority; it

manifests within a relational dialogue between the individual and the external world. Taylor then journeys through the great European philosophers illustrating how each contributed to the slow incremental development of modern European interiority. This development argues Taylor, began with Augustine, who introduced practices of self-reflective gaze and moved though Descartes, who achieved the objectification of subjective states. However, Taylor argues, it is Locke who finally crystalizes modern European interiority. Through his writings, Locke depicts feelings, habits, and inclinations as both housed, and controlled, by an atomised inner self. Furthermore, Taylor believes that this historical process has had a significantly detrimental impact on knowledge.

Taylor argues that the language of science, atomisation, and quantification over-dominate modernity's stories of human existence. Thus, the modern subjects' story of self has been purged of the language of subjectivity and we have rendered ourselves existentially inarticulate as a result. Taylor is not 'anti-science' but argues that by ignoring the qualitative, the subjective and the emotional, we are robbing ourselves of the very essences that make us human. Unfortunately, we have reduced the experience of being human to the status of epiphenomena; a mere illusion. There is a place for science, but human beings are not merely biological machines. Instead, Taylor argues that social science and philosophy should actively strive to re-legitimise the language of feelings and subjectivity. This knowledge should add to, not detract from, the objective quantification of the empirical world.

Sociological critiques articulate two essential features for the development of Boredom as a widely available cultural resource. Firstly, within classical sociology, modernity was constructed as synonymous with an erosion of meaning and antithetical to human emotional well-being. The toxic vacuity at the heart of industrialisation was seen, by all three founding fathers of sociology, to reflect into the modern soul as some form of subjective malaise. Secondly, social science, philosophy and popular culture coalesced around the concept of an inner world brimming with interiorised experience. Finally, a process of normalisation, indeed reification, of an inner world as the site for emotional experiences has occurred and accordingly, Boredom should be regarded as a socio-historic construct (rather than a biological/evolutionary one). This the first major element of my developing understanding of Boredom and as such requires a little unpacking.

Boredom and the modern soul.

Foucault (1975:1978) presents a genealogy of the modern soul. In these texts Foucault argues that aspects of experience which appear concrete and stable can be seen to be the outcomes of the interplay of historically constituted knowledge and power. Modern social science (especially psychology) grew in tandem with the need to locate justifications for bureaucratised systems of punishment and population management. A symbiotic mutually reinforcing relationship between state and social science gave a powerful drive to establishing (the now common sense) notion that the human being is propelled by an internal world of cognition, personality and traits; i.e. the modern soul. In the early industrial period, embryonic social science solidified its own status by fabricating an object for study, the human being. The objectified human being became a 'thing' to be stripped bare, dissected, and known. The knowledge this objectification process constructed became a powerful tool for those who could claim to wield it. The knowledge/power relationship concerning crime and sex subjectified human beings to fabricated 'natural' laws via the various technologies of control which sprang up from them; the prison and the clinic. These technologies deployed social scientific knowledges as justifications for increasing intrusion, observation and control. The mutual benefit to social science and the state of this 'modern soul' was reaped via the establishment of 'criminal' and 'perverted' minds as knowable aberrations to a newly constructed natural order that should be policed and punished. It is likely to be no coincidence that Boredom as an internally driven and psychologically knowable entity arrived at this time; 1852 to be exact (Watt-Smith 2015).

Goodstein (2005) follows on from Foucault to argue that Boredom is the emotional harvest reaped from a scientific rationalist discourse sown during the 19th century. Her main argument is that subjectivity, rather than being the stuff of evolution and biology, emerged out of socio-historically situated discursive contexts. She argues that each historical period is characterised by a unique 'rhetoric of reflection'. This is the prism through which socio-historically located subjects articulate their own sense of selfhood as both coherent and 'rightful'. In particular, Goodstein maintains that the 'twin revolutions' of 'science' and 'enlightenment', the industrial revolution and the establishment of the French republic respectively, established a modern rhetoric of reflection from which Boredom emerged.

According to Goldstein (2005), two seismic shifts emerged out of the 'twin revolutions'. Firstly, the motifs 'innovation', 'new' and 'perpetual change' became powerful significations of value in their own right. Within this motif, cultural moments were seen as constantly being superseded by superior and perpetually advancing modernisation. Accordingly, the past, especially its association with spirituality and superstitious meanings, became devalued and viewed as inherently flawed. Secondly, mass industrialisation led to the democratisation of 'clock time', the quantification of experience and ultimately the normalisation of homogeneity. Subjectivity was reduced to an endless linear succession of quantified moments strung out into infinity; the present merely a waiting room for the future. The conflation of these two developments coalesced around a burgeoning 'scientific rationality'. This discourse challenged the traditional commonly accessible spiritual meaningfulness of life. Human beings became existentially hollowed out, constituted as merely biological facts in an essentially meaningless and indifferent universe understandable only to those who possessed the sceptical intellectual distance to comprehend this vast inert materialist framework. The success of the natural scientific paradigm in nineteenth-century Europe saw the triumph of the material over the spiritual, objective over subjective and quantitative over qualitative.

Although the modern and rational was praised to the detriment of the ancient and the romantic, Goodstein maintains that these changes did not go without challenge. Romanticist critique, exemplified in the literary works of Baudelaire in France and the antiquarian rival of the British Victorians, successfully presented modernity as inherently damaging to the human soul. This motif can also be seen within embryonic sociology; Weber and disenchantment; Durkheim and anomie; Marx and alienation. Ironically however, classical sociology employed, and indeed continues to laud and benefit from, the very scientific materialist framework under critique and so, ironically, sociology helped to further solidify the rational/scientific paradigm under lament. The proliferation of social critiques, both within burgeoning social science and literature, ironically aided by the process of mass production these perspectives decried, led to the formation of what Goodstein calls 'democratized scepticism'. This is a rhetoric of reflection which discursively fabricates a way of perceiving one's subjective experience as both inevitably

harmed by, and explained in the terms of, the rationalist-materialist paradigm. Thus, a thoroughly modern rhetoric of reflection was constructed out of a sense that the quantified and mechanistic nature of modernity was inherently harmful and yet ironically that this harm could only be understood by implementing the motifs of that same modernity. Boredom is an accident of modernity.

Klapp (1986) provides a useful illustration of how, within a sociological examination of Boredom, the malaise is positioned as an inevitable interiorised experience resulting from an entropic modernity. Furthermore, Klapp exemplifies the way that Boredom is regarded as being animated by technological developments and thus peculiar to modernity.

Klapp's (1986) was the first detailed sociological examination to focus explicitly on Boredom as a societal issue[2]. Up until this point, common sense largely assumed Boredom to be the result of under-stimulation and estrangement. Klapp, on the other hand, paints a picture of *Boredom caused by over-stimulation* with the malaise being the inevitable by-product of 'progress' and its increasingly sophisticated communication systems. According to Klapp, enlightenment thinkers assumed that the spread of ideas could only contribute to human welfare and happiness. However, the deafening volume, the frenetic cadence and sheer triviality of modern communication systems and the volume of information have led to a society characterised by, what Klapp terms, 'noise' and 'banality'. Firstly, 'noise' refers to the tsunami of irrelevant information in which the modern individual is drowned on a daily, even minute by minute, basis. Buried deep within this tidal wave of information there may be some drop of resonance for the individual. But to reach it s/he must wade through oceans of meaninglessness and irrelevancy. Secondly, 'banality' or 'banalisation' refers to the smoothing out, the elimination of challenging uniqueness and the homogenisation of information in order to make it as palatable and consumable to as wide an audience and market as possible. An information society franticly mass-produces homogenised and blandly consumable quantity at the expense of slower, meaningful and challenging quality. The result, according to Klapp is 'social entropy'. As in physics where deterioration of the material world is inevitable, so Klapp believes that 'progress'

[2] Earlier sociological analysis of subjective malaise as a societal phenomenon exist, see for example Lepenies (1969) and Kuhn (1976) but these deal with 'melancholia' and 'ennui' respectively, not specifically Boredom.

always leads to the degradation of humanity into degeneration, unhappiness and deficit. Eventually, an information society drowns itself in ever-increasing tidal flood of meaninglessness, irrelevancy and Boredom where, because everything is important, nothing is.

Klapp's analysis is of course highly reminiscent of Simmel's (1997) essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' where the individual city dweller, bombarded with a maelstrom of stimulation, dizzying lights and distractions, emotionally closes down as an act of self-care and hides within the cloaked sanctuary of a blasé demeanour. However, like Simmel, Klapp's analysis locates Boredom within a narrow, urban and urbane relative affluence. To be bombarded with information one must live in a technologically advanced economy and be personally wealthy enough to afford technology. Thus, Klapp's Boredom is a malaise of western material privilege and connectivity. Klapp fails to address the Boredom of disprivilege, poverty and disconnection. O'Neill (2017), for example, documents the marginalised, excluded and ostracised Boredom experienced by Romanian homeless people. These are the precariat for whom the wealth and opportunity to access Boredom-inducing levels of information technology and connectivity is merely a dream. Never-the-less Klapp's work is useful. It is useful as a reminder that a back-slapping celebration of 'progress' should be tempered with an awareness of the malaise that can be associated with it. Put simply, 'more' is not necessarily 'better'.

A similar view of toxicity, excess and its damage to the soul is a central theme of Gardiner's (2014) synthesis of autonomism and Boredom. In Gardiner's view, autonomism is concerned with highlighting processes through which human subjectivity and affective experience have been subsumed by the development of Semiocapitalism; a term used to refer to the significant transformations in technological and productive process that have occurred over the last fifty years. In particular, Gardiner argues that harvesting and remodelling human emotions has been an essential development in furthering the interests of twenty-first-century neoliberalist capital. During the Fordist period, (early twentieth century) labour was predominantly physical and material and, as such, only bodies were needed to operate machines. Accordingly, Boredom was tied to the workplace and once out of the factory the worker could indulge in community experiences relatively free from the oppressive impediments of capital. In a post-Fordist era, however, labour has shifted

away from the body to the mind. Gardiner uses the term ‘cognitariat’ to distinguish a new type of worker whose labour is mainly non-material in that labour manifests as specialist knowledge, information technology and interpersonal relationships. In post-Fordist Semiocapitalism, cognition itself has been marketised. To facilitate cognitive commodification a process of ‘deterritorialization’ has taken place where a form of hyper-exploitation has bled out of the factory gates and flowed into the homes, hearts and everyday lives. Rather than merely controlling the body, Semiocapitalism has developed technologies to inhabit and mould the mind of the worker into an exploitable asset. Hochschild (1997:2012) provides evidence of this flow into the home. Hochschild argues that the combination of time constraints and persistent gender inequalities in terms of domestic labour and childcare has forced many women to adopt almost Taylorist levels of time management. This has led to a reconceptualization of family time as a commodity. Reified to an object, ‘quality time’ is planned to maximise enriching outcome whilst minimising the temporal input. To continue with Gardiner (2014), the very soul is now a site for class struggle and oppression. Accordingly, the cognitariat is distinguished by a new subjectivity that is constituted via neoliberal motifs which position work as a creative imaginative enterprise, the self as an entrepreneur and, significantly, that equates personal value with performative financial success and conspicuous consumption. Moreover, significations of success and worth are also demonstrated by a continual drive for re-invention, self-development and a performance of self-actualisation. Happiness, or at least its performative fabrication, has become an oppressive ethical imperative and, subsequently, failing to be happy requires a ‘cure’. The paradoxical result of this situation is an upsurge in narcoticized and caffeinated ontological insecurity with individuals precariously hovering between ‘success’ and ‘failure’. The losers in this pitiless competition, as exemplified by O'Neill’s (2017) ethnography of the Romanian homelessness, drop into a twilight world where they are surplus to requirements, unexploitable and powerless to consume. Accordingly, the precariat is unable to inhabit an entrepreneurial fantasy of perpetual self-actualisation. In this way, Semiocapitalism both *feeds*, and feeds *off*, the emotions of its subjects.

Gardiner (2014) continues by pointing out that there are both physical and cognitive limits to human endurance. Boredom in the Fordist era emerged as a result of physical and mental estrangement experienced during the production process. Physical fatigue

produced physical estrangement. In Semiocapitalism, Boredom is the result of cognitive fatigue (see D'Hoest and Lewis (2015) for an application to higher education and the 'fatigue university'). Moreover, Boredom is the subject's flight away from the frenzied cognition demanded by entrepreneurial subjectivity. When bored, the subject is dangerously de-subjectified. S/he is cut loose from an enslavement to affective and cognitive imperatives that demand banal happiness and self-development. Reminiscent of Klapp (1986), Gardiner (2014) argues that, battered and bombarded by stimulation, consumption and the unrealistic 'just do it' demands to produce a frenzied façade, Boredom represents a fatigued sanctuary for the heart and soul. Boredom is a refusal, a *"…frustration with the status quo, and an inchoate desire for a different way of living"* (p42). Specifically, Boredom allows the subject to detach from the existential dread and ontological insecurity produced by the hyper-activity of ceaseless competition and performance and to wrestle a degree of autonomy, however limited and unpleasant, from the toxicity of semiocapitalist subjectification.

Gardiner concludes by offering therapeutic advice. He argues that Boredom should not necessarily be feared but regarded as a warning to the individual that s/he needs to, counterintuitively perhaps, slow things down. 'Time' has been harvested within Semiocapitalsm and unhinged into depersonalised exploitable units to coerce and control. Wrestling back and reinvesting 'time' with personal and human qualities is only possible however through acts of refusal and pursuing a life of 'less', less exploitative work, less time on the hamster wheel of self-development and less vacuous consumption. Indeed, Gardiner tentatively suggests that Boredom is the mind's own autonomic attempt to establish a life of 'less' via a refusal of the present's incessant demand for more. In this sense, Boredom acts as a pre-conscious self-defence mechanism, protecting the individual from hyperactivity by creating an enforced pause in which reflection on the nature of the situation is invited. Thus, Gardiner concludes that, although unpleasant, Boredom may be the key to unlocking a momentum for change via an invitation to reflect that, in the end, 'this' is not good enough.

The Sociology of Boredom: Summary

Although the sociology of Boredom can be described as both embryonic and inchoate, several points can be highlighted. Firstly, sociology generally regards Boredom as a

socio-historic construct and a product of modernity. I have argued that this position was instigated within the writings of the classical sociologists whom all narrated what they regarded as the largely detrimental impact that anomic social change, industrialised exploitation and rational bureaucratisation had on subjective experience. Secondly, this view was both reflective of, and helped to further constitute, a rhetoric of reflection which located Boredom as an interiorised experience explainable in material and scientific terms. Thirdly, within this discourse, Boredom arose from the development of the constrictions of an increasingly de-humanising society. Sociology regards modernity, through its imposition of technology, its tyranny of clock time, its fetishisation for change and novelty and the increasing quantification of experience as posing a significant existential crisis for humanity. However, this crisis may yet reveal a potential for reflection and enacting positive social change. Thus, Goodstein writes, Boredom is a '…vaguely disquieting mood that haunts the Western world…both as the disaffection with the old that drives the search for change and as the malaise produced by living under a permanent speedup' (2005: 18).

Chapter 2: Boredom and Education

Boredom and primary research: The early years.

The earliest published empirical primary research relating to Boredom came from Galton (1885) who, himself distracted during a lecture, noted the number of fidgets displayed by audience members and proposed this as a means of quantifying Boredom. More technically advanced work emerged from psychologists studying the behaviour and dispositions of industrial factory workers. In these early works, Boredom was self-evidently problematic because of its negative impact on productive capacities (Vernon 1926). Accordingly, early research on Boredom was born out of a desire to understand the malaise with a view to minimising its impact on production. These early works can be placed in one of two camps; firstly, those tending towards Boredom as *situational* in nature and, at least in part, as an unfortunate but inevitable by-product of modern industrial economies and; secondly those that tend towards seeing Boredom as an *individualised* pathology, a 'failing' or abnormality found within individuals.

The very earliest situational research located Boredom as an inevitable by-product of the industrial economy. Vernon (1926) exemplifies the early situational approach in his work on the relationship between Boredom and industrial accidents. To Vernon, it is the inescapably monotonous nature of factory production itself which leaves workers feeling disengaged, disinterested and simply too bored to concentrate on their work. Providing the earliest application linking Boredom to an educational context, Davies (1926) echoed the pessimism of Vernon (1926) but located the origins of discontent within modern systems of education. Davies argued that 'repetition' only becomes 'monotony' because schools provided workers with surplus intellectual and critical capacities. Education, given the low skilled and dull nature of factory work, fertilised and amplified subjective feelings of monotony and meaninglessness. Quite simply, an educated worker was more likely to be bored. Thus, Davies argued that "If there are no standards of criticism towards aimless mental activity of this kind then the worker is contented (p475)." Lewinsky, (1943) equally critical of cognitive over-development and stimulation, argued that the problem, indeed 'danger', of Boredom stemmed from children's over-dependency on external excitement of which modernity is superabundant. Lewinsky calls for a more 'stand and stare' version of childhood

where children are encouraged to manage their own time; to muse rather than be amused.

Although emulating the depiction of Boredom as a self-evident problem for production, Wyatt (1934 cited in Hill & Perkins 1985), saw Boredom's genesis as stemming from the individual worker's *personality* rather than the situation itself. To Wyatt, businesses should aim to employ submissive individuals with 'placid' and 'imperturbable' characteristics as these individuals are less prone to Boredom. Similarly, Fenichel (1951) argued that Boredom resulted from the individual rather than the situation. As a Freudian, Fenichel believed that Boredom was a distortion of what he terms 'drives'. The individual's 'normal' drive is towards positive, and away from negative, stimulation. Therefore, the presence of Boredom reveals a pathology and a distortion of both one's desire for, and the perception of, positive stimulation. Although the oft-bored rhetorically perceive their Boredom as situational, Fenichel dismisses the situational explanations of everyday folk as a mere defence mechanism hiding a chronic damming-up of the libido which can be unblocked via psycho-analysis. Kooker's (1959) research involved diagnosing the emotional affective states of elementary school children based on their observable behaviour. These labels were then correlated with educational attainment. Kooker identified that those who displayed Boredom-behaviour were negatively correlated with high educational attainment. Finally, Kooker also identified continua between insecurity measures and Boredom behaviour. Kooker concluded that Boredom and insecurity may be synonymous and that Boredom could be a product of issues related to the child's developmental psychological state.

These early studies are useful contextual origin for the examination of education and Boredom because they illustrate several assumptions that permeate subsequent research. These will be developed and challenged later but are worth noting briefly here. Firstly, Boredom is a self-evidently *negative emotional* state. Accordingly, it is self-evident that research should aim to 'cure' Boredom. Secondly, Boredom is negative because it leads to a deviation from desired *performative* norms. Bored workers are less productive and bored children achieve lower grades. Thirdly, 'the bored' are a problem that requires external *management* in order to achieve a desired performative norm. Note also that performative norms tend to be imposed by the powerful and it was the failure of workers or children to perform 'appropriately' which

instigated much of the early research. This inequality in power is often regarded uncritically. Finally, Boredom was the product of *materialist* and *causal* factors. Furthermore, being materialist, these 'causes' are observable, knowable and available for manipulation. Boredom inducing factors may be as either 'situational' or 'individual' but never-the-less Boredom as is regarded as an atypical state which is causal in origins. In summary, Boredom research began from the assumption that Boredom is a negative emotional state which is problematic because it has a detrimental impact on performance. Its causes can, and should, be identified so that it can be cured thus re-establishing normative standards of performance.

During the 1960s a strongly functionalist and situationist narrative developed which located the school itself as the primary site of Boredom through a perceived failure to 'keep up' with rapid social and technological change. Time magazine (1960), for example, ran an article which, although anecdotal, foreshadowed a narrative which would emerge during the coming decades. Kindergarten teacher Virgina C. Simmons complained that misguided and outdated pedagogy created classrooms of bored children. Simmons argued that an over-emphasis on play left children under-stimulated. The pace of change and stimulus in the world outside the classroom led precocious modern children to expect a more mature, varied and demanding curriculum; one that reflected their experiences of international travel, telephones and an advanced technological media. Hansbury, (1962) echoes this view, arguing that schools were failing to adequately adapt to the needs of a fast-moving advanced industrial economy. Thus, schools were failing to enhance students' job prospects and accordingly, left them feeling that their lessons were meaningless; Boredom thus ensues. In a manner reminiscent of Davies (1926), Hansbury (1962) argues that when students actually found employment, they discovered that the education system has over-intellectualised their minds; rendering their mental capacities under-utilised and their minds bored. However, in most governmental reports at the time Boredom remained invisible.

Boredom was officially identified as a problem within the UK governmental Newsom Report (1963). Newsom reported, in regards to secondary pupils, that "Too many appear to be bored and apathetic in school" (p14 para 47) Newsom contributed to a functionalist narrative of systemic educational failure by asserting that a high incidence of 'early leaving' resulted from perceived lack of usefulness and relevance

in the curriculum. Obuchowski (1964) lamented unenthusiastic and predictable teachers failing to avail themselves of modern and interesting teaching practices for losing the interest of students. Lynch (1967) wrote of a necessary 'revolution' against classroom Boredom and against the abstracted irrelevancy of the curriculum. Lynch maintained that secondary school practices failed to address the economic interests of schoolchildren thus fostered widespread disengagement and classroom Boredom. To assist his account, Lynch constructed a historical narrative with competing groups of 'traditionalists' and 'reformers'. The 'reformers' were represented as modern, progressive and wanting to 'free' education by connecting lessons to 'real-life' and therefore meet the children's 'needs'; significantly Lynch uncritically assumed that children's 'needs' were synonymous with those of the industrial economy. Lynch represented 'Traditionalists' as 'outdated' and interested in 'rigid' boundaries and a more 'abstracted' and implicitly less useful curriculum. Furthermore, in an inquiry commissioned by the Schools Council, Moreton-Williams and Finch (1968) identified a covariation between 'uselessness' and 'boringness' for a range of school subjects. Over 40 per cent of pupils reported that factors such as '…the same thing all the time; teachers going on and on; a lack of variety" and "not understanding; not being any good at; not having subjects explained enough" as the core constituents of a boring lesson. Moreton-Williams and Finch argued that the failure of schools to provide children with access to an occupationally relevant education was at the heart of this discontent.

Research concerning Boredom and education in the 1960s tended to use Boredom in line with functionalist thinking. This entailed fabricating a form of Boredom which stemmed from the perceived failure of schools and teachers to fulfil their primary economic role. Social science authors in this decade used Boredom as a means to criticise existing educational practices to drive what were seen as necessary changes to the curriculum; changes that would serve the interests of industry. As with earlier research, Boredom was located in terms of its damaging relationship to economic performance.

Boredom: Education, Resistance and Social Class

Emotions and Social Class

Before embarking on an examination of research that specifically links social class and Boredom to an educational context it is useful to examine the relationship between emotions and social class more generally from Hochschild (1979). Hochschild argued that ideology and social class are both important concepts in understanding an individual's management of, what she terms, 'feeling rules'. 'Feeling rules' are culturally specific guidelines that dictate what appropriate feelings should be experienced within a given context. Furthermore, each situation comes already pregnant with its own 'feeling rules' and these rules are expressions of dominant ideologies. To Hochschild, an ideology is an interpretative structure that determines the 'framing' of a situation. An ideological frame dictates the normative emotional context of a situation. In short, ideologies dictate situational frames, frames dictate the nature of the situation and feeling rules dictate our emotional response to that situation. Altering the emotional context of a situation is only possible by altering the ideological frame which has been placed over that situation. However, Hochschild believed that it is the ideologies of 'elite' social groups that permeate social structures and that their ideologies inevitably reflect their own narrow economic and social interests. It is the ideologies of these elite groups which determine the nature of situational frames and their corresponding emotional rules. This has led to the 'commoditisation of feeling' which, she argues, is linked to social class.

Hochschild believes that each social class socialises its children to be adept at delivering emotions commodified by the job market. Each class prepares its children with the skills necessary to manage emotions as required by the jobs likely to be encountered. As the ability to deliver passive and conformist emotions is more salient within middle-class jobs, middle-class parents have become adept at teaching their children to manage and control feelings. However, feeling and emotions are less significant for working-class occupations and so, accordingly, working-class parents only focus on controlling behaviour. Thus, children are differentially equipped to manage their emotions according to social class and this both delimits working-class access to many middle-class occupations and acts to reinforce class inequality at an emotional level. Empirical evidence in support of Hochschild's ideas can be found in

feminist writing from Bates (1990:1991:1994). In these works, the teaching of 'care' work within schools and colleges is examined to illustrate how emotion management is central to understanding female working-class exploitation. Thus, Hochschild's work establishes that emotions, rather than being merely individual experiences disconnected from context, can be linked to cultural and social factors such as social class. It is from this social constructionist position that the relationship between education, Boredom and social class will be examined.

Boredom, Social Class and Resistance.

> *"Resistance does not have to seek to change the world; it can be no more than small acts that provide a source of transient satisfaction, small private denials of power, of the encroachments of the desires of others. Resistance does not even have to be a conscious reaction to be effective – yet it is still resistance*."
>
> (Jackson and Carter 2011:398)

One of the first examinations of the relationship between Boredom and resistance came from Bernstein (1975). Bernstein distinguished between two types of Boredom; 'chronic Boredom' and 'responsive Boredom'. 'Chronic' refers to Boredom as a malaise; a deeply rooted psychological problem that operates at an ultimately dispositional individual level. 'Responsive' refers to the effects of a dull situation. Of these two, it is chronic Boredom, Bernstein argues, that is at the heart of the 1960s student resistance culture and the form that Bernstein regards as the most significant accordingly. 1960's students, being chronically bored, dropped out of colleges and universities, not because they were particularly uninterested in college, but because they were not interested in anything. The student-state confrontations of the 1960s, the 'turn on, tune in and drop out' rebelliousness of the counter-culture movement are dismissed by Bernstein as the result of misdiagnosis and treatment; fighting society provides relief from the individual's own chronic Boredom, hence "… battle makes the bored feel more alive" (p524). Bernstein is clearly influenced by Freud's (2002) account of the damaging effects of civilisation for the seemingly mass chronic Boredom amongst students. In simple terms, Boredom breeds rebellion. Rebellious students suffer from an over-developed, and authoritarian, super-ego which represses impulses and feelings. Without the ability to confront the internal source of repression, students project hostility outward to an external manifestation of the super-ego; the

authority of the state itself. To Bernstein, the malformed super-ego is born from the increasing female participation in work, the subsequent break-down of traditional family life and the resulting over-dependency on the education system to socialise children. This over-dependency results in an increasing necessity for children to suffer heightened demands for self-control and precocious development which in-turn fertilises the super-ego into over-repressing emotions and feelings.

However, Bernstein's work suffers from patriarchal assumptions regarding the socialising functions of women in traditional family life. Bernstein's twin assertions that increasing maternal paid employment has disrupted an effective mechanism for the regulation of emotional development and that the state lacks the capacity to provide adequate socialisation, are provided without evidence. Also, his dismissal of student-led protests as merely born from individual psychological pathology (albeit en masse) caused by absent mothers rather than a legitimate concern for equality, justice and a desire to end futile foreign wars is staggeringly arrogant. What *is* highly significant in Bernstein's work is that he uses Boredom as an epistemological device; a means of constructing 'rebellion' into something far less dangerous; individual pathology. If student protests can be dismissed as *merely* Boredom, then this de-grades and de-politicises their potential for enacting change. Bernstein's work is a fascinating example of how Boredom can be used to explicitly reconstruct reality in order to diffuse the potential impact of rebellion.

In an oft-cited work, Robinson (1975) provides one of the earliest examples of primary research into the relationship between social class, Boredom and education. In addition, Robinson's work heralds a new era of research that specifically acknowledges social class as a factor in explaining school Boredom. Robinson begins by lamenting the relative absence of research into Boredom - a prelude that will serve many future authors – and outlines his questionnaire survey of 4,618, 13 to 16-year-old children. Robinson constructed a 'bore score' for each pupil calculated from the number of lessons that pupils labelled as boring. The strongest correlation was between the highest Bore Scores and parents in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations. Robson argues that an interrelated set of circumstances associated with working-class material and cultural deprivation including poorer amenities within school, a lack of positive regard for education at home and low expectations from teachers fostered a fertile ground for Boredom. Furthermore, Robinson argues that

Boredom itself will feed back into these variables and intensify their effects. Robinson concludes by arguing that the cure for Boredom lies in "… showing pupils that what is being taught is valuable..." (1975 p151)

However, there remains a glaring issue within this research. Robinson's analysis was based on the construction of a pupil 'bore score'. It is worth quoting Robinson's own words here. "A Bore Score was calculated as the number of *subjects* labelled boring expressed as a percentage of all subjects studied." (1975 p145 my italics). The bore score represents the pupils' *critique* of and resistance to their subjects. It is school *subjects* that are labelled as boring. However, Robinson then proceeds to analyse the *pupils*. Robinson's subsequent analysis pathologises pupils for being critical of their subjects. An alternative reading of Robinsons' findings is to argue that working-class children are using Boredom as a resource to evaluate their education system. Their *use* of Boredom as critique reveals a significantly higher level of discontentment within working-class education compared to their middle-class counterparts. However, more significantly, when reading Robinson this critique is *invisible*. Indeed, not only is the use of Boredom-as-critique invisible but is used to pathologize working-class pupils by examining *their* potential failings and *their* home and family life.

Both Bernstein's (1975) Robinson's (1975) work are useful additions to this review as they represent the earliest pieces of social science primary research that specifically sets out to examine the relationship between Boredom, and resistance within an educational context. Furthermore, they fired a starting gun on an embryonic paradigm on the nature of Boredom within education. In summary, this paradigm assumes that Boredom could be conceptualised as an individual psychological pathology albeit induced by particular circumstances. This narrative allows children and young people who report Boredom to be observed and examined to see what is 'wrong' with them. My burgeoning argument has been that through this paradigm the use of 'Boredom' as a mechanism for signalling social critique has been rendered invisible and thus de-politicised.

Bowles and Gintis's (1976) seminal Marxist work is placed in this review because, despite not explicitly referring to Boredom, their work is made relevant via their centrepiece concept; 'the correspondence principle'. The correspondence principle denotes the way that education, far from being determined by democratic or

pedagogical ideals, is subservient to the needs of the economy. According to Bowles and Gintis, the function of a capitalist education system is to socialise children into being compliant and exploitable workers which of course requires an affective dimension. This is achieved via a 'hidden curriculum' which mirrors, or corresponds to, hierarchical regimes found in business. Hidden curriculum socialisation occurs on four levels. The first relates to the promotion of exploitable personality traits within pupils such as passivity and conformity whilst penalising less exploitable traits such as creativity and independence. The second relates to the legitimisation of hierarchy and the normalisation of conformity. Thirdly, knowledge is fragmented so that pupils become accustomed to the fragmentation of occupational tasks. Finally, pupils are motivated by external rewards. This is achieved through a performative system where a grade acts as a metaphorical paycheque awarded to the students based on the perceived utility of their finished product. Thus, in keeping with their future roles as workers, pupils are trained to value the extrinsic rather than the intrinsic, and telos rather than praxis. Indeed, pupils are actively encouraged to expect meaninglessness as normative. It is this element of the 'correspondence principle' that renders Bowles and Gintis most relevant to an examination of Boredom. It is possible to argue that pupils' experience of classroom Boredom is not an aberration or misperception. Rather, pupils' inability to perceive intrinsic value is an entirely rational interpretation and, indeed, one built into the system itself. Unsurprisingly, Bowles and Gintis' claims were viewed as controversial. The argument that education was a mere economic instrument to the detriment of more lofty and noble democratic and pedagogical concerns was viewed as little more than Marxist conspiracy thinking (Ripton 1992: Bowles and Gintis 2002). However, as will manifest later, their insight that education is, first and foremost, an economic structure and that external measures, outcomes and goals are the drivers of this system has, under the kind of neoliberal managerialism which currently infests UK secondary schools, shifted from conspiratorial paranoia to mainstream common-sense. However, although undoubtedly influential, Bowles and Gintis' ideas have suffered from accusations of relying on a mechanical, deterministic and over-simplified view of social life. Their failure to recognise agency has been viewed as being a major flaw. Bowles and Gintis failed to recognise the degree to which pupils are not quite as subservient as their writing indicates. Pupils use their own agency to ignore, resist and indeed subvert educational socialisation. However, themes of agency and resistance were central to the work of Paul Willis.

Willis (1977) also researching from within a Marxist, albeit Althusserian, framework examined working-class culture via an ethnographic study centring on twelve disaffected school-aged working-class males; 'the lads'. Willis' research positioned education as an instrument for the reproduction of exploitable labour. However, although Willis' work concurs with Bowles and Gintis in that education contributes to the reproduction of labour, Willis avoids the critique of determinism by emphasising 'the lads' resistances to subordination and the role of agency and creativity. He argues that counter-school cultures and resistances emerge as a result of 'the lads' abilities to see through or 'penetrate' capitalist ideology. Understanding the inherent inequality of the system, the lads' refuse conformity and spend their time resisting, undermining, and contesting the legitimacy of school rules. Ultimately though, their daily misdemeanours are self-destructive and merely act to convert juvenile insurgency into adult subservience.

Willis specifically subtitles one section of his transcript 'Boredom and Excitement' (p33). However, he fails to define or explain his contextual understanding of Boredom. Instead, Willis' implicit premise is that Boredom is simply the antithesis to excitement. Accordingly, Boredom and excitement appear as mutually extinguishing emotional states; Boredom corrodes excitement and vice versa. Significantly though, as revealed in his interview transcripts, classroom Boredom is always 'there', lurking in the background. From its multiple appearances and the significance allotted to it within 'the lads' conversations (for examples see p28:29:33) Boredom was a constant and significant dimension within their education in the sense that Boredom needed to be continuously 'defeated'. Nevertheless, despite this, Boredom remains frustratingly elusive in Willis' work; there is no sense of what Boredom actually is, merely what it is not. There was no critical analysis offered which could help understand the nature of 'Boredom'. Although Boredom regularly appeared as a contextual antecedent in 'the lads' delinquency tales no understanding of the emotion was offered. Although other aspects of their lives were analysed with some sophistication, Boredom appears to be ontologically bracketed off, existing in its own uniquely self-evident domain. Willis' work is significant because it illustrates the manner in which sociological narratives that featured Boredom appear unwilling to problematise the term. Indeed, Willis' sociological approach to Boredom was very *un*sociological. Boredom was largely viewed through the prism of common-sense and Willis' uncritical analysis was

a missed opportunity to bring Boredom under his otherwise formidably critical sociological gaze.

Linton and Pollack's (1978) research into Boredom as experienced by American high school students (aged 14-18) was equally critical of the education system. They argued that Boredom was a product of three factors as evident within their interviews. Firstly, they argued the curriculum, which was tailored for university applications, appeared irrelevant for students without such ambitions. Secondly, the structure of learning and school life, in general, was aimed at managerial efficiency rather than engaging learning. Finally, teachers are trained to mistrust students which leads to suspicious monitoring and the curbing of individual freedom. Within these interviews, school is to be endured rather than enjoyed and the students develop strategies to insulate themselves with minimum effort and engagement. The ultimate outcome is the creation of disinterested and easily manipulated citizens who lack the ability to participate critically with the world around them. Schools are devices for "…grooming slaves…" (p72).

Linton and Pollack's account is useful because it identifies Boredom as a key experience of school life. It links Boredom to minor acts of deviance and presents Boredom as a factor in the disengagement of pupils from learning. Finally, there is a sense that Boredom is part of a wider social malaise concerning conformity and the suppression of critical thinking. However, although Boredom is a central feature, as with Willis (1977) there is no analysis concerning the nature of Boredom itself. The authors rely on the reader's own common sense understanding of Boredom. There is no sense of how this seemingly deadening education system emerged nor in whose interests this system continues to serve. In this sense, although useful, the work remains a descriptive account of disillusioned youth.

Boredom research during the 1970s developed an approach that began to use Boredom in a wider social critique and introduced a link between social class and Boredom. However, the explicit links between emotions, Boredom and social class remained implicit rather than fully developed. Boredom remained a 'black box', an undeveloped concept during this period. The research generally relied on a common-sense conceptualisation of Boredom and, as such, failed to unpack the concept and failed to focus specifically on the role that Boredom plays in educational inequality

Nelson (1985) provided a review of school-based research, conducted in the UK, US and Canada, which examined various acts of delinquency, 'skipping school' and 'dropping out'. He uses this evidence to argue that Boredom is at the heart of educational disengagement. Furthermore, to Nelson, Boredom is an embodied emotional resistance to a dehumanizing and depersonalising education system which is largely concerned with emotional socialisation. The function of school is to fabricate placid conformity and to normalise submission to authority because these are the emotional dispositions demanded by the political economy. Education is, in Nelson's words, "Schooling for Bureaucracy"; (1985:149). Those children who experience and display excessive Boredom, hostility and apathy are the unfortunate, but inevitable, detritus of this system. Bored children are too assertive, aggressive, and stubborn to be exploitable and are effectively weeded out into unemployment or low status/power/income occupations.

Shilling, (1988) examined a *discourse of deficit* present within the UK Schools Vocational Programme (SVP). This discourse was an attempt to fabricate youth unemployment *as-if* it was an outcome of individual deficits. The SVP was a school-based course designed to compensate for students' inadequate *attitudes* and *experience* by inculcating individual dispositions more congruent with the 'needs of employers'. To achieve this the SVP course attempted to colonise key terms such as 'efficiency' and 'teamwork' in keeping with interpretations more suitable to capitalist labour productions. However, the external and classed experiences that school children brought with them into school disrupted this process. The children often refused the interpellation offered and, instead, posited their own class-based meanings. So, 'teamwork' between managers and workers was rejected and mocked as a form of exploitation and production line 'efficiency' was equated with monotony and Boredom. In this way, the children's own classed experiences outside of school equipped them with a counter-cultural interpretation that allowed them to resist the discourse of deficit. Although the children's Boredom was unlikely to save them from a life of subservience, (indeed, as with Willis (1977) Boredom and disengagement acted to compound this) it would provide them with counter-cultural means to distance themselves from, and so survive, the exploitation.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, a critical sociological examination of Boredom firmly positioned the malaise within a discourse of resistance and rebellion.

Within this discourse, schools, as sites for the construction of subservient and exploitable personalities, have been positioned as having a key role in the socialisation, fabrication and management of exploitable emotions. Within the sociological story, Boredom is increasingly depicted as a resource used by pupils to acquire space outside of this process and as an attempt to deny and resist an essentially dehumanising process of labour reproduction.

As a new century dawned, Kanevsky and Keighley (2003) interviewed ten 15-18-year-old students identified as gifted but underachieving and who had dropped out or were suspended from school. Kanevsky and Keighley's interviewees distinguished between 'schooling' and 'learning'. 'Schooling' was synonymous with Boredom, teacher-control, text-book instruction and a largely irrelevant externally imposed content. 'Learning', by contrast, was characterised by, what Kanevsky and Keighley termed, the five 'C's. Learning was student-centred in terms of '*control*' and '*choice*', subjects involved '*challenge*' and '*complexity*' and learning involved a '*caring*' attitude from teachers. The interviewees associated increasing levels of Boredom with a decrease in the five 'C's. A correlation between an absence of agentic control and Boredom is a reoccurring theme in psychological research too (see for example, Pekrun (2006); Daschmann, Goetz, and Stupnisky (2013)). Significantly, the interviewees considered that a 'learning' environment, which promoted 'choice' and 'control' for example, was an essential, even sacred right (p26). Pupils presented inquisitive, energetic and heartfelt attitudes to learning. Furthermore, pupils had a great deal of respect for teachers who displayed caring and passionate attitudes to them and their subjects. However, Boredom emerged from a growing sense of resentment and frustration at the school's continual failure to provide an appropriately positive learning environment. Furthermore, Kanevsky and Keighley's (2003) interviewees greeted 'schooling' situations with a sense of injustice fuelled by a sense of inequality and missed opportunity. Schooling provided the children with a moral dilemma concerning whether it was justifiable to participate in a system that was failing them. The pupils' response was to position disengagement and Boredom as an *honourable response* to the tyranny of an education system that was itself unjust and neglecting their learning needs. Finally, Kanevsky and Keighley observed that as education systems are increasingly characterised by the external imposition of testing and attainment, this is likely to result in an increasing development of 'schooling', rather

than ‘learning’. Schools are increasingly under pressure to comply with demands imposed on to them from external agencies. A widespread quantification of education is likely to lead to a mushrooming of resentment, disengagement and Boredom. These views were also echoed by Dimitrios and Anastasia (2013) whose interviews with successful and gifted pupils show that they too fared little better. Dimitrios and Anastasia’s pupils also synthesised Boredom and frustration under a common antipathy towards what they regarded as an education system that simply wanted to turn them into commodities, products on a conveyor belt to university rather than provide a forum for creativity and personal development.

The link between Boredom and an excessively rigid and oppressive education system was also the focus of Jackson (2006). Jackson argues that the secondary schools in her research suffered from externally imposed neo-liberal testing regimes. Jackson distinguishes between what she terms a learning culture and a performance culture. A learning culture is one that positions the function of education as concerned with the personal development of its pupils. The emphasis is very much on the appreciation and understanding of knowledge as well as the mastery of skills. In a learning culture effort is rewarded rather than the finished product. However, the schools in Jackson’s research displayed signs of, what she terms, a performance culture. In a manner reminiscent of Merton's (1938) anomie, a performance culture is one that disproportionately rewards competitive performance at the expense of learning. Drawing on psychological literature concerning motivation, Jackson (2006), argues that a performance culture can encourage self-worth protection strategies as pupils try to mitigate the damaging potential of a ‘failure’ label. Jackson’s interviews showed that, despite some bravado, grades were significantly constitutive elements within pupils’ constructions of self-worth. Accordingly, pupils reported using self-handicapping strategies to insulate themselves and resist the toxifying label, ‘failure’. Jackson, for example, describes her pupils’ use of a blasé, nonchalant demeanour as a highly effective resistance mechanism. Being bored allowed pupils to deny the validity of failure with a ‘don’t care; didn’t try’ response. However, classroom nonchalance often masked a very real anxiety concerning grades. Pupils reported conducting most of their schoolwork outside the classroom and hidden from the critical gaze of their peers. Accordingly, middle-class pupils, with their greater access to home-based resources, were much better equipped to negotiate the precarious dichotomy between

feverish, but invisible, home activity and bored nonchalance at school. Middle-class students were much more likely to have reliable internet access which was available in their own comfortable and quiet bedrooms. This meant that not only could middle-class pupils complete work missed through nonchalant affectations of classroom Boredom, but they could 'talk' online with friends and continue to maintain disaffected coolness whilst doing so. Working-class children, by comparison, were more likely to find themselves without a functioning computer, inconsistent internet access, or without a private quiet space in which to work. Furthermore, working-class children were also more likely to have part-time employment which ate into their precious homework time. The corollary to this was that working-class children were more likely to underachieve and, accordingly, experience greater need for a disengaged, nonchalant and bored demeanour as a resistance against the damage to self-worth that would ensue. In this way, Jackson argues that contemporary classroom Boredom is an unintended consequence of an overzealous neoliberal testing regime that encourages working-class pupils to hide their efforts and bury any enthusiasm beneath a debilitating affectation of nonchalance and Boredom.

A similar relationship, between high-stakes testing and Boredom, was encountered by Mora (2011) in his ethnographic research examining the experiences of American middle school pupils (between the ages of 11-14). Concordant with Jacksons' (2006) findings, Mora (2011) believed that a 'testing culture' amplified student Boredom by forcing teachers to narrow the curriculum and classroom activities to focus on lecture-driven, exam-based, material and test-taking strategies. Moreover, many of the teachers in Mora's research admitted that they were aware that their lessons were likely to result in Boredom and disengagement but felt that they were powerless to offer anything else in the face of looming examinations.

Taking a more interpretative position, and influenced by Heidegger's ideas on Boredom, Breidenstein's (2007) ethnographic approach further cements the idea of Boredom as a means of critique and resistance. Breidenstein argues that pupils use Boredom to communicate their negative assessment of a situation and secondly, Boredom also signifies their subsequent situational rejection, disengagement and transcendence. Ostentatious displays of classroom Boredom have the power to be quite shocking because they are, in effect, direct challenges to the validity of the teacher and the social order of the lesson because the roles of 'teacher' and 'pupil' are

interdependent. The teacher's role involves the right to command obedience and conformity. Correspondingly a 'pupil' role involves the obligation to 'behave'. However, accompanying this is an obligation on behalf of the teacher to provide interesting or engaging lessons and activities. Displays of Boredom however communicate a 'failed' lesson and, accordingly, a failing teacher which in turn releases children from their own obligations to 'behave'. In this sense, Boredom is a 'taboo' as it represents an attack on the validity of 'the teacher' role and can endanger the social order of school lessons. Furthermore, communicating Boredom through signifiers such as "…the exchange of glances, the raising of one's brow or even a (simulated) yawn…" (p103) allows Boredom to quickly gain a collective intersubjective consensus. In this way Boredom can spread quickly resulting in the destruction of lessons under the weight of Boredom-instigated carnival. To Breidenstein, therefore, pupils use Boredom to communicate their conceptualisation of the situation and their position vis a vis that situation. Displays of Boredom communicate negative judgement and situational transcendence. Boredom, therefore, signifies critique and Boredom-induced behaviour undermines and challenges social order. Ultimately, Boredom poses a threat.

The idea of classroom Boredom as a threat is also central to the work of Lewkowich (2010). Lewkowich argues that the power of schools to elicit conformity and obedience stems from their ability to draw on the rhetoric of enlightenment ideals such as progress, democracy and justice. The premise that education is essentially a positive force within society, allows paternalistic control to be legitimatised as necessary for the pupil's development. However, exhibitions of classroom Boredom acts as a 'pointed finger' towards pedagogical failures to provide pupils with the type of cognitive enrichment required for their development. In this way, Boredom is highly corrosive, and schools exact an oppressive demand for children to be interested, happy and content in their lessons accordingly. Furthermore, the absence of these emotions crushes education's enlightenment claims under the weight of, what Lewkowich terms, 'radical Boredom'. Drawing on the ideas of Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, and Siegfried Kracauer, Lewkowich argues that Boredom can be regarded as radical because it transports the individual into a state which is both critical of the present and holds open opportunities for a transformative, creative and emancipatory future.

Lewkowich argues that Boredom is experienced as a situational pause coupled with a doubting and uncertain attitude towards the future. When Bored, a school pupil transcends the present and is freed from the shackles of normative, linear and situationally legitimised thought. If left alone to explore her/his Boredom, a pupil can enter a realm of 'dazzling and luminous' (p133) imaginative possibilities and, accordingly, becomes a truly revolutionary child. In short, Boredom invites the pupil to engage in a critical dialogue with the present and to originate her/his own future. Unsurprisingly, given its emancipatory potential, it is the *absence* of classroom Boredom which is problematic. Lewkowich's position clearly runs contrary to educational policies where, for example, OFSTED (2011) specifically required 'inspirational' environments and bemoaned the presence of 'dull' teaching. Similar views appeared in Estyn (2007). To Lewkowich, the insurgent potential of Boredom installs fear and, accordingly, instigates an imperative to create pedagogies brimming with distractions, false stimulations and artifices of delight. The resulting spectacle diverts pupils from critical reflection to such an extent that they become estranged and alienated from themselves but the paternalism at the heart of education is protected. Pedagogies that stifle Boredom erode the capacity for pupils to reflect and critically engage with the present, dampen the fire of imagination and curb the potential for self-discovery. Although Lewkowich's work is largely theoretical, empirical evidence in support of the relationship between Boredom and imagination can be found from both quantitative and qualitative sources. Mann and Cadman (2014) carried out a number of experimental research studies that consistently indicated that bored people display enhanced creativity when compared to either elated, relaxed or distressed people. Furthermore, Lomas' (2017) self-induced Boredom and use of introspective phenomenology revealed that Boredom facilitated heightened levels of curiosity and creativity. It seems, in some circumstances, Boredom can be regarded as an opportunity. Even if this is simply the opportunity to resist an oppressive demand to be interested, happy and content.

In this light, Jackson and Carter (2011) argue that a dominant narrative has emerged within Western Capitalism over the last century in which happiness and contentment are demanded from individuals. Specifically, 'engagement' is increasingly perceived as the key to unlock untapped and latent potential and human *beings* are increasingly regarded as human *capital* from which there is always a 'more' that can be extracted.

Indeed, as illustrated earlier, industrial psychology was born out of a desire to manipulate and coerce individuals into an 'engaged' happiness in order to unleash exploitable potential. In a government-sponsored report, for example, MacLeod and Clarke (2009) revealingly defined engagement as…

> "*A set of positive attitudes and behaviours enabling high job performance of a kind which are in tune with the organisation's mission*." (p8)

Here 'engagement' is synonymous with 'positive attitudes' and their corresponding ability to enable 'high job performance'. This report outlines the increase in productivity and profit that can be attained if the individual emotional self can be harvested and manipulated to serve the interest of capital. Furthermore, as Jackson and Carter (2011) point out, being '*in tune with the organisation's mission*' invariably involves subservience and acquiescence on behalf of the individual rather than a democratic dialogue. Although often framed as focused on improving people's sense of well-being, health and happiness, engagement must, first and foremost, increase profit. In this way, the individual's emotional self, his/her soul becomes part of the productive process and open to scrutiny and control. Accordingly, being content in one's exploitation is an oppressive demand faced by the modern subject. Boredom acts as a resistance to this emotional colonisation. Jackson and Carter argue that resistance manifests in many different forms. Most of these may never actually have any impact on the actual functioning of the social world. Small acts of intransigence, subversions of power and bloody-minded refusals, may do little more than provide grim pleasure for the exploited and weak; yet they are still acting as resistance. In this way, when faced with an increasingly colonised soul, and with enthusiasm and happiness demanded as a marketised imperative, the individual has no better resource to resist these incursions than Boredom. Boredom is problematic to 'the organisation's mission' because it is an unexploitable emotion; there is no profit to be gained from bored workers. Boredom is a personal space in which the rhetoric of care, which masks attempts to colonise the soul, can be denied. Boredom is a refusal to accept the imperative that the individual and work are to be subsumed together in a glass-eyed smiling and mindless acceptance of the corporate vision. As indicated in my earlier rendition of Heideggerian philosophy, when bored, the individual is 'held out' from local and contextual meanings. Boredom disconnects the individual from, and denies the validity of, the corporate fantasy. Furthermore, within a space of Boredom, the

individual is freed to reflect, contemplate and, in so doing, imagine an identity where well-being is not curtailed, constrained or dependent on its utility to power. Boredom is an opportunity to resist being reduced to usefulness, to resist being fabricated as a high performing and engaged piece of human capital and instead, even if only temporarily, become a human *being*. For these reasons, Jackson and Carter argue that we should not be so quick to accept the desire to expunge Boredom from the hearts of the exploited and instead open up the possibility that we should, in fact, be in praise of Boredom.

There is evidence to suggest that oppressive demands for happiness as normative also operate within UK schools. Cigman (2012) argues that a strong narrative that runs through UK educational policy is what she terms as the "the enhancement agenda" (p449). This is the deliberate cultivation of so-called positive emotions (Cigman lists these as optimism, resilience, confidence, curiosity, motivation, self-discipline, and self-esteem,) and the inhibition of negative ones. Although at first, this appears entirely laudable, Cigman points out that this agenda is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of positive psychology. In schools, positive psychology is the term for a broad movement of cognitive behavioural interventions that seek to educate pupils to challenge belief systems that are supposedly fuelling maladaptive emotions. In an educational context, positive psychology encourages pupils to be self-doubting when they experience negative thoughts. However, Cigman argues that this position is entirely out of keeping with the original position exposed by William James.

James (1982) is often used as the founding father of the positive psychology movement. He certainly delivered some key quotes to evidence this assertion. For example,

"Much of what we call evil is due entirely to the way men take the phenomenon. It can so often be converted into a bracing and tonic good by a simple change of the sufferer's inner attitude…" (James 1982:101)

However, James' thinking was more sophisticated than this oft-repeated quote implies. James recognised that optimism was an equally cruel master as pessimism. To James unrelenting happiness is equally a sign of mental ill-health. Blind happiness, existing despite acknowledging contextualisation, is an insensibility and a dislocation from reality. In short, James argued that the emotional state of individuals could be

considered healthy if those emotions were concordant with contextual reality. Cigman (2012) argues that in an educational context there is a danger that the enhancement agenda can lead to serious distortions. She posits the example of an abusive bully who, if following along with the ideals of the wellbeing agenda, is encouraged into a self-positive reflection 'I am happy with who I am'. Similarly, Cigman questions the concept of resilience. She notes that in certain situations pupils should not be resilient. In cases of cancer within the family, it would be entirely inappropriate for children to be laughing and smiling at the funeral. This of course calls into question who benefits from the enhancement agenda. Certainly, pupils can benefit on a day-to-day basis, but it is perhaps no accident that this agenda acts to allow schools to police misbehaviour and acts of deviance. However, control is masked behind a rhetoric of care and children are positioned as vulnerable rather than delinquent. This allows a great deal of psychological behavioural adaptations to occur which would seem Orwellian if the control narrative remained unobscured. So instead of children being trusted with their own emotions, the enhancement agenda forces a narrow definition of relentless happiness and 'cruel optimism' (Berlant (2011). Berlant defines cruel optimism as the unfulfilling pursuit of an unattainable goal that individuals incorrectly believe will bring them happiness. In the light of Cigman's (2012) ideas on the potentially harmful effects of the well-being agenda, the ideas of Jackson and Carter (2011) and also Lewkowich (2010) seem even more resonant. In conclusion, the enhancement agenda can be seen as an attempt to enforce relentless happiness onto school pupils. Accordingly, it is useful to examine the emotions that this movement is so keen to stifle. Jackson (2010) replies to this question; fear.

Jackson argues that fear is the key 'social technology' and the essential driving force within secondary education. She argues that fear of academic failure is rife amongst UK secondary pupils and that this fear reaches its frenzied zenith around moments of performance such as exams. Furthermore, her work indicates that fear increases with the pupil's age and that children from lower-income backgrounds express the highest levels of fear concerning examinations and tests. Also, her work indicated that girls were more likely to speak out about their fears compared to boys, but Jackson believes that this reflects ideas about masculinity rather than a real differential. However, Jackson believes that a neo-liberal discourse has fabricated notions that a successful pupil should be both competitive and resilient. This makes it much more difficult for

pupils to speak out and seek help. Ironically, it appears that the enhancement agenda, and its imperative that pupils display resilience through their performative ordeals as noted by Cigman (2012), may have the effect of compounding anxieties by creating the notion of a failed subjectivity if a pupil actually seeks help. Jackson believes that pupils respond to their fears through a range of self-insulating and defensive strategies which result in self-limiting behaviours such as, simply not working, procrastination and of course, Boredom. However, Jackson continues that rather than trying to reduce fear, schools use fear as a social technology to herd pupils into producing the kind of grade profiles that schools require to maintain financially secure levels of performativity within league tables. Accordingly, teachers tread a delicate balance between pastoral support, reassuring pupils, and enforcing a clear message that pupils will have a bleak future if they fail to achieve academically. Thus, Jackson concludes, schools need fear. Schools need pupils to be anxious, worried, and fretful to maintain discipline and, of course, performance. In light of these findings, Boredom appears a highly useful act of self-care. It is a means of dislocating oneself from a toxic environment. A means of sidestepping the proposed subjectivities of anxious performativity or doomed failure. Boredom provides a self-limiting means of temporary escape.

To summarise this section, Boredom is increasingly seen within sociology as a positive force from which individuals can resist attempts to colonise emotions for the benefit of power. Boredom acts to deny the fabricated myths that education is aimed at personal wellbeing and helps expose the dehumanised nature of modern school life.

Boredom and Education: Is it different for girls?

There is contradictory psychological evidence concerning the relationship between gender and Boredom. Firstly, there is evidence that females experience lower levels of Boredom proneness than males (Studak and Workman 2004: Sundberg, et al 1991; Vodanovich and Kass 1990; Watt and Blanchard 1994). Secondly, this relationship is observable in school pupils (Wegner, et al 2014). Thirdly, schoolgirl Boredom tends not to negatively impact on their grade performance (Erena and Coskunb 2016). However, other research has found either *no* significant gender differences (Watt and Vodanovich 1992) or that schoolgirls are *more* likely to experience classroom Boredom than schoolboys (Daschmann, et al 2011; Wegner, et al 2006). Overall, it's

safe to say that, in psychology, the link between Boredom and gender is ambiguous. Unfortunately, this ambiguity is further compounded in sociological research examining the intersection of social class and gender.

Sociological research which specifically examines the experiences of working-class females is relatively thin on the ground (Plummer 2000) and almost non-existent when Boredom is added to the mix. However, the invisibility of females within research is nothing new (McRobbie and Garber 1976; Spender 1982) Furthermore, Spender argued convincingly that sociological theories tend to ignore, marginalise and render females invisible because the ontological framework on which most sociological research is based tends to position male knowledge as the norm. This could indicate that knowledge concerning the nature of 'Boredom' may inadvertently have given sovereignty to 'male' experiences and manifestations. Indeed, even the classic literary depiction of female ennui, Madame Bovary, is essentially a male construction. Although originally translated into English by Eleanor Marx, (Karl Marx's daughter no less), Emma's Bovary's condition originates from masculine malaise. Berlatsky (2009), for example, argues that Madame Bovary is essentially Flaubert's autobiography carefully concealed within the folds of Emma's poignant downfall. Hence, Flaubert's famous assertion, "Madame Bovary? C'estmoi" (p188).

Kuhn's (1976) historical literary analysis of ennui is a useful case in point. Kuhn positions the ennui of great (male) literary works such as Shakespeare's Hamlet and Dante's Inferno as intellectually profound, existentially significant and hence research-worthy. Kuhn compares (male) profound ennui with the dismissively mundane and hence, research-worthless, (female) Boredom of a suburban housewife. In Kuhn's gendered hierarchy, the female version of Boredom is less worthy of study because it is self-evidently (to his male eyes) shallow and superficial. Male ennui signifies an ennobled soul resisting the tyranny of oppressive ideologies, the housewife's Boredom is a fleeting and intransient dissatisfaction emergent from her mindless inability to achieve momentary diversion. Whereas male Boredom signifies agency, potentiality and production, female Boredom signifies impotency, passivity and triviality. Subsequently, Kuhn's interest in female protagonists only appears when their experiences mirror the 'proper', i.e. male, manifestation of subjective malaise.

Walkerdine (1989) argues that over-reliance, on what she calls, 'simple empiricism' (p268), obscures the process through which 'facts' and 'fiction' are not discovered but *produced*. In short, when considering the relationship between gender and Boredom, it is important to illuminate the conditions of production through which the 'truth' of this relationship emerges. The noisy misbehaviour of schoolboys is easily *equated* with Boredom, whilst the quiet indolence of schoolgirls is easily *disassociated* with Boredom. In their examination of female Boredom within English literature, for example, both Spacks (1995) and Pease (2006) provide examples of the invisible uniqueness of female Boredom. Pease argues that, historically, female Boredom was invisible simply because passive demeanour and indolent behaviour associated with Boredom were normalised aspects of nineteenth-century femininity. Whereas masculinity was culturally disposed to be active and engaged, femininity was culturally disposed towards submissive passivity and a socially constituted reluctance to challenge the status quo. In short, men 'do', and women 'wait'. Females, displaying what would constitute Boredom within males, were simply behaving as females 'should'; passive, indolent and submissive.

It is my argument that the construct 'femininity', as a constellation of signs and performances, is antithetical to the essentially *masculine stories of Boredom* examined so far. In other words, because females fail to present a 'proper' (i.e. male) performance of Boredom, fail to present the 'known' signs of Boredom, their experiences are overlooked. Lloyd (2000) illustrated that children's responses to school problems are indeed gendered and girls' deviance is notably different, i.e. invisible when compared to boys. In particular, Lall (2007) argues that working-class schoolgirls tend to internalise their anxieties as depression, eating disorders and self-harming and so, girls' disengagement is often *invisible* to eyes trained to recognise and manage the more ostentatious displays of male deviance. Furthermore, girls' disengagement is not experienced as a priority by teachers because it is less likely to result in disrupted lessons.

From this position, it is essential to recognise that male performances of Boredom are just that, they are male. These should not be extrapolated to the broader population as a universalised norm. Instead, it is necessary to recognise and illuminate the various forms through which Boredom can be a gendered experience and the manner in which this may well affect its subsequent recognition within sociological literature.

McRobbie and Garber (1976), for example, examined what they termed 'teeny-bopper' bedroom culture. Through 'teeny-bopper' bedroom culture teenage girls spent their leisure time around the consumption of pop-cultural commodities and interacting with friends within the home. This culture emerged from a set of pressures exerted onto girls' which were not applied to boys. Girls were perceived to be at far more 'risk' from pregnancy, assault and damage to 'reputation'. Accordingly, girls were subject to far more social control and the motif of safety made bedroom culture appealing to girls. Indeed, girls actively used bedroom Boredom as a kind of sanctuary. McRobbie and Garber's initial research illustrates that understanding girls' experiences means moving away from male-dominated stories and, in terms of Boredom research, opens a window on the gendered nature of Boredom. McRobbie and Garber's research shows that, for example, although subject to far greater controls and restrictions, girls showed almost no explicit signs of class-based resistance, certainly in terms of deviance, when compared to boys. Female Boredom was relatively unobtrusive in that it would merely illicit a change of allegiance to another pop star or magazine. There were certainly no examples of conflictual resistance as observed by Paul Willis (1976). This of course problematises Willis' titular claim to have unlocked an understanding of 'working-class *kids*'.

Later McRobbie (1991) extended these initial observations in research conducted over six months specifically with working-class teenage girls at a Birmingham youth club attached to a comprehensive school. McRobbie employed an ethnographic mix of observations, interviews and dairies. Although McRobbie documented evidence of Boredom, this took a distinctly non-confrontational and passive form. The organisers of the youth club often despaired at the girls' unwillingness to participate in any formal activities; the girls' normal response to organised 'fun' was an eye-rolling and tutting obduracy. The girls *gently* resisted adult organisation and control by using Boredom and 'doing nothing'. Similarly, the girls gently weaponised Boredom when faced with a teacher who had treated one of their friends unfairly; the weight of their passivity and Boredom easily crushed any problematic adult intrusions into their social life. Furthermore, the absence of confrontation made it incredibly difficult for teachers to apply sanctions and, although many school lessons were effectively destroyed, no girl was subject to punishment. In Willis (1977), Boredom was the *cause* of action, however for McRobbie's (1991) girls' *Boredom was the action.*

Furthermore, McRobbie's girls often declared Boredom as a transient phenomenon. Boredom tended to be narrated as an immanent quality of consumer products. Certain pop artists and records were evaluated using 'Boredom' and this label elicited reasons for switching consumption. Furthermore, the girls used 'Boredom' as a reason to feminise their school uniforms. However, again, this was a gentle challenge and limited to critiquing the grey dullness of asexual uniformity rather than direct rebellion against the status quo. Aesthetics were extremely important in understanding working-class girls' relationship to Boredom. The girls would circumvent dress codes by purchasing clothes of sufficient conformity to avoid conflict whilst allowing a signification of femininity; school bags became handbags and skirts were short (not *too* short) and cut along fashionable lines. McRobbie's girls declared far less Boredom when they were able to express their gender ideals through feminine aesthetics. Indeed, the girls became positively lively whilst in pursuit of 'feminine' activities, especially the consumption of feminine commodities and dancing. McRobbie's girls used Boredom to push away unwanted adult interference and control. Boredom allowed the girls to achieve gendered 'space' but in a manner that was difficult to police.

Bates (1990:1991:1994) studied a group of 'care girls' who, through a process of educational under-achievement, and subsequent ejection from formal education, found themselves learning how to care for the elderly on a youth training scheme (YTS). The crucial factor which determined success involved the 'care girls' ability to manage their emotional performances. The girls had to hide displays of revulsion, anger and Boredom by developing and displaying non-confrontational passivity and emotional resilience. In particular, Bates believes that working-class girls were adept at displaying two appropriate 'care emotions', resilience and passivity.

Working-class girls were particularly suited for care roles because they arrived already "…hardened by their previous experience, but crucially *constrained by gender* from developing a pattern of violent response" (Bates 1994:28 original italics). Working-class girls enter education with an emotional palette already formed via their childhood experiences of gender and class inequalities. Of particular importance is working-class girls' ability to display, what Bates refers to as, 'resilient passivity'. As an integral element of working-class female emotionality, resilient passivity allowed the girls to absorb a great deal of Boredom whilst simultaneously preventing them from reacting

in a confrontational manner; thus, making them highly exploitable care workers. In Bates' work, the girls' vocational success depended on their ability to render negative emotions, such as Boredom, invisible. Furthermore, Plummer (2000) argues that working-class femininity, as modelled by working-class mothers, is constituted via personal sacrifice, the normalisation of putting others' needs before one's own and *hiding one's emotional disquietude* whilst doing so. In the absence of the kind of resources available to more affluent middle-class mothers, childcare, home help or care for elderly relatives, working-class mothers bear the weight of these responsibilities in isolation or through the recruitment of daughters. The performance of a 'good mother' entails not only the achievement of these tasks but doing so with little complaint or demonstrative rebellion. Working-class girls, therefore, grow up in an environment where the *suppression of overtly negative emotions is normalised*. Indeed, working-class girls may learn that protest often results in violence and aggression from male family members leading to the development of what Bourke (1994:80) refers to as "…risk averse protests, non-confrontation, small acts of resistance". These works illustrate that emotional invisibility is a constitutive element of working-class femininity and may well help to explain why a reliance on the 'simple empiricism' (Walkerdine, 1989:268) found in much Boredom research has consistently failed to observe classroom Boredom in working-class schoolgirls.

Francis (2000;1999a) also illustrates the mechanisms through which female Boredom is rendered invisible. Francis conducted her primary research in three inner-city (London) secondary schools which were populated by working-class children from a variety of ethnic minority backgrounds. Francis used a combination of audio recorded classroom observations and open-ended audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. Francis' primary research revealed that classrooms are highly gendered places. Two oppositional narratives; 'silly boys' and 'sensible girls' flourished. These narratives depicted boys and girls as occupying different positions regarding Boredom. Whilst these were not determinative the narratives invited boys and girls to accept gendered subject positions. Firstly, 'silly boys' were constructed as less 'mature' than girls and accordingly were narrated as more easily bored and distracted. Secondly, the 'silly boys' narrative equated being academic, working quietly and conscientiously as unequivocally antithetical to masculinity. Accordingly, 'silly boys' were expected to 'play up' more than girls. Significantly, because 'playing up' and 'being funny' were

strongly equated with masculinity, being known as a ‘class clown’ was highly attractive to ‘silly boys’. Furthermore, teachers admitted allowing ‘class-clowns’ some freedom to deliver their performances because these provided welcome interludes to dull lessons. Unfortunately, the dialogue between ‘silly boys’ and their expected Boredom often acted to the detriment of boys’ educational success. In contrast to this was the development of the ‘sensible-girls’ narrative.

The ‘sensible girl’ narrative equated femininity with diligence, maturity and academic success. Accordingly, demonstrative Boredom in the form of ‘playing up’ and ‘being funny’ were antithetical to femininity. The ‘sensible girls’ narrative gave girls access to higher academic and behavioural expectations from both pupils and teachers. However, girls *did* show signs of resistance to school activities and girls *did* engage in work-avoidance activities. However, these were often more ‘invisible’ acts such as talking quietly, drifting off into unnoticed headphones and gossiping whilst displaying ‘expressions of Boredom’ (2000:61). Significantly, these signs were not *equated* with Boredom by teachers because the girls were positioned firmly within the ‘sensible-girl’ narrative. Thus, girls’ disengagement and Boredom-induced work-avoidance activities were rendered invisible through the prism of a gendered narrative. Accordingly, ‘sensible-girls’ enjoyed access to invisible Boredom and unchallenged work-avoidance activities whilst maintaining their status as a ‘sensible girl’.

In short, Francis’s work illustrates that a gendered story that equates Boredom as antithetical to femininity can have implications for school experience and success. Specifically, the ‘sensible girl’ story dissociates girls from Boredom and renders the malaise invisible leaving girls freer to pursue academic goals. Finally, Francis’ work usefully illustrates that a ‘bored’ response to lessons cannot be separated from the narrative framework through which it is constituted.

Bored and disaffected males have been commonly labelled ‘lads’ from the earliest days of educational research (Willis 1977). Although the label is more often associated with working-class boys it has also been applied to middle-class boys too (Francis 1999b). Moreover, the ‘lad’ concept is often synonymous with the more sociological term hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1989; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to “the culturally exalted form of masculinity” (Carrigan et al. 1985 p. 592) and the term is used to refer to a hierarchical structure of

practices that are culturally invested with differing degrees of gendered masculine status. Accordingly, the constitutive elements of masculinity are not fixed but are contextual. Whitehead (2003) for example outlines the impact of social class on masculinity. Whitehead argues that middle-class masculinity is far less focused on the collective, as evidenced by Willis (1977) and far more focused on individual and personal achievement. Thus, argues Whitehead, middle-class masculinity provides boys with dispositions in keeping with educational values. However, very few males will display the stereotypical hegemonic masculine practices in all aspects of their lives. Hegemonic masculinity is usefully understood as a form of power. Gendered inequality is sustained through the widespread active pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. Hence it is possible to argue that hegemonic masculinity achieves the consent of a majority of males even though most males will never fully acquire its status. Furthermore, Ingram (2018) argues that it is useful to conceptualise hegemonic masculinity within contextual boundaries. Practices that are exalted within particular working-class cultures and allow access to high community status, for example, may also lead males into conflict, subordination and powerlessness and be disparaged within a broader social structure. However, as Connell (1989) explains, even in situations where access to higher incomes, status and power is restricted, hegemonic masculinity offers 'failures' alternative forms of power and pride in the forms of masculine practices such as "sporting prowess, physical aggression, sexual conquest". (Connell 1989, p. 295). To Connell hegemonic masculinity operates in order to allow exploitation and dominance of others. It is a means of controlling situations and people, often in situations where the male is himself a victim of oppression. In this way, hegemonic masculine practices may be reactions to subordination. Mac an Ghaill's (1994) observed masculinity in educational contexts. He argues that aspects of macho but self-limiting masculine practices operating in the classroom manifest as a reaction to "differentiated forms of authority" (Mac an Ghaill 1994, p. 57). Furthermore that "domination, alienation and infantilism … mediated through their [the macho lads] location in the lowest sets" (ibid., p. 57)

Walkerdine et al (2001) provide an examination of the relationship between classed and gendered emotions and their use in the management of the potential toxicity of educational failure. Walkerdine et al argue that a distinguishing feature of working-class emotional experiences of school is the role of 'happiness'. Working-class parents

often prioritised their daughter's happiness at school even at the expense of the child's performance. Often teachers would be exasperated by working-class parents' apparent lack of concern for their daughter's poor grades if these correlated with happiness. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, would expect and tolerate a higher degree of purposeful anxiety because this was perceived as an intrinsic element in achieving higher grades. Furthermore, in an approach entirely in keeping with the neo-liberal rhetoric of self-development, middle-class parents equated happiness with performative success. This rhetoric, stemming from notions of human capital, perceived unhappy anxiety as an acceptable cost, a down payment and an investment to be reaped via the inevitable affluence that success brings. Walkerdine et al argue that the differing patterns of assimilation into neo-liberal rhetoric can be explained in terms of the historical experience of inequality that many working-class families experienced.

However, Walkerdine et al were keen to point out that working-class parents *were* concerned about their daughters' performance. However, given their own classed biographies, working-class parents and children were pessimistic about the chances *and* desirability of success. To many working-class families, educational achievement was unknown and so they had good reason to be sceptical. The neo-liberal idea positioning purposeful anxiety as an investment for inevitable success was simply antithetical to working-class knowledge. Also, many working-class parents feared that academically successful daughters would leave home and enter an unknown world of university campus life which working-class parents felt unable to support either financially or emotionally. These fears were not unjustified. Plummer (2000) documents the psychological damage experienced by working-class high-achieving girls who, on entering academia, find themselves detached from the security of working-class family life and thrown, emotionally ill-equipped, into a world where they are not 'supposed' to be. Finally, Walkerdine et al (2001) noted that happy daughters were less likely to get into trouble thus reducing conflict with teachers, which itself was highly desirable. In short, within many working-class families, happiness was simply the most realistic achievement that could be hoped for.

Furthermore, given their own low expectations of success, often amplified by unjustifiably negative comments from teachers, displaying 'happiness' allowed working-class schoolgirls to occupy a subjective position that offered some means of

constructing a positive identity. A disengaged ‘laid-back’ attitude to school provided the schoolgirls with access to higher levels of social status amongst both peers and teachers. Working-class girls would often be praised by teachers for their pleasant demeanour, the absence of anxiety and their popularity. The resulting academic failure that often accompanied this laid-back attitude was often dismissed by the girls and their families as inconsequential in comparison to a much more significant achievement; happiness. By inhabiting a ‘happy’ subjectivity working-class schoolgirls achieved a difficult balancing act which allowed them to provide reassurance to parents, access to popularity and friendship, whilst insulating themselves from the expected and inevitable academic failures that awaited them.

Walkerdine et al provide a useful insight into the way that emotions, in particular as these relate to disengagement, are used agentically within educational settings to help manage the toxicity of potential failure. This expectation of failure has its roots in historically significant levels of classed oppression. The emotionality of the girls within this work illustrates that emotions are tools, drawn from a classed and gendered palette, that some children use to survive their educational experience. For working-class girls, displays of happiness are central in establishing status and ‘success’. These displays also clearly involve the suppression of negative emotions such as Boredom. Furthermore, Walkerdine et al illustrate that neo-liberal conceptualisations of success are accessed via both gendered and classed frameworks. Middle-class parents and girls are more willing to accept the invitation offered by the entrepreneurial self, given biographical evidence of its validity, whereas working-class children are more reluctant to accept this invitation as their experiences are antithetical to its premise. Finally, this work illustrates the potential damage to working-class identities resulting from the neo-liberal obsession with performance-testing and the reduction of ‘success’ to a mere number. Reay (2017) provides a particularly stark example of this damage in an interview with a working-class primary school girl who, despite being ‘an accomplished writer, a gifted dancer and artist and good at problem solving’ (p83) described herself as a ‘nothing’ because of a low score in a recent test. The girl assimilated the score into her own identity and effectively became an academic non-person despite having substantial evidence of being highly able, However, as her particular skill set fell outside the tested curriculum, she constructed herself as a failure. Similarity Walkerdine et al’s (2001) schoolgirls evidenced considerable

abilities but, as these fell outside of the narrowly defined neoliberal conceptualisation of success, their talents went unrecognised.

Walkerdine et al reveal a complex and ambivalent emotional relationship between working-class girls and education that is also documented elsewhere (Plummer 2000; Reay 2001; Reay 2017). Collectively these works illuminate that the emotional costs paid by many working-class girls for educational success and challenge the normative premise that academic success, and indeed its corresponding social mobility, is unremittingly positive. For middle-class children, however, academic achievement acts as a form of cultural and social reproduction. Middle-class girls moving to university and professional lives are often simply emulating their parents' well-trodden biographies and are, in this sense, fulfilling their classed destiny. For working-class girls, on the other hand, success can often open a Pandora's box of anxiety, guilt and loneliness. Often, disengagement is simply the most effective means of self-care.

The sociological examination of Boredom has tended to give sovereignty to male experiences of Boredom. Female Boredom, in particular female working-class Boredom, has been largely rendered invisible. Within schools, gendered expectations of behaviour often lead teachers to overlook female displays of Boredom and disengagement. This invisibility is also, in part, an element of working-class culture in which gendered notions of emotionality invite girls to hide negative emotions such as Boredom whilst over-emphasising positive emotions such as happiness. These processes occur within the context of an education system which, with its increasingly neoliberal and narrow definitions of success, is acting to the detriment of working-class girls.

Chapter 3: Neoliberalism and Boredom

What is Neo-liberalism?

Neoliberalism is an all-pervasive but contested leviathan within academic texts concerning education. Moreover, it is often poorly defined, ill-explained and used without recourse to situational contexts (Venugopal 2015). Eriksen et al (2015) for example, argues that the misuse of the term dangerously reduces complex localities to a simple singularity and 'does violence' (p911) to the historical and structural idiosyncrasies of distinctive places and peoples. Furthermore, a proliferation of competing paradigms has left the concept open to accusations of meaninglessness; the very ubiquity of the term rendering it analytically hollow (Garret 2018). However, although elusive and slippery the term should not be abandoned completely because analytical use of the term has been employed effectively in, for example, the examination of education (Ball 2003a:2016b). Furthermore, Erikson et al (2015) argues that neoliberalism remains a useful analytical tool because the global economic mechanics of late capitalism actively incubate and give birth to socio-historically unique forms of personhood. In particular, neoliberalism posits and actively encourages a new subjectivity; an entrepreneurial self. A self that is under permanent development, constituted as disembodied from the social, autonomous and goal orientated. In the light of this debate, and with an emphasis on neoliberalism as it manifests within the emotions, hearts and souls of its subjects; neoliberalism as it occurs *'in-here'* (Peck 2003), it is salient to revisit Foucault's (2008) lecture series, originally titled, 'The Birth of Biopolitics'. In these lectures, Foucault articulated a genealogy of neoliberalism which not only illustrates its historicity and nature but allows an appreciation of the way the entrepreneurial subject has been constituted.

Foucault presents the development of neoliberalism emerging from the post-Nazi Federal Republic of West Germany (FRG) and the post-New Deal of the United States. Both share a defining feature of neoliberalism which is a repulsion to Keynesianism and, accordingly, a rejection of, "…state-controlled economy, planning, and state interventionism" (p79). In post-war Germany, *ordoliberalism* (named after the prominent journal, ORDO), evolved as a powerful opposition to Keynesian economics and state power. Ordoliberal economists from the so-called 'Austrian School', such as Ludwig Von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, believed that a powerful sovereign state

always has the potential to drift into totalitarianism, as evident by the Nazis' murderous and catastrophic regime. Thus, fear of the state, and its potential for evil, cast a dark shadow over all aspects of the German post-war society. Indeed, so effective was the anti-state discourse that ordoliberalism managed to equate, "…concentration camps and social security records, in the same sweep." (p111). Subsequently, a driving principle of ordoliberalism was to create a political economy permanently liberated from even the possibility of state control or interference. The outcome was to be a social system deliberately subservient to the market. Within ordoliberalism, the market was a truly democratic force and the only purpose of social policy should be to secure its sovereignty. Totalitarianism is rendered inert and the state considered democratic when social policy is evidentially meeting market demands. However, this was not an attempt to 'roll back the state' completely, the ordoliberal state is not less active than any other, but rather ordoliberalism attempts to refocus the state's activities on promoting an economy based on competition. In terms of unemployment, for example, the role of the state, rather than alleviating poverty through benefits, is to establish an effective mechanism for a market-based exchange of labour, thus facilitating the individual's ability to become "…an enterprise for himself." (p206). Ordoliberalism established a precedent whereby the state was viewed with suspicion as a matter of course and responsibility for wellbeing was shifted onto the individual. The atomisation of responsibility was thus established as a keystone of neoliberalism.

Meanwhile, over the Atlantic, an even more radical form of neoliberalism was brewing in the United States. Whilst the US strain shared the ordoliberal repulsion to state intervention, in particular a revulsion towards the Roosevelt's New Deal approach, it reached much further into the hearts and souls of its subjects and, according to Foucault, contained significant 'affective dimensions' (p219). American neoliberalism differed from its German cousin because whereas ordoliberalism limited itself to submitting the state to a competitive economy, in the United States, neoliberalist economics *permeated throughout society at every level*, structurally, culturally and throughout the individual's "whole way of being and thinking" (p219). Accordingly, all aspects of public life were open to economic scrutiny in the pursuit of rationalised efficiency. Market economics became omnipotent. Public life became a game of supply and demand and social policy interventions became scrutinised via

quantifiable and reliable measurement in terms of costs and benefits to allow judgments to be made concerning service efficiency.

The totality of US neoliberalism was solidified under the fabricated 'truth' of 'human capital'. A significant achievement of this 'regime of truth' was that 'human capital' managed to escape the limitations imposed on theoretical knowledge. Instead, human capital emerged as a natural *truth*, a *discovery* about the way humans have *always* been. The resulting narrative posited humans as simply another form of natural capital. Furthermore, the truth of human capital is built on two main premises. Firstly, *people have always been rational agents within competitive markets*. Using this motif, all aspects of the individuals' biographies can be understood in economic terms with both the value and cost of human behaviour quantifiable and reducible to a cost-benefit analysis accordingly. This radical re-conceptualisation brings about a change in the way that education, crime and marriage are constituted. Crime, for example, is entirely rational if the rewards exceed the cost. The second, and far more significant, premise of human capital theory is that *individuals can change the value of their own human capital*. Human capital is constituted by two elements; 'heredity' and 'acquired'. The first element, 'heredity' refers to the characteristics with which one is born and as such is resistant to change. Although Foucault did wryly note the 'science fiction' possibility of genetic engineering to increase one's capital. The second element is 'acquired' and is far more interesting to neoliberals. This relates to the way *individuals form themselves* into marketable 'abilities machines'. This formation, of course, relates to education but also encompasses personal aspects of life such as hobbies, marriage, family life, belief systems, sexualities, health regimes and so on. In this way, lifestyle becomes an 'investment', education becomes an 'investment' and marriage becomes an 'investment'. Social action is instrumentally focused on its potential for increasing the 'worth' of the individual's human capital. Indeed, the theory of human capital locates individuals as projects in continual development; ceaselessly striving for increased marketability within a competitive economy. Thus, the entirety of an individual's life is swept up in the development of an entrepreneurial personality characterised by a zest for enterprise, a quest for self-actualisation and a commitment to resilience in the face of calamity. Hence, the economic bleeds into interiority.

Frustratingly, as Garret (2018) makes clear, Foucault's own position regarding neo-liberalism has been notoriously difficult to establish. Foucault's writing style allows

him to act as a ventriloquist, mouthing theories and ideas, but without providing an explicit judgemental nuance. However, aspects of Foucault's writing may indicate that he kindled certain affinities. Behrent (2016), for example, identifies similarities between Foucault's distaste for humanism and neo-liberalism's assumptions regarding human nature. Both Foucault and neoliberalism are sceptical about the existence of fundamental human qualities or attributes. Within neo-liberalism, for example, individual personhood emerges dynamically in a relationship with market choices. Furthermore, Foucault's own scepticism regarding an authentic human interiority was, after all, the basis of his famous televised debate with Chomsky (withDefiance 2013). Furthermore, Foucault and neo-liberal approaches share a mutual 'suspicion of the state' (Behrent 2016:29). One of the key features of Foucault's anti-statist position was his optimism regarding the ability that a retracted state, or at least one that limited itself to market concerns, would foster diversity and lead to an increased tolerance for minority groups. This seems to particularly apply to the US variant of neoliberalism which Foucault seemed to perceive as less disciplinary as other organising technologies and 'a precisely defined alternative to the other kinds of power and regulation' (Dean 2014:436)

A significant omission in Foucault's examination of neoliberalism is the invisibility of poverty and economic inequality. According to Zamora (2016), Foucault simply dismisses poverty as an issue from a by-gone age. Although Foucault must have been aware of the inequalities amplified by neo-liberal practices, the increases in material disparity between rich and poor for example, he effectively ignores the issue. Instead, Foucault's concern is with the enmeshed issue of power. The welfare state and benefit system are rendered problematic because these technologies result in 'excessive power' (Zamora, 2016:68). Furthermore, rather than highlight the inequality that results from the poverty-inducing level of benefits found in many European countries, Foucault focuses his gaze on benefit systems as a technology of objectification. Welfare is problematised because it is a 'tool that standardizes conduct and individuals' (Zamora 2016:69). Furthermore, as Garret (2019) illustrates, Foucault's examination of neoliberalism and its relationship to subjectivity suffers from a significant flaw. Outside of a brief reference to a general strike within the FRG, Foucault presents no indication of the degree to which the omnipotent hegemony of neoliberalism is contested or resisted either collectively or individually. There is no

sense of a micro-physics power inter-play where subjectification is negotiated at personal and local levels. No sense, for example, concerning how neoliberalism manifests differently according to gender, income or geography. Reading Foucault's lectures, he paints a picture in which individuals simply morph into a universal hegemonic entrepreneurial subjectivity with little agentic control.

Nevertheless, Foucault's (1997) ideas concerning neo-liberalism remain useful and in particular his conceptualisation and development of the concept 'governmentality'. Governmentality refers to a distinctive form of political power. It is the delineation of governing values, concepts and knowledge into the hearts and minds of subjects to such an extent that this knowledge becomes indistinguishable from the subjects' own dispositions. It is a 'mentality' formed through government. The two-fold nature of this phrase (govern-mentality) perfectly captures Foucault's idea on the interrelationship between power and knowledge in the sense that it is meaningless to analyse forms of knowledge (mentality) without recourse to the technologies through which this knowledge is constituted (govern) and vice versa. Governmentality, therefore, refers to a political rationality through which the self is constituted as a knowable form. Whereas previous forms of power such as 'sovereign' and 'disciplinary' relied on external impositions of control, governmentality needs little coercion, it is rule from a distance, as subjects effectively govern themselves. Subjects are free to choose, but their wishes, conform to the values of the governing mentality. Control manifests via the fabrication of legitimised (and of course, delegitimised) knowledge or 'truths' and the positioning of individuals into subjectivities in accordance with this knowledge. In the case of schools, knowledge production and subjectification emerge from three technologies, marketisation, managerialism and performativity (Ball 2003a, see below). In effect, the individual is in a permanent state of 'becoming' a subject as she/he interiorises the continuous flow of values and desires framed within a governmental discursive environment. Within regimes of governmentality, the need for overt or explicit forms of control is rendered unnecessary as Foucault stresses that individuals always remain active agents, albeit in the continual recreation of the regime of their oppression. In particular, argued Foucault, neoliberalism invites individuals into adopting a new form of subjectivity which he called the *homo œconomicus*, '…the man of enterprise and production' (p147). This is a reconfiguration of an individual in an 'entrepreneur of oneself';

human *being* turned into human *capital*. The essential core of this subjectivity is that, as an entrepreneur, an individual will find fulfilment as a continual project of self-enhancement with the ultimate aim of turning her/himself into a more marketable commodity. There are two further dimensions to the marketisation of the self into *homo œconomicus.*

Firstly, *homo œconomicus* requires that evidence for self-improvement should be rendered observable through performance. Performances, such as school examinations, are technologies of judgement where the individual is measured, graded and assessed for the degree to which he/she complies with the regime's definition of ideal. Furthermore, whilst the criteria for success are external to the individual these criteria are legitimised through the acquiescence of participation. Significantly, the individual is invited to construct an idea of him/herself through the judgements offered. The individual's identity, value and worth, therefore, are not simply authenticated through observation, but become *constructed* within it. In Ball's (2012:87) words "…there is no self that is ontologically prior to power". In this sense, governmentality is productive, positive and creative. Subjectivities are forged within its restraints. The individual becomes the performance and sees him/herself in terms of the enacted fantasy; a perfect synthesis of self and spectacle.

Secondly, the *homo œconomicus* subjectivity interpellates individuals into perceiving the fabrication of oneself into marketable capital as an ethic of *personal responsibility.* This means that individuals feel that they 'ought' to be improving or developing themselves as to do so is, in itself, a morally ethical act i.e. it is what a 'good' person does. Importantly, *homo œconomicus* is a structurally-blind position. So social barriers and inequities that obstruct the achievement of success for those from disprivileged backgrounds are simply ignored. In schools, neoliberalist technologies (marketisation; managerialism; performativity) intersect into a form of governmentality which encourages pupils to continually fabricate *themselves* as successful, via the performativity of measurable and observable examinations and grades, whilst at the same time encouraging the individuals to regard *themselves* as the morally responsible and accountable architects of those performances.

In examining Foucault's work a couple of points are salient. Firstly, as Dean (2015) indicates, Foucault was interested in constructing an 'ontology of the present' (p390).

Dean uses this concept to remind us of the, albeit obvious but nevertheless important, point that Foucault's 'present' is not ours and the global omnipotence and political reach of 21st-century neoliberalism had yet to develop during Foucault's lifetime. A peculiarity of our 'present', for example, is the multiplicity of complex, and sometimes contradictory, ways that the concept neoliberal is used coupled with a rhetorical bundling together of all things abhorrent, globalisation, state authority and neo-colonialism. Foucault could not have predicted the variants that have proliferated in recent years and these should not be read into Foucault's work. In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish between the neoliberalism of Foucault's present and the neoliberalism of ours and, Dean argues, it is important not to denounce Foucault for associations with a phenomenon yet to emerge during his lifetime. In particular, Dean argues that relocating to Foucault's present allows us to reconstruct a version of neoliberalism which has yet to emerge as a right-wing attack on the welfare state. Instead, Foucault's interest stems from a broad sympathy with legacies of '68 and the French second left's concern with a society characterised by self-management in the form of a post-individualistic and collective autonomy. This is a form of neoliberalism that positions itself in defiance of the disciplinary elements of large social institutions. Dean argues that Foucault's activities in the radical French left indicate his seduction into neoliberalism emerged from an aversion to the mainstream "social statism" of the French Socialist and Communist parties. His interest in neoliberalism being perhaps more of an experimental appreciation of the potentialities offered by subverting the state to the democracy of the market.

Rose et al (2006) provide a useful commentary to conclude this examination of governmentality. They argue that the concept's residing legacy its insistence in that we should recognise the prosaic nature of control and that power circulates within the everyday fields of the home, the workplace and the classroom. We should focus on the practices of the mundane 'grey sciences' (p26), the banal professions, and the seemingly innocuously business of governing the unremarkable. It is within the ordinary and the routine that governable persons are constructed. It is within the invisibility of the everyday that power and subjectivity dynamically emerge.

Foucault's work presents a useful starting point from which to examine the possibility that neoliberalism has constituted a socio-historically unique form of governmentality

and corresponding *homo œconomicus* subjectivity in a British Educational context. It is to this I turn next.

British Education and the Bored Neo-liberal pupil.

The neoliberal dimensions within British educational social policy can be traced back to the economic and institutional reforms established by various Conservative governments within the 1980s. These reforms instigated a series of changes that emphasised marketisation, competition and minimal state interference (at least rhetorically) coupled with an obsession with the observation and public demonstration of both 'standards' and 'excellence' (Wilkins 2012). During this period, the control and role of local authorities was continually eroded as schools were encouraged to forge partnerships with businesses. Neo-liberal practices were further solidified through the ensuing years of New Labour governments as 'modernisation' entailed a lurch away from state ownership and a re-narration of the role of private enterprise in the funding of previously state-controlled sectors. The Conservative-Liberal coalition (2010-2015) advanced the neo-liberal discourse further still through expanding opportunities for the development of self-governing schools via the establishment of the Free Schools programme.

Increasingly, schools have been expected to perform in ways that are sensitive to a market regime in which they have been placed. Schools are encouraged to perceive parents and pupils as consumers and 'compete' for their custom accordingly (Ball 2016b). Headteachers are encouraged to manage as autonomous and devolved private executives and to develop partnerships with business, voluntary groups and other sponsors. The backbone of these changes is league tables and the publication of performance data (Ball 2017). These quantified standards are the currency on which the education reforms trade. Today, schools find themselves in an unforgiving marketplace, hawking their wares via the data from pupils' performances (Jones 2003). Pupils' performances are reduced to simple quantifiable 'facts' and positioned as providing a reliable transparency concerning the 'excellence' of the school and the 'value' of the education it provides. The organisational impact of these changes has increasingly fallen on a new breed of managers whose increasingly venerated practice is "...based upon institutional self-interest, pragmatics and performative worth" (Ball 2003:108). In this way, schools are indeed self-governing but clearly in line with

neoliberal dictates. Furthermore, Ball argues that the effects of neoliberalism within classroom practices manifest in the formation of three distinctive technologies; *Marketisation; Managerialism;* and *Performativity*. Furthermore, these components have profound implications for the subjectivities of those who encounter them (Ball 2000; 2003a; 2012; 2016a; 2016b).

Firstly, according to Ball (2016a) *Marketisation* refers to the introduction of the ethos, language and culture of economics and business into education. Thus, notions of 'competition' and 'choice' are extolled from the view that these will improve children's education by driving both 'excellence' and 'efficiency'. From this position, schools have been encouraged to compete for pupils with other 'service providers' by making the value of their products transparent and attractive. Competition demands that the relational and structural complexities of 'learning' are smothered by an easy-to-consume quantitative spectacle such as exam league tables and national comparators. Similarly, pupils and their parents have been encouraged to view themselves as consumers who should 'shop around' for the best 'deal' from schools as revealed through exam performance indicators. As consumers of education, parents and children can expect a visually striking performance (i.e. the exam grade) of the product that they are purchasing. Thus, Ball (2017) argues a shift has occurred in the conceptualisation of education from a service to a commodity. This is a 'reculturation' of schools as 'economic' sites operating within an educational market. Thus the 'business' of schools has become rivalry with their competitor providers – schools, colleges and universities – to recruit consumers, pupils, in order to maximise their 'income', exam results.

Secondly, in terms of *Managerialism,* according to OECD (1995:75), the central qualities of management in a neoliberalist environment (more often known as 'leadership' within schools) are the development and maintenance of 'monitoring systems' and the 'production of information'. Furthermore, the development of these technologies has the effect of creating "…*changes in behaviour*…" (ibid). By ensuring that targets are externally verifiable, practice becomes enhanced by being more focused on delivering those aspects of service deemed as 'excellent'. However, Ball (2000) positions the effects of 'monitoring systems' and the 'production of information' more critically. Ball, for example, believes that managerialism has led to a kind of *schizophrenic classroom* and a 'splitting' between plasticity and authenticity.

According to Ball, neoliberal classrooms have become schizophrenic environments where authenticity, teachers' professionalism and pupils' developmental requirements, are split away from, and indeed sacrificed to, plasticity, a visually striking, but ultimately meaningless performance. Thus, Ball argues, the imperative to produce a spectacle that will satisfy managerialist targets has become *the* dominant driving force behind teaching and learning.

"*Not infrequently, the requirements of such systems bring into being unhelpful, or indeed damaging, practices which nonetheless, satisfy performance requirements*." (Ball 2003a:230)

Significantly, rather than merely recording existing practice, monitoring and information production actively distorts the nature of learning into the pursuit of measurable targets. For pupils, targets take the form of exam grades, assignment results and attendance percentages. For teachers, these targets take the form of national comparators, annual reviews and course-appraisals. Numbers become signifiers of a movement (or not) towards an external, i.e. a market-obsessed management's, notion of 'excellence'. However, excellence is, in Ball's terms, a 'fabrication' (Ball 2000). Ball's continual use of the term 'fabrication' is reminiscent of Butler's notion of an 'enacted fantasy' (Butler 1999:173) in that 'excellence' is constituted by actions that are performed *in order to be seen and judged*. However, as Butler notes, visibility and spectacle serve as a veil behind which the undesirable and inconvenient can be smothered. Ball argues that strategies of impression management have emerged in UK schools which erect a facade of plastic excellence behind which failures of authentic learning can be hidden. Thus, teaching and learning have been reduced to performances, valueless beyond the ability to create spectacle.

Finally, *Performativity* is a regime of 'terror' (Lyotard 1984). Performativity relates to both the imperative to fabricate a spectacle and all the various forms of regulatory technologies that subject individuals and organisations to acts of knowing, such as inspection, appraisal, judgement, comparison, examination and dissection associated with that spectacle. Performances are much more than simply moments of measurement; they are exhibitions of *value*. The performer and performance entwine, they are considered one, and the resulting spectacle becomes a signification of the soul. The spectacle serves as a platform through which subjects emerge as

momentarily knowable to both themselves and others via the vocabularies and stories of continuous judgment and appraisal. Furthermore, performativity has an ethical dimension. In the classroom, targets come to dominate notions concerning the 'worth' and the 'value' of learning and they have the potential to interpellate individuals into particular reflective ideas of self too. When delivering a 'poor' performance or 'missing' a target, for example, an individual is invited into the terror of knowing her/himself as a 'failing' pupil or teacher. Additionally, performativity obliterates the past as a source of potentially protective and shielding self-knowledge. Historically successful performances are moments of obsolete knowledge; brief candles and easily extinguished. Yesterday's success serves only as a benchmark to measure today's failure. To be a 'good' teacher or pupil means delivering a *constant* stream of quantifiably excellent spectacles; again, and again, and again. Accordingly, the individual's ability to resist the invitation and construct a counter-story based on biographical reflection is significantly corrupted. In this way, the individual's self-worth is continually assailed and reduced to the value of his/her present performance. Failing to meet a current target pathologises both the individual's learning journey and the individual him/herself. Historical and personal authenticity is sacrificed to fleeting and technicist plasticity. Furthermore, Ball (2012:20) argues that the real terror at the heart of the relationship between continual moments of measurement and anxious self-knowledge is the resulting emergence of 'ontological insecurity'. Ontological insecurity occurs when self-knowledge becomes synonymous with self-doubt. The sense with which I am deploying the term here differs somewhat from the more common use of the term. Stemming from Laing (2010) and moving through Giddens (1991) ontological insecurity tends to be associated with the prosaic existential anxiety which is part and parcel to being human. However, Ball (2012) argues that neoliberal pedagogies and management practices invite a new form of ontological insecurity. According to Ball (2003a), an inability to formulate a legitimised historical or qualitative sense of worth within classroom settings can plague an individuals' trust in their own ability to know themselves and this leads to ontological insecurity. Of course, it is possible to resist the identities offered through performativity but, as Ball (2003a) illustrates, this can leave individuals in a state of emotional turmoil, torn between a desire to care for oneself and an ethical duty to care for others.

"I was a primary school teacher for 22 years but left because I was not prepared to sacrifice the children for the glory of politicians and their business plans for Education"

(Christopher Draper in Ball 2003a:216)

Čeplak's (2012), research further substantiates the position that ontological insecurity and 'failure' within a neoliberal educational environment carries an emotional dimension. 'Failure' evokes a spectrum of negative self- knowledge that performance is '*not good'* (p1103), to having '*lost all motivation'* (ibid) to the sense that '*I'm a bad person, irresponsible, incapable and so on*' (p1104). Čeplak illustrates that a 'failing' grade can often be internalised, embodied and assimilated into oneself. Thus, a failing grade is a failing *feeling*. Furthermore, Čeplak argues that a feeling of personal failure can lead pupils into a choice between positioning themselves in one of two camps. The pupils can either remain faithful to *homo œconomicus* and narrate their 'failure' as indicative of personal incompetency, incapability and low potential or, using resources from their discursive environment, they can re-subjectify themselves. In choosing the latter, pupils can adopt an alternative position of resistance which, in inverting school norms, allows them to reconstruct their 'failure' as indicative of a new subjectivity based on rebelliousness, nonconformity and a 'cool' persona. These themes of 'fear', 'failure' and 'resistance' were also explored in Jackson's (2006) examination of 'lad' and 'laddette' culture.

In an examination of the devastating impact of neoliberal reforms on pupil subjectivities, Jackson (2006) conducted research within eight secondary school sites in north-west England focusing on the 13-14 age group. 779 questionnaire responses were analysed along with 200 hundred pupil interviews and 30 teacher interviews. The sites were chosen to display a range of school characteristics. Included in her sample, for example, were schools with a largely middle-class and white catchment area, others included a school with a catchment area consisting of mainly working-class families with a high level of ethnic diversity and one 'all boys' and one 'all-girls' school. The GCSE results for the schools were around the national average. Her general focus was on the relationship between gender, behaviour and educational achievement. Specifically, she was interested in understanding the so-called 'lad' and 'ladette' as lived identities and their relationship with Neo-liberal educational reforms.

To Jackson, Neo-liberalism is the dominant political discourse impacting on contemporary educational policy and practice. It is constituted by two elements; '*competitive individualism*' and the '*marketization of education'*. Firstly, 'competitive individualism' which, based on a premise of social meritocracy, is blind to the barriers posed by structural inequalities and reduces academic success or failure to the personal qualities, abilities and dispositions of the individual pupil. Secondly, the 'marketization of education' denotes the systemic competition between schools to attract customers where 'successful' schools attract more students and higher funding. Accordingly, 'success' has been quantified into easily communicable forms via the publication of academic standards. Standards are perceived as synonymous with measurable statistics such as league tables produced from examination results. Jackson believes that neo-liberalism has led to the development of what she refers to as the 'pupil success narrative'. This is a particular way schools, teachers and children constitute 'worth' and 'value' through the prism of graded success. Unfortunately, argues Jackson, rather than promote success, this system is driven by a desire to avoid failure.

Jackson goes on to distinguish between two types of educational climate. The first she terms a 'learning climate'. This is an educational system that rewards the effort and practice involved in developing skills and knowledge rather than the end product in itself. Jackson cites research (Covington 2000; Midgley et al 2001; Kaplan et al 2002; Freeman 2004; Wolters 2004 all cited in Jackson 2006) which indicates that 'learning climates' are highly motivational and effective technologies for improving confidence, skill development and increased enjoyment of educational tasks. In contrast to this is the 'performance climate'. This is defined by Jackson as an educational environment which pays little or no regard to the process of learning and is almost entirely focused on measuring the end result; the grade. Performance climates tend to result in increased competitiveness between students who begin to perceive each other, and are themselves perceived by teachers, predominantly in terms of their grade label. Increased competitiveness leads pupils' from 'performance-approach' to 'performance-avoidance'. 'Performance-approach' is a highly motivated response leading to pupils striving to be the 'top of the class' and is the manifest intention of competitiveness. However, a 'performance-avoidance' response occurs when pupils, wishing to avoid failure, self-handicap by refusing to engage with education thus

avoiding the possibility of failure; I can't lose a race I never ran. Jackson believes that Neo-liberal education, as described above, has led to an overwhelmingly 'performance' climate. Within this climate, *performance-avoidance* has become an endemic and routinized defence strategy against the demoralising accusation of personal failure. Performance avoidance has become crystallised in the development of both the 'lad' and 'ladette' gender identity.

To Jackson, laddishness is a bricolage masculinity inhabitable by boys who demonstrate anti-intellectualism, a celebration of traditional male interests such as football and the acquisition of social status through humour. Jackson believes laddishness is the hegemonic form of masculinity operating within schools; hegemonic in the sense that laddishness is high status, dominant and a highly attractive male gender position. However, she does sound notes of caution and recognises that this initial conceptualisation should be regarded as an ideal type and as such laddishness is neither fully achievable nor maintainable. Boys will often aspire to this position but drift in and out of on a daily basis.

The 'ladette' gender identity refers to a particular type of femininity, inhabitable by girls who demonstrate anti-intellectualism, heterosexual assertiveness, an ostentatious concern with personal beauty and fashion products and, to some extent, inter-personal aggression. Jackson observes that 'ladettes', although popular within school, are often regarded with far more suspicion and resentment by teachers than 'lads'. She believes that this is because 'ladettes' may be viewed as transgressing traditional gender narratives whilst 'lads' typically are not.

A final and central aspect of both the 'ladette' and 'lad' positions is the *demonstration of indifference to schoolwork* i.e. Boredom. To be successful as a 'ladette' or 'lad' *being seen* as nonchalant, blasé or bored is vital. Indeed, enthusiasm for anything academic was regarded as the antithesis of 'cool'. Hence this quote from one interviewee: "Don't revise, and be a bit bad, that's more popular" (Jackson 2006:1). To achieve popular status within schools, pupils of *both* sexes reported that a *display* of blasé and indifferent attitudes towards their studies was important. The pupils described a resulting narrative where it was 'uncool to work' (at least, uncool *to be seen* to work). In this sense, Jackson argues that although there are differences between

boys and girls within schools, there is a great deal of similarity within gender narratives; boys and girls may start at different places but inhabit a similar endpoint.

However, to make the situation more complex, although both boys and girls wished to protect themselves from accusations of failure by fabricating a classroom display of indifference to work, hidden away from the gaze of their peers, pupils revealed their secret yearning for academic 'success' and 'good' grades. The pupils wanted to be 'good' neoliberal subjects. Accordingly, many pupils who affected Boredom within class admitted, that in the confessional privacy of the interview, to working diligently and even enthusiastically at home. Jackson documents the techniques that many children have developed which allow them to display disaffection and Boredom within schools whilst secretly working at home. Children often hide the voluminous notes they have written over the weekend, go out with friends and then stay up late into the night to covertly complete assignments and continually switch between assignment writing and social media to maintain a façade of non-working indifference. For middle-class children with readily available resources, online computing, private bedrooms and supportive parents this tightrope is manageable. However, for working-class children from lower incomes with less access to resources working in secret is far more challenging.

To summarise, using Jackson's research, classroom Boredom can be seen as a response to performance pressure perceived as a result of neo-liberalist educational management. Neo-liberal educational policies have created a competitive and performance-driven climate characterised by a fear of failure. To insulate themselves from this fear, both boys and girls respond via techniques of performance-avoidance. This manifests as lad and ladette behaviour; displays of blasé attitudes, indifference and bored demeanours whilst at school. These behaviours also allow children to achieve status within their peer groups. Finally, although displaying indifference, many children secretly work hard at home. Those with access to educational resources at home manage this balancing act but those on lower incomes are less successful.

Jacksons' work is useful in a number of ways. Firstly, it provides an antidote to sociological research which, in airbrushing over the similarities within the experiences of boys and girls, ignores the intersectionality of social class and gender. The final sections of her research note how social class and low-income amplify the problematic

nature of secret scholarship for all working-class pupils. Finally, her work illustrates, through the use of discourse, that pupils' emotional performances should not be taken at face value. Emotions can have rhetorical functions; Boredom acts as a means of attaining insulation from neoliberal failure and acquiring social status.

Ethnicity and Secondary Education in the UK

Although ethnicity has not featured as a significant factor in this research. It is still worth ending this chapter with a brief identification of a few salient features which continue to blight the UK educational landscape. Using the 2016/17 GCSE grades data, Alexander and Shankley (2020) provide a neat summary regarding the relationship between ethnicity and education in the contemporary UK.

There is a continuing attainment disparity between ethnic groups. Pupils identified as Chinese and Indian tend to achieve higher A* to C in maths and English. However, pupils identified as Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Gypsy and Irish Travellers tend to achieve lower grades in maths and English. In terms of exclusion, pupils identified as Black, Gypsy or traveller have significantly higher rates of exclusion compared to all other ethnic groups.

The Prevent policies manifestly intended to target radicalisation have received increasingly well researched and evidenced criticisms. These include the highly racialised and community damaging nature of surveillance inflicted on Muslim and South Asian pupils.

Progression after secondary school is also related to ethnicity with pupils identified as White British tending towards apprenticeships, whilst BAME groups tending towards further and higher education. Although BAME groups are much less likely to attend the prestigious Russell Group universities. At universities BAME students are less likely than their White British counterparts to receive a 'good' (2:1 or first class) degree.

These figures illustrate despite these disparities being well documented for over 35 years (see, for example, Department of Education and Science (1985) and Parekh et al (2000)), the issue of ethnicity and inequality is still as pertinent as ever.

In terms of Boredom, Barnet and Klitzing (2006) illustrate a relationship between a propensity for Boredom and ethnicity in young people. Noting both the paucity and

contradictory nature of research in these areas, they proceed to use questionnaires to establish the correlation between demographic factors and self-declared Boredom. In terms of ethnicity, Barnet and Klitzing believe that Boredom was most strongly correlated with African American, Asian American, and Hispanic American students. Barnet and Klitzing ‘s research also showed a correlation between higher levels of emotional instability within these groups.

Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to crystallise and review relevant ideas concerning Boredom. In particular, as these relate to schools, social class and gender. The first chapter attempted to locate Boredom theoretically and attempted to illustrate the usefulness of a sociological approach. In particular, sociological ideas and were used to argue that Boredom is a product of a discourse peculiar to modernity concerning dismay at the impact of industrialisation and the interiorisation of experience. In the second chapter, empirical primary research concerning Boredom within education was reviewed, beginning with the earliest examples from industrial psychology and then moving onto a chronology of sociological research within schools. Although sociological research has tended to marginalise the study of Boredom, there is evidence that the sociological examination of Boredom has followed a path related to changes with the discipline as well as responses to socio-political changes. Boredom overall has been positioned within a narrative of rebellion and resistance. Increasing demand on the emotionality of subjects has led sociologists to see Boredom as a site of resistance and an attempt to acquire ‘space’ from the colonisation of the soul and oppressive demands for happiness. In this light, sociological research has been critical of education systems which, influenced by neoliberalism, have become increasingly instrumental, deferring to the requirements of performance via assessment and testing rather than providing intrinsically meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, the challenge that feminism has made to ‘malestream’ sociology and the invisibility of female knowledge and experience has allowed me to re-read texts to draw out their significance to the study of female Boredom. I have attempted to construct and argument that female Boredom, in particular as this applies to working-class girls, has been rendered largely invisible, not through its absence, but because its manifestation defies malestream assumptions. The final chapter outlines the relationship between neoliberalism and Boredom. This

relationship implies that the competitive, performative and managed nature of UK education is increasingly estranging children from their studies. The meaning and purpose of education have been ‘re-cultured’ so that the main point or purpose of activity is the production of spectacle in the form of a grade. Children want to succeed, they want to achieve the neoliberal dream but, unable to do so are faced with the toxicity of personal responsibility. In this context, Boredom can be seen as a mechanism for self-care and insulation from the potential toxic label of ‘failure’. Neoliberalism has effectively hollowed out learning to the point that feelings of meaningless on behalf of pupils are entirely valid and indeed, are an intrinsic element of an increasingly vacuous education system.

Part Two: Methodology.

Introduction

The main objective of my primary research was to explore how secondary school children used the concept of Boredom to make sense of, and construct, their daily lived experiences in school. I was interested in exploring the pragmatic rather than semantic, and the emic rather than etic, use of Boredom in an everyday local school setting.

My main research method was a focus group with secondary school children. I have termed my particular form of interview, a *researcher-absent focus group*. This is a focus group where I, as the researcher, was neither physically present nor explicitly directing the discussion. Instead, my pupil participants were given minimum instruction and invited to manage their own discussions via the use of a prompting device; open questions written on a chalkboard. Overall, fourteen researcher-absent focus group interviews were carried out in two waves, with a total of 50 secondary school pupils between the ages of 14-18 taking part. Focus group interviews occurred during January 2018 and during January 2019 and were conducted over three separate secondary school sites. The focus group interviews were digitally recorded by the pupil participants themselves. I produced full transcripts based on the entire recordings. In addition, three secondary school teachers kept diaries reflecting on their daily teaching experiences during the autumn term, 2018. Transcripts and diaries were analysed using Grounded Theory. So, in total there were 53 participants; 50 pupils and 3 teachers.

This methodology chapter is split into three sub-chapters. Chapter 3:1 presents my method, chapter3:2 presents my reading journey which informed my method and chapter 3:3 outlines ethical considerations.

Chapter 1: Method.

In June 2017 I conducted a total of eight pilot focus group interviews at a consenting research site. This site was my own place of work. There is a potential conflict of interest emergent when researching one's own workplace. My analysis and conclusions may be open to accusations of gerrymandering, for example. Accordingly, this site does not appear in the final findings. Instead, the site was used merely as a means to test out various methodological ideas. Finally, some interview material was transcribed to test out various means of recording and transcription and recording but this data was deleted and does not appear in my research.

I conducted each pilot interview slightly differently to get a sense of the most effective approach. Pilot interviews varied, for example, in terms of the number of participants, (from 3-8), how I recorded the sessions (including positioning the digital recorders), where the interviews took place (a single group isolated in a room or multiple groups in the same room) and how much structure I enforced on to the participants' conversations. My pilot interview structure, for example, varied along a spectrum from laissez-faire to controlled.

- verbal instructions and no structured activity,
- verbal instructions and structured activity,
- written instructions and structured activity,
- written instructions and questions with structured activity.

The most effective method was a small group (3-4) with verbal instructions and structured activity, for several reasons. Firstly, the participants adhered quite rigidly to written instructions, even reprimanding each other if the discussion was considered outside of these written parameters. Secondly, written instructions were used as 'evidence' to police transgression and acted to stultify talk. Thirdly, however, without a structured activity of some sort, participants would quickly drift away from discussing Boredom in schools. Fourthly, with groups larger than three it was nearly impossible to identify individual speakers on the digital recordings because multiple participants would speak at the same time and the unfamiliarity of their voices rendered them undiscernible to my ear. Finally, I experimented with placing a digital recorder in different locations and encouraging the students to give their first name at

the start of the discussion to help me identify 'who said what' during transcription. I also found that giving the recorder to one participant and assigning her/him the task of recording the interview, resulted in that person placing the recorder nearby and subsequently her/his voice was recorded slightly louder than the others and so was more easily identifiable when transcribing. This meant that I only had to discern two other voices; a much simpler task.

Sample: Finding the schools.

Initially, I desired to conduct the research solely in North East Wales. This is my local area and has experienced little in the way of sociological interest. Accordingly, I sent out letters, emails and made telephone calls to all ten secondary schools in my county taken from a list of all secondary schools published by Flintshire County Council (2019). I had set a target of three schools to research in. This would allow for the research to continue even if one or more dropped out. Based on Bryman (2016) I considered a 30 percent response rate to be a reasonable expectation. However, I was soon disappointed. One school was due to be closed during the research period and declined immediately. A further seven schools either refused or remained uncommunicative to letters, emails or telephone calls. The headteachers of two schools provided initial consent and meetings were arranged to discuss the nature of the research. During a meeting with the headteacher of one of these initially consenting schools, a request was made by the headteacher that I supply the names of all teachers and subjects that the pupil participants identified as boring. I replied that this was not possible as anonymity was a key element of the ethics process. Following this meeting, the school did not respond to any further contact. However, I was more successful with the last remaining school and thankfully consent *was* provided by the senior management team. Unfortunately, I had only received consent from 10 percent of my initial sample frame and relying on one school made the research extremely vulnerable to drop-out. Following this disappointment, I resorted to using teaching contacts within two secondary schools in the North West of England. Having been a teacher for around 20 years I have several friends who teach in secondary schools and thus the research ultimately relied on personal contacts. I contacted these teaching friends and emailed them the details of the research, including, consent forms and the participation information sheets. Additionally, I responded to any subsequent questions via email. Two teachers felt that they could help and arranged conversations with representatives

of their senior management team and advocated on my behalf. The insider status of these teacher advocates meant that my request for access to the schools enjoyed a more trustworthy status. Having an advocate on-site with insider status allowed my research to be personally vouched for and initial suspicions that the research may, in some way, harm the school or take up too much precious lesson time, for example, could be immediately assuaged. Ultimately, it was the trusted insider status enjoyed by my teacher advocates that allowed my research to be constructed as non-threatening. It was this personally facilitated route that secured consent from two further schools by December 2017.

Finally, I had a total of three secondary school research sites. By pure luck, these sites had also received three different Estyn/Ofsted gradings during their last inspection. Thus, an initial disappointment proved to be serendipitous because the contrasting inspection gradings invited the opportunity to make *comparisons between the schools* in a way that I had not anticipated before the research. The focus group interviews took place during January 2018. The pseudonyms for these schools are; Canal School; Commuter School; Castle School.

Canal School. (Ofsted: Outstanding)

'Canal' school was described by OFSTED as a larger than average-sized secondary school. It is located within the suburbs of a city in the North West of England. In its most recent inspection, the school was classed as 'outstanding' with 'outstanding' levels of teaching. The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is well below average. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade 'C' or above, including English and mathematics, has been consistently well above the national average.

Commuter School. (Ofsted: Good)

'Commuter' school was described by OFSTED an average-sized secondary school. It is located within the commuter belt of a city in the Northwest of England. In its most recent inspection, the school was classed as 'good' with a 'good' level of teaching. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and therefore supported by the pupil premium is in line with the national average. The standards achieved by Year 11 pupils were also broadly in line with national averages.

Castle School (Estyn: Adequate)

‘Castle’ school was described by ESTYN as a mixed comprehensive school. It is located in a large village in North Wales. In its most recent inspection, the school was classed as ‘adequate’ with ‘adequate’ teaching. The average of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the Welsh average. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grade ‘C’ or above has been below the Welsh average in two of the last four years.

I discussed potential reasons for the low response rate with my teacher advocates from the three consenting schools. Their reflections on their experiences in convincing their senior management team to participate are salient here. All my teacher advocates described encountering an initial reluctance by their senior management teams in allowing Boredom research to take place in their schools. My teacher contacts reported that they felt compelled to provide personal assurances of my professionalism, in particular, guaranteeing anonymity to their senior management teams. Furthermore, my teacher contacts reported that they had to assuage very real fears regarding reputational damage that Boredom research could bring. It seems that Boredom possesses a significant taboo within secondary schools and senior management teams feared that their school image may become contaminated by association with the term. One headteacher, for example, feared the potential of Boredom research to ‘open up a can of worms’ for the school. Consent is, of course, a serious issue within sociological research. However, there may be occasions when the consent imperative is exploitable by authority to veil inconvenient knowledge.

Participants

There were 53 Participants split over two waves of research. (50 pupils and 3 teachers)

First wave (32 pupils; 0 teachers)
During, what I have termed, the first wave, focus group interviews were carried out at all three sites (Canal: Commuter: Castle).

- 32 Pupils: Canal (4) Commuter (9) Castle (19)
- ages 14-18;
- 16 Working Class; 16 Middle class
- 31 White British; 1 White Romanian.

- 17 males; 15 females.

The differing numbers of participants from each site were not an aspect of design but simply reflected the numbers who volunteered and provided consent. Ultimately, Castle school was more accommodating.

Second Wave (18 pupils; 3 teachers)

This second wave of the research was an iterative response to the findings of the first wave and focused solely on Castle School accordingly. Additionally, in this second wave, three teachers completed diaries documenting their reflections on the autumn term 2018 in addition to 18 pupils who participated in focus group interviews.

- 3 teachers: Castle School:
    - Adults/middle class/White British.
- 18 pupils: Castle School:
    - Ages 14-18.
    - 10 working class; 8 middle class.
    - 17 white British; 1 Polish
    - 8 males; 10 females.

Researcher-Absent Focus Group: Final Method.

At all three sites, the administration procedure was largely similar. I met a contact teacher at reception before the school day had begun; usually, around 8:30 am. She escorted me to an allocated classroom where the consenting pupils were assembled at the beginning of form time. The schools all allocated form time for the interviews. Form time is a, roughly, twenty-minute window at the start of every day where registration and pastoral notifications take place. This was a school condition because it ensured that my research had no negative impact on subject lessons. However, it did mean that the interview time was strictly limited.

After consenting pupil participants were assembled and sitting in our allocated classroom, I delivered a brief introduction whilst my accompanying teacher would sit, usually at a desktop tending to emails, and thus played no more active role. I thanked the pupils for participating, delivered my brief research overview to contextualise the interviews and gave an ethical brief reminding them, for example, that they could

withdraw at any point. I then asked the pupils to write down their first name (only) and their parents' occupation on a slip of paper. The pupils then organised themselves in groups of three which they based on friendship. Although in most cases there were three pupils in each focus group, a couple of groups contained four students simply to accommodate friends. I led each pupil group to a separate room (always on the same corridor) provided by the school. Once seated, I collected the slips of paper with the participants' first names and parental occupations. I then gave the pupils a pre-written chalk board and a digital recorder. The chalk board contained the phrase 'Boredom in School' written in the middle with the questions, 'who', 'what', 'why', 'when', 'where' and 'how' radiating around like spider diagram. I explained that I wanted them to discuss 'Boredom in School' as their topic and to help them, they could use the questions in any order, if they wanted to. However, I explained that they did not have to refer to the questions and that they did not have to answer all the questions. I deliberately did not explain what the questions 'meant' to facilitate non-direction. I then asked who would like to work the recorder and gave the device to that student. I explained how to turn the device on and off and where the 'record' and 'stop' buttons were. I asked the students to quickly record themselves saying hello and giving their first name only. I explained that this was to simply allow me to understand 'who said what' during the analysis stage and that to maintain anonymity this part of the interview would not be transcribed. I asked whether everyone was happy to continue and take part. Finally, I asked the participants to begin when they were ready and simply switch the recorder off and leave the room when they had finished. I concluded by saying that I would wait outside. When I left the room, I quickly wrote down the interview title (Interview 'A', 'B', 'C' etc) in a notepad with the pupil's name/parental occupation to aid voice identification later on and placed this in a secure wallet file.

I knew the interview was complete when the pupils left the room. I quickly collected the recorder and chalkboard and I walked with the pupils back to the original room where the teacher was still waiting. I performed my ethical debrief when we were all together again and offered the pupils their last chance to withdraw. I also left my Liverpool University contact details via a business card in case there were any further questions. There were none. Indeed, many pupils simply discarded the card on the way out. Finally, after I had thanked the pupils, I was escorted to reception and exited the school. The next day I emailed my teacher-advocate thanking her, and the school, for

their cooperation. I also offered to return to the schools and present my findings to them as a way of reciprocating their assistance. This offer was uniformly declined.

Before the interviews, I asked each pupil to make a note of their first name and their parents'/carers' occupation on a slip of paper. The participants introduced themselves using their written name on the recording. This allowed me to connect the 'voice' of the participants with the parent's occupation whilst maintaining confidentiality: I did not transcribe this personal data. Using parents' occupations, I allocated the label 'working class' or 'middle class' to each of the voices on the recording. Social class was allocated using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) (see table 1). Allocating a social class based on the individual's occupation can be time-consuming and highly subjective, based on little more than the researcher's intuitions concerning the nature of the occupation. However, thankfully, there are computer-automated coding systems that are freely available via the internet. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) provides a free online tool for translating occupations into social classifications (ONS 2010). The ONS tool is relatively simple to use. The researcher merely enters the job title into a box and the tool delivers social classification for that occupation in line with the scheme presented in table 1 (see below).

Allocating Social Class

Defining Social Class: Discussion

In allocating social class to my participants, I used the National Statistics Social Economic Classification system (NS-SEC). The NS-SEC is an occupation-based social classification scheme constructed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and is the official socio-economic classification system in the United Kingdom (UK). It is this system that is used to allocate socio-economic status during the UK census, for example. The NS-SEC consists of a list of eight socio-economic groupings (Table 1)

The NS-SEC is based on the work of Erikson and Goldthorpe, (1992). This system allowed me to place my pupil participants into a particular social class based on their parents' occupation. Underpinning this scheme is the principle that occupations share a similar 'market situation' (e.g. levels of income, job security and promotion

opportunities) and ‘work situation’ (e.g. authority and autonomy). The most important premise of this scheme is that parental occupation, and their corresponding labour market relations, are highly significant factors in understanding the school pupils’ access to a variety of life chances and opportunities to access particular lifestyles including the pupils’ propensity to classroom Boredom and the nature of the Boredom described. In this sense, occupational detail itself is merely a signification of potential emotional repertoires. Within Erikson and Goldthorpe’s work, occupation is believed to correlate to fundamental variations in life chances, social relations and inequalities. If valid, Erikson and Goldthorpe’s premise could mean that I might be able to link pupils from differing social classes to differing constructions and operationalisations of classroom Boredom. Although a full analysis of the debates surrounding the efficacy of social class within sociological research is beyond the limitations of this methodology it is worth briefly noting two major objections to the use of occupational based classification schemes, such as the NS-SEC, as these relate to my sociological research.

The first of these questions is whether the concept ‘social class’ itself is of any use. The main thrust of this criticism is that any rendition of contemporary lived experiences, such as classroom Boredom, needs to be contextualised within the complex landscape of an entirely new globalised socio-political economy. Furthermore, this new landscape is far too fluid and transitory to be dominated by the rigidity and fundamentalist edifice of social class. This criticism implies that the social worlds of my pupil participants are unlikely to be dominated by class but rather, affected by multifaceted diversity and rendered even more complex through cultural hybridity and intersectionality. Intersectionality, the intertwining of factors such as sexuality, ethnicity, religion, environmentalism and identity-politics, amongst many others, acts to complicate a once relatively uncluttered sociological landscape. In this sense, selecting social class as a prism from which to explore classroom Boredom could appear to be arbitrary, even antiquated. Pakulski and Waters’ (1996) account of the ‘death of class’, for example, illustrates this position. Firstly, Pakulski and Waters argue that ‘class’ and industrialisation are co-significant. Accordingly, the decline of industrialisation within the western world has meant that the power of social class as a prism through which issues, such as Boredom, could be operationalised has effectively ‘peaked’ and has been in rapid decline ever since. Secondly, although

social inequalities, for example, the unequal access to emotional repertoires such as Boredom, are likely to be evident within modern society, it would be mistaken to align these with predominantly with social class. Instead, emotional inequality may be more effectively demonstrated, therefore, as co-existent with a multiplicity of fragmented "statuses" drawn from such elements as religion, culture and politics. Thus, from 'the death of class' position, my pupil participants are unlikely to have an emotional repertoire impoverished by the boundaries of a singular social class and instead may individually fall foul of inequality via an overlapping web of fluid and constantly changing positions and identities. However, as Connelly et al (2016) point out the concept of class is often poorly operationalised within the 'death of class' critique. It is often difficult to discern exactly what is being described as 'dead'. Accordingly, social class is poorly operationalised and is often caricatured, and limited, to a highly abstracted and theoretical Marxist tradition. This means that pragmatic technologies that have been developed and deployed in contemporary analysis, such as that involved in my use of the NS-SEC scheme, are often overlooked (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992; Platt 2011). My approach to using the NS-NEC scheme is to explore whether a potential relationship between occupation, social class and Boredom exists on an immediate and deliberately non-theoretical scale. The manner with which I am deploying the concept is not intended to imply determinism. Rather it may reinforce, or indeed challenge, a link between inequality and class in a manner that has a long history within sociological research.

A second critique of occupational based classification schemes can also be derived from those who feel that whilst social class is still a viable concept, its operationalisation must be expanded beyond the mere occupational. This is specifically relevant to my use of the purely occupational NS-SEC. Savage et al (2013) recently developed a classification scheme based on Bourdieusian theory (Bourdieu, 1984). Overly simply, this theory advocates understanding social class at the intersection of three overlapping capitals; economic capital (income and wealth), cultural capital (levels of engagement and taste concerning cultural objects and practices) and social capital (e.g. social interaction and networks). Through an engagement with these wider social dimensions of social class, examining 'taste' for example, Bourdieusian theory aims to unlock complex processes of social reproduction and inequality. However, despite the intricacies and complexities of

developing this new system, Payne (2013) illustrates that the 'new' classes proposed by Savage et al. (2013) mimic the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) categories almost exactly. Significantly, allocation to social classes is not significantly different using either method. In this sense, there is nothing revolutionary about Savage's 'new' approach. Furthermore, using Savage et al's method and Bourdieusian sensibilities would be more cumbersome and time-consuming for my participants (they would need to complete an online questionnaire as well as participate in a focus group interview during the allocated twenty-minute form time) but the result would essentially be the same. In this sense, forcing my participants through additional requirements required to complete Savage et al's analysis appeared unnecessary and potentially damaging to the richness and quality of the final data.

To conclude, marshalling essentially heterogeneous individuals into homogenous social class groupings is always problematic and needs some reflection. Furthermore, there are strong critiques from 'end of class' and Bourdieusian theorists regarding the use of occupational social class schemes. However, my use of an occupational social class system has a long and successful heritage within sociology and as Connelly et al (2016) conclude in their systematic analysis of the use and application of occupational classification schemes in sociological research, "…there is no strong empirical evidence that dissuades us of the extremely high value of using existing occupation-based measures" (p3).

Table 1: NS-SEC Analytic classes
1 Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations
1.2 Higher professional occupations
2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
3 Intermediate occupations
4 Small employers and own account workers
5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6 Semi-routine occupations
7 Routine occupations
8 Never worked and long-term unemployed
(ONS 2010 cited in Connelly et al 2016)

I gave the label 'Middle Class' to those pupils whom the ONS tool allocated a socio-economic classification ranging from 1-4 and the label 'Working Class' was given to those pupils whom the ONS tool allocated a socio-economic classification ranging from 5-8. Each pupil was thus given either a 'working' or 'middle' class status.

Finally, if a pupil's parent/s were declared by the pupil to be receiving benefits (free school meals (fsm)) then that child was automatically allocated working-class status. I have transcribed parental occupation detail as it was provided by the pupils in table 2 below. However, not every child provided clear occupational information for both parents. Importantly, I chose to not actively pursue and clarify these omissions because, in my ethical brief beforehand, I had assured the pupils that choosing to not answer or choosing to part-answer a question was unproblematic. To actively pursue the information seemed contrary to this assurance and might have undermined a pupil's perceived freedom to withhold information during the interview. Accordingly, some of the parental details are incomplete. I have recorded the parents' occupation in good faith, using the language provided by the pupil as far as possible and social class was allocated based on the information consensually provided. The list of participants, parents' occupation and their classification can be found in table 2.

Table 2 NS-SEC: 1-4 = MC / NS-SEC: 5-8 = WC M = male: F = Female. TM= Transgender Male WC = Working Class: MC = Middle Class. A;B;C;D;E;F = Focus group name FSM = free school meals		
School/participants	**NS-SEC Occupation classification**	**SOCIAL CLASS**
Canal school		
F1 self-employed guest house	4	MC
M2 fitter at airbus	5	WC
M1 self-employed business	4	MC
M3 self-employed business	4	MC
Commuter School		
Commuter A		
F1 My parents are secondary school teachers	2/2	MC
M1 self – employed as DIY painter and decorator.	5	WC
F2 single mum unemployed	FSM	WC
Commuter B		
M1 professional parents' accountant/ lawyer.	3	MC
M2 shop worker mum, dad is a mechanic	7/5	WC
M3 teacher dad and nurse mum.	2/2	MC
Commuter C		
M1 Mum legal assistant dad IT developer	3/2	MC
F2 both parents are teachers, mum primary dad secondary.	2/2	MC
F3 single parent mum she works as a care worker	6	WC
Castle School (first wave)		
Castle A		
F1 my mum and dad work in a chippy (Romanian)	6/6	WC
F2 single mum on benefits	FSM	WC
M1 plumber	5	WC

Castle B		
F1 accountancy /clerk	3/4	MC
M2 dad accountant	3	MC
M1 mum school counsellor	3	MC
Castle C		
M1 dad's a writer	2	MC
F1 dad manager	2	MC
F2 there's only me an mum benefits	FSM	WC
M2 my mum is a teacher	2	MC
Castle D		
M1 unemployed	FSM	WC
F2 unemployed	FSM	WC
F1 primary school teacher	2	MC
Castle School E		
M1 fitter airbus	5	WC
TM1 benefits I've got two dads	FSM	WC
F2 she's a teacher	2	MC
Castle School F		
F1 unemployed mum	FSM	WC
F2 shop worker	6	WC
M1 a shop worker	6	WC
Castle School (Second Wave)		
Castle School G		
M1 teacher mum	2	MC
M2 dad manager/mum teacher	1/2	MC
F1 dad fitter at aerospace / mum care assistant	5/6	WC
Castle School H		
F1 dad travel company manager / mum travel writer	1/3	MC
F2 dad plumber / mum unemployed.	5/8	WC
M1 Dad builder / mum unemployed	5/8	WC
Castle School I		
F1 unemployed mum	FSM	WC
F2 mum teacher / dad teacher	2/2	MC
Castle School J		
F1 mum shop manager (Polish)	1	MC
F2 dad self-employed builder / mum care assistant (Polish)	5/6	WC
F3 mum librarian	2	MC
Castle School K		
F1 teachers	2/2	MC
M1 aerospace	5	WC
M2 builder and cleaner	5/7	WC
M3 mum's a solicitor and dad is	2/2	MC
Castle School L		
F1 mechanic, dunno mum	5	WC
M1 factory and mum works in a shop	7/7	WC
M2 mum doesn't work	8	WC

Analysing the Data: Grounded Theory

Firstly, Grounded Theory (GT) is not a theory as such. It is a method of analysing qualitative data that allows the construction of *theory grounded in data*. The original

form of GT emerged from the collaborative writings of Glaser and Strauss (1967). According to Charmaz (2006) during the early 1960s, qualitative research was losing ground to positivist-inspired quantitative research which appeared to offer the opportunity to develop concrete rigorous causal explanations that could be tested, replicated and validated accordingly. Qualitative research, on the other hand, was often perceived as only capable of offering unreliable impressionistic accounts. Qualitative research was generally viewed as subservient to scientific methods and, accordingly, was useful merely as an inductive preliminary first stage, deployed before the main research and to facilitate the development of an informed deductive hypothesis. Glaser and Strauss aimed to counter this position by developing a methodology which would offer qualitative researchers an analytic method that was demonstratively rigorous, allowed for the development of causal explanations and the development of abstract social theory. According to Charmaz (2006) the defining qualities of Glaser and Strauss' can be summarised as:

- Iterative analysis and collection of data.
- Development of analytic codes based on data rather than theory.
- Use of the 'constant comparative method' by continually making comparisons between all layers and stages of the research.
- Writing memos to explore elaboration on codes, categories and their possible relationships.
- Using 'theoretical sampling' a method aimed at developing and exploring emergent theory rather than representativeness.
- Conducting literature reviews informed by the analytic ideas developed from the primary data.

Glaser and Strauss' *Discovery* book helped to re-legitimise qualitative primary research. They offered qualitative researchers a position from which they could move away from accusations of 'description' and develop theory with the kind of analytic rigour that could challenge the dominance of quantification (Charmaz 2006).

However, GT did not rest with this early work. An infamous spat between Glaser and Strauss led to the divergence of the two authors and competing versions of the theory developed. These have also branched into a myriad of other versions. Therefore, it is useful to make explicit the version of GT that is being employed within my research.

The data in this research has been analysed using the version of GT as presented in Charmaz (2006). The reasoning behind this is relatively simple. Charmaz's operationalisation of GT has been selected because of her explicitly constructionist approach. Charmaz notes that in the original Glaser and Straus (1967) position, GT was regarded as a vehicle to *discover* the nature of the social world to a scientific observer. The choice of the verb 'discover' was not epiphenomenal. Charmaz points out that, although GT emerged out of a desire to combat positivist assumptions, GT itself was built on a decidedly positivistic premise. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed GT as a method that could discover the nature of the social world as it exists *external* to the researcher. This is a point straight from the positivistic cannon and is the antithesis of the constructionist ontological position on which my research is based and which I will briefly outline now. Charmaz posits a version of GT which acknowledges that the writing of codes, categories and memos, the development of theory is an act of *construction, not discovery*. In my ontological position, I regard my role in the analytic process as a bricoleur. I am an active, creative and imaginative element in the construction of theory. However, following Crotty (1998) any developing construction is delimited by pragmatic boundaries, in my case I am limited by the empirical nature of my transcripts. My analytic activity, therefore, should be regarded as a dialogical process whereby I am actively involved in constructing theory but as delimited by my findings. My transcripts are the raw resource from which my ensuing ideas have been fashioned. Some material has been cut carefully and stitched together neatly whilst other material has been left discarded on the cutting room floor. My analysis is a creative process of manufacture rather than discovery. Thus, like an amateur sculptor clumsily chipping at a block of marble, my transcripts are the resource from which my tentative conclusions are hewn. This constructionist view is also the position explicitly extolled by Charmaz (2006). The concordance between Charmaz's understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the analytic process and my own renders her version of GT the most appropriate for this research.

In summary, Charmaz (2006) outlines the characteristics of (GT) used in this research. Firstly, GT is a systematic set of heuristic guidelines. Accordingly, procedures should be regarded as flexible, pragmatic and always subservient to the peculiarities of the research data. Furthermore, GT has implications for the collection as well as the analysis of data. Methods to gather data should be qualitative and capable of producing

a relatively rich collection on which analysis can be made. Finally, GT is explicitly intended to generate theory and that this theory should be evidenced within the data itself. Furthermore, she provides a useful step-by-step guide to the methodological process which I implemented when pursuing my research based on GT.

Gathering Rich data

Firstly, the most important element of my researcher-absent focus group research method is that it can produce 'rich' data. Charmaz advises that interviews should be regarded as conversations. In this way, I have attempted to mimic a conversational setting within my researcher-absent focus group interviews by providing a prompt of open questions. Charmaz also advises that constructionist-influenced interviews should encourage participants to frame and set their own agenda as much as possible to prevent the researcher 'closing down' potentially significant issues and areas too quickly. In my focus groups, for example, I was physically absent during the focus group interviews and only provided very ambiguous 'questions' that the participants could use to frame their own interview structure. These were deliberate strategies to promote non-directive *conversation*.

Coding

Coding involves categorising sections of data under a name or code which simultaneously summarizes, describes and accounts for that data. This certainly occurred when analysing my transcripts. *Initial coding* is the first stage and is best done quickly and intuitively. I concurred with Charmaz's advice and initially moved quickly through my transcript text using first impression and intuition. However, choosing codes is an iterative exercise and often my first codes needed to be revisited and altered as my interpretation of the data changed through multiple reading and re-reading. In my analysis, for example, I initially coded my pupil participants' critique of teachers simply as 'Teacher'. This was revised and altered to 'teacher talk' as I began to realise that lecture-type lessons were a particular issue to some pupils. Eventually, I finished with the *in-vivo* generated code 'drone' to capture the dismissive despair that some of the participants expressed when describing lectures. Charmaz recommends the use of in-vivo codes as these often crystalize the participants' perception in a manner that researchers' externally imposed codes fail to do. *Focused Coding* is the second stage in the process and involves the researcher making decisions

regarding the significance of each code. This inevitably involves cutting some initial codes from the analytic process. I eventually abandoned the universal one-size-fits-all 'drone' in-vivo code as I perceived dissatisfaction expressed by pupils was more nuanced. Furthermore, pupil Boredom seemed to be connected to issues related to 'learning frustration', 'grade frustration', 'grade anxiety' and 'loneliness' and these appeared to vary according to social class and gender.

Memo writing

Memo writing involved me developing analytical ideas beyond the coding stage. In my research, it involved many hours playing with the free flow of ideas and suggestions that were used to revisit the data. Often a lack of clear consistency within my transcripts meant that my ideas were often frustratingly disregarded, and the process began again. As memos suggested links between different aspects of the transcripts, they allowed me to revisit my pupils' talk and re-read to test out ideas. In this sense, there were deductive elements at play within my grounded theory analysis. For example, the code 'deviancy tales' was used to signify links made between Boredom and classroom misbehaviour. Initially, I constructed a memo which explored this as a result of masculinity and Boredom. This manifested as a simple, masculinity causes Boredom theory. However, when revisiting the data, I found this explanation inadequate because deviancy was narrated by fewer bored boys than I initially thought. Furthermore, the boys who used deviancy tales tended to be amongst the least-bored boys. So rather than masculinity as such being an issue, my refined memos revealed that a particular *type* of Boredom story, contingent (occasional) Boredom, was used to justify a particular *type* of flamboyant deviant classroom deviancy by boys with a particular *type* of (i.e. hegemonic) masculinity. Using memos in this way encouraged me to constantly compare and validate, test and refine my ideas to generate a much more nuanced understanding.

Theoretical Sampling/saturation

Within positivistic methodologies, the purpose of sampling is to establish representativeness. This allows general laws to be formed which should apply to a wider population beyond the research sample. Theoretical sampling, on the other hand, aims to develop a sample that allows the researcher to explore a particular issue and develop a particular theory within a particular context. In my research, this meant

limiting my research to a site where a particular form of Boredom was likely to be encountered. Perhaps remembering my school days, I sought out secondary schools. My participants had to have only one characteristic; attendance at a secondary school. The initial failure to recruit schools documented earlier on meant that ultimately my sample was limited by personal acquaintance and the voluntary goodwill of the schools and pupils. I had no power to select participants and could not therefore deliberately construct a representative sample. Furthermore, GT involves iterative analysis and data collection. In my research, analysis of the initial wave of transcripts from all three schools revealed a unique use of Boredom within Castle School. It was only here that endemic and predominant stories of Boredom were to be found. This revealed a previously unforeseen need to explore further the workings of Castle School. An opportunity to do so was presented when three teachers offered to keep diaries for me. These were used in addition to four further researcher absent focus group interviews conducted at Castle School with pupils. In these focus groups my interest was not representativeness, but the exploration of issues emergent within the first wave of analysis. Using theoretical sampling means that researchers should be continually seeking participants based on insights produced through ongoing research. My initial sample produced particular ideas regarding the situated nature of Boredom use within Castle School which I sought to explore through a specifically chosen sample. However, using theoretical sampling does mean that *I cannot make universal truth claims* based on my analysis.

My research reached theoretical saturation during the second wave of focus group interviews at Castle School. The analysis of the final 4 focus group interviews produced broadly similar findings to the first wave of group interviews. Further intrusion into Castle School seemed unnecessary at this point. Theoretical saturation occurs when the new data reproduces existing findings and fails to produce new insights.

Teacher Diaries.

According to Bryman (2016) there are three senses in which the term ‘diary’ is employed in social research. Firstly, diary as a method of data collection. This method involves the researcher commissioning participants to record their accounts of contemporaneous events and experiences. Secondly, researchers sometimes can

access diaries which have been written spontaneously by the participant, independent of direction from the researcher and often prior to the research. Finally, the term 'diary' is used to denote the researcher's own log or journal. This form is often akin to an *aid-memoire* or field notes kept by ethnographers. It is the first of these, diary as a method of data collection, that the term is used within this research.

A 'diary as research method' can itself be split into two further forms. The first of these is a structured method where the diarist is given formal and explicit instructions regarding exactly what to include (and omit) from their entries. Often, particular events are signalled for attention as are particular temporal periods. The second form, and that employed in my research, is a much more in-formal or 'free-text' approach where minimum and non-directional instruction are provided, and diarists are encouraged to make their own decisions regarding the content and nature of their entries. This second laissez-faire approach was selected in keeping with the participant-led emphasis of the focus group methods.

Method

During summer 2018 I had completed my initial analysis of the five wave of focus group interviews. This analysis identified Castle School as the site were the more severe Boredom stories (endemic and predominant) were narrated. Accordingly, at the beginning of the Autumn term 2018 (September) I re-contacted Castle School to request further access to the site to conduct a second wave of focus group interviews. The intention was to conduct a second wave of focus group interviews with pupils to pursue a more deductive approach and, in a loose sense, test the validity of the emergent themes of the first wave of interviews and provide an inductive opportunity to explore these themes a little more. A meeting was arranged with the teacher who had facilitated the first wave of interviews; pseudonym teacher Blue. Permission for a second wave of focus groups was granted during this meeting. During this meeting, a general discussion developed regarding the use of alternative qualitative research methods. One of those mentioned was a free-text diary. Teacher Blue volunteered at that point to keep a diary if it would assist in my research. Furthermore, she offered to attempt to recruit two other teachers into the project. I had no plans to research teacher narratives, but the opportunity was simply too good to miss. I returned to the school a couple of weeks later and I met all three teachers. By that time, I had developed a set

of pragmatic guidelines that I hoped would both be manageable for the busy teachers and provide useful data for me. These were discussed and the following guidelines were mutually agreed as practicable and useful.

Diary entry discussion: All the teachers were assured that their diary entries would be anonymous, and that each teacher would be ascribed a colour as a pseudonym. Furthermore, teachers were informed that it was unnecessary to use pupil names but if included, pupil names would be omitted in the final research. All teachers preferred the convenience of handwriting rather than use technology, (email, blog or shared cloud document) so each teacher used a school notebook of the kind used by the pupils. It was decided that these would be collected back at the end of term i.e., December 2018, rather than weekly or monthly. In terms of content and the nature of diary entry, we agreed that it was reasonable, and not over-burdensome, for the teachers to attempt to write one entry per week for the period October 2018 until December 2018. I would return in the first week of December (WB 03/12/18) to collect the diaries. In terms of content, I explained that, in keeping with my general methodological approach, I wanted then to complete free-text diaries as much as possible. I explained this meant that they could write about anything that they considered significant. There were no directions to deal explicitly with Boredom, for example. However, the three teachers were aware of the nature of my research and this could easily have formed an implicit horizon. I suggested that they could record events/experiences/emotions/thoughts that were subjectively regarded as significant. I stressed that nothing should be regarded as trivial and that I would rather have something that I did not use then miss something that they concerned mundane but was meaningful in my research context. I reminded them that I was unfamiliar with the workings of their school I would be grateful for as much detail as possible. Furthermore, I suggested that they could write about the broader senior management of the school and/or pedagogical organization of lessons and/or interactions with pupils. These guidelines emerged within discussion with the teachers.

In total the teachers collectively produced 19 diary entries during Autumn term 2018 specifically between the dates between 01/10/18 – 03/12/18. Teacher blue was the most diligent and produced nine entries, teacher red and teacher purple produced five entries each. On average each entry was about 500 words long and the total corpus of diary data was around 9,500 words. I collected these diaries during a meeting in

December 2018 to finalise arrangements for my pupil focus group interviews to be carried out in January 2019.

Analysing the Data.

In keeping with the analysis used for the focus group transcripts I used Grounded Theory (GT) drawn from Charmaz (2006). In particular I followed her guidance concerning the coding of data as 'incidents'. This involves reading each diary entry in its entirety and then allocating memo notes and codes based on the whole rather than line-by-line. Charmaz argues that coding by 'incident' is more appropriate when data tends towards the behavioural and descriptive, where the analysist does not have a full sense of the situational context and where the analyst has not interacted with the participants. All these criteria are relevant in regard to the diary entries. In this sense, each diary entry was treated as an observational 'incident' and coded accordingly. Initial codes included 'overwhelmed' to denote the high volume of administration and record keeping that the teachers described and 'external control' to denote the involvement the observational practices of senior management and 'business' to denote the market orientation of much of the teaching activities. I then followed Charmaz's guidance to pursue a comparative approach by attempting to establish elements of similarity and divergence between the diary entries. At the time of this analysis, I was reading through a collection of Stephen Ball's (2000: 2003a; 2003b; 2012; 2016a; 2016b; 2017) research concerning the emotional impact of neo-liberal educational reforms. Ball had based a great deal of this research on diaries that he had commissioned from teacher-participants in secondary schools. His findings revealed three themes, marketisation; managerialism and performativity. In comparing my own diary entries with Ball's, I found great deal of overlap and remarkable similarity between my teachers and Ball's. I decided to experiment with Ball's three codes. I returned to my data and compared the efficacy of these codes with my own diary entries to establish whether they adequately crystallized the experiences of my own participants. I found that not only did these code indeed 'fit', but they also allowed me to perceive and pursue a line of enquiry that began to locate my research data within a broader field of social policy, political reform and Foucauldian analysis. In GT it is highly unusual to adopt pre-existing codes. The preference is for codes to emerge directly from the data, preferably in an 'in-vivo' form using the language of the participants themselves. In my case, I am satisfied that the codes adopted adequately

resonate with my data. Using Ball's codes added extra analytical possibilities and insight and as such where absolutely invaluable in my developing research ideas. Furthermore, Charmaz (2016) advises analysts to regard all aspect of GT guidance as just that, guidance, rather than a dogmatic set of rules to which analysts should be enslaved. Ultimately GT exists as a framework for establishing theory grounded in data. The ideocracies of individual research may require that some of these guidelines bend in order to pursue this goal.

Chapter 2 My reading journey: Methodologies of Boredom

Before deploying my methodological approach outlined above, my first task was to trawl through the existing methodological literature to beg, borrow and steal from approaches previously taken. Overwhelmingly, this literature was dominated by psychology and its allegiance to both quantitative methods and positivism.

Although quantitative Boredom research does include notable examples of experimental methods, such as Mann and Cadman (2014) and Nederkoorn et al (2016), issues concerning ecological validity (Bryman 2016) have fostered a tendency towards survey methods. Survey methods are the most commonly used quantitative approach and, to more scientifically orientated minds, large sample sizes offer reassuring levels of representativeness (Vodanovich 2003). Furthermore, from my reading, it appears that Boredom surveys can be split roughly into an additional two forms; psychometric tests, which tend to locate the origins of Boredom within the individual, and self-report studies, which tend to locate the origins of Boredom within the situation.

The most commonly adapted psychometric test appears to be the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) developed by Farmer and Sundberg (1986). The BPS has, for example, has been used to investigate a diverse range of issues such as the effectiveness of cognitive strategies to minimise Boredom, (Nett 2011), and for making comparisons between cultures, (Vodanovich et al. 2011). However, Melton and Schulenberg's (2009) review of the BPS, noted that, in terms of gender differences and Boredom Proneness, several studies have demonstrated significant score disparities. Furthermore, Melton and Schulenberg's analysis revealed no reasonable fit between the BPS with any of the plethora of Boredom measures currently available. Ultimately, Melton and Schulenberg concluded that the BPS lacks validity because Boredom is likely to be a contextually sensitive construct and so will vary between social groups. This particular criticism is highly significant. The monotheism offered by the BPS is discordant with the diverse and complex lived realities of multiple agentic pupils potentially found within secondary school classrooms. Furthermore, Mercer-Lynn et al (2014) point out that a major flaw within the idea of Boredom proneness is whether individuals act as the permanent 'hosts' for the condition or whether they are simply more reactant to dull situations. In this sense, it is unclear whether it is the individual or the situation that leads to Boredom. Ultimately, it is…

‘…unclear whether Boredom propensity describes a person who possesses a particular personality trait that is carried across all situations (boring or not), or if it describes a person who reacts strongly to boring situations’

(Mercer- Lynn et al. 2014: 124).

Having abandoned the idea of psychometric tests, I read through approaches that focused on self-report questionnaires. More promising than the individual-blaming approaches, researchers who used self-report questionnaires tended towards explaining ‘Situational Boredom’, i.e. the relationship between situational correlates and Boredom. Such correlates include working-class family life (Robinson 1975); rote learning and a lack of challenge/relevancy (Brown et al (2008); overuse of PowerPoint slides (Mann and Robinson 2009). More recently, Chin et al (2017) identified ‘lack of engagement’ as a result of monotonous and/or difficult activities commonly encountered at work and at school. Finally, Pekrun et al (2006; 2010) have attempted to synthesise ideas concerning personality and situation under the umbrella ‘value-control theory’ of Boredom. Pekrun et al argue that Boredom is explained via an individual’s propensity to attribute negative cognitive appraisals of situations as being low in agentic control and low in personal and social value.

Although the above is only a snippet of the research, I can confidently concur with Goodstein’s (2017) observation that quantitative research dominates academic writing concerning Boredom, hence why I felt it important to review a selection here. However, beneath this omnipotence lies some fundamental problems as lamented by quantitative researchers themselves. These are problems important to note as my research, outlined above, deviates significantly from the quantitative norm in this field. For example, despite a century of experimenting, administering questionnaires and analysing reams of statistical products…

‘Boredom research continues to struggle with rudimentary concerns like taxonomy, construct issues, and a lack of investigatory direction’.

(Piotrowski 2013: 50).

Furthermore, the continual failure of quantified research to construct a generally agreed model has led to a perplexing proliferation of even more measures, constructs and models which in itself has created an even more complex and confused landscape.

Indeed, the damage being wrought on the study of Boredom by quantification has been recognised within the field itself…

"…it may no longer be particularly beneficial to create additional measures of Boredom…what is lacking is a mechanism to arrive at professional agreement on the definition of Boredom"

(Vodanovich 2016: 221)

Furthermore, Goodstein (2017) argues that quantitative researchers have tended to construct Boredom through scientific rhetoric which has effectively severed research from its social context. Accordingly, scientific and atomised accounts of Boredom have failed to engage with the social, historical, philosophical and literary contexts through which Boredom has been narrated as a lived daily experience. This last argument is highly significant. I needed a methodology that would locate Boredom as a situated and pragmatic concern for ordinary pupils in their daily school lives. I am not alone in reaching this desire. Vodanovich (2016) argues that for Boredom studies to progress requires research which will *resituate* Boredom within a lived context and, accordingly, there has to be an increase in interdisciplinary collaboration. Therefore, to unlock the areas of Boredom that quantification has failed to reach, I felt that it was essential that there is a re-engagement with the contributions of qualitative research.

Qualitative Research and Boredom

I am not alone in regarding Willis' (1977) work as a 'classic' and highly influential piece of critical qualitative sociological research (see Carspecken 1995). Furthermore, Wills (1977) was amongst the first to identify Boredom as a significant element in pupil-centred educational constructs. Also, rather conveniently, Willis deployed multiple qualitative methods allowing me to use this work as a basis to explore the relative usefulness and limitations of qualitative methods in Boredom research.

Willis is a highly useful case study because he used a mix of non-participant observation and group interviews. He conducted these methods with twelve working-class secondary schoolboys during their last school year and their first few months in adult work. Earlier, in my literature review, I have used his work to explicate the role of Boredom in the cultural reproduction of subservient labour. At the heart of Willis' ethnography is, what he terms, 'the cultural' (1977: 3) and, in particular, culture as

process. Rather than see culture as a simple internalisation of structure, Willis' account of lived reality produces 'the lads' as living agentic subjects, who 'let themselves' (p1) through their own 'personal and collective volition' (p2), become an active part in the social reproduction of their own exploitation. Willis reports this process through the prism of 'the lads' observable decisions, behaviour, emotions, disengagements, and their daily re-production of their own culture, Furthermore, Willis' skill was to locate these agentic actions within a broader horizon of social and material inequalities emergent from mass-industrialized capitalist society as these relate to gender and social class.

The inductive nature of Willis' research allowed him to bracket off *a priori* common-sense assumptions and instead access the social world anew, as constructed by 'the lads'. The richness of Willis' data allowed me to develop a previously hidden and radically alternative reading of Boredom into his work. In this reading, Boredom appears not an inherently negative state. Boredom was *used* by the 'the lads' to demonstrate their own working-class masculinity, and hence superiority, over the more conformist and feminised 'ear 'oles'. In particular, 'the lads' *use* of Boredom can be read as part of a broader texture of behaviour through which they fabricated working-class masculinity. This masculinity was constructed oppositionally as the antithesis to the feminised intellectuality of schoolwork and education. Significantly, *Willis' work allows Boredom to be tentatively re-positioned away from an atomised emotion into a social and cultural resource*. This was a particularly exciting moment in the research as I had never before considered Boredom as a resource that could be used to facilitate a contextually positive effect. Much Boredom research is based on the common-sense assumption that Boredom is a negative individual emotion; nothing more nor less. However, because of Willis' methodology and correspondingly rich data, I was able to read Boredom as a resource, a tool or a technology used as part of a wider contrivance. Boredom was a rhetorical device used by 'the lads' in their willingness, indeed eagerness, to pursue manual, and in their eyes authentically masculine, adult employment. Willis' research explicates Boredom as an integral instrument in the lads' reproduction of their own exploitable masculine labour. These insights, which I read into Willis's work, were only possible through the rich, inductive and emic nature of his qualitative research which gave sovereignty to the lived reality of his participants.

However, this is my reading and re-interpretation of Willis rather than one drawn from his explicit conclusions. This re-interpretation of Willis is appropriate because research narratives emerge within the intersectional space between the researcher, object of gaze and the reader. In particular, Scott (1991) argued that accounts of the "experience" of others should always be read as discursively structured, rather than as simple conduits concerning "what happened." The alternative, naive naturalism, Scott argued, fails to recognise that concepts are constructed and historically situated. In this the sense, an original author has little sovereignty. Scott problematised the idea that original accounts of 'experience' are simply "incontestable evidence" (p. 24). Willis reported Boredom *as-if* it was an individual emotional experience. However, Willis' gaze, being drawn towards issues of class exploitation, failed to examine Boredom contextually and, accordingly, failed to unlock Boredom from a historically situated perspective (Breidenstein 2007). Consequently, although Willis' research identified Boredom as a factor in 'the lads' disengagement, the mechanisms through which Boredom was fabricated and the role this played remained frustratingly black-boxed. Finally, in a manner characteristic of malestream ethnographic research at that time, Willis also failed to acknowledge the role of gender, and in particular the intersectionality between class, masculinity and emotions (McRobbie and Garber 1976: McRobbie 1991).

Furthermore, as Breidenstein (2007) notes, Boredom poses specific problems for a would-be qualitative researcher. Firstly, researchers often seek out the exotic and the exciting. Where this is not self-evident, as in the reporting of daily events, researchers often fashion their own writing to render mundane events interesting to engage readers; essentially purging Boredom from their work. Secondly, stemming from the previous point, researchers are often drawn away from inactivity and dullness and often deliberately locate themselves 'where the action is'. Thirdly, researchers are often drawn into situations by participants to mitigate against Boredom. The presence of the researcher in a classroom, for example, thus destroys the subject under study. Fourthly, the researcher is not immune to Boredom. Being in a boring situation will decrease the researcher's ability to fashion notes and record situations in rich detail.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Willis' qualitative research was a pivotal moment in my developing approach to methodology. Willis illustrated that unexpected and, indeed counterintuitive, insights can arise when participants are given the freedom to

present their own emic accounts. However, Breidenstein's work illustrates that Boredom research is particularly prone to researcher-led constraint. The conclusions I drew is that an approach should be devised which both facilitates the emic voice of the participant and delimits the influence of the researcher. This must be a participant-led and non-directive approach, capable of capturing the lived realities through which Boredom manifests within classrooms.

Finally, Breidenstein makes a final argument that was also highly influential in my developing methodological approach. Quite simply, *Boredom cannot be observed*. A would-be qualitative researcher of Boredom can only observe the *consequences* of Boredom. This is Boredom-as-telos. Breidenstein's solution is to research Boredom as a "…collective and communicated phenomenon" (p96). That is to say, Boredom can be rendered intelligible if the phenomenon is recognised as a *process* of continual intersubjective fabrication which exists in a fluid state of becoming. Boredom can be researched by recognising the phenomenon as a form of communication. This is Boredom-as-praxis. Boredom becomes an intelligible construct by observing the processes and mechanisms through which it is fabricated. This presented a new problem; can communication be observed? Breidenstein laments his observational attempts spending some time discussing whether a schoolgirl's yawn can be considered an indication of Boredom, an affectation, or simply tiredness. Ultimately, Breidenstein opts for group interviews. A practical and reliable means to observe Boredom, therefore, might be through interviews and the participants' use of language.

I had arrived at a significant moment in my research. My chosen approach was to be some form of a non-directive interview. This interview would need to be able to explore Boredom as used by participants in their everyday classroom lives. To further this method. I engaged in an examination of the sociological positions regarding language use.

Language and Boredom

The sociological view on language has developed considerably since the early structuralism of Saussure. Saussure perceived language as a decontextualized system of signs arbitrarily assigned their substance by convention, rather than the social context of their use (Kress 2001). However, the critical linguistics of writers such as Labov (1972); Gumperz (1982); Halliday (1978: 1985) convincingly established the

position that speakers used language actively and agentically in the pragmatic construction of meaning. Accordingly, I became interested in exploring the social constructionist view of language and read Wittgenstein's (1958) 'Philosophical Investigations'; John Austin's (1962) 'William James Lectures' presented at Harvard University in 1955; Harold Garfinkel's (1967) development of ethnomethodology and finally Harvey Sacks' (1992) work on Conversational Analysis.

Collectively these works emphasised the ingenious and, accordingly, heterogeneous nature of the actual deployment of words in everyday language. I felt that their ideas invited me to explore a pragmatic and situated understanding of everyday Boredom talk that perceives "…the meaning of a word is its *use* in the language", (Wittgenstein 1958 para 43 my emphasis). This implies that to understand the nature of Boredom language use, I had to recognise just that, its particular *use*. Thus, I rejected the pursuit of preconceived and semantic concerns regarding what Boredom 'really means'. Instead, I became concerned with exploring a situated and pragmatic use of the concept as displayed by the pupils themselves. The implication for my research into Boredom is that rather than try to 'discover' THE definition of Boredom as has been so unsuccessfully attempted within quantitative Boredom research (documented above), my interviews should employ an approach that actively seeks out the situated, local and intimate operationalisation of Boredom as it occurs on an everyday level. The position I have grown to adopt is that *Boredom can be researched as a tool with multiple and situated purposes*. For example, Boredom can be used to signify rebellious teenage coolness; to shift blame for poor grades; to inoculate deviant behaviour; to imply a moral critique or personal failing; it can be used to explain drug-taking, infidelity or provide a basis for revolutionary politics.

The final significant influence on my burgeoning ideas has come from the Bakhtinian circle and the concept of Dialogicism. Dialogicism is orientated around the pragmatic and inter-subjective use of language and refers to a process through which human consciousness and knowledge of the world are constituted via linguistic interactions with others (Holquist 1990). Bakhtin begins by equating the individual as the 'centre' in a system of relativity from which the individual attains his/her view of the social world. Clearly, all individuals are capable of formulating their own individualised notion of Boredom, for example. However, this atomised understanding is inherently limited as the individual can only be conscious of what is knowable from her/his

particular centre. Left alone, the isolated individual's concept of Boredom could only be constructed from an extraordinarily narrow viewpoint. The only means available to broaden this viewpoint is to incorporate or synthesise the views of an 'other'. Engaging in communication allows for the synthesis of alternative linguistic versions of reality from which an intersubjective intelligible whole can then be constructed. In terms of my research, this means that school children cannot know and understand Boredom in isolation. Rather, it is through their daily chats, discussions and interactions and they share and form their knowledges. The concept of Boredom, which deceptively appears to be atomised within individual children, may be a situated and co-constructed product of a multiplicity of local interactions. Being conscious of Boredom is to simultaneously synthesise both one's view and the view of an 'other'. To Bakhtin, there is no such thing as 'being' only 'co-being' (p24). *The essence of dialogicality sees an individual as a fusion of self and other; to be fully conscious means never being alone*. Significantly, using Bakhtin, I do not believe that the individual pupil is sovereign in terms of 'owning' Boredom, but that Boredom is co-authored in conjunction with other pupils' use of language. In application to my research, when accessing the language of the pupil group (rather than the individual), I can illuminate intersubjectively forming and locally accessible lexicons. In this way, I can render the schoolchildren's collective, situated and co-fabricated account of classroom Boredom intelligible. Thus, I am regarding any articulation concerning Boredom as always shared or, as Bakhtin eloquently states…

"The word of language is half someone else's."

(Bakhtin 1981:293)

As the capacity to be fully conscious relies on others, schoolchildren are inevitably susceptible to absorbing external ideological sentiments into becoming their internal world view. To Bakhtin, language is always evaluative and performs this function ideologically. Dialogicality frees the individual from atomised subjectivity but, as pupils must appropriate the views of others, so they can become tied to the ideologically informed evaluations from others. This aspect of dialogicality could imply a crude determinism but Bakhtin's next move is to illustrate the continuing struggle that that exists within this dialogical system.

As Bakhtin indicates, pupils do not learn the meaning of Boredom from dictionaries. On the contrary, pupils learn to construct their social world dialogically with others. However, dialogicality is not a simple hypodermic syringe. Understanding dialogicality involves recognising that 'language use' is a process of struggle because language exists as a heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981). Language does not consist of one voice. Language consists of a co-existing polyphonic mix of historical, present, future, social, political, ethnic, economic, religious, and moral voices. These voices are engaged in a struggle to assert meaning. In particular, battle lines are drawn between Centripetal and Centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces are conservative, fixed and dogmatic discourses of officialdom, religion science, politics and morality. The Centripetal forces represent the cannons of official language as policed by the authoritative voice; agencies of power such as the state, teachers and fathers. The authoritative voice attempts to install its ideological evaluations of the nature of reality. However, Centripetal forces are permeable and are constantly being enmeshed within a messy struggle with Centrifugal forces. Centrifugal forces are the 'persuasive voice' of the informal, unpoliced, dialects and slang of everyday talk. Centrifugal language is as flexible and open and centripetal language is rigid and fixed. Language then is a site of struggle. This is not merely a struggle between linguistic systems but a struggle between evaluative accents and ideologies.

In sociological terms, the dialogical and co-construction of reality with interaction can be rendered methodologically intelligible through the deploying the ideas of Harold Garfinkel (1967). Although preceding the proliferation of Bakhtinian studies, Garfinkel's work provides a useful framework for a practical deployment of dialogicality. As with Bakhtin, Garfinkel developed the argument that interaction is orientated around co-construction and the collective maintenance of an intersubjective social order. In Garfinkel's work social order can be regarded as an 'achievement' brought about by a mutual co-production and continual repairing of common-sense knowledge. Garfinkel aimed to illuminate (Ethno) methods; the practices that everyday folk do to maintain locally shared common-sense. Significantly, Garfinkel believed that the business of sense-making was an inherent feature in all human interactions. As such, sense-making can be seen as easily in sociologists as it can in non-sociologists. And so, in my literature review, the 'origin story' narrative that I use to presenting key moments in the study of Boredom is itself an ethno-method. My

Boredom origin story is an ethno-method in the sense that it is a means of creating social order. Garfinkel reasoned that sociology and everyday interaction were similar in their orientation to social order. Both ordinary members of society and sociologists share a common methodology. Both use forms of data, observations, and documents, to construct and *make* sense through processes of locally validated reasoning. Garfinkel termed this process 'the documentary method of interpretation'. This refers to the methods deployed by interactants to establish local, taken-for-granted and 'obvious' truths about the links between events; establishing, or at least inferring, causal relationships. However, Garfinkel recognised that the material of social order is fragile and, accordingly, is relatively vulnerable to tears and ruptures. Garfinkel exploited this fragility with his use of 'Breaching Experiments' (Garfinkel 1967). These 'experiments' deliberately destabilised situated common-sense-making methods in order to illuminate their significance for successful everyday interaction. Significantly though, Garfinkel found that although temporary breaches were possible, interactants would quickly act to re-assert social order by accounting for 'strange' behaviour via powerful local accounting practices which repaired the original common-sense version of reality. Thus, reasoned Garfinkel, social interaction is orientated, as a matter of course, with the construction, management and continual repair of social reality.

A powerful element within local accounting practices are the symbiotic linkages constructed between 'event', how incidents are defined and understood and 'situation' the perceived horizon within which the 'event' occurs. Garfinkel's research establishes that this event/context relationship is both dynamic and reciprocal. The locally understood nature of an interaction alters in accordance with the perceived nature of its context. The meaning of events, words, and actions, therefore, is always indexical. However, the exact nature of the context is also in a state of flux being subject to on-going interaction. Thus, context and interaction exist in a continually reciprocal state of emergence constructed via a symbiotically reflective relationship. Both 'indexicality' and 'reflexivity' illustrate the fluidity and continuous fabrication of social reality. Furthermore, 'indexicality' and 'reflexivity' are often explicitly evidenced by interactants themselves as their reasoning or justification for their actions; a method by which they invite others to understand the contextual nature of their actions. Conveniently, this also renders ethno-methods visible to research.

However, there are some nuances of divergence between the sensibilities of ethnomethodology and Bakhtinian studies which should be noted (Holt 2009). Firstly, ethnomethodology, being sociological, is concerned with language as action whereas Bakhtinian studies emerge from literature and, accordingly, is more concerned with the aesthetics of language. Accordingly, the Bakhtin approach is more concerned with the analysis of the perspectives of interactants to illuminate how individuals complete the world and giving account from the interactants' internal perspectives, whereas ethnomethodology is more interested in process, and documenting how the interaction occurs. Secondly, the Bakhtinian approach encourages analysts to view action and language in terms of a broader, distal social-economic landscape, whereas ethnomethodology remains more tightly focused on the uniqueness of context and situation. Finally, the Bakhtin concept of relativity means that utterances and actions, whilst perfectly intelligible to the originator, are infinitely contestable between interactants. Ethnomethodology does not share this notion of conflict but understands the construction of reality as more of a shared mutuality without the sense of tension implied by Bakhtin.

So, in summary, Bakhtin's (1981) dialogical constructionism invites me to recognise pupils' intersubjective use of Boredom. But in doing so it is also useful to use these ideas from within a sociological framework provided by ethnomethodology. In so doing, I must develop an approach that allows me to explore the necessary role played by others in the joint co-construction of classroom Boredom. Also, Bakhtin's ideas highlight how Boredom language is likely to be a site of struggle; a heteroglossia of multiple voices competing to assert their ideological evaluative accent; the nature of Boredom being, at any one time, the outcome of this never-ending process.

To understand the nature of Boredom within classroom contexts, the insights documented above imply that for an interview method to be appropriate it should be capable of capturing the language of Boredom in its every day and prosaic use. The interview should allow Boredom to be explored, not as an internal emotional affect, but within the context of intersubjective everyday talk. One means of rendering Boredom observable in this way would involve documenting participants' collective Boredom stories as discussed *amongst themselves* in everyday contexts. These are the stories through which participants collectively constitute their realities *as-if* they are boring and *as-If* they, themselves, are bored. However, as far as possible, this method

should allow these stories to occur and be recorded within everyday group contexts. Ideally, this would involve recording conversations that occur naturally between pupils and throughout their school day. However, wiretapping children to record all their daily conversations in the hope of grabbing a snippet of Boredom talk is logistically and ethically impractical. I considered setting up a microphone-laced classroom within a Liverpool University laboratory to record a teaching session. But this experience would likely provide such an adventure for the children it would evaporate any chances of naturally occurring Boredom talk. As an alternative, my compromise was to develop an interview method that allows me to set-up a conversation in as real and as everyday a situation as possible. I should try to capture the dynamic co-construction of reality that occurs between pupils and their intersubjective dialogue rather than a traditional direct interview led approach. Thus, I arrived at a *researcher-absent focus group*. The next section documents the process for understanding and refining this focus group interview method.

Focus Groups

Tadajewski (2016:319) defines a focus group as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher". Bryman (2016) provided me with a useful expansion to this stating that a 'focus group' can be distinguished from a 'group interview' in the following ways. Firstly, interviewers adopt the role of a moderator or facilitator and guide the group discussion rather than a direct interviewer. My role is to keep my group focussed on discussing classroom Boredom without directing the nature of this talk. Secondly, classroom Boredom will be discussed *as a group*. My focus group is intended to be an interactive methodology designed to illuminate the joint construction of meaning in relation to classroom Boredom. Accordingly, my focus groups will allow me to emphasise the social context through which classroom Boredom is co-constructed. Put simply, school children are not monadic, so it is reasonable to employ a research method that allows the relational nature of their everyday social life to be recognised within the research process.

Although it was Merton who brought the method into widespread use (Merton et al 1956), focus groups have a relatively long history in social science dating back to Emory Bogardus' pioneering work in 1926 (Lee 2008). Notable 'moments' in the development of the method came from Herta Herzog's use of the method in marketing

(Tadajewski 2016); a commonly cited review article by Calder (1977); Morgan and Spanish's (1985) research concerning health belief schemas and the development of heart attacks; and Morley and Brunsdon's (1999) research into audience reception.

More recently, Myers and Macnaghten (2011) have argued that focus groups can be used to explore the role of language in the local co-construction of reality (see also, Holstein and Gubrium 2007)). Myers and Macnaghten's particular model fits in well with my interest in exploring the role of language in the co-construction of Boredom within classrooms and will be examined in a little more detail accordingly. Myers and Macnaghten argue that participants' talk concerning 'views' and 'opinions' should be seen as actions in their own right and, more specifically, reflexive in nature. This contrasts with the more traditional approach which would treat Boredom talk as a mere description of an external boring reality. Using the sensitivity advocated by Myers and Macnaghten, however, I can explore an act of reality description as, simultaneously, an act of reality *creation*. The implication being that rather than reifying Boredom and using my focus group talk as a neutral conduit to unearthing its nature, I can view Boredom talk as a resource deployed by participants in action-focused and contextually specific ways. Myers and Macnaghten suggest Potter and Wetherell (1987) as a seminal example of this methodology. Potter and Wetherell researched immigration and racism. More significantly, their approach exemplified a sensitivity that views talk as orientated around the management of the immediate social order and the construction of personal identity. Significantly, talk was not analysed as a descriptive conduit to an internal 'attitude' but as an ingenious action creating a particular social order. From this perspective, Boredom talk will not reveal a stable and definable cognitive object but a flexible and reflexive resource through which the nature of reality is continuously re-established. Potter and Wetherell, for example, argued that their interviewees did not simply present views about immigrants but used *accounts* of immigration wrapped in a discourse of reason and rationality which had the effect of constructing the speakers' own identity as devoid of malice and racism. Thus, Myers and Macnaghten (2011) represent a radical alternative in the way that focus group talk can be understood and deliver a sensitivity to the relationship between language and reality construction that I will be deploying in my research. Whereas traditional focus group methodologies coincided in their position that group talk was merely a representational tool to access an otherwise hidden reality, in the Myers and

Macnaghten's approach, focus group, talk as the object of analysis in itself, reveals a reflexive rather than representational orientation.

I found both Bryman (2016) and Weloty (2016) provided useful practical advice in terms of group sizes, organising the practicalities of recording group discussions, advice on microphone position, microphone use and transferring data onto computers. However, it was Kitzinger (1994) that provided me with a useful operational guide and many of her ideas can be seen in my deployment of the method.

In terms of the composition of focus groups, for example, Kitzinger advocates pre-existing or 'naturally-existing' groups (clusters of people who have some form of pre-research relationship). Using pre-existing school friendship groups had several advantages for my research. Firstly, a friendship-based focus group allowed me to examine interaction within circumstances similar to how the school children actually operate. Secondly, as Kitzinger argues, friendship group membership is a central resource in the individual's everyday intersubjective construction of meaning and accordingly it is essential to mirror that social context in research. Finally, she cautions against a naive form of naturalism and advises that researchers reflect on the role that the research process itself has in constructing - rather than discovering - data.

In terms of conducting my focus groups, I was keen to minimise my level of involvement. As Silverman (2013) notes, the primary motivating factor behind the use of focus groups is analysing participants' interaction and, accordingly, moderator intervention should be kept to a minimum. In this way, I adopted Kitzinger's (1994) use of 'group exercises' or 'games'. In her research into the media representation of Aids. Kitzinger's participants sorted picture cards into 'degree of risk' and 'type of person' categories. The final organisation of the cards is unimportant; it is the process of sorting which is useful because it maximises intersubjective engagement. Sorting cards encourages participants to contextualise, account for and justify their decisions as "…seeing the card physically placed under the 'wrong' category makes the dissenting individual twitch" (p107). These exercises are useful in reducing moderator involvement, once the 'game' is set-up the participants simply take over. Games often lead researchers into new directions because their informal nature encourages diverse emic language frameworks, including stories, jokes and even songs. Kitzinger identifies two broad responses from these exercises; complimentary and

argumentative. In complimentary responses, participants show agreement with each other's statements. Complimentary responses can illustrate how 'truth' is intersubjectively maintained via the mobilisation of consensus as evidenced by complimentary snowballing. Snowballing occurs when groups demonstrate agreement by flooding conversations with a lexicon of mutually supporting sentiments which can illuminate the diverse and, often unexpected, nature of locally agreed conceptual repertoires. Also, group support can encourage the initial speaker to pursue and develop her/his initial sentiment thus providing greater depth and detail than would have occurred within an individual interview. An argumentative response, on the other hand, involves disagreement. Disagreement is useful as challenges can lead the speaker into providing an account or justification for his/her statement. In Kitzinger's (1994) research, participants' justifications not only provided greater detail but also revealed something quite unexpected; a 'hierarchy of credibility'. In their justifications, participants would often provide an argument using evidence such as citing sources, remembering or deferring to others. However, the status of this evidence varied in its acceptability to other members of the group. Evidence-based on personal or professional experience was at the top of the hierarchy of credibility and written information from advertisement/leaflets was at the bottom. Accounts were unlikely to receive 'truth' status if they were based 'written' 'official' sources. Again, the dialogical heart of the focus group method revealed an unexpected, and potentially useful, research outcome; explaining the relative ineffectiveness of the government's AIDS narrative which, at the time, largely relied on written material.

Focus groups and child participants.

Williams and Katz (2001) argue that focus groups have grown in popularity within educational research and have been used to examine a wide range of areas. These areas can be encompassed under four broad headings; research that seeks to evaluate practice to promote engagement; illuminating pupil's attitudes towards curriculum issues; the development of marketing strategies and enriching quantitative data. More usefully to my research, Livingstone et al (2019) argue that focus groups are useful when working with school children because the method impairs researcher control. In particular, the group nature of the interaction corrodes the traditional adult-led hierarchy meaning that children's narratives are more likely to be expressed in a way that is agentic and meaningful to them. Frazer's (1988) frequent loss of control during

her focus group interviews with teenage girls, for example, allowed the girls to develop their own narratives and determine their own agendas. Frazer's girls introduced many innovative and personal issues, for example, the significance of social class, which had not occurred to Frazer before the research. Furthermore, feminist authors (Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981) have identified significant ethical issues within one-to-one interviews which can be overcome with focus groups. Traditionally, within one-to-one interviews, it is the *researcher* who retains control over the proceedings, it is the *researcher* who regulates and imposes a meaningful framework on the narrative, and it is the *researcher* who conceals personal information whilst demanding disclosure from participants. The inevitably exploitative nature of traditional one-to-one interviews is further compounded with *adult* researchers and *child* participants. Children cannot easily refuse or challenge adults. This power imbalance is further exacerbated in my school settings where an adult researcher, such as myself, may easily be seen as a teacher and be attributed to all the trappings of authority, status and power that entails (Danby and Farrell 2005). In this context, focus group research provides me with a significant advantage when working with child participants. Put simply, an adult researcher can be easily outnumbered and overwhelmed by a group of children (Wilkinson 1998). This negates, and even inverts, the traditional power relationships between adult-researcher and researched-child thus effectively dismantling the abusive potential inherent within the research process. However, a loss of control can facilitate a form of reverse exploitation. Wilkinson, for example, documents cases of sexual abuse and harassment by male participants to female researchers. Notwithstanding this serious issue, feminist-minded researchers, such as Kitzinger (1994), interested in reducing exploitation and developing participant-led methods tend to regard the use of focus groups favourably. This is because focus groups are particularly useful where there is an obvious power imbalance between researcher and researched, as is the case in my research and whenever adults research children. Focus groups at least invite the opportunity for a non-hierarchical, democratic and generally more egalitarian research process. However, as Wilkinson (1998) points out, the use of focus groups on its own does not prevent the dominance of the researcher. During my data analysis, for example, I will reassert adult sovereignty. Overall though, as Kitzinger (1994) argues, focus group research means that it is more likely that sovereignty is awarded to the respondents' conceptualisation of what is significant. This is because it is the participants' intersubjectively fabricated

concepts and frameworks for constituting the social world which dominates the data. In this light, focus groups are ideally suited to explore the dynamic and intersubjective social construction of Boredom.

Focus Groups: Researching Classroom Boredom with Pupil Participants in Secondary School Education.

In writing this section of the methodology I attempted to locate research which displayed all the following criteria pertinent to my research:

- Sociological,
- Employs focus groups,
- Conducted within secondary schools,
- Pupils as participants
- Boredom was the main focus of the research.

Firstly, I used three online library databases; EBSCO Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete and Web of Science. I entered the (Boolean) search terms 'Boredom' OR 'Boring' OR 'Bored' AND 'School' limiting the results to, full-Text e-journals: Academic Journal and language: English. Education Research Complete returned 171 articles and Academic Search Complete returned 1,454 articles and Web of Science returned 274 articles. Secondly, I was also able to use a database which is continuously and collaboratively compiled by organisers and attendees of the 3rd Annual Boredom Conference held at Warsaw University in 2016. The database is maintained by individuals currently researching within the field of Boredom studies. This database is entirely Boredom-orientated. After these databases had been trawled, the abstracts of any article that appeared to meet the above criteria were read and the full article was read if most (at least 3 out of the 5) of these criteria appeared to be met.

There is almost no primary sociological research that specifically employs focus group methodology to research Boredom within secondary schools and uses pupils as participants. This paucity is frustrating but unsurprising given the general absence of sociological research into Boredom itself. To date, I have only located one piece of research that meets all 5 of the above criteria; Mitsoni (2006).

The objective of Mitsoni's research was to establish, 'what causes students to be bored' (p161). This objective was framed within her broader evaluation of the effectiveness of pedagogical practices within the teaching of archaeology in Greek secondary schools. Furthermore, her research specifically evaluated the effectiveness of archaeological artifacts, museum visits and a widely used textbook as engaging teaching tools. The main body of her research was conducted at four secondary 'state schools with mixed ability students' (p161). There were 32 pupils split into eight focus groups with two groups per school. Each group was comprised of four pupils, two girls and two boys, all aged 12–13. Although Mitsoni used archaeological artifacts to elicit 'ice-breaking' at the beginning of the focus group sessions, Mitsoni used, what she refers to as interviewer-posed, 'core questions', for most of her interviews. She concludes that Boredom arises because of a deficit. Boredom is caused by lessons that fail to actively involve pupils, fail to connect subject matter to pupils' everyday lives and fail to treat pupils as autonomous and responsible learners.

However, there are elements of unproblematised knowledge underpinning Mitsoni's work. The first is the over-reliance on a common-sense assumption that Boredom is already so sufficiently familiar to the reader that its constitution requires no further explanation. More problematically, there is no sense of what Boredom represents to her pupils. Instead, Boredom is presented implicitly as existing oppositionally at the other end of an interest/motivation/curiosity spectrum. Implicitly Boredom is merely the absence of these elements. Secondly, this vacuum allows Mitsoni to import her own common-sense inflections of Boredom into the research situation. As an archaeology teacher, for example, Mitsoni admits to being 'disappointed' (p159) by her pupils' lack of engagement. Boredom is blamed and regarded as negative accordingly. Boredom is pathologized as a problem for pupils because it is a problem for teachers. In this sense, her work is reminiscent of the earliest industrial psychological research of the 1920s and 30s (Vernon 1926; Wyatt 1934 cited in Hill & Perkins 1985) which regarded Boredom as problematic because of its negative impact on production and performance. There is no sense within Mitsoni's work of the pupil's agentic use of Boredom as a technology for managing their own experiences and no sense of Boredom's creative or positive potential. This is not a view of Boredom as a precursor to radical change (Lewkowich 2010).

Mitsoni's research is, in a sense, a missed opportunity. Her use of focus groups could have allowed her pupils free reign to explore and narrate their own conceptualisations of Boredom. This freedom may have indeed revealed significant challenges to Mitsoni's own teacher-led negative assumptions. However, the method employed, the over-use of interviewer-led 'core questions' has prevented her pupils from agentically directing the narrative. This control prevented the pupils from taking over the research situation and has dismantled their ability to overwhelm the interviewer's control of the narrative. Instead, her use of archaeological artifacts, only used as icebreakers, could have been extended. The lack of structure this method would have facilitated could have produced the space necessary for pupils to illustrate how they narrate Boredom as a lived reality of their everyday experiences. Unfortunately, Mitsoni's research merely acts to confirm the preconceptions and common-sense of the researcher.

Chapter 3: Ethical Considerations.

Two ethical statements commonly deployed by social science researchers are the British Sociological Association (BSA) (2002) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2014). Although each statement reflects idiosyncrasies to be expected from the unique socio-historic periods and paradigms from which they were drawn (a review of which is not possible here) these statements share several key principles that are embedded in this research. In summary, research involving human participants should involve the following:

- Researchers should display **respect** for the autonomous nature of participants by ensuring that consent to participate is both freely given and fully informed.
- Social research should be focused on the principle of promoting **beneficence** and the avoidance of **non- maleficence**.
- Researchers should maintain the principle of **justice** through the recognition of equality (including differential treatment where potential inequalities and the possibility of exploitation by factors such as age and social status) and the imbalance of power. This includes recognising the possible misuse of the research findings.

Furthermore, Marrow and Richards (1996) argue that a researcher working with children should consider two issues explicitly: *Consent* and *Protection*. These are the two main ethical issues which require demonstrative reflection for my research:

- Consent -school children as participants and their ability to provide freely given and fully informed consent.
- Protection - The use of focus groups and the implications for confidentiality.

Consent - School children and their ability to provide freely given and fully informed consent.

Frustratingly, Alderson (2005) notes that the issue of children's capacity to provide consent in a manner that clearly meets the standards 'fully informed' and 'freely given' is unresolved; there are no right or wrong answers in this area. Moreover, as Marrow and Richards (1996) note, any understanding about what is 'right' and 'proper' in terms of the treatment of child participants is inevitably clouded by assumptions about

the nature of 'the child' and 'childhood'. Marrow and Richards identify four paradigms which they argue dominate research ethics, each providing a particular position from which 'the child' is fabricated. Firstly, 'the developing child' (p99) paradigm holds that children are 'adults in waiting' and, accordingly, that children should be regarded as lacking (adult) competency because of their supposedly embryonic cognitive abilities. The danger with this view is that children's views and opinions can be easily undermined and dismissed as undeveloped. My research is the antithesis to this position as I am directly seeking, indeed, giving sovereignty to, my child participants' construction of a classroom Boredom. The second paradigm, 'the tribal child' (p99) sees children as existing in their own distinctive non-adult realm. The methodological implications when researching this strange child-world implies that I should employ techniques similar to anthropology; typically ethnography and observation. A danger exists in adopting this position. The assumed opaque 'otherness' of children may lead me to speak 'for' and 'about' children. This will distort the pupils' own voices through a contaminating imposition of my own evaluate accent as I reconstruct the child's perceived life as esoteric. Although I have some sympathies with the tribal child view, in particular as this acknowledges the child's uniqueness and difference, I am keen to avoid drowning my pupils' voices with the volume of my interpretation. Accordingly, my analysis does not imbue 'meaning' as such but rather the demonstrable, and reliable *use* of Boredom as evidenced in the children's own talk. Thirdly, the 'child as adult' (p100) paradigm views the child as competent but vulnerable in an adult environment. Here I should simply deploy adult research methods and disregard the particular uniqueness and status of 'childhood'. However, this would leave my pupils completing inappropriately worded and constructed questionnaires and answering adult-led questions on issues they have neither interest nor experience. Finally, Marrow and Richards believe that the fourth model, 'the social child' (p100) offers something of a solution. The 'Social child' is a view of children as 'differently competent'. This is a view of 'the child' adopted in my research which acknowledges children as active and competent social actors but one which acknowledges that these competencies are different from adults. Furthermore, the child's social world, its pressures, relative powerlessness and uniqueness need to be acknowledged. It is this final position, the 'social child', as developed and applied specifically to research by Danby and Farrell (2005) which is employed in this research. The 'social child' world is recognised in my approach to

using research-absent focus groups. I am intentionally absent during the focus group interviews and the operationalisation of my primary research questions, interview structure even recording of the interviews themselves is entirely child-centred accordingly.

Unsurprisingly, I am deploying the 'social child' paradigm in my research. My academic background is sociological and, as Danby and Farrell (ibid) argue, the 'social child' paradigm emerged from the sociology of childhood which developed over the latter part of the twentieth century. This spans the entire period of my own sociological life. In this sense, I am most sympathetic to this particular construction of the child as an effect of my socio-historical agency. Even though the sociology of childhood perspective (see Waksler 1991; Prout and James 1997; Mayall 2003) poses significant challenges to the more traditional developmental view which sees the child as being both vulnerable and lacking competencies my biographical and dialogical relationship with decades of sociological research leads the 'social view' into a state of almost common sense. Adopting this view means that my construction of child participants positions them as capable of both providing consent to participate in research and as being competent articulators of their own experience. Furthermore, this perspective forces me to recognise that the status of children is relatively powerless, in comparison to adults, and to act accordingly; removing myself from the interview process, for example. In a sense, my research sits within a broader paradigm known as 'a child's rights approach' in research. This approach ensures that children's voices are heard in line with the United Nations (1989: article 12) Declaration on the Rights of the Child which states that children have a right to express their views and that these views have to be afforded 'due weight' in all matters which affect them. My 'social child' approach, therefore, demands that my child participants are explicitly required to provide their consent for research, and this is not merely a matter for gatekeepers to decide. In line with this perspective, I have explicitly built in the prerequisite for children to provide their own signature on the consent form and the child cannot participate unless this consent is evidenced. However, I also required the signature of a child's parents/guardians, the absence of the parental signature prevented the child's participation. At first, this appears to contradict the 'social child' notion of children as competent participants. However, as well as recognising that children are active and competent participants, I also recognise the second element of the sociological view

of the child in that my child participants are relatively powerless agents in an adult orientated world. Danby and Ferrell's (2005) research into the consent process with school children illustrates my point. Danby and Ferrell observed that when children are 'asked' to participate in an activity *whilst in school* the pupils can often perceive this as instruction because genuine requests for consent are so untypical of their quotidian classroom experience; children have little option to refuse 'requests' from teachers. Thus, 'consent' offered is unlikely to be freely given. The implications for my research are that, as an adult, I may appear to be 'just another teacher' and the activity 'just another piece of schoolwork'. To disrupt this process, I wanted my pupils to complete their consent form *outside of the school sphere* and *with a more powerful other more able to refuse consent*. This was intended to incite a greater opportunity for the pupil to dissent because s/he is cloaked by the protective collusion of an agent powerful enough to refuse a teacher; their adult parent. If a pupil did not want to take part s/he was greatly empowered accordingly. However, I acknowledge that there was a potential contradiction inherent in this plan. It could have eventuated that a pupil wished to take part and was prevented from doing do by an adult intervention. This of course would undermine my claims to a 'child's rights perspective'. However, I have no evidence of this situation occurring. Furthermore, there are no perfect solutions to the conundrum of child's consent in research and I feel secure that this approach was *most likely* to provide *most children* with an environment in which consent could be seen as freely given.

To ensure that children are fully informed, I continued to follow the example of Danby and Ferrell (2005) in their deployment of the concept 'research conversation'. A research conversation denotes the ongoing process where the researcher provides multiple opportunities for the participants to withdraw. Accordingly, I offered my pupils three moments at which discussion/non-consent or withdrawal could have taken place: Firstly, by returning (or not) the consent form, secondly, at the beginning of the focus group and thirdly, immediately after the focus group interview. In the last debrief I explained to the participants that because the data would be anonymised this was the last point at which they could withdraw simply because I would be unable to identify their talk in the data.

Through the deployment of these strategies, I have acknowledged both the unique competencies that children possess but also the inequalities in power that characterise

school children's lives to provide an environment where consent can be seen as both informed and freely given.

Protection - The use of focus groups and the implications for confidentiality

Smith (1995) argues that focus groups provide several advantages for researchers wrestling with the ethical implications of their methodologies. Some of these are particularly salient for me in my research with child participants. Focus groups, for example, rarely require the development of long-term or intimate relationships with participants. Indeed, the focus group method is ideal for maintaining distance between the researcher and the researched (Calder 1977). This protective distance is vital for the wellbeing of both me and the child participants. Focus groups are also seen as being useful methods for destabilising the power relationships embedded within more traditional atomistic methods; the group can subvert the interview by refusing the researcher's control thus providing unexpected and highly useful participant-centered findings (Kitzinger 1994) This is particularly the case with child participants (Wilkinson 1998). Thus, focus groups have been perceived as potentially empowering means of engaging with the voice of marginalised groups, particularly within feminist-inspired methodologies (Wilkinson1998; Madriz 2000: Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981). However, Smith (1995) argues that the interactive nature of focus group interviews poses a unique ethical challenge for researchers. Smith has termed this challenge 'over-disclosure'. Over-disclosure occurs when participants reveal information because they are in a group that they would have preferred not to. The tendency to obedience (Milgram 1963) and group think (Janis 1972) in group settings are well noted. Although arguably a potentiality in all research that poses questions to participants, this issue is amplified because focus groups have relatively low degrees of 'internal confidentiality' (Tolich 2009). Whereas 'external confidentiality' refers to the ability of those *outside* the research to identify participants, 'internal confidentiality' is a term Tolich uses to describe the degree to which research *participants can identify each other*. Typically, focus group methodologies have low degrees of internal confidentiality because participants can identify 'who says what' in the research findings. Therefore, Tolich argues that when conducting focus groups, researchers should use multiple sites to increase 'internal confidentiality'. In light of this, I have used multiple school sites and pupils from multiple classes within each site. However, this does not prevent members of groups discussing their experiences

with others immediately following the focus group sessions. Following Smith (1995) I deployed two strategies to minimise the potential toxicity of post focus group gossip. Firstly, I requested that participants respect each other's confidentiality as part of the brief before the group session. Secondly, my participants should understand that ultimately, I have no control over whether other participants discuss their experiences. This was made clear within the information provided as part of the consent process and on the consent form itself. However, given the relatively innocuous nature of the research harmful discussion is unlikely to occur. Furthermore, I also made clear that, as the participants are children, safeguarding concerns will be reported to the school if I perceived potentially harmful over-disclosure.

It was vital that children were participants in my social research. Substantively, I am exploring classroom Boredom from the perspective of the children themselves. Furthermore, their participation is also embedded in their rights to be consulted and due respect paid to their voice. However, as well as bringing invaluable insights, child participants do demand a level of ethical sensitivity that ensures that their voice is heard and that their lack of power and status does not lead to exploitation. I feel that the approach enacted bridged this difficult gap. However, as noted earlier, the ethics surrounding children's participation in research is unresolved. Whereas there are no right or wrong answers in this area; there can be better and worse ones. I believe that the above approach can be considered as the former.

Part 3: Findings and analysis

Introduction

Central to my literature review is the argument that Boredom can be regarded as a socio-historic construction. I attempted to show that Boredom is thoroughly modern. To achieve this, I used concepts such as *anomie*, (Durkheim 1984;1951, Merton 1938) *alienation*, (Marx 1975; Marx 1959) *disenchantment*, (Weber 1946; 2005) and the metropolitan *blasé demeanour,* (Simmel (1978; 1997) to illustrate sociology's embryonic assumptions regarding the link between modernity and a subjective malaise. Furthermore, 20th-century writers such as Marcuse (1964;1974), Elias (1992), Thompson (1967) Spacks (1995), Taylor (1989), Foucault (1975:1978) were thrown into this mix to further bolster the argument that Boredom is a unique subjectivity assembled via a conceptual and discursive framework emergent within modernity. I concluded with Klapp (1986), Goodstein (2005) and finally Gardiner (2014). My overall position was most clearly articulated by Goodstein whose sophisticated analysis maintains that modern Boredom was born out a synthesis of narratives that are situated within modernity, namely democratised scepticism and scientific materialism.

To observe this argument further, I wish to explore how Boredom is fashioned within one particular sociohistoric moment using locally available resources. Accordingly, the findings from focus group interviews conducted at three schools will illustrate the unique, precinctive, and idiosyncratic ways that Boredom is fashioned. The argument being, accounts of Boredom will always be situated and, above all, social.

The analysis of my pupil transcripts has produced four pupil-constructed stories of classroom Boredom, *endemic, predominant, contingent,* and *non-bored*. These stories are used by pupils to describe what Boredom is, what causes it, how it affects them and so on. Furthermore, because each account uses the limited discursive resources found locally within the parameters of particular socio-historic peculiarities, each story depicts Boredom as an intimate socio-historic fabrication in a manner that is inevitably precinctive and idiosyncratic. Accordingly, the 'Findings and Analysis' element of my research is split into two chapters.

Chapter 1: Boredom Stories, Neoliberalism, Resistance and Invisibility.

Chapter 2: Intersections of Social Class and Gender.

Chapter 1 Boredom Stories, Neoliberalism, Resistance and Invisibility.

Introduction

There are three aims of this chapter.

Firstly, to outline the use of Boredom within secondary pupils' talk to reveal their emic operationalisation of Boredom.

Secondly, to explore the relationship between classroom Boredom and neoliberal school-based pedagogies and management practices.

Thirdly, examine Boredom through the prisms of rebellion and gender invisibility.

Accordingly, this chapter is split into three sections.

Section one outlines four Boredom stories. These describe how classroom Boredom operates from the perspective of secondary school pupils.

Section two examines the impact of neoliberal pedagogies and management practices on pupil subjectivities.

Section three critically analyses the argument that Boredom can be seen as rebellious, an act of resistance and even revolutionary. This section also considers the invisibility of working-class girls' experience of Boredom.

Glossary of transcript annotations.	
[…]	Denotes a pause in speech which is discernible but too short to be timed.
[3 secs]	Denotes a pause in speech. Length in seconds.
CAPITAL	Capitalisation denotes a word discernibly louder than the rest of the talk.
↑	Denotes an upward inflection in talk.
↓	Denotes a downward inflection in talk.
alo::ong	Denotes a word which has been elongated or stretched out in talk.
[speech]	Denotes overlapping speech.

Boredom Stories

This section will outline four Boredom stories. These were the narratives used to operationalise that Boredom by pupils at the three school sites.

1. The *endemic* story narrates Boredom as normal, inherent, and ubiquitous. Education is associated with performance.
2. The *predominate* story narrates Boredom as normal and inherent but with exceptions. Education is mainly associated with performance.
3. The *contingency* story narrates Boredom as an atypical injustice encountered through poor teaching. Education is mainly associated with learning rather than performance.
4. The *non-bored* story narrates Boredom as a result of individual dispositions in others. Education is associated with learning and no reference is made to performance.

Overall, this section will illustrate that Boredom is associated with positioning school as a site for performance. The more severe Boredom stories appear in conjunction with performance motifs and the least severe stories appear in conjunction with learning motifs.

Endemic Boredom Stories.

In this first story, school is presented as totally and completely boring, without exception. Accordingly, Boredom is relentless, ubiquitous, and intrinsic. Six pupils (out of 32 participants) narrated endemic Boredom stories. These stories were constituted by two characteristics, the use of absolutist language (Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone 2018) and a performance view of education (Jackson 2006).

1) Use of absolutist language.

Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone (2018) define absolutist language as the use of words and phrases that depict the world in an undiluted, unqualified, and unrealistically 'black and white' manner. Absolutist language includes terms such as everywhere, all, none, every, always, and never. Although, Al-Mosaiwi and Johnstone's research indicates that absolutist language can be used as a reliable signifier for emotional distress, to my knowledge, a link between absolutist language and Boredom is unique to my research.

Endemic Boredom stories were strewn with examples of absolutist language. Accordingly, endemic stories cast Boredom as an inescapably ubiquitous characteristic of school life.

M1 *you obviously get bored all the time in the classroom […] I mean ALL the time*.

F2 *yeah […] all the time* (Castle school F L35-36)

F1 "…you do the same thing every day […] you wake up you get dressed you go to school […] it's just the same routine every day and that is boring" (Castle School Interview B L137)

Note M1's use of the preface 'obviously'. The term 'obviously' is an ethnomethod attempting to index the ubiquity of Boredom as inter-group normality (Stokoe and Edwards 2008). M1 is inviting other interactants to treat his statement *as-if* it is a commonly known truth. F2 tacitly colludes with M1's assertion by repeating the term 'all the time'. Although counterfactual, 'all the time' is *not treated* as an act of lying by F2 Thus, this episode illustrates a specific ethnomethodological moment with group members engaging in the *dialogical* construction of Boredom.

2) A performance view of Education.

The label ‘performance’ was taken from Jackson (2006) and is applied when pupils’ rationalised their school participation in terms of extrinsic performance rewards. Pupils cited three extrinsic performance rewards; educational, such as a grade; economic, such as enhanced income; or social, such as friendships. A link between a performance-based education and Boredom is relatively well documented in other Boredom-centred education research (Linton and Pollack 1978; Kanevsky and Keighley 2003; Jackson 2006; Mora 2011; Dimitrios and Anastasia 2013).

Endemic stories depicted lessons/activities as mere pathways to qualifications and/or grades. Here F1 is identifying the key to her Boredom as the empty pursuit of grades.

F1 “*like algebra is an example […] you are going to be bored doing it because you know deep down you are only doing it because you’re doing an exam and getting a grade from it*.

M2 *yeah good point* (Castle School Interview B L155-156)

Also, endemic narrators dialogically rationalised that school must be emotionally endured now so that life may be financially enjoyed later on.

M1 *I hope it will I hope my life will get interesting […] more money, hopefully I can just [5 secs] go alo::ong with it↑ for the next two years get the grades*

T1 *more money* (Castle School E L123-124)

Finally, endemic stories saw school jointly constructed as a vehicle for socialising with friends.

T1 *have fun […] just be yourself with your friends*

Predominant Boredom Stories

12 pupils (out of 32 participants) narrated predominant Boredom stories. I attached the predominant label to stories that positioned Boredom as the prevalent emotional experience within school, but which contained at least one explicit example of occasional non-Boredom. Predominant stories differ from endemic stories because Boredom can, occasionally, be punctuated.

M2 *I think it’s rare to find a lesson where you are interested in it ↓ […]* (Castle School B L12)

F1 *if the subject is interesting and the teachers make the lesson interesting then it's not […] as tiring and boring […] but they are rare*↓ (Castle School F L117)

Non-boring experiences are narrated as 'rare'. Interesting lessons existed only as tantalising possibilities rather than lived realties. Although seemingly quite bleak in its outlook, the predominant story contains at least a germ of optimism. Although experiences tend to be dominated by Boredom, there is a sense that maybe tomorrow's school life will improve. More comforting than the endemic stories, predominate stories always provides the narrator with a sanctuary of hope.

A common motif in predominant stories was the purpose and function of school. School and education generally were depicted in terms of performance, as means to an end, and as having no intrinsic worth. In this sense, endemic and predominant stories overlap. The significant difference is that whereas endemic stories locate performativity as an omnipotent feature of school life whereas predominant stories allow for occasional and rare exceptions.

M2 *… but things like err […] maths […] like I get algebra and all that is maths […] but […] and I get that you have got to do it to get the grade in order to go through life so it's not useless […] but algebra is useless as it is by itself […] but to get you a grade, it's not useless is it*↑*? cos it gets you grade*↑(Castle School B L143)

Here both boys reduce school to the status of performance and a means of achieving an external reward; a grade. The predominant story tends to position lessons as normatively devoid of basic value. Instead, learning and education are being constructed in terms of performance. Education's raison'd'etre is to produce grades that lead to employment. Under this premise, lessons appear pointless when they fail to explicitly facilitate performativity.

Contingent Boredom Stories.

Eleven pupils (out of 32 participants) narrated a contingent Boredom story. Stories were labelled as contingent because firstly, Boredom was constructed as atypical and tied to specific failures of school life rather than as a generic aspect of it. Secondly, pupils found most lessons, interesting, enjoyable, and meaningful. Firstly, activities that were enjoyed…

M1 *it's not like homework if it's on the computer […] that's good homework* (Commuter School A L122 &124)

F3 *I think that's why I think that's why I love writing so much because I can feel creative* (Commuter School C L88)

In these extracts, pupils identify schoolwork that is 'good' or they 'love'. In contingent Boredom stories, liking school is both normative and prosaic. Accordingly, Boredom is tied to specific, atypical, contexts.

M3 *Monday mornings […] Wednesday midday […] Friday afternoons* (Canal School A L23)

Within the contingent story, pupils cast school as a site for learning and personal development. They cast themselves in the role of fundamentally 'good' students who want to learn. They appear comfortable expressing conservative educational values concerning the importance of learning. Boredom occurs because something has gone wrong in a normatively positive learning situation i.e. poor teaching. Accordingly, Boredom is synonymous with injustice and expressed as frustration. This is reminiscent of Kanevsky and Keighley's (2003) research that argues that Boredom is born from pupils' resentment and frustration at school's continual failure to provide an appropriately positive learning environment.

F2 *it does annoy me when teachers say they spend all their time planning lessons […] so why are they all boring* (Commuter School A L191)

Furthermore, contingent stories position pupils as innocent bystanders who have Boredom unjustly inflicted on them by incompetent teachers. Within the contingent story this is an injustice because, in direct contrast to previous stories, school is not supposed to be boring.

F3 *and all of a sudden like […] well […] I am not learning anything because it's::s crap. How am I supposed to learn anything if you […] you just zone out* (Commuter School C L66)

Generally, these stories depict school as a place of learning where personal enrichment occurs. Accordingly, the performance motif is relatively weak, and pupils rarely

describe school in terms of performance grades but in terms of learning and personal development.

Non-Bored Stories.

Only three pupils (out of 32 participants) presented a non-bored story. This label was given when the narrator declared her/himself free from classroom Boredom. Additionally, the narrator professed to enjoy school. Non-bored stories do acknowledge Boredom as a feature of school life, but this is narrated as a phenomenon that affects others. Firstly, enjoying school…

M1 *I love school* (Castle School B L24)

Secondly, witnessing Boredom in others…

M1 *people who like struggle with work and are like bored* (Commuter School L168)

M1 *it's also for maybe for like intelligent students when they've finished the work […] They have like nothing else to do* (Commuter School C L94)

In the non-bored story, propensity for Boredom is heightened amongst certain pupil types; 'intelligent' and 'struggle'. 'Intelligent' pupils experience Boredom because teachers fail to provide enough stretch and challenge. Also, pupils who 'struggle with work' are bored because they experience 'confusion' during lessons, leading them to 'switch off'. Significantly, all the previous stories deploy situational accounts of Boredom. However, the non-bored story uniquely constructs Boredom as a personal disposition. Boredom is accounted for in terms of individual personality or preference for lessons. Indeed, the idea of disposition was used extensively in this narrative. No other story does this.

M1 *I think it yeah […] it's a personality thing […] in my opinion […] I believe that's why people are bored in school* (Castle School B L 57)

Finally, there is no sense that education is viewed in terms of performance. School is presented as a positive learning environment. Within the non-bored story, lessons are described as being enjoyable and the act of learning itself is viewed as being intrinsically worthwhile. Generally, this story allocates enjoyment and fun to the very activities that others find so appalling.

M1 *… but personally I think I think it's […] silly really […] you are here to learn […] I don't know how you can be bored to be honest it's erm* (Castle School B L55)

Section one: Summary

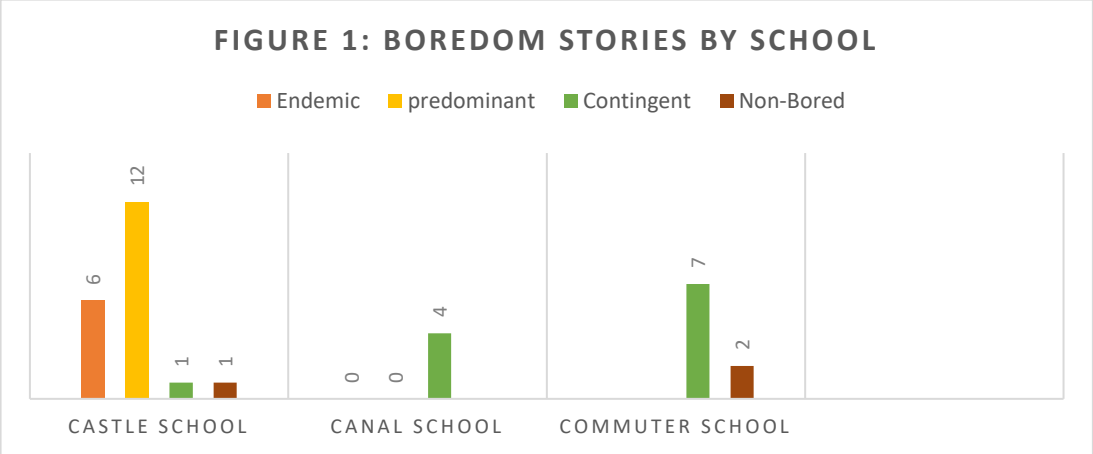
This section has outlined four Boredom stories.

5. The *endemic* story narrates Boredom as normal, inherent, and ubiquitous. Education is associated with performance.
6. The *predominate* story narrates Boredom as normal and inherent but with exceptions. Education is mainly associated with performance.
7. The *contingency* story narrates Boredom as an atypical injustice encountered through poor teaching. Education is mainly associated with learning rather than performance.
8. The *non-bored* story narrates Boredom as a result of individual dispositions in others. Education is associated with learning and no reference is made to performance.

Overall, Boredom appears to be associated with positioning school as a site for performance. The more severe Boredom stories appear in conjunction with performance motifs and the least severe stories appear in conjunction with learning motifs.

Chapter 2: Boredom and Neoliberalism: Castle school

I have collated the Boredom stories into the following figure for illustrative purposes only.



As Figure 1 (above) clearly illustrates, the most severe stories of Boredom (endemic and predominant) were all produced by pupils from Castle School. Furthermore, despite having a much larger sample than either Commuter or Canal School, pupils from Castle School produced disproportionately fewer contingent and non-bored stories. Accordingly, the relationship between Castle School and Boredom will be the next focus of analysis.

In response to these findings, I returned to Castle School and conducted further focus group interviews. The second wave of focus group interviews established theoretical saturation in that they failed to produce new insights, but they were useful in that they acted to confirm the findings of the first wave and Boredom was still commonly narrated as a feature of Castle School life.

During this time, and rather serendipitously, three teachers who had helped me conduct the interviews offered to keep diaries documenting their daily experiences during the Autumn term 2018. Extracts from these diaries are presented below. These teacher diaries provided an invaluable sense of ‘what’s going on’ in Castle School from a teaching perspective and will be used to contextualise the plight of the Castle School pupils and explain the high degree of severe Boredom stories narrated on this site.

Castle School

"My phone/PCs are out of synch with the school bell. Weird? So, I get the times wrong all day. The morning meeting begins before my phone says it's 8:30. I am so overwhelmed before the day has even started. We hear our brief for the rest of the week. Kids going to the toilet too much. Kids out of lessons too early. Kids need to answer make comments in books / there is going to be a work scrutiny / there is a parents evening / use this data to sell the school more etc etc straight from meeting into lesson; log on etc no board rubber. Lesson 1; lesson 2; send printing to resources; break; emails and UCAS. 5 mins to get to the toilet / get photocopying – write this!!! Get back before the kids and do the lesson. Yet another room; 5 lessons in 5 different bloody rooms!" (Teacher Blue diary entry 8; Castle School)

The above is an extract from a diary written by a teacher from Castle School. This extract illustrates the intensity, the volume and, in her own words, the 'overwhelmed' nature of feelings encountered by teachers within this school. In this section, I aim to use Castle School teacher diaries (kept between September-November 2018) to explore the relationship between classroom Boredom and neo-liberal pedagogical and management practices. I will argue that performance-based Boredom within Castle School is an outcome of three neoliberalist management technologies; *Marketisation; Managerialism;* and *Performativity*. Furthermore, although my arguments and evidence are invariably based within this school, it is unlikely that these practices are confined to only this school. In this light, it is possible to read these findings as relevant to sites with similar practices.

How is Neoliberalism operationalised in this research?

Firstly, given the ambiguity with which neoliberalism is often used, it is important to unpack the sense with which I am deploying the concept here. Ball (2003a: 2016b) argues that, within school-based research, neoliberalism is constituted by three overlapping, interdependent and coexisting technologies, *Marketisation; Managerialism;* and *Performativity*. Furthermore, as these components constitute neoliberalism in terms of policy and practice, they can be considered neoliberalism as it exists 'out-there'. However, he also argues that these components have profound implications for the internal subjectivities of those who encounter them (Ball 2000; 2003a; 2012; 2016a; 2016b). It is this last sense that I am most interested in. I am

interested in exploring the possibility of an embodied neoliberalism as it manifests within the emotions and the hearts and souls of teachers and their pupils; *neoliberalism as it occurs 'in-here'* (Peck 2003). Accordingly, I intend to explore whether neoliberal technologies, Marketisation, Managerialism and Performativity, have led to the development of a specific *neo-liberal governmentality* in Castle School. This is a subjectivity that repositions the self as an improvable marketable project i.e. human capital; measures and monitors personal worth in terms of outcome and performance; and which atomises 'excellence' or 'failure' in terms of the individual as an entrepreneur. Finally, based on my pupils' focus group interviews, I will argue that a perceived inability to inhabit an idealised neo-liberal self, results in pupils narrating themselves as experiencing an individualised alienated discontent which, although entirely social in genesis, becomes translated as an individual subjective malaise; Boredom.

Neoliberal Technologies; Marketisation; Managerialism; Performativity.

Firstly, I aim to explore evidence that suggests neoliberalism, in terms of the three technologies identified, is present in Castle School. I have chosen to focus my attention on Castle School because the more severe stories of Boredom, Endemic and Predominant, emerged from that site. Pseudonyms for these teachers have been adopted, Teacher Red; Teacher Blue; Teacher Purple. Their diary entries will be used to explore whether neoliberal technologies, Marketisation, Managerialism and Performativity**,** are operating within the school. It is worth noting however, that to render my analysis intelligible, I will be examining these technologies one at a time. However, these components do not operate in isolation. Rather, they overlap, intersect and are interdependent. Marketisation, for example, cannot occur without the data produced by performativity, and performativity is driven into being by a managerialism which itself serves educational markets.

Marketisation: Marketisation is the 'reculturation' of schools as 'economic' sites where their business rivals are other schools and colleges with whom they compete to recruit consumers to maximise their exam 'income'.

The language of marketisation is evident with the teacher diaries. For example, when Teacher Blue (diary entry 8) describes the features of her '*overwhelming*' morning staff meeting she describes management directives which instruct teachers to

encourage pupils to increase the amount of writing in their notebooks. This is to render the pupil's classwork observable and therefore more marketable. Furthermore, teachers' compliance will be observed in a rather ominously titled '*work scrutiny*' by managers. The pupil's work is thus transformed into a vehicle for marketing teaching practice. Specifically, pupils' work is being transformed into marketable '*data*' to be used in an upcoming Castle School parents' evening which itself has morphed into a commercial promotional opportunity. Indeed, teachers are explicitly told that they need to "…*sell the school more*". Furthermore, in other extracts, teachers Red and Blue reveal that they are encouraged to monitor school uniforms so that pupils' clothing is in keeping with the concept of '*business attire'* (Teacher Red, diary entry 1; Teacher Blue, diary entry 3). The pupil's very clothes becoming an embodiment of neoliberal marketisation. Finally, a third teacher, Purple, reveals a painful awareness of the need to produce an attractive educational product to '*sell*' to potential future students. She implies that a failure to do so may mean the termination of her current teaching… "*If they don't produce decent grades, I can't sell the course to the next lot*." (Teacher Purple, diary entry 3). This extract also illustrates the personal, precarious, and powerless experience of neoliberal teaching. The teacher's 'worth', future employment and livelihood are held captive by the performances of her pupils.

My findings echo those of Stephen Ball. This is significant because it indicates that the kind of practices that I have evidenced are unlikely to be limited to Castle School only. Ball's research has, over many years (Ball 2000; 2003a; 2012; 2016a; 2016b), involved eliciting stories from teachers' dairies, often in email form, recording their teaching experiences and feelings. These diaries are also laced with the language of the market and business…

"*It's as though children are mere nuts and bolts on some distant production line, and it angers me to see them treated so clinically in their most sensitive and formative years*" (Teacher Roma from Oxford, Ball 2003a:216)

"I find that one of the most fundamental challenges of my job is trying to avoid being incorporated into market modes of thinking" (Martin, US school principal, in Ball 2016a:1134)

My analysis of the teacher diaries from Castle School mirrors Ball's analysis (Ball 2003a:2016a) this suggests that *marketisation is present within Castle School.*

Specifically, these extracts concur with Ball's (2000) work in that there is a sense that education is becoming less concerned with what the school can do for the pupil and is moving towards what the pupil can do for the school.

Managerialism: Managerialism manifests via the development and maintenance of 'monitoring systems' and the 'production of information' to create "…changes in behaviour…" OECD (1995:75). Ball (2000) argues that an imperative to produce a spectacle capable of satisfying managerialist monitoring systems has become *the* dominant driving force behind teaching and learning. Furthermore, he believes that managerialism has led to a kind of *schizophrenic classroom* where the requirements of observation, monitoring and information production actively distort the nature of learning into the pursuit of measurable targets. Using Ball's research, it is possible to state that managerialism rife within UK schools and is unlikely to be limited to Castle School.

In Castle School, the existence of managerialism in the form of monitoring, knowledge production technology and the fashioning of spectacle are evident. Teacher Blue (diary entry 8), for example, identifies the existence of two managerialist technologies which she calls a '*work scrutiny*' and a '*data capture'*. The 'work scrutiny' is an inspection of hard copy evidence such as handwritten assignments and teacher marginalia. The 'data capture' refers to a statistical analysis that compares measures of current performance with a computer-generated prediction. The exact, and indeed exacting, nature of these monitoring technologies is recorded throughout her diary. I have reproduced this lengthy extract in full to convey the eloquent richness of teacher Blue's laments concerning managerial monitoring. I then follow this with analysis.

Teacher Blue Diary extract 9 (in full)

Stage 1. All the books have to submitted to the team leader. All books meaning all books that the kids write in. all the books are purple. Name class subject and TARGET GRADE on the front. If kid isn't meeting the target grade eg target C but pieces of work marked at D/E then teacher has to submit why and provide evidence of intervention. Intervention = an email has been sent home. Kid had detentions for missing work. Form tutor / year head have been informed. So, every purple book has to have a learning plan stapled to the front. / it has to be in the right relevant place. This has to cover the until half term. This is just so the SLT can check the date of what

you say you are doing and what you are actually doing. If you are doing something different then you have to account for this too. On this plan must be two assessments. These make up the grades that get sent to SMT and home so it's wise to pick these carefully. I am actually just getting all this by writing it down!!! Generally, if the class know it's an assessment for the work scrutiny – and we make sure they bloody well do! – then to be fair they do try. Otherwise they're not interested in tasks or homework. Other issues = some kids will not use the purple book. Makes teachers paranoid and means we have to keep checking what's in the kids' books etc. oh yeah and for the assessment there also has to be a MAD book – I know!!! - this means Making A Difference. In this I have to write what can be improved. But I have to use green ink – when they respond to this then I have to write another response but this time I have to use purple. It's called the 'purple pen of power' – seriously!!!

Stage 2 subject leader then asked for specific books selected at random by SMT (senior management team) if books don't have name / underlined date / Gwaith dosbarth / Gwaith cantref titles / aren't matching the target…

Then the line manager has to explain, which means you have to explain.

In addition, there is a data capture. On SIMS (register) the subject tutor fills in the current grades of each pupil (based on 2 pieces of assessment) these run A-E. then an Attitude to Learning (ALT) score 1-8 with three being cause for concern – immediate contact to parent and tutor must prove evidence of intervention. The pupils also have an ALPS score; a computer-generated score based on some algorithm which says what they should be getting. It doesn't matter what you think. If the current performance doesn't match the ALP's e.g.

ALP= C but Grade 1=D Grade 2 = E

Then everyone is in deep shit.

You can lie and hope for the best, and some do, but you will still need to explain why Johnny Biggs doesn't get his computer predicted C.

Once all of this process is complete then the kid gets a card sent home showing predicted grade / 2 assessed grades / ALT. Then the phones call from parents begin…

The teacher has to present data which shows that their discrepancy between APLS (which takes into account what a nominal kid of that social status / GCSE's / SAT should achieve and current grade. ALPS is based on Fischer Family Trust. Teacher must explain a shit ALP e.g my subject got an 8 which is apparently bad and how they will improve this e.g. get Joe Bloggs to a C not D. And then you identify the kids that bring you down e.g. nutter / non-attendance finally you have to declare that

1 the date capture is correct AND..

2 the data predictors are in your opinion accurate – there is actually no choice in this. If you don't say it is then you just have to keep doing it over and over again until you do agree. Mindless.

3 that you have intervened where necessary

4 that you have down 'sparkly' teaching – I kid you not!

This shit happens every 5-6 weeks!!!

Work Scrutiny - The purpose of work scrutiny is one of monitoring and "…*is just so the SMT* (Senior Management Team) *can check the date of what you say you are doing and what you are actually doing"* (teacher blue diary entry 9). During a work scrutiny, the teacher must submit, for every student, a work plan, an annotated student workbook, a teacher assessment workbook (known as MAD – Making a Difference) and two graded assessments. Teachers and pupils appear to collude to produce a satisfactory spectacle.

"On this plan must be two assessments. These make up the grades that get sent to SMT and home so it's wise to pick these carefully… Generally, if the class know it's an assessment for the work scrutiny – and we make sure they bloody well do! – then to be fair they do try. Otherwise they're not interested in tasks or homework" (Teacher Blue diary entry 9)

A work scrutiny is a highly structured internal inspection which is less an observation of current practice and more a driving force determining that practice. The nature of the assessments set is chosen '*carefully*' by teacher Blue, not to meet pupils' learning needs, but to create a desired spectacle. Additionally,

"…for the assessment there also has to be a MAD book – I know!!! - this means Making A Difference. In this I have to write what can be improved. But I have to use green ink – when they respond to this then I have to write another response but this time I have to use purple. It's called the 'purple pen of power' – seriously!!!" (Teacher Blue Diary entry 9)

The need for spectacle dictates the content, format of assessments and even the colour ink used by teachers to annotate pupils' work. Teacher Blue is no longer an autonomous professional, but an automated facilitator of spectacle controlled through observation and judgement. There is no serious sense that 'green' and 'purple' inks are advantageous to learning but are merely part of the spectacle, significations of dressage, observation and control. Teacher Blue's professionalism is utterly obliterated in this process with even the minutiae of her practice heavily controlled via observation. As the above extract makes clear, observation drives behaviour and practice. Teacher Blue continues by describing an additional aspect of inspection called 'data capture'…

"In addition, there is a data capture. On SIMS (register) the subject tutor fills in the current grades of each pupil (based on 2 pieces of assessment) these run A-E. then an Attitude to Learning (ALT) score 1-8 with three being cause for concern – immediate contact to parent and tutor must prove evidence of intervention. The pupils also have an ALPS score; a computer-generated score based on some algorithm which says what they should be getting. It doesn't matter what you think. If the current performance doesn't match the ALP's e.g. ALP= C but Grade 1=D Grade 2 = E, then everyone is in deep shit." (Teacher Blue diary entry 9).

As the final sentence in the above extract illustrates, these highly intrusive inspections have the potential of creating significant anxiety for all those involved. The worth of Teacher Blue's teaching and learning is held captive to a complex matrix of alienating algorithms and dehumanised digits. Highly intrusive inspections have the potential of creating significant anxiety for all those involved

These extracts illustrate the presence of managerialism within Castle School. The teachers and pupils collude to erect a plastic façade, a spectacle, and a fabrication of learning in order to present the required enacted fantasy of learning.

Finally, it is worth concluding this section by making the point that these inspections are not isolated inconveniences. The imperative of spectacle is never far away. Indeed, the Damoclesian threat of managerialist monitoring continuously hangs over the heads of both pupils and teachers alike. Or, as teacher Blue eloquently states… *"This shit happens every 5-6 weeks!!!"* (Teacher Blue diary entry 9).

Performativity.

The final technology, performativity, relates to any activity which is performed to be observed. The sole purpose of performance is to become spectacle. However, performances are much more than simply moments of measurement; they are exhibitions of *value*. Accordingly, performances have the potential to interpellate individuals into conceptualisations of self. When delivering a 'poor' performance, failing an exam or 'missing' a teaching target, for example, an individual is invited into the terror (Lyotard 1984) of knowing her/himself as a 'failing' pupil or teacher. Even 'successful' subjects are not free from anxiety. To be a 'good' teacher or pupil means delivering a *constant* stream of quantifiably excellent spectacles; again, and again, and again. Accordingly, Ball (2012:20) argues that performativity inevitably leads to a unique form of educational 'ontological insecurity'. Ontological insecurity occurs when self-knowledge becomes synonymous with self-doubt. Furthermore, my concurrence with Balls' work shows that ontological insecurity is unlikely to be limited to just Castle School. Teacher Blue's self-knowledge concerning her teaching practice is invalidated by the data-capture described above. Success or failure, for example, is unjudgable in terms of her emotional relationships with students or her professional intuitive understanding of their learning because the technologies to legitimate such personal, reflective and qualitative claims simply don't exist, hence, "…*It doesn't matter what you think*.". Instead, she must wait to discover what kind of a teacher she is according to a "…*computer-generated score based on some algorithm*…". Self-doubt is an unavoidable effect of the constant scrutiny that these technologies Marketisation; Managerialism; and Performativity inflect on pupils and their teachers.

Moreover, classroom practices encourage pupils to perceive of themselves as entrepreneurs and the architects of their own futures. The personal responsibility imposed on pupils atomises academic failure as '...a matter of personal sin." (Wilkins

2012:768). The impacts of structural inequalities are obliterated beneath the stigma of poor attitudes and personal failings. Pupils are positioned as organising their behaviour along rational self-interest lines with a desire for success as normative.

Finally, the terror of performativity within Castle School can be found within a matrix of real and symbolic punishments meted out for failing to deliver a required spectacle. These are evident within Teacher Purple's very real fear of not being able to '*sell*' her course and within Teacher Blue's symbolic fear of '*deep shit'* if pupils' actual grades fail to match up with computer-generated fabrications. In these extracts, teaching has become fundamentally altered to meet the demands of plastic pragmatism and the immediacy of spectacle rather than the more qualitative and abstract idea of 'learning' as the mastery of skill and the appreciation of knowledge. This is evidenced, for example, by Teacher Blue (and her pupils) '*carefully*' producing inspection-worthy assessments. In this way, these neoliberalist technologies inevitably distort what it means to be educated, they alter what it means to learn and alter what it means to be both a pupil and a teacher. In this sense, neoliberalism acts as a device for the re-culturation of education and a reformation of the self.

Teacher Diaries: Summary.

By deploying Ball's understanding of neo-liberalism in terms of three interlocking technologies, Marketisation; Managerialism and Performativity I have provided evidence to support the position that these neoliberalist pedagogies are operating at Castle School. In so doing, I have hoped to establish the nature of the discursive environment in which the Boredom stories at Castle School are narrated. Furthermore, by referencing the research of Stephen Ball I have shown that these practices are unlikely to be unique to Castle School. My findings therefore can be seen as emblematic of practices commonly encountered within UK secondary schools. The next stage is to attempt to explain the relationship between the endemic and predominant Boredom stories and this neoliberal environment.

The impact of neoliberalism on individual pupil subjectivities

Here, I am going to be borrowing heavily from Foucault (1991:2008) and his concept of *governmentality*. This, often slippery, concept was used by Foucault to conceptualise what he believed was an operationalisation of power and knowledge production. Foucault (1991) describes how treaties on the art of government began to

emerge from the 16th century. Within these works the concept of 'population' and processes through which a population could be mobilised, particularity through education, to concur, and indeed, valorise, the interests of the ruling regime, were created. Whereas *Sovereign power* refers to forms of control excised directly by a king, ruler, or president and *Disciplinary power* refers to power exercised by bureaucratic significations of sovereignty, *Governmentality,* on the other hand, refers to the various technologies that lead individuals to govern themselves. In my use of the term, governmentality renders a school pupil governable by interpellating him/her into a subjective self-governing mentality which, although s/he is 'free', 'chooses' to act in accordance with the legitimised 'truths' found in the constantly shifting ethics, values and goals of the school regime. Put simply, the mentality, wants and desires of a pupil become synonymous, in effect, with those of the school.

How does all this apply to pupils and Boredom?

The endemic and predominate Boredom stories produced by pupils at Castle School can be rendered intelligible in the light of Foucault's concept of governmentality in two ways.

Firstly, endemic and predominate Boredom stories share a common motif. This was the positioning of learning as meaningful only in terms of extrinsic performance functions. Specifically, the function of teachers, activities and lessons was often evaluated in terms of external performance measures, such as grades. Furthermore, pupils used Boredom as a critique of pedagogies that failed to facilitate a successful grade performance. From this position, *classrooms were only meaning-full when they provided pupils with a performable spectacle*. Therefore, any lesson which failed to provide access to a meaningful outcome was, by definition, meaning-*less*. Importantly, pupils' conceptualisation of their lessons' worth and value is exactly in line with neo-liberal performativity. It is *not* that the pupils have misunderstood, misaligned or are incorrect in their view of the function of school. Quite the opposite. As I have argued earlier, neoliberal education *is* focused on producing performance and observable performative spectacle, or, as Ball (2003b) explains "Results are prioritised over process, numbers over experiences, procedures over ideas, productivity over creativity" (p91). Furthermore, the reduction of education to essentially performance functions appeared normalised in their talk and so pupils presented this picture of

school as unproblematic. Indeed, neoliberal governmentality is so successful that pupils construct themselves as arriving at this discursive environment as ideal neoliberal subjects. They are initially hopeful and enthusiastic, and they *want* to be produced as measurable and knowable. They appear to believe, optimistically, in the transformative power of spectacle. Significantly, critique only emerges when school life fails to fulfil its ordained function i.e. facilitating their access to spectacle. I will present evidence from the interview transcripts.

Working-class boys who narrated endemic and predominant Boredom stories, for example, all described the function of school as a performance vehicle for the production of spectacle, i.e. to '*get the grades'*. Furthermore, Boredom is the critique applied when this breaks down.

M1 *I hope it will I hope my life will get interesting […] after this hopefully I can just [5 secs] go alo::ong with it↑ for the next two years get the grades* (Castle School E L123) (WC male: Endemic)

M1 *err well I get bored by doing work having to revise and then failing and getting a D in sociology* (Castle School D L55) (WC Male: predominant)

Middle class boys who delivered a predominant story, whilst still narrating school in performance terms, positioned the desirable outcome in terms of usefulness in 'real-life' and lamented the Boredom-inducing absence of educational capital and employability within their lessons.

M2 *I think as well if there is anything in school that you are not going to use in real life […] like trigonometry or angles or something like that it can be very boring* (Castle School C L56) (MC female: Predominant)

Similarly, MC class girls painted a picture of school performance, as part of a conveyor belt which carries them along eventually to a job with Boredom emerging from the absence of any intrinsic worth.

F1 " *It bugs me that you have got to make these decisions and do A levels and then you are going to go to uni and then you are going to get a job in it and it's like whoa::a*" (Castle School interview C L58) (MC female: Endemic)

F1 *"like algebra is an example you are going to be bored doing it because you know deep down you are only doing it because you're doing an exam and getting a grade from it"* (Castle School Interview B L155) (MC female: Predominant)

As stated earlier, neoliberalist governmentality invites pupils to perceive value in spectacle. In these extracts, Castle School pupils show evidence of doing just that. Value is constructed as an attribute of spectacle only; leaving pupils with no sense of lessons with intrinsic value.

However, Castle School pupils are also concerned over whether they will be able to fabricate the desired spectacle. They appear apprehensive concerning skills relevant for economic success and the grades required for university. They are aware that a pupil is only as 'good' as his or her last grade there is the ever-present danger that the next assessment will signify 'failure'. In this sense, Castle School pupils are aware of their own ontological precarity. Furthermore, and perhaps most damaging of all, because neoliberalist governmentality also encourages Castle School pupils to regard *themselves* as the morally responsible and accountable architects of their own performances, not only are these pupils continuously vulnerable to 'failing' but *they own the responsibility for this failure*.

F1 *but it doesn't mean that […] I mean I know it's my fault, but I can't do it so it's me, I know that*

M1 *yeah*

F1 *like today in English I had to sit there listening to Mr J speak whilst writing notes like […] I just feel like a loser* (Castle School interview B L36-38)

Thus, the Castle School pupils can find themselves in a potentially toxic ontological precarity which can have damaging implications for the pupils' sense of self. Čeplak (2012), also, using focus group interviews with secondary school pupils, illuminates the potential effects of this ontological crisis. Čeplak's research is useful here because he illustrates firstly how the neoliberal environment is not merely limited to Castle School and secondly, how a 'failing' grade can be internalised, embodied and assimilated into oneself.

A failing grade is a failing *feeling*. In Castle School, pupils can either narrate their 'failure' as indicative of personal incompetency, incapability and low potential or,

using resources from their discursive environment, they can re-subjectify themselves. In choosing the latter, pupils can reconstruct their 'failure' as indicative of a new subjectivity based on rebelliousness, nonconformity and a 'cool' persona. Concurring with this view, and drawing from her research in secondary schools, Jackson (2006) believed that neo-liberal education, of the kind I have illustrated within Castle School, with its emphasis on measures of individualised competitiveness, leads to a performance-avoidance climate amongst pupils where indifference, nonchalance and Boredom have become routinized defence strategies against the demoralising accusations of personal failure. Put simply, in being bored, Castle School pupils, as with many school children living under this regime, are defending themselves against the tyrannical imperative of neoliberal 'success'. In this sense, Boredom can be seen as a useful rhetorical device, a re-subjectification and a practice of resistance that acts to insulate the pupil from the potential harm of a 'failing' subjectivity. As an act of refusal, Boredom is a protective shield against the violence of neoliberalism that would condemn pupils as 'failures'. Boredom is a tool fashioned within the limitations of their discursive environment that pupils, anxious about being a failure, can use in their daily struggle to construct a less toxic identity. Moreover, via the prism of Boredom, pupils' failure metamorphoses from being a signification of personal incapability and incompetence to one of coolness and indifference. As Jackson (2006) indicates, a bored demeanour not only protects Castle School pupils from performative toxicity, Boredom affords access to an alternative version of success. The 'coolness' enjoyed by the 'bad student', the 'ladette' and the 'lad' lies in a *demonstration* of indifference to schoolwork. Hence this quote from one of Jackson's interviewees: "Don't revise, and be a bit bad, that's more popular" (2006:1). Additionally, because education systemically regulates access to higher education and employment, some failure, and therefore some Boredom, is inevitable. 'Success' is relational and only becomes intelligible in comparison to 'failure'; for there to be wheat, there must be chaff. In this sense, there is a certain inevitability to Boredom too. Indeed, Boredom could be said to be indicative of a 'successful' education system in the sense that, as a regulatory technology, it must be as capable of producing losers as winners.

To conclude this section, firstly, I have argued that there is evidence that neoliberal pedagogies and management practices that characterise UK secondary education are operating within Castle School. Secondly, Castle School pupils locate Boredom within

the failure of school to provide opportunities for their success. Furthermore, I have argued that this position is framed as 'being bored' because it is a rhetorically useful device through which pupils can insulate themselves from the potentially toxic labels of failure. Put simply, I can't lose a race I didn't run. In this sense, being bored in a neoliberal educational environment, such as Castle School, is a highly useful and effective mechanism of self-care, and indeed resistance. It is to the issue of resistance that I turn next.

Chapter 4:1 Boredom and resistance.

Willis (1977) produced the classic sociological examination of pupil resistance to oppressive schooling. Willis' 'lads' enacted a form of oppositional working-class masculinity which, although subversive within their school context, actually secured their entry into exploitative and subservient manual labour in adult life. Willis' work is useful because it illustrates the idea that resistance can be a systemic element in actually perpetuating oppression. Here I want to consider the effects of Boredom as a mechanism of resistance and the impact that this has on the continuation, and indeed perpetuation, of neoliberalist pedagogies within schools. This is via the way that Boredom can act as disciplinary mechanism by pupils against teachers.

The idea that Boredom can be used as a mechanism of resistance but with disciplining qualities is not new. McRobbie (1991) for example, provides evidence of the use of Boredom by school pupils to discipline teachers. McRobbie reports an incident where the schoolgirls in her study felt that a particular teacher had treated one of their friends unfairly. As an act of resistance to this inequality, the girls produced displays of languid intransigence and Boredom during the condemned teacher's lesson. When presented with classroom activities, McRobbie's girls passively sat and stared. They offered no direct confrontation to the teacher but effectively crushed the lesson through the weight of their Boredom. Furthermore, the absence of confrontation made it incredibly difficult for their teacher to apply sanctions and although the lesson was effectively destroyed, no girl was subject to punishment. Additionally, the operationalisation of Boredom as a catalyst for, imagination, rebellion and even revolution, has been a characteristic of recent examinations of the malaise (Lewkowich 2010; Jackson and Carter 2011; Mann and Cadman 2014; Lomas 2017). The basic premise of these positions is that Boredom *represents a dislocation from*

normative situational constraints which allows the development of agentic narratives. The creative and innovative nature of these narratives means that they are inherently rebellious.

In praise of Boredom – being so useless that you cannot be used.

Pupils described many creative and innovative responses to classroom Boredom. These can be loosely rounded up into three forms; *imaginative, nonconfrontational* and *confrontational.* These are the behavioural reactions that pupils describe as their responses to Boredom.

Imaginative responses take the form of fantasy solutions to Boredom. These are often very colourful and appear to be intentionally self-entertaining. This form of response most often appears within predominant Boredom stories and involves creating an exciting imaginary.

M1 *…maybe some unstable plutonium always in err school […] constant risk of being eradicated in a sudden blast […] that would keep me from being bored* (Castle School C L33)

M2 *yeah, it would be interesting if we […] if we could blow things up in chemistry or…* (Castle School B L 69)

The second type is a non-confrontational response. This is mainly emergent from female stories. An excellent example of this is the recurrence of drawing, art and the use of what a female pupil called her Boredom-book. This is a sketchbook that she uses to draw in when a lesson becomes boring.

F3 *yeah that's when the Boredom book comes out* (Commuter School C L104)

F1 *I would be drawing an stuff with my fre:in::ds↑ at least it's fun (*Castle School B L58)

Finally, there is a confrontational response. This appears mainly within the contingent boys' story and involved relating deviancy tales concerning conflicts with teachers.

M3 *when I am bored I either don't do work and I just ignore the teacher […] or I just argue back with them to make me not bored* (Canal School L256)

M2 *when you annoy teachers and they lose it […] it's the most satisfying thing.* (Canal School A L268)

From within the interview transcripts, there are certainly many more examples that can support a link between creativity, innovation and Boredom. However, at first, it appears that these acts have little to do with resistance or rebellion. Certainly, the behaviours identified will have no transformative impact on school life either in a macro or micro sense. Even the most confrontational form of response merely results in boys being removed from lessons to languish in internal exclusion. However, as Jackson and Carter (2011) argue, resistance can take many different forms. Resistance may not have any impact on the actual functioning of the social world. Pupils' daydreams, doodles and disputes appear to provide little more than the pleasure of momentary distraction. However, despite their apparent impotence, pupils' Boredom responses can still be regarded as acts of resistance. But the question begs, what are these acts resisting? To answer this, Jackson and Carter argue that even seemingly innocuous disconnecting behaviour can be understood as resistance within the context of a neo-liberal managerialist obsession with engagement. Engagement involves encouraging workers (and pupils) to align personal wellbeing with the economic objectives of their employers. A key focus of managerialist practices, therefore, is aimed at colonising the emotional life of the worker/pupil because, ultimately, emotionally engaged workers/pupils are more productive. Under managerialism, human beings have morphed into a project of relentless self-improvement as human beings are increasingly being repositioned as useful human capital. Accordingly, neoliberal managerialism encourages a personal imperative to become more, more skilled, more qualified, to seek actualisation, to become fitter, and ultimately to fabricate oneself into a more useful marketable product. Even more can be extracted from this capital if it becomes engaged to the company or school ethos. Specifically, Jackson and Carter argue that, in employment, although worker engagement is explicitly linked to increasing profitability, this exploitation is veiled under a rhetoric of care. Similarly, Gardiner (2014) concurs that remodelling human emotions into a more usefully exploitable form has been an essential development in furthering the interests of twenty-first-century neoliberalist capital.

In terms of schools, Cigman (2012) argues that UK educational policy is dominated by "the enhancement agenda". This is illustrated by F2…

F2 *[no no no hey this is serious now] […] I like being happy in my way not in the way they say […] do you know what I mean? I'm happy being me not with school stuff. So here I am […] fake smiles* (laughs) (Castle School B L35)

This is an equally cynical attempt to colonise the souls of pupils into developing exploitable, and therefore useful, emotions. These include emotions such as resilience, motivation, and optimism. Enhancing pupils' engagement is a means of increasing their performative usefulness hidden under a rhetoric of well-being. In both situations, the interiority of workers and pupils is subjected to emotional colonisation to increase performance. Furthermore, Jackson (2010) argues that if a rhetoric of care fails to entice pupils into welding their souls to the performative demands of the school then pupils can be bludgeoned into conformity with fear narratives threatening them with a future life constituted by meaningless drudgery and precariat poverty. The choice is clear in Castle School, conform, engage and be a useful neo-liberal subject, or experience the terror of failure.

M1 *I hope it will I hope my life will get interesting […] after this hopefully I can just [5 secs] go alo::ong with it↑ for the next two years get the grades otherwise[…] I'll just end up a bum* (Castle School E L123)

However, Boredom provides a liminal third response. In a school that demands that all aspects of the pupil's subjectivity are sacrificed on the altar of self-actualised performative usefulness, Boredom is a perfect sanctuary of uselessness. This is because Boredom is itself perfectly useless, or rather, Boredom is perfect, precisely because it is useless. Bored pupils are useless to neoliberalism because they are declining to play their part in the performance of externally imposed interests. When they are bored, pupils cannot be objectified as human capital. Indeed, Boredom is the antithesis to human capital. Moreover, Boredom is a refusal to be cowed by fear. There is no sense of fear when the pupils recount their confrontations with teachers. Indeed, these confrontations are recounted with great relish.

M3 *when I when I get bored I mess around the whole time* (Canal School L252)

M3 *when the teachers, when the teacher's […] wrong and you are right, I love it* (Canal school L263-264)

There is no more rebellious state than a victim who refuses to be victimised. Boredom exists in-between the narratives of conformity and fear. It is a third liminal position in which pupils are free to act according to their own momentary desires, inclinations, or predispositions. In a sense, Boredom can be regarded as a shift in consciousness when the individual ceases to be pupil in-itself and becomes a child for-itself.

When acting as a pupil *in*-itself, the pupil is inhabiting a neoliberal subjectivity and allows her/himself to be acted upon accordingly. S/he becomes an objectified product, human capital, and is fabricated within a neoliberal narrative which demands engagement, positivity and motivation. The pupil *in*-itself is carried along on a conveyor belt from school, to university and the finitude of employment. The pupil *in*-itself acquiesces to his/her objectification and dissolves into human capital. The bored pupil on the other hand, can be regarded as a child *for*-itself. The child *for*-itself transcends normative situational constraints and begins to act according to her/his own momentary inclinations. These inclinations will inevitably, by the transgressive nature of Boredom, produce behaviours which are useless to the neoliberal performative narrative and are viewed as situationally deviant accordingly. Examples include drawing on one's hands, sketching, imagining nuclear explosions or deliberately picking fights with teachers that will inevitably be punished with more Boredom.

M3 *it's like […] alright! […] it's like it's like isolation but errm you're supposed to get graded in there, but you aren't. But I don't mind it to be honest because once you're bored and bad they can't touch you anymore. D'you know what I mean?* (Canal School A L111)

Importantly, transgressive acts have no use other than an agentic purpose of providing momentary distraction. When acting as a child *for*-itself the child acts as-if there is a suspension of normative hierarchies and inevitably engages in playful rebellion.

M3 *you're not allowed to go out so it's like being waited on because you get your lunch delivered to you by the teachers. I call them by their first names […] thanks Emma […] they hate it (laughs)* (Canal School L113)

Boredom has the effect of inverting many classroom norms. In a manner echoing 'the carnivalesque' (Bakhtin (1984), rules concerning familiarity between teachers and pupils are flouted, teachers are given nicknames, their clothing is ridiculed, they are regarded, and spoken to, as inferiors, often leading to a gleeful confrontation.

Furthermore, the child *for*-itself ignores normal prohibitions, confrontations are faced fearlessly, and indeed, punishments are regarded as significations of pride.

M2 *this is one with Miss A […] I'm just going to go on purely off this with Miss A [laughs] I was bored so I wound her up so much she freaked and ranted […] it was epic!* (laughs) (Canal School A L271)

The child *for*-itself organises her/his own time choosing when to work, when to chat and when to turn maths lessons into art classes. Boredom, therefore, becomes a sanctuary of uselessness, a place where the child is held out from the oppressive demands of neoliberal engagement. In doing so, Boredom acts to provide children with the freedom to pursue normatively useless activities. These activities invert the processes of classroom life and as such, Boredom can be a rebellious sanctuary of playful uselessness.

However, it must be recognised that these carnivalesque responses appear to have no significantly reforming impact on the overall performative nature of either the classroom, the school nor the education system as a whole. Indeed, in some ways, pupils' carnivalesque resistance acts to reinforce the very system under attack.

Next, consider this extract from a teacher diary at Castle school.

"I try something different to get them involved by talking about happy slapping and granny spinning. It's a bit inappropriate but what can I do? Is this on the exam? Aaaargh! No, so it's too dull and they start to talk. Generally, they are mainly passive and bored. Run through it as best I can do given the lack of response – give up. I let them go early." (Teacher Purple diary entry 4)

Teacher Purple attempts to '*try something different'*. However, the students question the legitimacy of the lesson via reference to its exam relevancy. On discovering that the offered activity is unlikely to enhance their exam grade they become '*passive and bored'*. Ultimately, the lesson fails and teacher Purple '*gives up'* and lets '*them go early'*. The Boredom demonstrated by the Castle School pupils has had a disciplinary effect on the teacher. As illustrated earlier, Boredom can emerge when pupils perceive that lessons, activities and so on that are unlikely to provide access to performative spectacle. So, when Teacher Purple attempts to '*try something different'* with informal activities such as 'talking', the pupils' use of Boredom closes the lesson down. The

pupils are, in effect, using Boredom as a means of disciplining teacher Purple for failing to provide them with access to the kind of pedagogies and activities that will enable the pupils to construct themselves as '*homo œconomicus'*. Thus, this use of Boredom illustrates the circulatory nature of power. That is to say, power does not simply rain down on hapless pupil victims. Castle School pupils are not simply the dominated victims of neoliberalist governmentality operating within their school but, in their micro-acts of resistance, they are the co-architects of its *power* too.

So, it is possible to say that Boredom can result in resistance and rebellion. Bored pupils, for example, consistently provide evidence of their willingness to subvert lessons, relationships, and activities. However, claims that Boredom is potentially revolutionary and radical (Lewkowich 2010) are much more difficult to support. Boredom can be rebelliously carnivalesque and results in situationally subversive playfulness, but because the synthesis of pupils' sense of themselves, their desires and ideas about what school is for and the ideals of neoliberalist governmentality have been so successfully interiorised into a neo-liberal subjectivity, pupil's Boredom only appears to have the effect of perpetuating and strengthening performative education. This is, from their own mouths, the very source of their Boredom. Furthermore, as the next section will illustrate, even the framing of their discontent as an emotion also has the effect of strengthening the grip of neoliberalism.

Boredom and the depoliticization of discontent.

In this next section I intend to argue that through the use of Boredom, Castle School pupils are depoliticising their narrative, rendering their critique impotent and thereby assisting in the perpetuation of their own discontentment.

First, I will briefly refer to Lutz (1988) to illustrate the way that emotions can be used as a means of assessing and defining a situation and are resources in the social construction of reality. Lutz examined the emotional lives of the Ifaluk people of Micronesia. In particular, she analysed the pragmatic use of the emotion 'Song'. 'Song' does not have a direct western equivalent but for the purposes of analysis Lutz roughly translates 'Song' as justifiably indignant anger that one should feel on behalf of someone of lower social status who has been treated unfairly. Furthermore 'song' is perceived as a negative emotion, its assertion often results in intergroup conflict because its deployment renders a situation 'unfair', the actions of others as unjust and

the status of the victim as below or beneath one's own. The deployment of 'song' exposes the *reflexive* (in the ethnomethodological sense) nature of emotions. *Emotions can be used as a means to assess and define situations.* Developing Lutz's analysis further, (Edwards 1997) argues that emotions can be regarded as resources that are deployed by individuals to assert, amongst other things, the nature of the situation. When Castle School pupils describe, for example, lessons as 'boring' they are inviting an ontological assertion regarding how that lesson should be conceptualised. This assertion has several implications. Firstly, the pupils' use of Boredom acts as an invitation to 'know' the situation as an *emotional* event. Significantly, as Edwards also points out, not all forms of knowledge are regarded equally. The status hierarchy regarding forms of knowledge leaves rational and objective knowledge on top, trumping emotional and subjective forms. Emotional knowledge, in contrast to that based on reason, therefore, is relatively easy to dismiss as unreliable and to demean as irrational. This is especially so in a neoliberal environment where, as Ball (2003) argues, the qualitative landscape of feelings and beliefs has been increasingly banished as archaic, old fashioned and unfit for purpose. Feelings and beliefs are regarded as outmoded forms of knowledge and are examples of, in Foucault's terms, "…knowledges inadequate to their task…naive knowledges…disqualified knowledges" (1980:81-82). In this way, the perceived inadequacy of emotionally based knowledge is potentially an enormously useful resource in repudiating the status of the pupils' critique; it is 'just' Boredom after all. Furthermore, *Boredom is routinely dismissed as a trivial emotion*. The positioning of Boredom as trivial is evidenced even within social sciences where Boredom remains an under-researched phenomena. Kuhn (1976), for example, sneeringly dismisses everyday Boredom (désoeuvrement) as an unworthy object of study preferring to examine ennui, its more glamorous continental cousin. Indeed, sociology has failed to research Boredom (Darden 1999: Barbalet 1999). Darden even goes as far to describe Boredom as a 'socially disvalued' (p18) emotion within sociology. Finally, as Billig (1995) points out in his examination of Banal Nationalism, ideologies that are invisible are the most powerful. This is because the unexamined is inevitably the unchallenged.

To explain the significance of this invisibility I am going lightly borrow from Marcuse (2002) and his concept, 'the language of total administration' (p88). Using this term, I intend to argue that turning critique in emotionalised language can act to close down

critical thinking. To Marcuse, when language is used rationally, i.e. when concepts are tied to real material conditions, words can be used to provide an authentic understanding of the world. However, in, what he terms, Advanced Industrial Society, language operates irrationally. Concepts are not only divorced from the reality that they purport to describe but actually operate to disguise the true nature of phenomenon and instead implant a meaning that both suppresses discontent and acts to promote oppression. He provides examples such as 'luxury-fallout shelter', 'harmless- fallout' and 'clean-bomb' to illustrate the manner to which irrationality has become normalised. His argument is that language needs to be recognised as a powerful epistemological device, as an essential element in how reality is structured, hence… "It is the word that orders and organises…" (p89). In this sense, there are no concepts or ideas which do not further repressive power. Marcuse evokes Orwell's concept of newspeak to illustrate the detachment of language from reality. Indeed, it is the language of rebellion and protest that suffers the most in this totalising discourse. Marcuse asks, "How can such protest and refusal find the right word…?" So, applying these ideas to neo-liberalism, I will now turn to Apple (2013).

Part of the omnipotent strength of neoliberalism comes from its ability to distort language to corrode opposition and critique whilst normalising its position. One of the most effective tactics has been the twin processes of 'disarticulation' and 'rearticulation'. 'Disarticulation' relates to the ways in which everyday words have been harvested and hollowed out so that they are no longer associated with their historical forms. 'Rearticulation' refers to the repopulation of these words with new meanings infested with vocabularies drawn from markets and business. The term 'excellence', for example, no longer denotes a qualitative experience but instead signifies improvements to market competitiveness and the degree to which quantitative targets are serviced. Specifically, Apple argues, the disarticulation/rearticulation process has involved a corruption of language via a reduction from 'thick' to 'thin' meanings. 'Thick' meanings are constituted by ambiguity, complexity and subtle nuance. Words such as 'democracy' could be conceptualised across a range of terms relating to engagement, activism and a politically informed population. This has been reduced to 'thin' understandings which are inevitably drawn from the lexicon of business and market and orientate around vocabularies of consumer choice. In this sense, when the Castle school pupils seek to

critique their classroom experiences, they do so via a vocabulary that has already been harvested and rearticulated. They do not speak the 'thick' language of resistance or rebellion; neither do they speak of alienation and angst because these resources are no longer available within their discursive environment. Instead, the pupils' critique is reduced to the 'thin' vocabularies of the individual, the emotional and the *merely* 'bored'. Castle School pupils articulate their critique via the vocabulary of neoliberalist individualism and their inability to produce themselves as marketable products. Thus, Boredom distorts discontentment into a passive technology of individual complaint rather than a technology of revolutionary social change. In this way, the pupils' critique is rendered impotent and depoliticised. In the words of Žižek (2012: online) "We feel free because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom."

In examining the radical potentiality of Boredom, I have reached several conclusions. Firstly, there is strong evidence that Boredom results in carnivalesque acts of situational resistance and rebellion. These acts do have the effect of disrupting and subverting individual lessons. However, because pupils frame the absence of performativity as an instigator to their Boredom, pupils tend to close down alternative, non-performative lessons. Furthermore, the framing of their discontent into an individualised, subjective and emotional narrative depoliticise their discount and renders it impotent.

So, in summary, classroom Boredom is subversive and rebellious, yes. However, under neo-liberalism, its revolutionary blood has been drained to the point of anaemia.

The confounding curiosity of working-class schoolgirls.

The previous analysis examines the findings as they relate to MC boys, MC girls and WC boys only. However, the endemic and predominant stories produced by WC *girls* remain unexamined so far because, unlike the three groups analysed, *WC girls did not narrate their Boredom in performative terms*. Instead, the WC girls tended to narrate their Boredom in terms of, what I have coded, *'relationships'*.

F3 I'm bored because […] *also it's because [laughs] because it's why is sometimes […] because I miss my friends […] I miss my dog […] I even miss everybody. (laughs)* (Commuter School C L9)

F3 *well everyone gets bored if the teacher doesn't like you and you don't like them. I'm never bored with the friendly teachers like Miss* (Castle School C L35)

In the (WC) girls' endemic and predominant stories Boredom emerged in the girls' demotivational relationship with teachers and the long hours spent passively waiting in drab physical environments.

F1 *look around […] like literally look around[..] is it even wallpaper? […] I think its paint […] dirty paint […] sitting in this mess is boring* (Castle School A L17)

Similarly, a narrative concerning 'relationships' was also interwoven throughout the (WC) girls' stories too. Specifically, 'Home' was characterised as a sanctuary from school Boredom; 'being' with friends was seen as essential in preventing school Boredom, and finally; the code 'teachers' relates to the pedagogical practices that disrupted 'being' with friends. Finally, teachers' clothing was often humorously personified with emotional characteristics.

F1 *but […] what also bores me is that I have to come from my nice clean home and sit here with them [..] always dressed in black […] and that is b::oo::ring!* (Castle school A L36)

To make sense of the uniqueness of the working-class girls' stories I looked for existing literature in this area. However, frustratingly, research that specifically examines the experiences of working-class schoolgirls is relatively thin on the ground (Plummer 2000). However, even from the earliest research, (McRobbie 1976, for example) the *uniqueness* of working-class girls' relationship to home, friends and family has been highlighted. This relationship, according to Llewellyn (1981), leads girls to develop an 'oppositional' anti-school culture which, inverting the school's traditional emphasis of vocational rather than domestic knowledge, led girls to disengage from education. The result, according to McRobbie (1976) was that working-class girls tended to focus on the social rather than the academic. Stanworth (1984) argued that the apparent lack of engagement perceived in working-class girls should not be used to pathologize working-class girls but instead should be recognised as a structural product of the historically narrow range of opportunities offered to successive generations of exploited working-class women. More recently, Plummer (2000) interviewed adult women concerning their memories of their school days. These memories illustrated that, although many working-class girls initially valued

education quite highly, they disengaged because the personal and social costs of success were simply too high. These costs often manifest within the complex relational incongruities between home and school. Plummer's interviewees described how educational success often entailed sacrificing relationships with family, friends and their communities. Furthermore, they reported academia as a world filled with insecurities and uncertainties. Continuing educational engagement often produced family conflict along a spectrum that ranged from disinterest, jealousy and downright hostility. Conflicts emerge because Plummer's educationally successful working-class women were failing to do what they were 'supposed' to do. They weren't available to 'help' at home, nor were they providing wages for the family's meagre pot, nor were they available to boys, marriage and pregnancy. Significantly, Plummer's interviewees often described their mothers as 'martyrs' to signify the hardship their mothers' lives entailed. Trouble started because, by engaging successfully with education, girls were effectively refusing to become martyrs themselves. Curiously, despite receiving little or no family support during their studies, many women reported that, much later in life, there was explicit family pride in their achievements. To be educationally successful, working girls must negotiate a complex matrix of relationships both within school and their homes. These appear unique and forged from the gender roles that it is assumed that working-class girls 'should' take. The relationship aspects within working-class girls predominate story can be rendered intelligible through reference to Reay (2001;2017). Reay argues that working-class girls often face a difficult balance between articulating a new educationally successful identity whilst trying to retain working-class authenticity. Middle-class girls, however, do not experience this conflict. The working-class girls in this research and Reay's (2001) transcripts both depict similar emotional conflicts between education and the girls' community, friends and home. Reay argues that for working-class girls to successfully assimilate into a middle-class educational subjectivity entails accepting a 'pretentious' dimension to their self-narrative. Pretention, in this sense, is a gap between working-class girls' sense of themselves as a pretender or imposter and the perceived authenticity of their community-based self. This feeling of being an imposter in an unfamiliar landscape is a situation that Ingram (2018:6) describes as a 'dual classed identity'. A troublingly dichotomous subjectivity occurs when working-class girls have to negotiate an alien middle-class culture whilst inhabiting the comforting familiarity of their community and home. Whereas middle-class pupils

can use education to pursue their classed destiny, as indicated by the bored confidence expressed in middle-class stories, working-class girls can struggle to articulate their place as rightful. Accordingly, working-class girls can use Boredom as an emotional space to reject the unfamiliar and unwelcoming and, instead, return to the reassuring subjectivities offered by working-class friends and family life.

These findings render my findings more intelligible. Working-class girls use of Boredom could easily denote an emotional and subjective malaise experienced when balancing the need to maintain a successful set of relationships, which may be anticipated as oppositional in nature, and a desire for educational success. Boredom may be indicative of a female working-class struggle to reconcile the irreconcilable, to achieve success in an individualised, highly competitive neo-liberal educational market, whilst at the same time being loyal to a working-class community which is normatively antithetical to education. Furthermore, as a means of maintaining a sense of gendered and classed identity in the face of a lonely academic middle-class culture, McRobbie (1976) also identified that working-class schoolgirls would exaggerate aspects of their femininity including a heightened interest in the aesthetics of fashion and clothing.

Many features of this incongruity are evident in the talk of the working-class girls from Castle School. There is evidence of a rejection of school in favour of home, friends and relationships within the Working-class girls' stories. Firstly, the power of home to 'save' one girl from Boredom.

F2 *those exit times at the end of the day I am like yeah! I am getting out of here […] on a Friday as well and I am going home, that's like […] the only place I am not alone […] It literally saves me from Boredom*. (Castle School D L232)

…and an emphasis on being with friends as an antidote to Boredom…

F2 *who makes you bored? […] everyone but my friends*↑ (Castle School D L76)

…and the emphasis on teachers' clothing…

F1 *m::y I find that I become bored in school when I am sitting staring at their boring clothes […] and it becomes very tedious […] and I usually become bored […] when […] there's only black* (L95).

Working-class schoolgirls' Boredom could be the expression of a unique range of social, emotional and psychological barriers emerging from the isolation experienced through being torn away from the familiar culture of their upbringing and held out into the unfamiliar world of middle-class academia. This clash of cultures may be expressed and felt as a subjective malaise, labelled Boredom, and could lead to long-lasting damage to former relationships as girls face the rejection of being 'too big for their boots' (Richards 2018:11).

Judith Shakespeare: The curious case of the invisible Working-Class schoolgirl.

As a final element of this analysis, it is useful to highlight another aspect of classroom Boredom which is unique to working-class schoolgirls' experiences; invisibility. Invisibility is a concept that denotes the particularly pernicious manner in which many female activities are delegitimised, ignored and 'othered' in patriarchal knowledge regimes. That is to say, in a largely male-dominated society behaviour, language and psychology which can be easily associated with masculinity have been normalised. Characteristics more commonly associated with femininity are often perceived as atypical, denied validity and are rendered invisible. The link between 'invisibility' and female lives is nothing new, as eluded to in the title of this section (Woolf 1945). In terms of the sociology of education, Spender (1982) illustrated how education operates tacitly to serve male interests. How male subjectivity is labelled as 'fact' and how female knowledge, and even schoolgirls themselves, are simply ignored. Furthermore, Bourke (1994) maintains that invisibility is an inter-generational aspect of female working-class identity passed between mother and daughter. To contest daily oppression, and rather than engage in open conflict, working-class mothers often develop hidden and invisible strategies of "risk-averse protests, non-confrontation, [and] small acts of resistance" (Bourke 1994:80). Lall (2007) argues that 'invisibility' not only de-legitimises 'female problems' but also masks the ways that females choose to manage these problems. In managing Boredom, schoolgirls described passive and non-confrontational strategies…

F2 *errr […] doodle on your hands* (Castle School C L48)

F2 (laughs) *I colour in a lot […] do you? Like in Miss D's lesson. God that's bad […] I'm just head down and colour in* (laughs) (Castle School A L60)

F2 *I don't mind Miss B's class because it's high up and I can stare out of the windows. She never notices anything* (laughs) (Castle School F L36)

In a busy classroom, it is easy for a teacher to 'miss' the unobtrusive girl quietly doodling on her hands, the girl colouring in or the girl staring listlessly out of the window. These were all strategies used by schoolgirls to alleviate their Boredom. None of the girls reported anything that would constitute deviance in the 'classic' (i.e. male) sense that Willis (1977) documented. My findings concur with those of Lall's (2007) in that girls are just as likely to be bored as boys (indeed slightly more) but, because the *form* of this Boredom is not male and noisy it is *more likely to be ignored*. Girls are much more likely to develop internalised and hidden responses to problems such as "…anxiety, depression, eating disorders and self-harming…"(p223) Furthermore, Lall's evidence suggests that female disengagement only receives school attention when the girls, act up, and in doing so, present deviance which emulates boys.

To conclude, female Boredom, just as damaging and just as likely to corrode educational success, is unlikely to attract the attention of a harassed teacher preoccupied with the noisy arguing boys at the back of the class. Put simply, girls' Boredom is invisible.

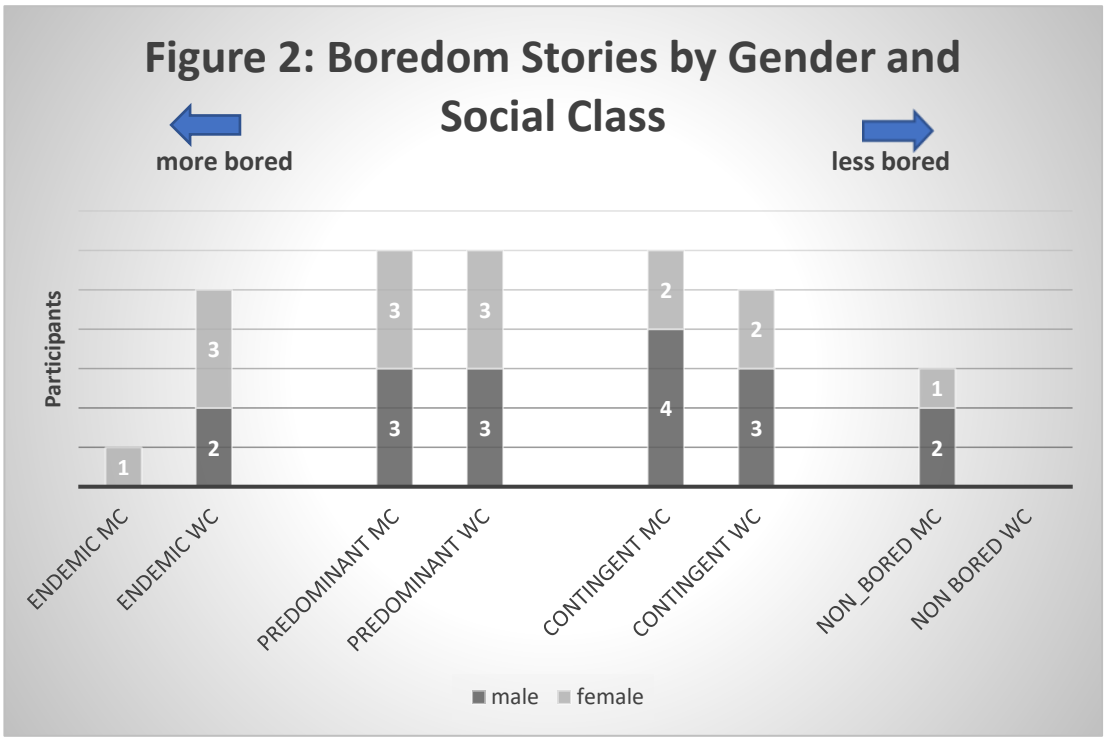
Chapter 1: Summary

In this section, I have argued that there is evidence to suggest that Boredom is linked to imagination, creativity and innovation. Secondly, this often leads to pupils engaging in highly agentic, carnivalesque behaviour which can act to subvert normal situational constraints and can be regarded as resistance and rebellion accordingly. However, I have found little evidence that this behaviour can be considered revolutionary. This is because not only do Boredom responses fail to impact on the overall structure of schools, they also act to reinforce neoliberal practices. Pupils tend to experience Boredom when lessons do not give access to performative goals. Their behaviour disciplines teachers into re-establishing performative goals. Furthermore, pupils' narration of their own critique as, subjective and emotional renders their critique impotent and depoliticised. Finally, I argued that the pupil's responses to Boredom are gendered. Girls' responses are more likely to be passive, nonconfrontational and, accordingly, invisible.

Findings and Analysis: Chapter 2

Intersections of Social Class and Gender.

I have collated the Boredom stories according to social class and gender into the following figure for illustrative purposes only.



WC= working class MC = middle class

Social Class: As figure 2 (above) illustrates, working-class pupils were much more likely to narrate endemic Boredom. However, there was no difference between social classes in narrating predominant Boredom and very little difference in contingency Boredom. Only middle-class children presented a non-bored story.

Gender: As figure 2 (above) illustrates, girls were more likely to narrate an endemic Boredom story in comparison to boys. Boys and girls were relatively evenly matched in terms of predominant and contingent. There were slightly more non-bored boys than girls.

Overall children from lower-income backgrounds are more likely to narrate the more severe Boredom stories and, by implication, more likely to narrate school in terms of performance. Children from middle-class backgrounds were more likely to narrate the least severe Boredom stories and, by implication, more likely to narrate school in terms

of learning. Also, girls were more likely to describe school as boring compared to boys, with working-class girls most likely to depict school as boring.

Having identified a link between class, gender and Boredom, I will re-examine each Boredom story but this time through the prism of two narratives: social class and gender.

The argument I intend to pursue is that social class and gender are rich discursive sources from which pupils can fabricate situated accounts of classroom Boredom. So, for example, the intersection of class and gender will provide idiosyncratic and culturally specific discursive parameters resulting in differing accounts of Boredom between, say, working-class boys who view school in terms of performance and middle-class girls who view school in terms of learning. The resulting analysis will attempt to display classroom Boredom as a contextually sensitive construct synthesised within the intersection of socio-historic narratives.

Goodstein (2005) argued that contemporary Boredom is a particular rhetoric of reflection which emerged out of sociohistoric narratives. Similarly, I will argue that classroom Boredom is assembled from a collection of intersecting narratives. This moves Goodstein's argument, from the abstract and macro, to the micro intimacy of classroom talk. However, the fundamental argument remains the same. Boredom is assembled and communicated from locally discursive resources and, accordingly, Boredom will always retain a precinctive and homegrown flavour.

The remainder of this chapter is split into four sections. Each section analyses a Boredom story assembled from narrative resources drawn from social class and gender. This is a brief overview of the findings.

1. **Endemic Boredom stories:** For working-class boys, classroom Boredom is constructed via the intersection of school as a site for performance which is pessimistically framed by working-class expectations of failure. The boys' response to expected failure is to deploy a masculine 'silly boy' narrative. For working-class girls, Boredom is characterised by the unattractive, ugly, and dull decor found in school. This emphasis on appearance may be rooted in working-class feminine ideals concerning the use of aesthetics as a signification of worth and value. The girls' indolent response to Boredom is located within working-class

femininity which valorises resilient passivity and leaves the girls appearing apathetic rather than confrontational.

2. **Predominant Boredom stories:** Both middle-class boys and girls narrate school as an arena for performance. Accordingly, both find school intrinsically boring. However, this is not problematised. Within middle-class educational narratives, a degree of purposeful anxiety is viewed as a necessary price for inevitable success. Additionally, boys provide imaginary deviancy tales as part of their attempts at hegemonic masculinity which is tempered by middle-class expectations of personal educational success. Within the working-class girls' story, lessons are located along a being-with/being-without spectrum. Being-with denotes any situation where the girls' experience interpersonal connectivity especially with friends, family and teachers. Being-without denotes situations where there are barriers to interpersonal connectivity and Boredom is experienced. Being-with is a classed and gendered subjectivity that is communal and altruistic and, as such, is antithetical to a neoliberal education system that emphasises individualism and competition. The ensuing emotional distress is articulated as Boredom. Working-class boys in this story position school as a site for performance. Their expectations of failure render school boring. Boredom to these boys offers them an insulating position.
3. **Contingent Boredom stories:** Both boys and girls depict school as an arena for learning. Accordingly, Boredom is positioned as an injustice. Boredom is caused by poor teaching. However, responses to this injustice are gendered. Boys describe teacher-directed confrontational behaviour in displays of hegemonic masculinity. For the girls however, demonstrative deviance is antithetical to the kind of sensible femininity espoused within this story. Accordingly, girls' behavioural responses to Boredom are nonconfrontational.
4. **Non-bored Boredom stories:** All non-bored pupils position school as a site for learning. Boredom emerges out of the predispositions of 'intelligent' or 'struggling' pupils. This story accepts the personalisation of responsibility but rejects the performativity inherent within neoliberal narratives.

These brief outline will now be expanded upon in greater detail and depth.

Endemic Boredom stories

Boredom stories almost exclusively emerged from pupils from a Working-class (WC) background. Moreover, WC endemic stories were gendered. I will examine the endemic stories by analysing the transcripts from firstly, WC boys and secondly, WC girls.

Endemic story: Working-class Boys.

The WC boys' performance view of education is split into two smaller motifs: 'performance economic' and 'performance social'.

The 'economic' motif relates to the way that the WC boys rationalise their participation in lessons solely in terms of future occupational and financial rewards. School is painted as an experience that must be emotionally endured now so that life may be financially enjoyed later on. The WC boys' endemic story narrates a life course where the protagonists are locked into a continual pursuit of an elusive goal; school leads to university; university leads to a job; a job leads to money and so on. There is no sense that the boys are pursuing a 'passion' or a 'vocation'.

M1 *this year […] more than most […] it seems that there's MASSIVE consequence to not getting homework in […] stuff like grades for uni and then it'll be grades for a job […] it's so boring now […] it won't be I think […] can't wait for it to be be all over, do you know what I mean?* (Castle School E L148)

Furthermore, this situation is not explicitly problematised. School's economic function is presented as inevitable, taken-for-granted and common-sense. Alternatives are simply inconceivable. Portrayed as equally pervasive and common-sense is a willingness to sacrifice immediate emotional well-being in the pursuit of an economically rewarding future. The WC boys' endemic story is brimming with fatalism where Boredom is an unavoidable down- payment for an anticipated future reward.

M1 *maybe it's a fact of life that we have to be bored…*

F2 *for a few years*

M1 …*for a few years and then we can experience interesting parts.* (Castle School 116-118)

However, the WC boys' 'performance economic' motif is strewn with contradictory statements. The WC boys narrate scepticism regarding the relationship between payment and payoff. That is to say, the boys often signposted uncertainty concerning whether enduring daily emotional estrangement would actually secure future economic benefits. The payment, Boredom, was certain; the reward, occupational and financial security, was less so…

M1 *I think school is a great place I think it offers a lot of opportunities it is boring […] yes but […] even though it is boring […] it can help me get a better job […] maybe […] a better life […] a better quality of life […] but who knows […] I do find school [2 secs] extremely boring [..] yeah* (Castle School E L24)

In this extract, M1 initiates talk by praising the school but quickly moves to critique '*…it is boring…*'. He reaffirms the economic function of school '*…it can help me get a better job…*' and '*…a better quality of life…*' but qualifies both of these with uncertain knowledge markers *'...maybe..*' and *'...but who knows...*' respectively. These acts lace his vignette with doubt and ambiguity. Doubt signposting occurs many times within the WC boys' endemic story. The WC class boys are able to identify and describe the *apparent* purpose of school, but underneath there appears a continual subterranean doubt whether they will ever get to enjoy the promised land. Willis (1977) argued that although education is largely successful in socialising working-class boys into exploitable labour, never-the-less, boys are often able to articulate what Willis (1977:119) termed 'penetrations'. This refers to the ability of social actors to occasionally pierce through ideology to perceive the realities of material inequality thus enabling individuals to form critical but inchoate accounts. Although a decades' old classic, Willis' findings are still being replicated (see Trondman 2018; Nolan, 2018). Willis points out that in most cases, as evident here, these penetrations are likely to be inchoate and, as such, incapable of supplying social actors with sufficient knowledge to seek redress.

TM1 *people say that school is the best the most exciting part of your life […] which is depressing* ↓ (Castle School E L119)

There is a sense that my WC boys are indeed displaying 'penetrations' here as they describe their allegiance to school as contradictory and an act of conformity to a

broader set of rules, the origins of which, they are uncertain. Their uneasy conformity is portrayed as delimiting their ability to construct alternatives.

M1 *[I thi::nk] […] that we've been brainwashed into coming to school every day so we don't know any other options of not coming to school*↑ (Castle School E L103)

However, as predicted by Willis, the boys' penetrations are only partial because despite their background uneasiness quietly voiced in this story, the boys maintain (perhaps realistically) that their material situation renders alternatives to school impossible.

M1 *errm we don't have […] at this age […] we don't have err resources money or anything to […] do anything else* (Castle School E L112)

'Performance social' is the second motif appearing in this story and positions school as a means of meeting and socialising with friends to avoid 'seriousness'. Seriousness encompasses all academic/educational activities like homework, making notes and revising. '*Taking things seriously'* involves neglecting friends by focusing on scholarly pursuits. The WC boys' use of discursive resource 'seriousness' is reminiscent of Francis' (2000) examination of the relationship between masculinity and Boredom. Francis argued that a 'silly boys' narrative operating within secondary classrooms equates being academic, working quietly and conscientiously as unequivocally antithetical to masculinity. Accordingly, 'silly boys' are expected to 'play up' more than girls because 'playing up' and 'being funny' were behaviours strongly equated with masculinity. Coupled with the boys' pessimism regarding academic success, being known as a 'class clown' is understandably attractive to 'silly boys' because it provides a relatively accessible means of achieving positive social status.

M1 *enjoy yourselves*↑ *[…] [express yourselves]*

T1 *[don't take things] so seriously*

M1 *yes*↑

T1 *yeah*º

M1 *wa:ay too many people in our year are taking it wa::ay too seriously* (Castle School EL39-43)

Although ‘seriousness’ has its rewards, an improvement in grades is identified as a likely outcome of being ‘serious’, “…*wow, an A on a piece of paper*” (Castle School E L60), for example, this is positioned ironically and with some distain. Within the WC boys’ endemic story, the ultimate worth of ‘seriousness’ is measured in terms of future employment. Unfortunately, the WC boys describe future employment as exposure to more ‘seriousness’ and hence, more Boredom. Employment prospects for those who are ‘serious’ will inevitably lead them into occupations that are going to be as boring as school. This is a clear demotivation for educational participation. The rejection of seriousness, the anticipation of a dull economic future, accompanied by a corresponding emphasis on fun and friends, is of course, again reminiscent of Willis (1977). Willis argues that such self-limiting resistances emerge as a result of an inchoate, but valid, understanding of the educational system as inherently unequal.

TM1 *now I can go and do more of studying and more serious stuff once again*

M1 *now I can now it controls my life* (Castle School L61-62)

Working-class boys’ endemic story: Summary. For these working-class boys, classroom Boredom is constructed via the intersection of school as a site for performance which is pessimistically framed from working-class suspicions regarding achievement. Finally, their response to expected failure is to access a masculine ‘silly boy’ narrative.

Endemic story: Working-Class Girls

The WC female endemic story produced a similar portrayal of school as an utterly joyless and bleak place.

F1 *yeah but like the gates at school […] it’s like a prison isn’t it↑?* (Castle School A L86)

F2 *yeah […] like [3 secs] you’d think they’d have painted it. I mean it’s peeling and it looks like mud […] or something worse (laughs) it is depressing […] and boring obviously*. (Castle School A L8)

However, these statements also hint at a motif that was unique to the WC female endemic story. This motif involved making continual use of aesthetics and the physical environment to index Boredom. When discussing the nature of school Boredom, the

WC girls returned again and again to the school's physical environment which they portrayed as both drab and poorly maintained. The WC female endemic story was, for example, highly critical of the absence of 'joyful' colours.

F1 *yeah but it's like […] dirty though […] it's literally dirty […] there's actually dirt on the walls* (Castle School A L68)

F1 *I just think […] that if it was dead colourful […] not dirty↑ like d'y'know what I mean […] we'd be […] we'd enjoy it […] and we wouldn't be just*

F2 *if it was like fuchsia↑ pink?*

F1 *yeah let's do it*

F2 *we'd definitely enjoy it more*

F1 *yeah I just think maybe a rainbow or something*

Laughter

F1 *yeah y'now what we should do […] we should all come with like paints [1 sec] make it colours and not be bored* (Castle School A L21 - 28)

However, the WC girls constructed an image of their actual school as an ugly and dull edifice, its very physicality an embodiment of the Boredom they endured. The walls were pictured as 'mud' coloured, the girls described paint peeling and the apparent general lack of care that the school gave to the structure within which they considered themselves captive. Indeed, the WC female predominant story explicitly likened the school to both a hospital and a prison; the dirty, drab and unkempt walls of this institution seemed to be metaphoric for their imprisoned plight. The emphasis on aesthetics is unique to the WC girls in this research. However, there are indications of this phenomenon identified elsewhere. McRobbie and Garber (1976) and later, McRobbie (1991) for example identified the importance of style, appearance and aesthetics in working-class girls' emotional self-narratives via the 'teeny-bopper' culture. McRobbie noted how girls used 'Boredom' as a reason to feminise their school uniforms. McRobbie's girls would critique the grey dullness of their asexual uniformity in a manner similar to the girls' critique of the drab classroom decors in this research. Aesthetics appear to be important in understanding working-class girls' relationship to Boredom. McRobbie's girls declared far less Boredom when they were

able to express their gender ideals through feminine aesthetics, circumvent dress codes and alter their physical environment to be more in line with a femininity construct that they have made their own. Finally, Walkerdine et al (2001) argue that given realistically low expectations of academic attainment, the pursuit of 'happiness' is possibly the only credibly achievable success WC girls can look forward. So, the desire to reconstruct, repaint and re-fashion their physical surroundings into a 'happy' space with brighter colours and so on seems entirely in keeping with Walkerdine's findings. The pursuit of happiness, via aesthetics, allows WC schoolgirls to occupy a subjective position that offer some means of constructing a positive identity. Aesthetic paucity was amplified even further through the next motif unique to WC girls, passive waiting.

F2 *cos you are always sat waiting in a chair for […] HOURS* (Castle School C L39)

F1 *but […] what also bores me […] I have […] on a Tuesday […] one lesson first […] and then […] I have […] four free's and I'm going to […] have to wait upstairs for […] FIVE HOURS…* (Castle School A L36)

F2 *yeah like sitting […] like sitting and waiting and waiting […] Waiting for lessons and then waiting for miss and like […] oh my god that's all we do […] it is soooo boring (laughs) (*Castle School D L50)

In these extracts, the WC girls illustrate the motif of passive waiting. The girls construct themselves as abandoned to time, waiting passively until a lesson, which may be many hours later, through which they then sit waiting unreceptively until they can finally reach the sanctuary of home time.

However, at no point in the WC female endemic story do the girls mention any incidents of deviance as either a lived or imagined reality. There is no sense of a desire to challenge teachers or misbehave to escape Boredom.

F2 *Miss S [laughter] she's a boring pig but she never notices I am even there. I kinda just blend in (laughs) That's how I like it (laughs)* (Castle School D L95)

The girls' passivity can be understood via Bates (1990:1991:1994). Bates argued that a central characteristic of working-class feminine narrative is, what she terms, 'resilient passivity'. Resilient passivity allows WC girls to absorb a great deal of Boredom whilst simultaneously preventing them from reacting in a confrontational

manner. In Bates' work, working-class female success depends on their ability to render negative emotions, such as Boredom, invisible. Furthermore, Plummer (2000) argues that working-class femininity is constituted via personal sacrifice, the normalisation of putting others needs before one's own and hiding one's emotional disquietude whilst doing so. Working-class girls, therefore, grow up in an environment where the suppression of overtly negative emotions is normalised. In distressing situations, WC girls are likely to display "…risk averse protests, non-confrontation, small acts of resistance". (Bourke 1994:80). Accordingly, when considering how to escape Boredom, WC girls' responses are typically introspective, passive and non-confrontational…

F2 *I just look out the window and think ooh […] birds* (Castle School C L76)

F2 *d'you know […] sometimes […] when I know I am going to be bored […] like with Miss S […] I bring my file in just to do my nails. […] it's very relaxing (laughs)* (Castle School D L118)

F2 *I just hide at the back in PE so no one notices. I don't do anything to be honest. Is that bad*? (laughs) (Castle School C L29)

Working-class girls' endemic story: Summary. For these working-class girls, Boredom is characterised by the unattractive, ugly, and dull aesthetics found in school. This emphasis on appearance may be routed in working-class feminine ideals concerning the importance of aesthetics. Similarly, the girls' docile response to Boredom is also based within working-class femininity which valorises resilient passivity which leaves the girls indolent rather than confrontational.

Predominant Boredom Stories

12 pupils narrated predominant Boredom stories, six middle-class (MC) pupils (3 girls; 3 boys) and six working-class (WC) pupils (3 girls; 3 boys). This is a view of school as mostly boring with rare moments of interest.

A performance view of education featured heavily in most predominant stories. However, performance was narrated differently according to class and gender.

Middle class girls and boys

The MC boys' and girls' predominant story both tended to describe school in terms of performance and a conveyor belt metaphor. One MC girl, for example, described education simply as a conveyor belt transferring her into employment via university.

F1 " It bugs me that you have got to make these decisions and do A levels and then you are on a conveyor belt going to uni and then you are going to get a job in it and it's like whoa::a" (Castle School interview C L58)

This is a similar sentiment expressed by a MC boy.

M2 *... but things like err […] maths […] like I get algebra and all that is maths […] but […] and I get that you have got to do it to get the grade in order to go through life so it's not useless, but algebra is boring as it is by itself, but to get you a grade, it's not useless is it? cos it gets you to unilike..it's like a conveyor belt* (Castle School B L143)

MC progression to university was constructed with relatively few uncertainty markers. Accordingly, despite their Boredom, MC pupils appear confident in their eventual personal success. These MC pupils expect their education to be boring but ultimately resulting in personal success. Boredom increases when school fails to provide these pupils with educational capital. Significantly, Boredom is depicted uncritically. This story is rendered intelligible though the work of Walkerdine et al (2001). Walkerdine et al documented a MC educational narrative that both expected and tolerated a high degree of purposeful anxiety as a necessary element in achieving higher grades. Furthermore, this narrative equated authentic happiness with educational and financial success. It is unsurprising therefore that MC pupils would be uncritically pursuing the very source of their unhappy anxiety. In the MC predominant story, Boredom is

constructed as an acceptable cost, a down-payment and an investment to be reaped via the affluence that *inevitable* educational success brings.

M2 *we are not here to have fun…we are here to learn* (Castle school B L88)

F1 *I just think […] keep going […] yeah I am bored now [..] but later on […] in life I mean […] it'll be worth it to get the good stuff […] house and holidays and that […] I mean you don't want to be a bum do you?* (Castle School C L77)

However, MC boys displayed a unique motif within their story. This was the use of deviancy tales, brimming with imaginary risk and excitement, as antidotes to Boredom.

M2 *I would say that there are people who are bored because err […] the school do not teach […] they don't promote exciting lessons as much they do boring ones we need SOMETHING to h-happen -BOOM […] but basically like they they will stress err [..] English […] science […] Maths to be important […] as they are […] but there's no EXCITEMENT […]* (Castle School B L54)

M1 *…maybe some unstable plutonium always in err school, constant risk of being eradicated in a sudden blast that would keep me from being bored […] maybe we could re-start the Cuban missile crisis…err, but otherwise* (Castle School C L33)

M2 *Find something to do that is new and exciting [..] pick a fight [..] I don't know […] rather than sitting being bored for the whole day* (Castle School C L10)

Within the MC male predominant story, Boredom is eliminated through the presence of imagined risk, danger and excitement. Importantly, these boys do not recount actual deviancy, these are imaginaries only. There are two issues here. Firstly, why are these acts present within the boys' stories only? Secondly, why are these imaginaries rather than accounts of actual deviance? These boys narrate themselves as needing excitement at the intersection of a MC hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to "the culturally exalted form of masculinity" (Carrigan et al. 1985, p. 592) However, significantly, very few males will achieve hegemonic masculine status in all aspects of their lives. Hegemonic masculinity is often an imagined ideal to be striven towards even though this may never be attained. Furthermore, Ingram (2018) argues that it is useful to conceptualise hegemonic masculinity within contextual boundaries. Whitehead (2003) argues that middle-class masculinity is, at

least in part, constituted by a desire for individual and personal achievement. This makes it less likely that MC boys will actually go on to commit self-limiting acts of deviance. The MC boys' response to Boredom bears the signature of a masculinity that valorises danger and excitement. However, their response remains imaginary because, as MC subjects, the boys are likely to expect educational success and committing actual deviance would be antithetical to their classed destiny (Reay 2017). The boys' imaginary deviancy tales occur at the point at which they are 'doing' a frustrated masculinity tempered within the constraints of a MC expectations of and desires for individual and personal educational achievement**.**

Middle-class Predominant story: Summary. Both MC boys and girls narrate school as an arena for performance. Accordingly, both find school intrinsically boring. However, this is not problematised. Within MC narratives, a degree of purposeful anxiety is viewed as a necessary price for inevitable success. Additionally, boys provide imaginary deviancy tales as part of their attempt at a form of hegemonic masculinity tempered by middle-class expectations of, and desire for, educational success.

Working-class girls

As stated earlier, (Chapter one: Section 1: Boredom Stories) a unique and reoccurring narrative woven throughout the WC female predominant story was the significance of 'relationships'. Here, however, I am going to re-analyse this relationship narrative and the Boredom induced as metaphoric for a distinctive form of 'loneliness' which was unique in the working-class girls' stories.

F2 *errm say doing activities on my own […] I get lonely and I don't really want to do them* (Castle School C L25)

F2 *I just get bored when I am on my own. It's boring when everyone is in lessons and you are working alone on the computer. I just think it's more interesting with someone to talk to. Deffo on my own is when I am the most bored. It's pants.* (laughs) Castle School C L36)

Firstly, to quickly re-cap, working-class girls' 'relationship' narrative was constituted by three motifs; 'home'; 'friends'; 'teachers'. Each of these motifs framed Boredom

in terms of the degree of loneliness the girls experienced with each of these spaces or people.

F2 *which classroom bores me the most? Any room that's not my bedroom (laughs)* (Castle School D L17)

F1 *when I am alone on my frees […] I just want to go home because I am bored* (Castle School F L99)

F2 *If I could bring home into school then I wouldn't be bored. If I could be in my bedroom […] then I would be ok.* (Castle School C L30)

These extracts illustrate how 'home' was represented as a sanctuary into which the WC girls escape being 'alone'. The 'home as sanctuary' motif constructs an oppositional emotional binary between home and school. This motif, on one hand, builds 'school' as an institution of isolation and somewhere to escape from. On the other hand, 'home' is constructed as a place of warmth, sanctuary and escape.

The second motif in the 'relationship' narrative is 'friends'. The WC female predominant story narrates the social presence of friends as an essential weapon in a daily confrontation with Boredom.

F1 …you get bored at school when you don't have any friends […] and errm they have run-away home […] and you sit there […] by yourself (Castle School F L4)

F2 *like it's not subjects so much as who you are with [...] like when I am not with my friends […] those are the worst […] the most boring ones.* (Castle School D L20)

In this extract, F1 illustrates that loneliness, induced by the physical absence of friends, leads to Boredom. Furthermore, it appears that loneliness/Boredom is not simply a result of physical isolation but of social isolation too. Elsewhere loneliness occurs when friends are physically present, but girls feel socially isolated through the nature of learning activities. Teachers set the girls individualised learning and research tasks. Accordingly, the girls work in an enforced Boredom-inducing *social isolation* to complete these tasks.

F1 *what is the key to your Boredom …* (Castle School F L167)

F2 *wrrm probably when a teacher just tells you to go and do your own work on the computer because I don't do anything* (Castle School F L168)

Here F2 locates the 'key' to her Boredom as being the individualised nature of the work that she is set to do. Being told to work alone, to '*do your own work'* has a sufficiently negative impact on her that she is rendered inert. Using computers is an activity that is often constructed negatively precisely because it is synonymous with isolation.

F1 *how? […] [computers […] working on my own […] being on my own […] [sitting on my own […] why do they make us do that? […] it is very boring. It's just easier and more interesting with friends isn't it. It's weird.* (Castle School A L56)

F2 *I dunno […] it's just that the teachers don't make it fun they say […] work on your own[..] I hate computers […] I NEED my friends [laughs]* (Castle School D L7)

Understanding this 'hatred' claim requires contextualisation by the subsequent phrase '*I NEED my friends*'. Consequently, F2's 'hatred' is not found with the use of computers per se but the enforced loneliness which emerges from their use in school. Although physically present and in the same room, F2 cannot 'be' with her friends because she is fettered to the lonely computer screen. In the WC female predominant story, isolation and loneliness are synonymous with Boredom. Conversely, activities that involve the girls 'being' with their friends are positioned far more positively. These activities are often described as 'interactive' and involve group or joint projects.

F1 *…it's just I like I like group work […] learning and being with friends too […] I feel like that's entertaining* (Castle School F L114)

F1 *I wish they would leave us alone to work with friends the whole time. […] Like I'm doing sociology and you're doing English but it doesn't matter if we know what to learn […]. We can still sit together can't we?* (Castle School A L61)

A link between loneliness and Boredom narrated by these girls is not restricted to my research. A co-existent relationship between Boredom and teenage loneliness was also identified by Moore and Schultz (1983), for example. Furthermore, the Office of National Statistics (2018) report showed that children from lower-income groups experience higher levels of self-declared loneliness, thus indicating a class dimension. More recently, Etheridge and Spantig's (2020) examination of the emotional impact of social distancing measures brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic shows much higher levels of reported loneliness experienced by females compared to males.

Etheridge and Spantig argue that social factors associated with gender such as an increased meaningfulness of social group interaction heightens a sense of isolation and loss for women. The evidence, therefore, concours that loneliness, Boredom, social class and gender are indeed interwoven.

The final motif in this 'relationships' narrative can be found in the girls' sense of rapport with their teachers. Teachers are characterised as being able to project their own unique emotional palette on to lessons. Consequently, teachers are located along a 'boring – idolised' spectrum according to the emotional inflexion they bring into the room with them. This emotional inflexion is often embodied in the physical appearance of the teacher. The least boring teachers are described in terms of their flamboyant and inspiring wardrobe whilst the most boring teachers are represented as clown-like parodies of insipidity. In this first extract, the girls discuss a non-boring, indeed, 'idolised' teacher…

F2 *she a::mazing*

F1 *she is great*

F2 she *is my idol*

(Group Laughter)

M1 *oh my god*

F1 *she's amazing […] I love her dresses, the flowery one makes me positive do you know like inspiration hoodies*

M1 *yeah*

F2 *she wears she wears actually inspiration dresses* (Castle school D L155-162)

Note in this section the difference in talk provided by the females (F1 & F2) and the single male (M1). Although M1 makes affirming comments, the narrative is entirely driven by the two (WC) girls. The teacher is positioned as 'amazing, 'great' and' an 'idol'. These accolades are rained upon her in conjunction with a 'love' for her 'inspirational' clothing. Contrast this with the portrayal of teachers who are located much further into the boring spectrum…

F2 *[how do you get bored]*

F2 *it's like it's like their clothes […] why do they all dress in black?*

F1 *I know it's depressing*

F2 *it is depressing* (Castle School FL46-49)

The girls use hyperbole to exaggerate the negative impact of teachers' clothes on their own emotional states. Teacher's clothing acts as a symbol of vacuity and thus embodies the Boredom they depict all around them.

In this predominant story, the WC girls' Boredom is deeply entwined with their sense of being connected to other people. The more inter-personal connection, then the less the girls narrate Boredom. Accordingly, Boredom can be located along a spectrum of what I have termed '*being-with'* and '*being-without'* subjectivities. The girls are in the state of '*being-with*' when their self-described situation facilitates interpersonal connectivity. So, for example, when the girls chat during group work, when they are in the warmth of home or when a teacher's clothes invite aesthetic admiration, the girls present themselves as in a state of *being-with* and, accordingly, are Boredom-free. Significantly, *being-with* appears to be a prerequisite to their educational engagement.

On the other hand, Boredom is depicted in situations where barriers to interpersonal connection are present and the girls drift into a *being-without* subjectivity. Some of these barriers are highly idiosyncratic. A teacher dressing in black, or the isolation of computer work for example, are both depicted as detrimental to forming a *being-with* bond. Unfortunately, according to the girls' predominant story, education is constituted by situations that increasingly induce a sense of *being-without*. Walkerdine (2020:3) characterises her own experience as an educationally successful working-class woman in terms of a "sense of isolation" which increased with academic success as she found herself *being-without* the company of fellow working-class women. Observing her students, Walkerdine maintains that although the situation has improved, social isolation is still a significant issue for educationally successful working-class women who still experience *being-without* the support of family and friends. The question begs, why is it that a *being-with/being-without* spectrum only appears as a characteristic of working-class girls' Boredom stories? To answer this, I am going to adopt Lucey et al, (2003) use of the concept of emotional hybridity. Traditionally the term hybridity has been used to refer the formation of new ethnic subjectivities forming in the wake of globalisation (Gilroy 1993). However, Lucey et al, (2003) use the term to firstly, denote a gendered process of deidentification and reformation. Such a process is exemplified in the girls' predominant stories. The girls' *being-with* working-class femininity is in the process of being re-fashioned into an educationally more expedient *being-without* neoliberal subjectivity. Secondly, and

significantly for Boredom, emotional hybridity also signifies the anxiety and uneasiness specifically experienced by working-class girls and young women as they attempt to remake a hybrid version of themselves. In education, emotional hybridity involves the normalisation of a neoliberal, individualised, self-orientated and *being-without* subjectivity that is, in many ways, the antithesis to the communal, altruistic and being-*with* biographies inhabited by the girls' working-class families and peer group. This is in stark contrast to the smooth educational conveyor belt metaphor deployed by the middle-class pupils. The concept of hybridity then is to be understood as a period of metamorphosis and accompanying distress and emotional turmoil.

The WC girls' predominant stories reveal concerns regarding domestic, aesthetic and personal agendas that centre on inclusion, community and togetherness; *being-with*. Hence F2's declaration, "I NEED my friends" (Castle School D L7). All through their stories the girls make similar claims concerning the centrality of *being-with* friends, the significance of home and the fun informality of inspirational clothes. However, these declarations are in stark contrast to the far more isolated, competitive and *being-without* education that they describe as being imposed on them. Hence why the key to their Boredom is declared as working *alone*. The girls are displaying what Skeggs' (1997) identified as a central aspect of working-class femininity, the altruistic self. I am understanding this as signified through the girls' *being-with* needs. An altruistic, *being-with* self-narrative, demonstrated in the girls' talk, associates personal fulfilment with nurturing the well-being of others and perceiving one's own needs as secondary. However, this working-class female *being-with* altruism runs counterpoint to the demands of the neo-liberal pedagogies operating within Castle School which encourage competition and valorise individual personal success. To be successful, a neo-liberal girl has to go it alone; *being-without*. In this sense' individualised competition, so utterly central to neoliberal education, is antithetical to classed notions of *being-with* femininity and the key to the working-class girls' predominant Boredom. Boredom is the embodied articulation of the distressful choice between estranging themselves from a central aspect of their *being-with* classed femininity which valorises communality and altruism and instead, embracing the *being-without* loneliness of a competitive and isolated neo-liberal education system. Furthermore, this choice is likely to be weighted. The invitation offered by 'doing' working-class *being-with* femininity is easily accessible, achievable and provides a secure route to a

respectable life (Skeggs 1997). Whereas pursuing the loneliness-inducing Boredom of a *being-without* neoliberal academia is brimming with far more personal anguish and uncertainty and is likely to appear far less accessible accordingly. At the moment of these interviews, the girls were standing on a crossroad. They were experiencing the emotional distress of emotional hybridity and metamorphosis necessary for educational success. This is an academic world where *being-without* friends, families and communities is likely to be the new normal. If these WC girls are educationally successful, they will, in all likelihood pay a high emotional price (Evans 2009). Like Walkerdine (2020) before them, they will experience the increasing 'sense of isolation' of *being-without*. They will increasingly be faced with the lonely Boredom of hybridity. Liberal and left-wing sociological discourse hold education and social mobility as pivotal in establishing a fair society. This claim is laudable. However, this research indicates that, at least for working-class girls, social mobility is likely to come at the cost of Boredom and loneliness.

The working-class girls' predominant story: Summary. Boredom appears on *being-with/being-without* spectrum. *Being-with* denotes any situation where the girls' experience interpersonal connectivity especially with friends, family and teachers. *Being-without* denotes situations where there are barriers to interpersonal connectivity. I have argued that *being-with* is a classed and gendered subjectivity that is altruistic and communal. Furthermore, this subjectivity is antithetical to a neoliberal education system that emphasises individualism, competition and *being-without*. The ensuing emotional distress is articulated as Boredom.

Predominant story. Working-class boys.

In the WC boys' predominant story, performance, in the form of achieving a grade, is depicted as a pivotal factor in the construction of a lesson as boring. A WC boy's depiction of himself as 'failing' will almost certainly also be accompanied by a description of the subject as boring.

M1 *it's b-boring because probably a lack of like there's no incentive to…if you're gonna fail* (Castle School F L75)

M1 *it's like when you're not going to pass or get a decent grade […] I'm like […] oho nope […] I'm bored now*. (Castle School D L13)

Furthermore, grades are themselves merely performance signifiers to another outcome, going to university. There is no portrayal of intrinsic value in *any* of the school experience. Moreover, the assumption that the purpose of school is grade performance is unchallenged and appears normative. It is common sense in the WC boys' predominate story that grade performance *should* govern pupils' school lives. Furthermore, once a lesson is failing its objective i.e. producing university entrance grades, then it appears entirely rational to abandon it.

M1 *yeah OH MY GOD like welsh bacc is one of the most boring subjects […] at GCSE like if we had an option now if we could drop out or take it I would drop it*. (Castle School D L24-25)

There are similarities between the MC predominant story and the WC boys' story. Both see education as primarily for the performance of attainment and grades. However, the subtle, but significant, difference is that whereas the MC pupils depict school as an arena for achievement and narrate Boredom when their expected successful performance is frustrated, the WC boys depict school as an arena for disappointment and narrate Boredom when their expected failing performance is con

M1 *the topic as well […] can be really boring when you just know you are going to fail […] Might as well just sack it off.* (Castle School F L19)

M1 *err well I get bored by doing work […] having to revise but then I know I'll only fail anyway and get a D in sociology* (Castle School D L55)

As writers such as Walkerdine (2001) Reay (2001;2017) and Ingram (2018) illustrate, working and middle-class family biographies provide children with radically different discursive resources in terms of articulating their relationship to education. Whereas the MC boys expect success, the WC boys here expect failure. Jackson (2006) illustrates how Boredom can be a useful insulating tool against the toxicity of a 'failure' label. Jackson argues that nonchalant indifference is particularly in tune with WC 'lad' masculinity which WC boys use to construct an impermeable version of themselves as effortless and indifferent. However, it would be overly simplistic to regard the predominant WC boys' story as a simple triad linkage between being WC, laddish behaviour and a bored rejection of school. This is because the boys in this story

position themselves as initially keen pupils who *become* bored as a response to what they regard as a failing performance.

M1 *wh-why why though why why is it boring? I mean I started off really liking history […] but […] I don't know […] I wanted to do it […] it seems weird now [,…] but as I started failing it I just got bored I suppose.* (Castle School F L69)

The WC boys are initially pro-learning and their disengagement should not, therefore, be immediately pathologized as cultural deprivation. Ingram (2018) argues that it is important for researchers not to get seduced by lazy stereotypes regarding social class. Instead, the WC boys in this research illustrate the way that classed masculinity, rather than being fixed, is performed as a fluid dialogue with context. The initially pro-school approach of these WC class boys transforms into insolent, drop-out antipathy in response to expected failing performance. As Ingram argues, it is useful to understand masculinity as contextually sensitive with multiple dimensions which can switch rapidly from dominance to subordination.

Working-class boys' predominant story. Summary: WC boys in this story position school as a site for performance. Their expectations of failure render school boring. Boredom to these boys offers them an insulating position.

Contingent Boredom stories

Eleven pupils narrated this story, six middle-class (MC) pupils (4 male; 2 female) and five working-class (WC) pupils (3 female; 2 male).

The contingent story frames school as a site for learning rather than performance. Boredom is seen as an occasional injustice and is tied to specific (albeit reoccurring) failures of teaching rather than a generic aspect of school.

There was a significant gendered link between contingency stories that appears to override social class. MC and WC boys provided equally detailed accounts of classroom deviancy, both in terms of an intimate knowledge of school discipline regimes and rich anecdotal evidence of their own misbehaviour. Also, the contingent story told by MC and WC girls was remarkably similar. Within the girls' story Boredom, was synonymous with frustration experienced in poorly taught classes.

Contingent Story and boys

The contingency Boredom stories from both WC and MC boys were remarkably similar. Accordingly, masculinity appears to play a significant part in the boys' contingent story's association between deviancy and Boredom. For example, M1, the only boy in this particular focus group, attempts to initiate a deviancy tale.

M1 *and detentions are the worst*

F1 *and it's like*

M1 *detentions should be like […] banned* (Commuter School A L 172-174)

The two (MC) girls in this group do not join in with this tale, perhaps because they have no experience of these events or perhaps because they do not share a (male/contingent) common-sense assumption regarding a link between Boredom and deviancy. Consequently, M1's deviancy tale remains undeveloped.

However, when boys' contingent story was developed it contained three elements; deviancy tales, highly emotive language and the personality of the teacher as the focus of their anger.

The male contingent story explicitly positions Boredom as the cause of classroom misbehaviour. Furthermore, misbehaviour is not imaginary, as with the predominant story but, through the richness of details presented, appears to be grounded in actual experience. Significantly, misbehaviour is deliberately directed at teachers. The ensuing confrontations are described with relish and pride

M3 *when I am when I am bored I either don't do work and I just ignore the teacher, or I just argue back with them to make me not bored* (Canal School A L256)

M2 *I get told off and sent out and removed and stuff* (Canal School A L250)

M2 *when you prove teachers wrong, it's the most satisfying thing […]* (Canal School A L 264)

M1 *I mess around when I am bored. I can't help it. It's so boring sometimes I just cause a fuss for something to do. It's actually quite a laugh.* Canal Scholl A (L248)

The male contingent story also contained a good deal of information regarding punishments that the boys had received for their misdemeanours. These revealed an intimate knowledge of school disciplinary procedures. Furthermore, all incidents were embellished with relish and a sense of pride. Firstly, an example from Commuter School;

M2 *do you know about the consequence system like C1 2 3 and 4 yeah?*

M2 *C1 is a verbal warning C2 is 10 minute breaks C3 is a twenty-five minute lunch time C4 is an one hour afterschool and C5 is either isolation or seventy-five minutes on Friday with (teacher's name given) 'R'* (Commuter School B L94-95)

In the second example from Canal School, a boy describes a punishment system he refers to as 'Artwell'. Artwell appears to be a form of internal exclusion system; a disciplinary measure that removes misbehaving pupils from class and places them in isolation.

M2 *no […] artwell is boring*

M2 *oh no no no you're not allowed to leave your desk for the whole day*

M2 *oh we are so bored in there*

M2 *seriously there's two teachers that come […] one walks you and he follows behind…* (Canal School A L 108; 120; 121;129)

M2 has to endure the Boredom of 'Artwell' as a consequence of his misbehaviour in class. Ironically M1's school punishes Boredom with more Boredom.

There are two issues to be dealt with here. Firstly, why do non-imaginary deviancy i.e. real-life, tales exist in contingency stories only? Secondly, why is it only males that recount them? Firstly, the link between deviancy and contingent stories emerges precisely because Boredom is depicted as occasional. Most of the time these pupils narrate themselves as content and even happy.

M1 *yeah cos usually when I do least lesson on Friday it's SO-O […] SLO-OW and boring but the rest of the time […] yeah […] school's ok to be fair.* (Canal School A L20)

Boredom is constructed as an aberration, a sign of failure, and something going wrong. Unlike the previous (endemic and predominant) stories, within the contingent story, school is *not supposed* to be boring. Accordingly, Boredom is depicted as injustice.

M1 *yeah I'm bored when they don't […] teachers who are a bit crap and don't do any practical's. Most do […] but it's just the crap ones.* (Canal School L42)

Precisely this argument was also presented by Kanevsky and Keighley's (2003) interviewees. Kanevsky and Keighley's pupils described poorly planned or under-resourced lessons as missed learning opportunities. This filled them with a sense of injustice and inequality. Accordingly, they emotionally withdrew from lessons in an act of defiant Boredom. The deviance associated with Boredom in this story exists precisely because Boredom is encountered as injustice.

The second issue concerns why this injustice evokes confrontational behaviour in males only. Connell (1989) posits that hegemonic masculinity offers behavioural practices that act as alternative routes to power and pride. These, often self-limiting, practices involve acts of aggression and dominance, and are used when males are faced with emasculating situations. Once experiencing powerlessness, Connell believed that practices that involve aggression and domination are deployed to restore the male's sense of masculinity. To Connell, hegemonic masculinity is constituted through practices that allow the exploitation and dominance of others. Hegemonic masculinity provides access to forms of behaviour aimed at controlling situations and people and is accessed where the male perceives himself to be a victim of oppression or injustice. In this way, Connell believes that hegemonic masculine practices are reactions to perceived subordination. This explanation seems to be highly resonant with the boys' situation. The boys directly and aggressively confront the most powerful person in the room, the teacher, and declare their absolute delight if they can defeat this powerful figure.

M3 You argue with the teacher to make you not bored […] I love it […] I love it when they lose it and start ranting […] It's the funniest thing to beat them. I love it when they are wrong […] and you are right. (Canal School A L241)

Accordingly, Boredom is used by the boys as a technology that allows them to access hegemonic masculine aggression which they then use in a public display of dominance to reassert their own sense of masculine power in the face of perceived injustice.

Further evidence in support of this view is the use of highly evocative, emotive, and aggressive language that the boys use in their contingency story.

M3 *yeah […] writing […] I hate it* (Canal School L67)

M1 *reading is horrible* […] *absolutely hate […] HATE it* (Canal School L70)

M3 *copying out of books […]oohh that's the worst […] BURN 'EM* (Canal School L71)

The male contingent story uses strong and aggressive emotional language to frame their occasional experiences of Boredom as a hegemonic masculine aggressive response to the perceived injustice of Boredom. Significantly, contingent Boredom is painted in much more vibrant emotional colours than in the male predominate story where Boredom is narrated as a much more prosaic and expected aspect of daily life. It is the difference between a scream and a sigh. Furthermore, the male contingent story tends to construct Boredom within a binary emotional framework. Pupils either 'love' teachers or they 'hate' them. A recurrent theme with the male contingent stories was the personality of the teacher and the corresponding relationship this evoked. A teacher-based relational narrative is absent from the male predominant stories but runs throughout the male contingent stories. In particular, the male contingent story tends to narrate Boredom as an emotional correlate of a personal relationship with a teacher/personality-type.

Contingency Story and Boys. Summary: Boys' contingency story positions school as mainly an arena for learning. Boredom is positioned as an injustice. In reaction to this injustice, boys display aspects of hegemonic masculinity in aggressive attacks aimed at teachers.

Contingent story and girls

As with the boy's contingent story, there is very little difference between the stories told by WC and MC girls. The female contingent story is dominated by a single overriding narrative; the 'poor teaching' narrative.

F1 and they're talk and talking and telling you to write down what they are saying and they're and they're talking too quickly… (Commuter School interview A L8)

F3*Yeah I am blaming the teachers […] yeah the teachers are the reason that you get bored* (Commuter School C L40)

F1 *I actually like learning and the lessons are ok. It's just bad teachers, not planning lessons [..] yes it is why […] that's why I get bored!*↑ (Canal School A L142)

The girls view school largely as a site for learning (rather than performance). Boredom is synonymous with the frustration that occurs when poor teaching acts as a barrier to learning. Typically, the female contingent story does not account for Boredom as occurring as a consequence of an absence of performance but when pupils encounter a barrier to their own learning and personal development.

F1 yeah but the whole point of school is to learn (Commuter School interview A L189)

F1 *if it's done done and it's something I've learned and it's something I get […] I'm like ooh that's well good. I enjoy those lessons where you learn things* (Canal A L149)

However, there is little sense in the female contingent story that a desire for success is performance-based. Success is not described in terms of grades, outcomes nor future employment. This is in stark contrast to the girls' endemic story. Although at first glance seemingly similar, the endemic story also located Boredom in the frustration felt at inadequate teaching, the endemic story, however, lamented the negative impact that this had on grades and outcomes, whereas at no point do the contingent girls narrate performance into their story. Indeed, the female contingent story locates Boredom within the damage to *learning*.

F3 *and all of a sudden like […] well […] I am not learning anything because it'ss-s crap. How am I supposed to learn anything if you […] you just zone out* (Commuter School C L66)

F1 *Learning things is interesting […] It's when they don't plan lessons properly and you are like […] erhh more textbooks. You just don't learn anything.* (Canal School A L151)

This positions education and learning as intrinsically valuable rather than merely as a means to an end. The inability to *learn* is in-itself a self-evidently sufficient reason for discontent. The girls' frustration is levelled at teachers whom they position as failing to provide an appropriate pedagogy to facilitate *learning*. In the quote above,

(Commuter School C L66), F3's discontent is linked to her '*…not learning anything'* and continued inability *'…to learn anything…'* rather than not achieving a grade for example.

Within this story, the girls position themselves as generally enjoying the satisfaction associated with learning and Boredom is used to signify frustration when their development is denied.

The girls suggest non-confrontational behavioural strategies to cope with their Boredom such as 'flicking pens', making 'zippy ears' and rubbing nails. However, teachers are problematised again because the girls often feel that their strategies to manage Boredom are actively stifled by their teachers.

F3 *You hide it from the teachers but you start making zippy ears with your pencil case…and you constantly start clicking your pen…when I get bored I'm just rubbing my nails*…(Castle School C L8:10:16)

F1 *So I guess we learnt for this […] what's not boring is drawing in your maths book. I'm dead good at art in maths* (laughs) (Canal School A L170)

The female contingent story is remarkably similar to the 'sensible girls' narrative identified by Francis (2000) Within the 'sensible girls' narrative the girls present themselves as diligent, mature and appropriately motivated by educational values. Furthermore, Francis' work explains why there is no mention of the kind of confrontational behaviour so in evident within the boys' contingent story. Demonstrative deviance in the form of 'playing up' and 'being funny' is antithetical to the kind of sensible femininity espoused within this story. However, the contingent girls *did* show signs of behavioural adaptations to Boredom and girls *did* engage in work-avoidance activities. However, as with Francis' observations, these were 'invisible' acts such as sketching or zoning out. Significantly, again in concordance with Francis, the contingent girls' adaptations appear to be unnoticed by teachers and the girls' disengagement and Boredom-induced work-avoidance activities are rendered invisible through the prism of a gendered narrative. These girls are unlikely to receive specialised support or resources. This illustrates that Spender's (1982) observations on female invisibility within classrooms is likely to persist. Lloyd (2000) concurs and argues that children's responses to school problems are indeed gendered. Girls' deviance is invisible when compared to boys. In particular, Lall (2007) argues

that schoolgirls tend to internalise their anxieties as depression, eating disorders and self-harming and so, girls' disengagement is often *imperceptible* to eyes trained to recognise and manage the more ostentatious forms of male deviance. Furthermore, girls' indolent disengagement is not experienced as a priority by time-pressed teachers because it is less likely to result in disrupted lessons. Accordingly, although Boredom is likely to be a significant issue for girls, gendered conceptualisations concerning Boredom give sovereignty to males' behaviour. Accordingly, it is likely that many girls in schools throughout the UK will be allowed to 'zone-out' into disengaged Boredom but receive little attention from teachers.

Contingency Boredom and Girls. Summary: Girls position school as mainly a site for learning and Boredom is an injustice caused by poor teaching. However, a sensible girl's narrative renders demonstrative deviance antithetical to the kind of sensible femininity espoused within this story.

-Non-Bored story

Three pupils narrated a non-bored story (2 boys; 1 girl). All were middle class. In this story, school is not seen as boring at all. Indeed, school is actually loved.

F2 *I love maths, I know, but I do enjoy it… so I don't get bored. It can be a bit too easy sometimes though that's when they get bored.* (Commuter School C L102)

M1 *if you feel that a lesson has gone really quickly that means that you have focused and that you have done lots of fun hard work* (Commuter School C L222)

M1 *I don't think the topics I am learning are boring at all to be fair.* (Castle School B L15)

Furthermore, the non-bored story was unique in that it explained Boredom dispositionally. Boredom was accounted for in terms of individual personality or preference for lessons. Indeed, the idea of agency was used extensively in this narrative.

M1 *I think personally that it's a personality thing people are saying, you two are saying, tha' you get bored in school. I think it is just down to your personality, people have different* (Castle School B L 115)

M1 [laughs] yeah it's just some people in class […] It's some personalities and that I think. (Commuter School C L11)

F2 *it's just some […] Personality is part of it […] Some people are just bored with everything.* (Commuter school C L7).

As stated earlier (Chapter 1: Section 1: Boredom stories) Two pupil categories were constructed as likely to experience Boredom. Firstly, pupils who 'struggle' could be bored because they would experience confusion during lessons, and this would lead them to 'switch off'.

M1 *people get bored like if they don't understand something […] they'll probably like just to switch off and then they will get bored…it's normally people who struggle* (Commuter School C L1-3)

Secondly, 'Intelligent' pupils could experience Boredom because teachers fail to provide enough stretch and challenge for pupils

M1 *but if you are intelligent and not challenged you just give up and then switch off* (Commuter School C L101)

However, generally, this story allocates enjoyment and fun to the very activities that others find so appalling. The reason for this may be found in the next theme; the learning narrative.

The non-bored story values education and learning in its own right. Reference to the usefulness of education is mentioned but this is located in terms of the intrinsic worth of knowledge and skills in themselves rather than as an extrinsic means to an end. Within the non-bored story, lessons are described as being enjoyable and the act of learning itself is viewed as being worthwhile.

M1 *… but personally I think I think it's […] silly really […] you are here to learn […] I don't know how you can be bored to be honest* (Castle School B L55)

M1 *yeah no I find history lessons last quite a while but it's not necessarily a bad thing* (Commuter School C L221)

F2 *I don't think I get that bored. I enjoy learning and the lessons are alright. I can see people do […] just not me (laughs)* (Commuter school C L54)

This story is the only one to present school exclusively as, what Jackson (2006) calls, a learning culture. This is a particular narrative that frames education in terms of intrinsic worth and promotes understanding and appreciation of knowledge rather than its performance. According to Jackson, learning cultures are associated with a range of positive attitudes and experiences. This position also echoes the findings of Kanevsky and Keighley (2003). Kanevsky and Keighley's pupil interviewees also reported less Boredom when faced with a 'Learning' environment. This environment was constituted by what Kanevsky and Keighley termed, the five 'C's. Learning was student-centred in terms of '*control*' and '*choice*', subjects involved '*challenge*' and '*complexity*' and learning involved a '*caring*' attitude from teachers. It appears that pupils who experience school as a site of learning, personal development and intrinsic value, as opposed to performance, are less likely to depict school as boring.

Furthermore, non-bored pupils were continually held to account for their views and challenged throughout their discussions. In particular, one boy (M1 Castle School B)

spent most of the discussion defending his position against the increasing incredulity of his peers.

M2 *you love school you weirdo*

M1 *err I think it's the best*

3M2 *right oh my god you are taking the piss now*

M1 *errm […] look I just do. It's just my thing ok?* (Castle School B L25-28)

The demand for an account or justification is often seen as a signifier of a situationally non-normative or controversial position (Potter and Wetherell 1987). The incredulous reaction of other pupils to the non-bored story provides evidence that a lack of Boredom is indeed regarded as situationally deviant. However, this brings me to a final perplexing question. Why aren't these three pupils bored? So far, I have argued that a neoliberal discourse invites pupils to develop bored subjectivities constructed via the prisms of social class and gender. However, these three non-bored pupils stand in absolute defiance of this argument.

Significantly, the non-bored story illustrates that no matter how seemingly pervasive, narratives are never 'monolithic' in their power. The presence of non-bored pupils reveals a form of agency that can resist interpellation from gendered, classed and pedagogical narratives. However, the sense with which agency conceptualised is not the same as an independently minded pre-discursive subject freely steering its own journey. Rather agency exists within the constitutive force of discourse (Davies 1997), indeed the concept of agency or 'choice' is itself a product of the narrative.

M1 *it's only boring if you choose to make it boring I think* (Castle School B L139)

F2 *you look at the lessons […] it's up to you to make something out of it or just to zone out and be bored […] It's up to you I think* (Commuter School C L52)

M1 *and if you choose to make it boring it will be […] so they are like oh I'll just switch off* (Commuter School C L55)

These pupils are constructing an account of an agentic and essentially free self where an individuals' Boredom emerges from autonomous choice. There are two elements to this account of the self. Firstly, individuals are positioned as free to make their own choices and secondly, individuals are personally responsible for their choices. This

construction is entirely in keeping with neoliberal motifs. As Foucault (2008) argues, the atomisation of responsibility is a keystone of neoliberalism. M1's interiorization of personal responsibility is an example of Foucault's (1997) concept 'governmentality'. Governmentality acts as a form of power through which M1's self is constituted as a knowable form. M1 argues that pupils are free to make choices, and Boredom is, to some extent, emergent from personal preference. However, these choices, indeed the valorisation of 'choice' itself, conforms to the values of the governing neoliberal mentality. As Foucault stresses, neoliberal subjects, such as M1, despite being in the continual recreation of the governing regime, always regard themselves as autonomous agents. In particular, argued Foucault, neoliberalism invites individuals into adopting a form of subjectivity, homo œconomicus, this is '…the man of enterprise and production' (p147). The essential core of this subjectivity is that, as an entrepreneur, an individual will find fulfilment in being a continual project of self-enhancement.

M1 *I enjoy sitting in lessons and writing out notes because… it's fun […] because it's just […] this is my idea of a good time really* (Castle School BL120 & L 123)

However, the non-Bored story does *not* recognise a central aspect of the neoliberal narrative; performativity. Instead, the three non-bored pupils view education as a site for the appreciation of expertise rather than its performative observation and themselves as engaged and active learners rather than merely performers.

M1 *I don't enjoy it for exams […] learning stuff sort of […] it gets me going anyway (Castle School* B L31)

F2 *I think exams are a bit pointless though. I don't see the point. Look you know I've learnt this stuff so why make me go through that (laughs)* (Commuter School C L72)

M1 *and you are like erm erm I've done all the work and learnt it all. Now you want an exam too. I'm like whaa? (laughs)* (Commuter School C L71)

In the non-bored story, the function of school is formed via an alternative, liberal education narrative. Frustratingly, the limitations of my research mean that I cannot identify the potential source origins of this alternative narrative. This is because I have created an object of knowledge 'school' as if this is sealed off from distal discursive environments. Rather like drawing a circle on a piece of cloth and simply researching

the inside of this circle, I am unable to examine the threads of the cloth that permeate through this artificially imposed parameter. As Holt (2009) points out, ethnomethodologically informed approaches, such as mine, although useful in providing a tight focus on the uniqueness of local context and situation, never-the-less fail to allow me access to a broader, distal social-economic landscape. However, it may be significant that the parents of these non-bored pupils work in either creative industries or are within education. It may also be significant that two of these pupils appeared in the same focus group and their non-bored story emerged dialogically. Whilst accepting that a hegemonic or dominant narrative is available, at any sociohistoric moment, the constitution of narratives can draw from a wide range of heterogeneous and diverse sources. This heterogeneity means that there will always be room for alternative and exceptionally unique social constructions of Boredom. The ability to resist the narratives offered within school was likely made possible by the availability of liberal notions of the purpose of education drawn from home.

Non-bored story. Summary. Firstly, in the non-bored story Boredom is dispositional and emerges as a co-variant of ‘intelligent’ or ‘struggling’. Secondly, the non-bored story positions school as a site for learning. I have argued that the non-bored story contains elements of the neoliberal motif concerning individual responsibility. However, the non-bored story resists positioning school as a site for performativity.

Chapter 4:2 Intersection of Social Class and Gender: Summary.

Chapter 4:2 was split into four sections. Each of these examined how the four Boredom stories fracture according to social class and gender.

1. **Endemic stories:** For working-class boys, classroom Boredom is constructed via the intersection of school as a site for performance which is pessimistically framed from working-class suspicions regarding likely success and achievement. Their response to expected failure is to deploy a masculine 'silly boy' narrative. For working-class girls, Boredom is characterised by the unattractive, ugly, and dull aesthetics found in school. This emphasis on appearance may be routed in working-class feminine ideals concerning the importance of appearance. Similarly, the girls' response to Boredom is also based within working-class femininity which valorises resilient passivity and leaves the girls appearing indolent rather than confrontational.
2. **Predominant story:** Both middle-class boys and girls narrate school as an arena for performance. Accordingly, both find school intrinsically boring. However, this is not problematised. Within middle-class narratives, a degree of purposeful anxiety is viewed as a necessary cost to inevitable success. Additionally, boys provide imaginary deviancy tales as part of their attempts at hegemonic masculinity which is tempered by middle-class expectations of success. Working-class girls position school as the Boredom inducing antithesis to the sanctuary of home. This may occur as a result of a classed and gendered positioning of school as an alien landscape and themselves as imposters within it. Working-class boys in this story position school as a site for performance. Their expectations of failure render school boring. Boredom to these boys offers them an insulating position.
3. **Contingent story:** Both boys and girls position school as mainly an arena for learning. Accordingly, Boredom is positioned as an injustice caused by poor teaching. However, the response to this is gendered. In reaction to this injustice, boys display aspects of confrontational hegemonic masculinity. However, for the girls, demonstrative deviance is antithetical to the kind of sensible femininity espoused within this story.
4. **Non-bored story:** All non-bored pupils position school as a site for learning. Boredom emerges out of predispositions in particular 'intelligent' or 'struggling'

pupils. Non-Bored pupils show signs of accepting neoliberal motifs concerning personal responsibility but reject the concept of performativity.

Overall, Boredom is connected to the pupil's ideas concerning the function of school as either a site of performance or learning. The exact nature of this function is then constructed at the intersection of class and gender.

Children from lower-income backgrounds are more likely to narrate school in terms of performance and by implication more likely to narrate the more severe stories of Boredom. Children from middle-class backgrounds a more likely to narrate school in terms of learning and by implication more likely to narrate the least severe stories.

Middle-class children, on the whole, tend to narrate the least severe Boredom stories, more likely to depict school in terms of a learning environment and are generally more confident regarding their chances of educational success. Working-class children, on the whole, tend to narrate the most severe Boredom stories and position school as a performance environment. The more school is depicted as a site of performance, the more Boredom appears. Furthermore, working-class children have a much more troubled relationship with school. Boys are pessimistic about their chances of success and girls valorise relational attachments in the form of family and friends. Gendered responses to Boredom, particularly in terms of the occasionally encountered contingent variety, can lead boys to display the most disruptive behaviour. Girls' responses tend to be more passive.

Summary points				
	Endemic Boredom story	**Predominant Boredom Story**	**Contingent Boredom story**	**Non-bored story**
Situational vs dispositional	Situational.	Situational.	Situational.	Dispositional.
Language	Manifests in absolutist language	Boredom is normalised but punctuated by imaginaries which allow pupils to maintain hope.	Narrated using evocative oppositional emotional language i.e. love/hate.	Affectionate depictions of education.
View of education	Performance view of education.	Performance view of education	Boredom occurs in situations where self-declared positive attitudes to school are frustrated by poor teaching.	Education and learning are constructed as intrinsically worthwhile.
Class	Likely to be narrated by pupils from a working-class background.	For all middle-class pupils, Boredom is a corollary with success-frustration but for working-class boys, Boredom is a corollary for performance anxiety.	No variations	Non-bored stories emerged from middle-class pupils only.
Gender	Gendered: working-class boys expressed low expectations of success; working-class girls expressed passivity and home separation.	Gender: Working-class girls do not employ performance motifs. Instead, Boredom appears as a corollary of loneliness. Leads to invisible disengagement.	Contingent Boredom and deviancy are linked: Boys' deviancy is ostentatious whilst girls' deviancy is passive.	No variations
Other points	Not associated with deviancy and indeed may insulate pupils from this.	Not associated with deviancy and indeed may insulate pupils from this.	Only story with deviancy as a significant feature.	Boredom is observable in others, who are predisposed to boredom as a result of disposition. Individual responsibility.
School	Castle school.	Castle School.	All schools.	Castle; Commuter schools.

Chapter 4: Findings and analysis Final Summary

The findings and analysis element of this research was split into two chapters. Chapter 4:1 Boredom Stories, Neoliberalism, Resistance and Invisibility; and Chapter 4:2, Intersections of Social Class and Gender.

Chapter 4:1: Neoliberalism, Resistance and Invisibility was split into three sections.

I outlined and defined four Boredom stories, *endemic, predominant, contingent,* and *non-bored*. These were used to illuminate the nature of Boredom from the perspective of secondary school pupils. The stories also illustrate that Boredom can be understood as a socially mediated narrative of experience.

1. The *endemic* story narrates Boredom as normal, inherent, and ubiquitous. Education is associated with performance.
2. The *predominant* story narrates Boredom as normal and inherent but with exceptions. Education is mainly associated with performance.
3. The *contingency* story narrates Boredom as an atypical injustice encountered through poor teaching. Education is mainly associated with learning rather than performance.
4. The *non-bored* story narrates Boredom as a result of individual dispositions in others. Education is associated with learning and no reference is made to performance.

Overall, the more severe Boredom stories appear in conjunction with performance motifs and the least severe stories appear in conjunction with learning motifs.

I argued that neoliberalist pedagogies are operating at Castle School deployed in the form of three interlocking technologies, Marketisation; Managerialism and Performativity were operating at Castle school. I examined the impact of these technologies on pupil subjectivities. I concluded that Boredom is a rhetorically useful device through which pupils can insulate themselves from the potentially toxic labels of performative failure and that Boredom is a highly useful and effective technology of self-care.

I have argued that there is evidence to suggest that Boredom is linked to imagination, creativity and innovation and this often leads to pupils engaging in highly agentic, carnivalesque behaviour which can act to subvert normal situational constraints and

can be regarded as resistance and rebellion accordingly. However, this behaviour fails to impact the overall structure of schools and it also acts to reinforce neoliberal practices. Furthermore, pupils' narration of their own critique as, subjective and emotional renders their critique impotent and depoliticised. Finally, I argued that because pupils' responses to Boredom are gendered. Girls' responses are more likely to be passive, nonconfrontational and, accordingly, invisible.

Chapter 4:2: Intersections of Social Class and Gender, was split into four sections. Each of these examined how the four Boredom stories fractures according to social class and gender.

1. **Endemic stories:** For working-class boys, classroom Boredom is constructed via the intersection of school as a site for performance which is pessimistically framed from working-class suspicions regarding likely success and achievement. Their response to expected failure is to deploy a masculine 'silly boy' narrative. For working-class girls, Boredom is characterised by the unattractive, ugly, and dull aesthetics found in school. This emphasis on appearance may be routed in working-class feminine ideals concerning the importance of appearance. Similarly, the girls' response to Boredom is also based within working-class femininity which valorises resilient passivity and leaves the girls appearing indolent rather than confrontational.
2. **Predominant story:** Both middle-class boys and girls narrate school as an arena for performance. Accordingly, both find school intrinsically boring. However, this is not problematised. Within middle-class educational narratives, a degree of purposeful anxiety is viewed as a necessary cost to inevitable success. Additionally, boys provide imaginary deviancy tales as part of their attempts at hegemonic masculinity which is tempered by middle-class expectations of personal educational success. Within the WC girls' story, Boredom appears on being-with/being-without spectrum. Being-with denotes any situation where the girls' experience interpersonal connectivity especially with friends, family and teachers. Being-without denotes situations where there are barriers to interpersonal connectivity. Being-with is a classed and gendered subjectivity that is communal and altruistic and, as such, is antithetical to a neoliberal education system that emphasises individualism and competition. The ensuing emotional distress is articulated as Boredom. Working-class boys in this story position school as a site

for performance. This at first appears very similar to ideas expressed by their middle-class counterparts. However, WC boys' story contains indications that they have expectations of failure (rather than success) and it is this anticipation of failure that is the cause of their Boredom. Boredom offers them a position of sanctuary insulating them from the potential toxicity of 'failure'.

3. **Contingent story:** Both boys and girls position school as mainly an arena for learning. Accordingly, Boredom is positioned as an injustice caused by poor teaching. However, the response to this is gendered. In reaction to this injustice, boys display aspects of confrontational hegemonic masculinity. However, for the girls, demonstrative deviance is antithetical to the kind of sensible femininity espoused within this story.
4. **Non-bored story:** All non-bored pupils position school as a site for learning. Boredom emerges out of predispositions in particular 'intelligent' or 'struggling' pupils. This story accepts the personalisation of responsibility but rejects the performativity inherent within neoliberal narratives.

Part Four: Conclusions

Literature Review

Firstly, my literature review began with a critique of historical and philosophical Boredom stories. A historical story proposes that Boredom, in different guises, has always existed. However, I argued that, although incrementally shading into modern Boredom, because historical malaise such as acedia, melancholia and ennui were endured by idiosyncratic, spiritual, artistic and educated elites, they should *not* be considered as synonymous with the much more endemic, prosaic, democratised and universal modern Boredom. Heidegger's philosophical 'grammar of Boredom' was examined in this light. I argued that despite utilising modern motifs in its exploration, Heidegger's story abstracts a distinctly modern subjectivity from its historical context and fails to account for Boredom's unique relationship with western modernity accordingly.

Secondly, I argued that the psychological Boredom story tends to depict Boredom as an ailment in need of a 'cure' especially as this impacts on performance. Psychology's 'cure' story splits into two camps, one focusing on the measurement of an individual state of Boredom and the other focusing on the contextual correlates of Boredom. Furthermore, I argued that both of these psychological accounts have failed to produce a satisfactory conceptualisation of Boredom because they fail to recognise the social and historical dimensions of the malaise.

Subsequently, I have constructed my own sociological Boredom story which articulates the social and historical dimensions of the malaise. Firstly, I argued that, although often implicitly, subjective malaise has been underpinning sociological critique since the birth of the discipline. The early 'classical' sociologists, for example, used subjective malaise as a signifier for, what they saw as, the dehumanising impact of rapid industrialisation and rational modernity. I then moved to explore the argument that Boredom is a corollary of modernity. Following Foucault, Goodstein (2005) was used, for example, to argue each historical period can be characterised by a unique 'rhetoric of reflection' and that Boredom is the outcome of a modern rhetoric of reflection; 'democratized scepticism'. Ultimately, democratized scepticism is the emotional harvest reaped from a scientific rationalist discourse sown during the 19th century. *A central conclusion in my sociological story is that Boredom is a subjectivity*

emergent out of socio-historically situated discursive contexts. In particular, modernity is characterised by a socio-historically unique rhetoric of reflection which discursively fabricates a way of perceiving oneself as a subjectivity which is both inevitably harmed by, and explained in the terms of, a rationalist-materialist paradigm.

To explore the sociological story further and develop the theme of Boredom as a distinctly modern malaise, I presented Klapp's (1986) dystopian view of an information society franticly mass-producing homogenised and blandly consumable quantity at the expense of slower, meaningful and challenging quality. A similar view was found in Simmel's (1997) essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'. Simmel depicts city dwellers as existentially estranged because they are bombarded with a maelstrom of stimulation, dizzying lights and distractions. Essentially, modern urbanites emotionally close down as an act of self-care within a cloaked sanctuary of a blasé demeanour.

Finally, the motif of Boredom-as-sanctuary was continued in my use of Gardiner (2014). In Gardiner's account, Boredom is the subject's flight away from a state of ontological insecurity experienced as a result of the frenzied cognition demanded by entrepreneurial subjectivity where the individual is only one performance away from failure. In this account, Boredom may be the key to unlocking a momentum for change via an invitation to pause and reflect.

This first element of the literature review was intended to outline the parameters for my own embryonic sociological story. *I conclude that Boredom is a sociohistorically situated phenomenon that has its roots in the rational, technological and industrial developments of the last 200 hundred years.* Furthermore, my sociological story not only offers insights into the possible socio-historic dimensions of Boredom, my sociological story invites a radically alternative view of Boredom too. Whereas the psychological story, for example, depicts Boredom as an ailment in need of a cure, my sociological account is more sympathetic. *I also conclude that Boredom can be a sanctuary and a position of self-care in which the individual can be detached and protected from a toxic environment*. Furthermore, I have portrayed Boredom as a reflective space and, as such, a potential catalyst for change and a dynamic for resistance and rebellion.

So far I have developed the argument that Boredom is a subjectivity emergent out of socio-historically situated discursive contexts namely, the rational, technological and industrial developments of the last 200 hundred years and that Boredom can be a sanctuary and a position of self-care in which the individual can be detached and protected from a toxic environment. The next element of my literature review attempted to explore the extent to which these arguments could be applied to one particular social-historical context, namely secondary education within the UK

Originally, stories of Boredom within education shared several interconnected motifs. Firstly, Boredom was portrayed as an obstacle to performative norms. Bored workers were depicted as problematic because they were less productive, and bored children were seen as problematic because they achieved lower grades. Secondly, Boredom was depicted as a self-evidently negative emotional state that external observation and control should aim to 'cure' by re-establishing a performative norm. Finally, Boredom was the reified outcome of either 'situational' or 'individual' materialist and causal factors. In summary, the origins of Boredom's story within educational research began from the assumption that the malaise is an unquestioningly negative emotional state because it has a detrimental impact on performance. Furthermore, the causes of Boredom can, and should, be identified so that the malaise can be managed to re-establish normative standards of performance.

However, I have argued that a more critical story emerged within the sociology of education during the 1970s. This was initiated in the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Willis (1977) which offered a radically new and distinctly critical sociological position regarding Boredom. Willis', for example, illustrated how Boredom was used within pupils' narratives when explicating their (ultimately) self-defeating practices of working-class resistance to exploitation. Furthermore, inhabiting a bored demeanour was a means through which Willis' pupils asserted their individual and rebellious *superiority* over conformist others. However, although sociological Boredom stories during the 1970s introduced a link between Boredom, social class and exploitation, Boredom remained 'black-boxed', and these stories generally relied on a common-sense conceptualisation of the malaise and, as such, they failed to fully illuminate a role for Boredom in understanding educational inequality.

Through the 1980s, Boredom continued to appear as an emotional corollary of a dehumanizing and depersonalising education system. Boredom was positioned within a broader story of resistance and rebellion. Furthermore, schools were depicted as oppressive sites, intent on the construction of subservient and exploitable personalities, and as agents in the fabrication and management of exploitable emotions. Within this emerging story, Boredom appeared a resource used by pupils to deny and resist an essentially dehumanising process of labour reproduction.

As the new century dawned, the concept of neo-liberalism increasingly loomed like a spectre within sociological stories. Neo-liberalism manifested within curricula changes in terms of increasing levels of individual competition, marketisation, managerialism and the need for quantifiable performance. These features continually reappear as corollaries of contemporary classroom Boredom. The relationship between neoliberalism and Boredom was exemplified within the story presented by Jackson (2006). Jackson narrated contemporary classroom Boredom as an unintended consequence of an overzealous neoliberal testing regime that encourages working-class pupils, in particular, to self-protect by burying their enthusiasm beneath a self-handicapping affectation of nonchalance and Boredom. In this way, *the sociological story presents contemporary classroom Boredom as a response to neoliberal changes to education*. In sociology, classroom Boredom has become a technology of self-care, resistance and a corollary to inequalities in educational attainment. Furthermore, the role of teachers' in this neo-liberalist 'testing culture' story is to narrow the curriculum and restrict classroom activities to focus on lecture-driven and exam-based strategies. Moreover, teachers are depicted sympathetically, aware that their lessons result in Boredom but powerless to offer anything else in the face of an examination onslaught.

Additionally, in the light of these narratives, Boredom has increasingly been depicted in terms of its emancipatory potential. Lewkowich (2010), for example, argued that being content in one's exploitation is an oppressive demand faced by the modern subject. Accordingly, the individual's emotional self has become part of the productive process and, as such, is open to scrutiny and control. Boredom, being intrinsically critical of the present, enters this scene as a subversive subjectivity that acts as a potential dynamic for a radical, transformative, creative and emancipatory future. Accordingly, pedagogies that stifle Boredom erode the capacity for pupils to reflect and critically engage with the present, dampen the fire of imagination and curb

the potential for self-discovery. Thus, within the sociological story, Boredom has been transformed from an inherently negative to a potentially positive dynamic. *Boredom can be seen as a form of resistance to emotional colonisation and an opportunity to resist being reduced to usefulness.*

I conclude that the emerging story of Boredom within sociology presents contemporary classroom Boredom as a response to neoliberal changes to education. Furthermore, Boredom can be seen as a form of resistance to emotional colonisation and an opportunity to resist being reduced to usefulness. My sociological story of Boredom within education attempts to articulate Boredom as a potentially emancipatory force. I conclude that Boredom creates a space in which pupils can resist an increasingly neoliberal emotional colonisation. Boredom acts to deny the fabricated myths that education is aimed at personal wellbeing and helps expose the dehumanised nature of contemporary classrooms.

However, the examination of Boredom within UK secondary education tended towards a narrative which gave sovereignty to particular gendered (i.e. male) accounts, performances, and experiences of Boredom. Accordingly, within the sociological story concerning education and gender, working-class girls' Boredom has become translucent, if not invisible. I argued that this gendered-invisibility is a manifestation of a wider phenomenon within sociological stories which tend to normalise male knowledge. Within a malestream gaze, because schoolgirls fail to present a 'proper' (male) performance of Boredom and fail to present the 'known' (male) signs of Boredom they simply disappear. In other words, the noisy misbehaviour of schoolboys is easily *equated* with Boredom, whilst the quiet indolence of schoolgirls is easily *disassociated* with Boredom. I then proceeded to examine feminist-inspired stories in which female manifestations of Boredom are less translucent. *I conclude that girls are just as bored as boys but in different ways*. For girls, in particular working-class girls, Boredom manifests in passive and non-confrontational forms. Indeed, a working-class girl's ability to suppress negative emotions and experience Boredom non confrontationally makes her ideally suited for exploitation within such fields as child and adult care work. Francis' (2000) story was used to illustrate how girls' Boredom vanishes within a classroom setting. Francis illustrates how teacher's self-authored stories, 'silly boys' and 'sensible girls', rendered boys' deviancy opaque whilst quiet girls enjoyed invisible disengagement. Francis's work illustrates that gendered

narratives equating Boredom with masculinity melt female disengagement into an imperceptible shadow. On the other hand, although Boredom is dissociated with working-class femininity, Walkerdine et al (2001) concluded that the pursuit of happiness is almost compulsory. In Walkerdine's story, a historical antithesis between working-class experience and educational success leads working-class girls and their parents to view happiness as the only realistically achievable educational outcome. Middle-class girls, on the other hand, can more optimistically pursue the self-development motifs offered by neo-liberal education and experience greater success accordingly. Thus, *I conclude that gendered narratives that associate boredom with masculinity allow working-class girls to invisibly disengage from education amidst smiling displays of indolent happiness*.

My feminist-inspired story concerning gender and Boredom is critical of the sociological ignorance of classroom Boredom as experienced by working-class schoolgirls'. Effectively, female classroom Boredom has often been ignored and rendered invisible. However, girls are just as bored as boys but in different ways. Gendered narratives concerning emotionality invite working-class girls to hide negative emotions such as Boredom whilst over-emphasising more positive emotions such as happiness. These processes occur within the context of an increasingly neoliberal education system whose narrow definitions of success are acting to the detriment of working-class girls.

Indeed, the most recent sociological accounts of the relationship between Boredom and education have increasingly be drawn to examine the relationship between neo-liberal educational reforms, their corresponding pedagogical and management practices and classroom Boredom. In this light, I undertook an examination of Foucault's account of neoliberalism and then turned this focus on to educational research specifically.

Neoliberalism reoccurs within sociological stories of education as a corollary of contemporary classroom Boredom. Accordingly, I attempted to unpack this poorly defined and ill-explained concept. I chose to begin with Foucault because his story explicitly articulates neoliberalism as an 'in-here' subjectivity; the *homo œconomicus* (entrepreneurial self). Through Foucault's genealogy, I represented neo-liberalism as constituted by two elements. Firstly, German macro-neoliberalism which fears the

state and depicts the market as a democratic force accordingly. And secondly, US micro-neoliberalism which invites individuals to inhabit themselves as a continuous zesty self-developmental project, self-actualising its way to increased marketability. I argued that Foucault synthesised these two elements within his concept 'governmentality'. This translates as the individual's interiorisation of governing regimes' values *as-if* these were, personal, historical and natural. A successful interiorisation into a *homo œconomicus* subjectivity occurs firstly when individuals subject themselves to a regime of truth via judgemental and subject-fabricating performances and secondly when the individual regards the outcome of these judgmental performances as a matter of personal responsibility.

Cloaked under the rhetoric of modernisation, I argued that aspects of neoliberalism, marketisation, competition and minimal state interference, have characterised UK educational policy for the last forty years and that the effect of these policy developments has been a re-culturalisation of schools into sites constituted within the language of market economics. To explicate these effects further, I relied heavily on Stephen Ball's analysis of three neoliberal technologies, Marketisation; Managerialism; and Performativity. *I conclude that the effect of neoliberal educational technologies is the emergence of 'ontological insecurity'* (Ball 2003a; 2012) Ontological insecurity occurs when self-knowledge becomes synonymous with self-doubt. Furthermore, an individual inhabiting a *homo œconomicus* subjectivity experiences the threat of failure as both self-defining and a matter of personal responsibility; a failing grade becomes both a failing feeling and a failing person. Although pupils aspire to success, *I conclude that pupils often re-subjectify themselves and use a bored, nonchalant and blasé demeanour to insulate themselves against the toxicity of ontological insecurity and fear of failure.*

Literature Review: Summary Conclusions.

Chapter 2:1: Theories of Boredom

- Modern Boredom is a sociohistorically situated subjectivity which has its roots in the rational, technological and industrial developments of the last 200 hundred years.
- Modern Boredom can act as a sanctuary of self-care into which the individual can retreat and be insulated from a toxic environment.

Chapter 2:2 Boredom and Education

- Classroom Boredom is a situated subjectivity that can be seen as a form of, albeit self-defeating, working-class resistance to emotional colonisation and exploitation.
- Girls can be just as bored as boys but gendered narratives that disassociate classroom Boredom from femininity allow working-class girls to invisibly disengage from education.

Chapter 2:3 Boredom Neoliberalism.

- Contemporary classroom Boredom is a sociohistorically situated subjectivity; a response to neoliberal changes to education that foster 'ontological insecurity' amongst pupils.
- With historical biographies of failure and experiencing structural inequalities, working-class pupils, in particular, use a bored, nonchalant and blasé demeanour to insulate themselves against the toxicity of ontological insecurity and their expectations of failure. With working-class girls this process is often invisible.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The main objective of my primary research was to explore how secondary school children used the concept of classroom Boredom conversationally to make sense of and construct their daily lived experiences in three secondary schools. This methodology was aimed at capturing pupils' own stories of Boredom in a setting that would mirror, as far as possible, their own daily prosaic interactions. Accordingly, I have described the journey taken to developing a form of a focus group that I termed a *researcher-absent focus group*. This, as the name suggests, involved leaving the pupils alone, albeit with a prompt to help structure their talk, to conduct a discussion by themselves. I was interested in exploring the pragmatic rather than semantic, and the emic rather than etic, use of classroom Boredom in an everyday local school setting. The methodology section was split into three sub-chapters.

Chapter 3:1 Here I provided an account of the processes, procedures and problems involved in conducting this research. This section described and explained sampling,

participants and methodological processes deployed. The section concluded with an examination of my use of grounded theory; the method deployed to analyse the primary data.

Chapter 3:2 presented an account of my reading journey and the influence on key texts on my methodological decisions. I critically examined the proliferation of quantitative research and contrasted this with the usefulness of qualitative research in the context of the linguistic turn within sociology. The section then narrowed its analysis towards the use of focus groups with children as participants and then specifically examined the deployment of focus groups within secondary education and with secondary school pupils as participants.

Chapter 3:3 concluded the methodology by analysing key ethical issues as these relate to research with children as participants.

Chapter 4 Analysis and Findings

In analysing my focus group findings, I identified four distinct stories of Boredom. Here, I conclude by highlighting the 'similarities', the elements that appeared as a common theme throughout all stories irrespective of social class and gender, and 'differences', the elements which appear to fracture according to social class and gender. Following this, I highlight my conclusions regarding the situation in Castle school.

Endemic Boredom stories.

Similarities within all endemic stories: Firstly, in terms of common themes, all endemic stories emerged from Castle School. Secondly, all endemic stories construct Boredom situationally and draw on several constantly encountered situational factors to account for the malaise. Thirdly, endemic stories painted a picture of school as unremittingly boring. Pupils used absolutist language and, indeed, this may be a useful way to identify potential endemically bored pupils. Terms such as 'all the time', 'everywhere' and 'everyday' may very well be useful signifiers to lead teachers to inquire about pupils who may be at risk of disengagement. Fourthly, endemic stories did not associate Boredom with deviancy. This is probably not so surprising as an endemically bored pupil would be at constant war with their surroundings. It seems that most endemically bored pupils have wisely learned to negotiate school-life

without recourse to deviancy. Furthermore, Boredom may allow pupils to withdraw from toxic situations and protect themselves from disrupting acts of deviancy. Boredom may be a significant and pragmatically useful element (to pupils and teachers) in ensuring the smooth functioning of lessons. In this sense, Boredom allows pupils to successfully negotiate through the immediacy of a dull moment without conflict. In the long term, however, disengagement is likely to have a significant impact on educational attainment. Finally, within the performance narrative that these stories produced, school and education are intrinsically meaningless, and lessons are depicted in entirely consequentialist terms. If pupils cannot describe the relationship between a lesson and a direct impact on perceived valuable performance, then lessons are constructed as irrelevant. However, it should be recognised that much of the present neoliberal secondary education is explicitly target-orientated and so this performance view is hardly surprising. Caught in a winner-takes-all system and fettered to tests and examinations, pupils have an entirely appropriate understanding of their education. A performance and outcome-driven curriculum is a fertile ground for classroom Boredom. This is likely to be particularly damaging for working-class pupils who have high expectations of failure. Pupils from backgrounds who have a family history of educational failure and/or are experiencing structural inequalities may be particularly prone to narrating classroom Boredom in this way. This can only act to compound educational inequalities.

Differences between endemic stories: There were significant differences according to social class and gender within endemic stories. The first and most obvious difference is that endemic stories were relatively rare amongst middle-class pupils; 1 female and 0 male. It is safe to say that endemic Boredom stories are far more likely to emerge from pupils from a working-class background. Moreover, working-class endemic stories were gendered. Working-class boys used insecure knowledge-markers when describing the supposed benefits of education. This may indicate that their endemic Boredom is linked to expectations of failure and may relate to failure in an academic sense and/or a scepticism concerning whether their efforts will be adequately rewarded. Unfortunately, as much sociological research into the relationship between social class and education demonstrates, this scepticism is justified. Furthermore, working-class boys pejoratively associated Boredom with the high levels of seriousness perceived necessary for success. Furthermore, working-class boys

associating a high social and emotional cost with educational success were simultaneously pessimistic about their chances of enjoying benefits at the end. The costs of seriousness, in this context, were understandably extortionate. Working-class girls, on the other hand, gave no acknowledgement to economic benefits of education or the lack of. Instead, they used drab aesthetics encountered within schools to express their Boredom. This association was unique. The ugliness of their surroundings was further compounded with the amount of passive waiting that they described themselves as enduring. Furthermore, in contrast to the working-class boys, who often described home as more boring than school, working-class girls viewed home as a sanctuary which acted to save them on a daily basis. Indeed home/school were counterposed oppositionally. The girls' emphasis on aesthetics and home may well be an expression of working-class gender norms and expectations.

Predominant Boredom stories.

Similarities within predominant stories: Firstly, all predominant stories emerged from Castle School and constructed Boredom situationally. These stories draw on several commonly encountered situational factors to account for the malaise. Secondly, although Boredom was narrated as the most commonly expected experience of school, non-boring situations were recognised. Interestingly, the adjective 'rare' was consistently used to conclude descriptions of non-boring situations and acted to emphasise atypicality and re-stress the normally boring nature of school life. Also, rare non-boring situations were often exemplified with imaginaries rather than real events. Using imaginaries allowed pupils to weave hope into their stories. In this sense, hope acted as a technology to rationalise, account for, and ultimately justify their continuing participation in a system that they otherwise describe as so clearly detrimental to their well-being. Thirdly, as with the endemic stories, deviancy was largely absent. Again, I would argue that this absence of a deviancy response is entirely rational. As with endemic Boredom, predominant Boredom-instigated deviancy would be such a totalising experience that pupils would be constantly at war with their surroundings.

Differences between predominant stories: Firstly, the predominant story contained a performance view of education for most pupils (middle-class females; middle-class males; working-class males). Both middle-class girls depicted education as a conveyor

belt transferring them into employment via university. Interestingly, the move to university was never doubted and normalised within this story. Middle-class boys also positioned school as a link in an education/employment conveyor belt and narrated this as appropriate. Indeed, to middle-class pupils, predominant Boredom emerged when the conveyor belt showed signs of breaking and their expected access to success became barred. Middle-class boys, for example, lamented lessons which they could not equate with economic capital. Furthermore, within middle-class narratives, success was never really doubted, Boredom emerges, therefore, when schools obstruct expected success. However, working-class boys connected Boredom to failure and grade anxiety. Working-class boys did not position Boredom as emergent from barriers to otherwise inevitable success. Instead, they expressed Boredom as a corollary of inevitable failure. In particular, these boys expressed Boredom as a corollary of grade anxiety and their diminishing expectations of attending university. To middle-class pupils, Boredom was a frustration that accompanied obstacles to their success, whilst to the working-class boys, Boredom was an anxiety associated with failure. This is a subtle but significant difference. Middle-class children are much more likely to have access to family and biographical narratives of educational success and can much more easily construct their own future accordingly. To working-class boys, on the other hand, it may be much more difficult to locate education as a route to success.

Finally, a noticeable variation appeared with the working-class female predominant story. This story did not contain an instrumental motif. The girls did not present education as a route to success or failure. They did not make references to university or occupation. Instead, Boredom appears as a corollary with problematic relationships and as a metaphor for loneliness. Loneliness was expressed in terms of being-without family, friends and even friendly relationships with teachers. The girls become saved from Boredom by returning home and also by developing informal and friendly relationships with inspirational teachers. Although the girls do not appear to be anti-educational when self-declared needs are unfilled the girls drift off into a form of screen-staring inactivity and disengagement unlikely to be noticed by hard-pressed teachers. Accordingly, invisible female deviancy could have a significant impact on educational inequality. To the working-class girls, Boredom is a metaphor for a form of loneliness.

Contingent Boredom Stories.

Similarities within contingent stories: Firstly, contingent stories emerged within all schools and constructed Boredom situationally. Boredom is a result of situational factors occasionally encountered. Accordingly, Boredom is an atypical school experience. Secondly, pupils tend to narrate themselves as fundamentally 'good' students and they express learning educational values. Boredom occurs when their self-declared positive attitudes to school are disrupted by specific corollaries. Furthermore, all contingent stories locate teachers as a corollary in determining whether a lesson is going to be boring or not. Although teachers are consistently blamed for a wide range of misdemeanours, these are generally expressed as problematic because they act as a barrier to success. In the contingent story, Boredom is analogous to frustration at not being able to conform to the educational values of learning. Indeed, these pupils expressed enjoyment and happiness when they experience learning. They do not bemoan homework, for example, if this is seen as developmental. Accordingly, the discourse of performance is relatively weak in these stories and pupils often describe success, not in terms of grades, but in terms of learning and personal development. Thirdly, the contingent story contains the most emotive language. Often lessons and teachers are placed at either extreme of a love/hate dichotomy. Pupils appear to feel quite relaxed about declaring their 'love' for one teacher and their 'hatred' for another. It would appear inappropriate to assume that the intensity of language use indicates the extent of Boredom encountered. However, although these pupils experience Boredom only occasionally, they narrate Boredom with the most intensity. Perhaps this intensity exists precisely *because* Boredom is encountered occasionally. Pupils may have not developed acceptance or resignation strategies as with the more endemic and predominant pupils. Boredom is depicted as atypical, unjustified and unfair and they react accordingly.

Differences between contingent stories: There was a significant gender difference in the links made between Boredom and deviancy. Both middle-class and working-class boys provided equally detailed accounts of classroom deviancy, both in terms of an intimate knowledge of school discipline regimes and rich anecdotal evidence of their own misbehaviour. Although these tales dominated the male contingency story, they appeared no-where else. This indicates that the impact of contingent Boredom is highly gendered. Girls narrating Boredom as contingent suggest non-confrontational

and hence invisible behavioural strategies such as ‘flicking pens’ and making ‘zippy ears’. However, contingent Boredom encountered by boys appears more likely to result in misbehaviour and school discipline than when classroom Boredom is encountered as an endemic or predominant phenomenon. The narration of Boredom as routinised and prosaic, with correspondingly low expectations, may help male pupils by acting as a shielding insulation from the emotionally damaging potential of occasional Boredom. Male pupils who narrate Boredom as an occasional-only phenomenon, however, may be less well-equipped to manage its impact on their behaviour. Boredom narrated as severe is a useful technology in allowing male pupils to emotionally withdraw from toxic situations and protect themselves from disrupting acts of deviancy. Surprisingly, Boredom may be a significant and pragmatically useful element in ensuring the smooth functioning of lessons.

Non-bored Stories.

Similarities within non-bored stories: Firstly, non-bored stories constructed Boredom dispositionally and this construction was unique to this story. Examples of non-bored stories were lamentably few but significant never-the-less as these may indicate a relationship between a learning view of education and non-boredom. The more-bored stories, endemic and predominant, are littered with performance motifs that are utterly absent in non-bored stories. It appears that Boredom and performance are linked. Secondly, all non-bored stories came from middle-class children (2 male: 1 female) This contrasts with the findings concerning endemic Boredom stories which were almost entirely from working-class children. The extremes of Boredom, endemic and non-bored appear to be classed. Thirdly, education and learning were depicted as intrinsically worthwhile within the non-bored stories. Indeed, learning was often narrated as evoking love. However, viewing school in such an entirely positive light was antithetical to other pupils and this position had to be defended against the incredulity of others.

Differences between non-bored stories: There were very few differences within these stories. Given the small sample, this is unsurprising. However, there was a small difference in how responsibility was allocated. The one girl tended to construct Boredom-propensity as a result of personal failing stemming from a lack of ability, whereas the two boys tended to stress Boredom as a simple aspect of diversity and

personal taste. In both cases, however, Boredom-prone dispositions were observably present in ‘others’ but absent from the narrator.

Summary points				
	Endemic Boredom story	**Predominant Boredom Story**	**Contingent Boredom story**	**Non-bored story**
Situational vs dispositional	Situational.	Situational.	Situational.	Dispositional.
Language	Manifests in absolutist language	Boredom is normalised but punctuated by imaginaries which allow pupils to maintain hope.	Narrated using evocative oppositional emotional language i.e. love/hate.	Affectionate depictions of education.
View of education	Performance view of education.	Performance view of education	Boredom occurs in situations where self-declared positive attitudes to school are frustrated by poor teaching.	Education and learning are constructed as intrinsically worthwhile.
Class	Likely to be narrated by pupils from a working-class background.	For all middle-class pupils, Boredom is a corollary with success-frustration but for working-class boys, Boredom is a corollary for performance anxiety.	No variations	Non-bored stories emerged from middle-class pupils only.
Gender	Gendered: working-class boys expressed low expectations of success; working-class girls expressed passivity and home separation.	Gender: Working-class girls do not employ performance motifs. Instead, Boredom appears as a corollary of loneliness. Leads to invisible disengagement.	Contingent Boredom and deviancy are linked: Boys' deviancy is ostentatious whilst girls' deviancy is passive.	No variations
Other points	Not associated with deviancy and indeed may insulate pupils from this.	Not associated with deviancy and indeed may insulate pupils from this.	Only story with deviancy as a significant feature.	Boredom is observable in others, who are predisposed to boredom as a result of disposition. Individual responsibility.
School	Castle school.	Castle School.	All schools.	Castle; Commuter schools.

The Case of Castle School.

My focus group findings revealed that the most severe Boredom stories (endemic and predominant) were produced by Castle School pupils. The second wave of interviews revealed further evidence of endemic and predominate stories confirming this. Furthermore, I analysed three Castle School teacher diaries to explore situated pedagogical and management practices. I concluded that these diaries contained evidence of neoliberalist practices in the form of marketisation, managerialism and performativity.

Marketisation: Evidence of marketised language was used to claim that Castle School was reculturing into a business site. Furthermore, in its regard and use of pupil's grades as marketable data, Castle School's marketisation practices framed pupils and grades as forms of useful capital and as a marketable product.

Managerialism: The effect of managerialism in Castle School led to an imperative to produce spectacle to satisfy managerialist monitoring systems. Spectacle production appeared to be *the* dominant power driving teaching and learning. The need for spectacle dictated the content, format of assessments and even the colour ink used by teachers to annotate pupils' work.

Performativity: In Castle School, performativity emerged within classroom activities and practices orientated around performance indicators such as tests and exams. I conclude that *performativity constitutes a toxic classroom environment in which endemic and predominate Boredom stories flourish.* Accordingly, performativity has a catastrophic impact on learning. Firstly, Performativity invited Castle School pupils to construct their education in purely performance terms. To Castle School pupils, the manifest function of their education was the fabrication of spectacle in the form of performance indicators i.e. grades. In Castle School, classrooms were only meaning-full when they provided pupils with performative spectacle. However, Castle School pupils cited many barriers to spectacle which included expectations of failure, grade anxiety and frustrations concerning poor teaching. Barriers were identifiably associated with social class and gender. Secondly, because performance and spectacle are much more than mere measurements; they are technologies of self-knowledge construction, pupils have to produce a constant stream of quantifiably excellent spectacle to maintain healthy self-knowledge. Castle School pupils are subjected to

continuous concern regarding whether they will be able to fabricate the next spectacle. Accordingly, performativity breeds anxiety, frustration and 'ontological insecurity'. Thirdly, the atomised nature of neo-liberal discourse invites pupils to construct their ontological insecurity as a matter of personal responsibility. Hence, Castle School pupils found themselves in a toxic ontological precarity of which they were responsible. Finally, in this toxic context, Boredom can be seen as a useful rhetorical device, a re-subjectification and a practice of resistance that acts to insulate pupils from the potential harm of a 'failing' subjectivity. In Castle School, Boredom acted as a protective shield against the violence of neoliberalism that would condemn pupils into inhabiting a 'failure' subjectivity. Boredom is a technology of self-care that pupils can use in their daily struggle to defend themselves against a toxic subjectivity

Limitations

I have claimed that neo-liberalism, in the form of marketisation, managerialism and especially performativity, is at the heart of the unique Boredom stories (endemic and predominant) apparent within Castle School. A limitation to this claim is that I have not provided evidence that neo-liberalism, in the form described, is as unique to Castle School as endemic and predominant Boredom stories are. For my claim to be perceived as authentic, neoliberalism, in the form described, should be *demonstrably absent* from Canal and Commuter School. It is possible, for example, that teacher diaries from Canal or Commuter School may equally show neo-liberal governance technologies but without the same stories of Boredom, thus rendering my claims problematic. In this sense, Canal and/or Commuter Schools could have acted as quasi-control groups to explore my suggested relationship between neo-liberalist governance and Boredom. This was an opportunity missed. Ultimately this exploration did not occur because neither Commuter nor Canal Schools were receptive to further research beyond their initial consent. Withdrawal manifested in non-response to email requests and telephone calls. Although frustrating, I felt that best practice dictated that I should avoid any actions which could be constituted as pressure to continue with the research. However, in respecting Canal and Commuter Schools' right to withdraw I have opened my research to critique. Therefore, a development to my research would be to, firstly, collate teacher diaries from a diversity of schools to establish, if possible, a broad range of governance technologies and secondly, to conduct focus group

interviews with pupils at these schools. Subsequently, this could allow my claim of a relationship between neoliberalism and Boredom to be further explored.

However, despite the above limitation, the authenticity of my claim can be established through confirmation via the existing body of literature (Jackson 2006; Mora 2011; Ball 2000; 2003a; 2012; 2016a; 2016b; Čeplak 2012). Collectively these works argue that neoliberalism has led to a performance or testing culture which narrows the curriculum and classroom activities to focus on performance via lecture driven, exam-based, material and test-taking strategies. As value is abdicated to performance, pupils' trust in their own ability to know themselves diminishes leading to ontological insecurity. Ontological insecurity encourages self-worth protection strategies as pupils try to mitigate the damaging potential of a 'failure' label. Accordingly, pupils can adopt an alternative position of resistance which, inverting school norms, allows them to reconstruct their 'failure' as indicative of a new subjectivity based on rebelliousness, nonconformity and Boredom.

Accordingly, despite a clear limitation in my primary research, there are grounds to argue that my claims have some authenticity.

A second issue with my research is the relative paucity in my sample size. To recap, there were 53 participants in my research; 32 pupils in the first wave of focus group interviews and, in the second wave of research, there were 18 pupils and 3 teachers. To contextualise this number, it is useful to compare my sample size with other focus group studies. Bryman (2016) has produced a convenient collation of nine 'classic' focus group studies which details the number of both participants, group sizes and the number of groups. This collation reveals that sample sizes in four of these studies, 40 (Morgan and Spanish 1985), 49 (Lupton 1996) 48 (Warr 2005) and 56 (Livingstone 2006) are comparable with my own. Furthermore, Mitsoni (2006), the most directly comparable research to mine, used focus groups with secondary school children to investigate classroom Boredom and had a sample size of 32 pupils. In this sense, although my sample size is towards the lower end of qualitative research sample sizes it is, never-the-less, still well within normative boundaries.

Despite this normative claim, the main criticism is that my research contains such small numbers that the findings cannot be generalisable to a broader population. This is of course a valid criticism. However, there are two points of defence that I raise.

Firstly, my methodology was largely adapted from Charmaz's (2006) ideas on grounded theory (GT). Charmaz's version of GT advocates the use of theoretical sampling. This is a method that advocates the pursuit of new participants only when these participants are contributing alternative or extra perspectives to the specific issue under investigation. Concordantly, Malterud, Volkert, and Guassora, (2015) propose the deployment of the concept "information power". This concept relates to forming an appropriate sample size for qualitative studies. Put simply, information power means that the more information the sample yields, the lower number of extra participants is needed. In my research, I returned to Castle School to test or refine the labels and codes developed in the first wave of focus group interviews. However, the second wave of interviews failed to produce anything new and indeed, simply acted to reinforce the findings of the first wave. In this sense, the research had reached a point of theoretical saturation and no further participants were necessary. Driven by the ideas emergent from Charmaz's position on GT, my research should have stopped exactly when it did. Interviewing further participants was unlikely to contribute anything new.

Secondly, a significant strength of qualitative research, especially with ethnomethodological influences such as mine, is the close examination of a relatively small amount of data to produce rich and detailed insights. In examining talk from working-class boys in the formation of their endemic Boredom story, for example, I was able to analyse the use of uncertain knowledge markers within their talk. The extract below was examined in terms of the use of markers such as 'maybe' and 'but who knows'.

M1 *I think school is a great place I think it offers a lot of opportunities it is boring […] yes but […] even though it is boring […] it can help me get a better job […] maybe […] a better life […] a better quality of life […] but who knows […] I do find school [2 secs] extremely boring [..] yeah* (Castle School E L24)

Spotting these markers was only possible through constant reading and re-reading which it-self was only possible through the relatively small sample. The insight that working-class boys may be sceptical regarding the likelihood of educational success could easily have been missed within a larger corpus.

Theoretical Saturation: Critical Discussion

A further limitation in my research appears in my operationalisation of the term 'theoretical saturation' (TS). This limitation is clearly articulated by Low (2019). Low argues that, although a pivotal concept within qualitative research, the term can be naively operationalised leading researchers to make universal truth claims beyond the scope of their data and analysis.

In their original work, Glaser and Straus (1967:61) encourage researchers to declare TS at a point where, "… no additional data are being found" and where the researcher, "sees similar instances over and over again". This is a conceptualisation of TS as a point of data repetition and therefore data redundancy. Low (2019) argues that definitions orientating around repetition and redundancy have led researchers into pragmatically deploying the term as simply meaning 'no new information'. A 'no new information' position encourages the researcher to regard further investigation as redundant and the research site is exited accordingly. This position was also advocated by the main methodology text used in my research, Charmaz (2016). Significantly, a smaller sample is likely to produce a 'no new information' repetition/redundancy response fairly quickly. My relatively small range of 50 pupils and three teachers inevitably produced a narrower range of Boredom stories with the effect that TS was achieved relatively quickly, for example. However, this is not necessarily problematic as such. Smaller samples, for example, are highly useful in allowing researchers to examine a smaller volume of locally manifesting themes in depth and detail. Roy et al. (2015) argues that precisely because small sample sizes produce a narrow range of themes researchers are able to invest these manifesting themes with closer reading, re-reading and detailed analysis. Guest et al (2006) research, which involved 60 participants, revealed a point of 'no new information' after six interviews. This led Guest et al to conclude that interviews beyond this number were redundant. Researchers, in this sense, would be more usefully employed spending their valuable time on the analysis of a limited number of interviews rather than gathering more repetitious data that would later prove redundant.

The argument made so far is that TS is achievable relatively quickly within small sample sizes as such samples will inevitably present a narrow range of themes and this is useful in allowing closer analytical focus. In my research, I claimed TS to have

occurred within the second wave of focus group interviews, for example. However, as Low (2019) points out, a significant limitation occurs when the researcher draws over ambitious conclusions based on smaller sample sizes. This limitation is when the researcher misunderstands the nature of the TS that has been achieved. It should be made clear that *TS can be regarded as achieved within the small sample rather than the broader population*. That is to say, whilst TS can be achieved within a small research sample, and all locally available themes are fully explored at that point, there may still be researchable themes within the broader research issue and population left unexplored. A larger, more diverse sample may very well (and indeed almost certainly will) produce further themes that require analysis. This is the significant difference between understanding TS at a local, micro and sample-only level and achieving TS at a global, macro universal level. In my research I am confident that I reached a point of TS at a micro level. The second wave of focus groups interviews produced repetitious and therefore redundant data. However, because of the limitation and relatively small nature of may research sample I cannot claim to have reached a point of TS at a macro level because *I am unable to guarantee that I have explored all possible themes pertinent to Classroom Boredom and secondary school pupils*. The paucity of my sample can clearly have a negative impact on my ability to make universal truth claims. In simple terms, although my relatively small sample size produced a repetition of data and TS was achieved at a micro level, I cannot claim to have achieved TS at a macro level. Although my claims may resonate with other research sites and fields, my specific claims must be regarded as limited specifically to my research site and sample.

Final Conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice.

At the end of this research, I conclude that classroom Boredom is indeed a social construction. In particular, Boredom is a useful and highly flexible technology that allows pupils to articulate their own dislocation from a situation understood as toxic. Boredom can be an act of self-care.

Furthermore, Boredom emerges out of a dialogue between an individual's classed and gendered subjectivities and his/her perceived social context. Anxieties, frustrations and loneliness have all been articulated by pupils as synonymous with Boredom within this research. In this sense, this is no singular 'form' of Boredom. When addressing secondary school pupils' Boredom, care must be given to recognise that the nature of Boredom will be as diverse as the pupils and their contexts.

Secondly, although classroom Boredom is most commonly constructed as problematic, not all aspects of the malaise should be a cause for concern. In disconnecting individuals from their present, Boredom leads to a form of transcendent daydreaming which can itself be highly rewarding. Boredom fuels personal reflection, creativity and imagination. From this perspective, an imperative to fill classroom time with dizzying distraction is suffocating, over-zealous and counterproductive. Pupils should be allowed some time to 'stand and stare', to occupy an undirected space and learn to be comfortable with their own absent-minded thoughts. A response to the lament "I'm bored" doesn't need to be a panic-induced lurch towards sleepless screens and the latest educational software. An alternative response can simply be, 'good, now you have time to think'. In this sense, it is useful for policy-makers and teachers to abandon neoliberal performativity and its frenetic race for quick results and, instead, consider the benefits of a slow-education.

As Smith (2018) explains, the Slow Education Movement (SEM) has its roots in the slow-food movement which was born through a protest against a McDonald's franchise opening in the Piazza di Spagna in Rome in 1986. The slow food movement gives sovereignty to quality over quantity, process over product and individuality over mass production. SEM emerged in the UK as part of a growing opposition to the perceived constraints of the national curriculum introduced in 1988. SEM is a loosely formed collation of ideas that analogises fast-food production with standards-driven neoliberal education. Instead of nuggets of processed meat, it is pre-packed,

decontextualized and test-shaped knowledge that is consumed. In simple terms, fast knowledge is ingested but is poorly digested. Accordingly, neoliberal, standards-driven and fast-education mass-produce indolent pupils with shallow knowledge and skills at levels just-sufficient to provide economically functional human capital. As an alternative, SEM focuses on empowering pupils to become critically aware of their environments so that they can question, confront and indeed disobey any authority which seeks to pacify and exploit them. In practical terms, slow education emphasises a student-led curriculum and *the removal of exams and targets* (Barker, 2012). SEM advocates an inversion of emphasis away from exam outcome to refocus on the learning *process*. This involves slowing down the curriculum, emphasising quality over quantity and doing less but with more depth. Expanding curriculum time should be used to encourage students to reflect on, and develop, the manner and form of their learning. In this sense, the curriculum should prioritise learning processes rather than drilling for outcomes. Bracey (2001) lists slow learning processes such as creativity, critical thinking, resilience, motivation, persistence, humour, reliability, enthusiasm, civic-mindedness, self-awareness, self-discipline, empathy, leadership, and compass. Furthermore, practical classroom-based strategies should centre around the development of safe, cooperative learning environments where 'mistakes' are valued as part of a process of discovery. Indeed, the benefits of failing and 'failing well' could become daily detoxified expressions within the classroom lexicon. In this way, classrooms shift from being teacher-led monologues and information-transference sites to pupil-led dialogues and project-based learning environments which promote understanding and discovery. A successful lesson will not be judged on the basis of a knowledge product reached, but on the learning *processes* experienced. Attainment will signify 'how' not 'what'. In this way, performance targets disappear beneath the development of positive learning habits. Knowledge is subsumed beneath the development of human qualities.

Smith (2018) provides a useful illustration of a functioning and successful slow education in his research into Blue Gum Community School. The school identifies itself as an Australian independent secular school offering education programs for 0-16-year-olds and cites slow education amongst its self-proclaimed educational philosophies (Blue Gum Community School 2020). The school's position regarding pupils is to start from the assumption that each child is highly competent, capable,

creative, responsible, resourceful and resilient. Accordingly, pupils learn and develop their potential through what Smith describes as 'deep extended learning experiences' (Smith 2018:24). The centrepiece of learning activities involves engaging pupils in an exploration of pupil and community orientated interests/questions/theories. In this sense, the curriculum is always situated and contextual. Accordingly, the school models itself as a site for research rather than a site for information transfer. This model advocates learner-responsibility and, indeed, views teacher-led activities as potentially damaging for pupil development. The expertise of the teacher is as a guide to facilitate the development of learning habits and to promote sound research practice. The most effective means of achieving this is for teachers to provide what Smith terms 'provocations' to stimulate learning activity. These provocations emerge from a dialogue between the teachers' expertise, community expectations and pupils' interests which synthesise and lead to group research projects known as 'explorations'. Explorations are co-designed by teachers and pupils to promote 'core fundamentals', such as reading, writing, and maths. Accordingly, pupils are not provided free reign and pupils' work is continually assessed based on daily learning processes. However, this assessment is not limited to outcomes but recognises achievement in terms of process such as over-coming individual barriers to learning. Overall, the school emphasises cooperation, working as a group and dialogicality.

Of course, none of this can occur at a national level without political motivation. In the UK, individual teachers and schools are currently powerless in the face of a target driven neoliberal national regime. Pupils themselves would see themselves as failing and indeed bored if teachers abdicated from the pursuit of grade targets. Within the UK, a radical reconceptualisation of the purpose and function of education needs to occur at the highest policy and political level. At present, UK education is largely subservient to economic demands. Instead, education should act as a force to serve democratic values that promote human welfare over economic imperative. There is little sign of this reconceptualisation within contemporary educational policy.

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Appendix

Teacher Diary Full Extract (1)

Stage 1. All the books have to submitted to the team leader. All books meaning all books that the kids write in. all the books are purple. Name class subject and TARGET GRADE on the front. If kid isn't meeting the target grade eg target C but pieces of work marked at D/E then teacher has to submit why and provide evidence of intervention. Intervention = an email has been sent home. Kid had detentions for missing work. Form tutor / year head have been informed. So, every purple book has to have a learning plan stapled to the front. / it has to be in the right relevant place. This has to cover the until half term. This is just so the SLT can check the date of what you say you are doing and what you are actually doing. If you are doing something different then you have to account for this too. On this plan must be two assessments. These make up the grades that get sent to SMT and home so it's wise to pick these carefully. I am actually just getting all this by writing it down!!! Generally, if the class know it's an assessment for the work scrutiny – and we make sure they bloody well do! – then to be fair they do try. Otherwise they're not interested in tasks or homework. Other issues = some kids will not use the purple book. Makes teachers paranoid and means we have to keep checking what's in the kids' books etc. oh yeah and for the assessment there also has to be a MAD book – I know!!! - this means Making A Difference. In this I have to write what can be improved. But I have to use green ink – when they respond to this then I have to write another response but this time I have to use purple. It's called the 'purple pen of power' – seriously!!!
Stage 2 subject leader then asked for specific books selected at random by SMT (senior management team) if books don't have name / underlined date / Gwaith dosbarth / Gwaith cantref titles / aren't matching the target…
Then the line manager has to explain, which means you have to explain.
In addition, there is a data capture. On SIMS (register) the subject tutor fills in the current grades of each pupil (based on 2 pieces of assessment) these run A-E. then an Attitude to Learning (ALT) score 1-8 with three being cause for concern – immediate contact to parent and tutor must prove evidence of intervention. The pupils also have an ALPS score; a computer-generated score based on some

algorithm which says what they should be getting.It doesn't matter what you think. If the current performance doesn't match the ALP's e.g.
ALP= C but Grade 1=D Grade 2 = E
Then everyone is in deep shit.
You can lie and hope for the best, and some do, but you will still need to explain why Johnny Biggs doesn't get his computer predicted C.
Once all of this process is complete then the kid gets a card sent home showing predicted grade / 2 assessed grades / ALT. Then the phones call from parents begin…
The teacher has to present data which shows that their discrepancy between APLS (which takes into account what a nominal kid of that social status / GCSE's / SAT should achieve and current grade. ALPS is based on Fischer Family Trust. Teacher must explain a shit ALP e.g my subject got an 8 which is apparently bad and how they will improve this e.g. get Joe Bloggs to a C not D. And then you identify the kids that bring you down e.g. nutter / non-attendance finally you have to declare that
1 the date capture is correct AND..
2 the data predictors are in your opinion accurate – there is actually no choice in this. If you don't say it is then you just have to keep doing it over and over again until you do agree. Mindless.
3 that you have intervened where necessary
4 that you have down 'sparkly' teaching – I kid you not!
This shit happens every 5-6 weeks!!!