“Living the dream?:
A qualitative retrospective study exploring the role of adolescent aspirations across the lifespan

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Abstract

There is a lack of longitudinal research linking adolescent career aspirations to adult outcomes other than career and income attainment. Drawing on Salmela-Aro, Nurmi and colleagues’ life-span model of motivation and using quantitative survey data at ages 16, 23, 33, 42 and 50 combined with retrospective interview data at age 50, collected from 25 members of a British cohort study born in 1958, we aim to gain a more rounded understanding of the role that adolescent career aspirations play in shaping not only adult career development but also adult identities and wellbeing. Twenty-two of the twenty-five participants fulfilled their adolescent career aspirations at some point over their lives through achieving (a) the exact career they aspired to, or (b) the social status of the career they aspired to. In relation to adult personal identity and wellbeing, the findings suggest that what matters is not just whether you aim “high” at age 16 (i.e., to be a professional or a manager) but also whether you remember having strong or meaningful career aspirations. Further themes, gender differences and implications for policy and future research are discussed.

Keywords: adolescent aspirations, adolescent values, career development, wellbeing, personal identity
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"Your aspirations are your possibilities" — Samuel Johnson

The association between adolescent career aspirations and adult career attainment is well established (e.g., Clausen, 1995; Croll, 2008; Elder, 1974/1999; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Marjoribanks, 2003; Mello, 2008; Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). Young people with high career aspirations are more likely to (a) enter a professional career and (b) earn more money in adulthood. Adolescent aspirations and goals act like a compass to help chart a lifespan and direct the spending of time and energy (Nurmi, Salmela-Aro, & Koivisto, 2002; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Salmela-Aro, 2009). However, with the exception of anecdotal case studies, there is a lack of longitudinal research linking adolescent career aspirations to adult outcomes other than career and income attainment (Ashby & Schoon, 2010; Ritchie, Flouri & Buchanan, 2004).

Using data collected from 25 members of a British cohort study born in 1958, we aim to close this evidence gap and gain a more rounded understanding of the role that adolescent career aspirations play in shaping not only adult career development but also adult identities and wellbeing. All participants answered questions at age 16 about their future career aspirations. They also provided information on their career development at various times points between the ages of 16 and 50 years. At age 50, they took part in a retrospective qualitative interview study in which they were asked to reflect back upon their lives (see Elliott, Miles, Parsons, & Savage, 2010). In the present paper we intend to create “types” of
individuals based on the nature of their career aspirations at age 16. We will then explore the way in which one’s typology at age 16 is related to career trajectories up to age 50, as well as identity and wellbeing at age 50.

It is important here to clarify what we mean by the terms identity and wellbeing. The term “personal identity” is used to mean those aspects of one’s self that serve the psychological function of making one feel unique (Eccles, 2009). Social psychology theorising suggests that when individuals define themselves as group members, they want to feel good about their group (i.e., to have a positive social identity, as suggested by social identity theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and when they define themselves in terms of personal identity they want to feel good about themselves as individuals (as suggested by self-enhancement theory; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). As Gleibs, Haslam, Morton, Rabinovich and Helliwell (2010) point out, if circumstances allow particular self-relevant values to be realised then individuals will feel positive about the self and this, in turn, will promote feelings of happiness and wellbeing (see also Eccles, 2009). To the extent that teenage aspirations are maintained, this theorising suggests that individuals who meet or exceed their career aspirations will feel more positive about their work identity and experience greater wellbeing, than those who fall short of their aspirations.

Reaching a single definition of wellbeing is not an easy task as the terms happiness, life satisfaction and wellbeing are often used interchangeably, yet operationalised in different ways by researchers (Diener & Seligman, 2002, 2004). There are two traditional approaches to studying wellbeing — the hedonic or subjective wellbeing (SWB) tradition and the eudaimonic or psychological wellbeing tradition (PWB, see Nave, Sherman & Funder, 2008). The SWB tradition emphasises constructs such as happiness, positive affect, low negative affect, and satisfaction with life (e.g., Diener, 1984; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). In contrast, the PWB tradition emphasises constructs such as autonomy, environmental
mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, which are theorised to vary across the lifespan (e.g., Ryff, 1989; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). In this paper, wellbeing at age 50 will be captured using quantitative measures of life and job satisfaction, perceptions of one’s financial situation and general health, as well as through the way in which participants talk about their lives (i.e., do they actually say that they feel happy, do they have positive relations with others, do they have a positive perception of themselves?; Diener, Kahneman & Helliwell, 2009; Keyes, 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

In light of the recent economic recession and resultant (possible) difficulties in reaching one’s teenage career aspirations, a better understanding of the role of early aspirations in shaping adult wellbeing and identity is instructive. It is also timely given recent policy and government discussions encouraging young people to “aim high” (e.g., Her Majesty’s (HM) Government & Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010; HM Treasury & DCSF, 2007; President Barack Obama, 2010).

In the same situation, some people choose a path that leads in one direction, while others take the opposite route (Schoon, 2006; Salmela-Aro, 2009). Understanding which pathways people choose and which result in wellbeing is complex and depends on a multitude of factors. Broadly speaking, standard economic models suggest that because humans are economic beings, money is the path to wellbeing and happiness (Frey, & Stutzer, 2005). However, the importance of partnerships (i.e., cohabitation or marriage), social networks and communities in determining happiness has been recognised (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gleibs, et al., 2010; Mastekaasa, 1994). In opposition to the “money is the path to happiness” argument, some studies have shown that once basic needs are met, additional income does not substantially enhance happiness (for reviews, see Ahuvia, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Easterlin, 2005; Lane, 2000; Layard, 2005; 2006).

Salmela-Aro (2009) describes motivation, goals and related concepts, which could
include aspirations, as key features in understanding why some people succeed in living a happy and satisfying life (see also Baltes, 1997, Brandtstädter, 1984). Goals, like aspirations, are conceived of as future-oriented representations of what individuals strive for in various life domains (Salmela-Aro, 2009). While goals or aspirations capture what one would like to happen, expectations describe what one thinks will happen. Research findings suggest that adolescents’ educational and occupational aspirations are likely to be more closely matched or “realistic” than young children’s (see Ritchie, Flouri & Buchanan, 2004).

According to Salmela-Aro, Nurmi and colleagues’ (Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007) lifespan model of motivation suggest (1) age-graded demands and opportunities channel the kinds of goals people construct, (2) such aspirations play an important role in the ways in which people make choices and direct their own development, (3) people co-regulate their goal attainment with other people; and (4) people compensate for failure experiences by adjusting their personal goals. This is the framework used in the present paper.

The model recognises that everyone does not start out at the same point and that family social background and socialisation processes play an important role in the formation of adolescent career aspirations. Adolescents from higher income families are more likely than those from lower income families to (a) aspire to professional jobs, (b) expect to stay on in education, and (c) perform better in the exams at age 16 (Ashby & Schoon, 2010; Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Sewell & Shah, 1968; Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 1986; Willis, 1977). However, high parental educational aspirations for their children can go some way to balancing out the negative effect that adverse socio-economic circumstances have on adolescents’ educational performance (e.g., De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004; Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990; Schoon, 2006; see also Cooper & Good, 1983 for a discussion of teachers expectations for pupils). This is because individuals whose
parents both expect and want them to continue on in education achieve higher exam results at age 16 and have higher aspirations for their own jobs and education (after controlling for family socio-economic factors, see Ashby & Schoon, 2010).

Moreover, Schneider and Stevenson (1999) suggest that encouraging young people to have what they term “aligned ambitions” — where adolescents know what they want to do and what they need to achieve it — is just as important encouraging them to “aim high.” This is because they suggest that in contrast to those who have no clear plan for reaching their aspirations, adolescents whose life plans are coherent with detail and realism are more likely to choose a path that encourages success in adulthood.

It is worth noting that some research suggests that females (compared to males) choose less prestigious positions in the labour market (Arbona, 1991; Raffaele Mendez & Crawford, 2002; Shapka, Domene, & Keating, 2006) and place greater value on jobs that help them to fit in family role plans (e.g. see, Eccles, 2007; Frome, Alfeld, Eccles, & Barber, 2006). In contrast, males have shown to place more value than females on making money, seeking out challenging tasks, and work that involves mathematics and computers (e.g., Eccles, 2007; Eccles, Barber & Jozefowicz, 1999; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Correll (2001) suggests that these differences in job preferences and aspirations stem from cultural beliefs about gender, which differentially shape males’ and females’ perceptions of their own competence at career-relevant tasks.

However, evidence from more recent studies suggests that despite gender-typical job choices and the fact that society often links the manager role to men (Richway & Correll, 2004) teenage girls are at least as likely, if not more so, than teenage boys to aspire to a professional or managerial job requiring academic qualifications (Francis, 2002; Mello, 2008; I Schoon, 2006; I. Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007). In line with these findings, a US study with under 29 year olds revealed that working women were just as eager as men to move up
the career ladder (Galinsky, Aumann & Bond, 2008).

Whatever one’s adolescent career aspirations, the lifespan model suggests that, to the extent these aspirations are maintained, individuals who feel that they are making good progress towards achieving their aspirations (even if they have not reached them yet) or who have met or exceeded their aspirations will experience greater wellbeing and a more positive sense of self, than those who do not (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). This theorising fits with assumptions in social identity and developmental psychology research (see Eccles, 2009; Gleibs et al., 2010).

However, it is not necessarily the case that individuals who “fall short” of their aspirations, or feel that they are unreachable, will experience low wellbeing, so long as they adjust their aspirations or goals. Eccles (2009) points out that a possible strategy for coping with falling short of one’s career aspirations is to (a) reduce the value one attaches to competencies in this particular career domain and (b) to place more value on those tasks and activities at which one is most likely enjoy and excel (see also, Gottfredson, 1996; Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto & Halmesma¨, 2001).

One caveat is that excessive self-focus can lead to ruminative thinking and low wellbeing (Salmela-Aro, 2009). This could mean that in certain contexts only focusing on achieving one’s aspirations and changing oneself could be problematic. Also, those who are highly ambitious with regard to their careers and regard it as central to their lives are likely to make sacrifices for it, which could have a negative impact on other life domains, such as the family (Peters, Ryan, Haslam & Hersby, in prep).

The present research

Using data collected from participants at age 16, we aim to create “types” of individuals based on the nature of their career aspirations in order to explore the way in which one’s typology at age 16 is related to career trajectories up to age 50, as well as
identity and wellbeing at age 50. We have 4 research questions:

R1: Are there any differences between males and females in their career aspirations at age 16?

R2: Do adolescent career aspirations influence career development between the ages of 16 and 50?

R3: How do individuals remember their career aspirations — are they remembered accurately or are they current narratives that serve a function to the individual giving the responses?

R4: Do adolescent career aspirations play a role in shaping personal identities (in particular class and work identities) and wellbeing?

Based on Salmela-Aro, Nurmi and colleagues’ (Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007) lifespan model of motivation and the literature set out above we make the following hypotheses:

H1: At age 16, individuals from more privileged social backgrounds will have higher career aspirations than those from less privileged social backgrounds.

H2: Career aspirations at age 16 will map onto adult career attainment.

H3: Career aspirations at age 16 are more likely to be realised if they are aligned with career expectations at age 16.

H4: Career aspirations at age 16 are more likely to be realised if they are aligned with parental career aspirations and expectations for their children.

H5: Perceptions of social class at age 50 will be related to parental social background at age 16, career aspirations at age 16 and whether or not these aspirations were fulfilled in adulthood.

H6: To the extent adolescent career aspirations are maintained, individuals who feel that they are making good progress towards achieving their aspirations (even if they have not reached
them yet) or who have met or exceeded their aspirations will experience greater wellbeing and a more positive sense of self, than those who do not.

H7: Individuals who do not fulfill their career aspirations and consequently adjust them will experience greater wellbeing than those who do not? adjust their aspirations or goals.

Method

This article used data collected for the 1958 National Child Development Study, which is a continuing longitudinal study following children born in England, Scotland and Wales in one week in March 1958. Data collection sweeps have taken place at birth and ages 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42, 46 and 50 years. At age 50 a subsample of 170 participants from England and Scotland took part in a semi-structured interview study covering topics such as life history and identity (see Elliott et al., 2010 for more details). Interviews were carried out by a team of experienced qualitative researchers in the individual’s home, lasting no longer than 90 minutes. A semi-structured interview schedule was used as a guide but the aim was to encourage a conversation. According to Elliot et al. (2010) the subsample is broadly representative of the cohort as a whole with all major socio-demographic groups represented.

We were granted early access to 42 of the 170 interview transcripts, none of which are publicly available yet. We were not granted access to the entire 170 transcripts because the anonymity of respondents could have been compromised, as only 42 were anonymised. Although access to the full subsample was the preferred option, the reduced subsample still offered a unique opportunity to link career aspirations measured at age 16, to quantitative data collected throughout the life course and to in depth interview data at age 50.

Of the 42 participants, 25 had answered questions at age 16 about their future career aspirations. The sample used here comprises these 25 participants (18 females and 7 males). At age 50, one participant was retired, 3 were self-employed and 21 were in part or full time employment. Fictitious names have been used to safeguard the anonymity of the respondents.
Quantitative Measures

Table 1 provides a summary of the quantitative measures used from the survey data collected at birth, and ages 16, 23, 33, 42 and 50.

Qualitative data analysis

The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) scheme for carrying out a thematic analysis was used as a guide. First, the tapes were fully transcribed by a trained research professional. The next stage involved a detailed reading and preliminary coding of the data on a line-by-line basis to identify different concepts. Each new concept was written on its own index card and a short piece of text (and the transcript identifier), which was relevant to the concept, was recorded on the card. As other examples of a concept arose they were added to the appropriate card. However, the aim is not to record every instance of a concept, but include examples that add further meaning to the concept (Adams & Webley, 2001). When a qualitative index of coded concepts had been created, the index was refined. This involved checking the cards against the transcripts and noting any links between the different concepts. Definitions were then written for the “saturated” concepts (i.e., when adding new entries to a concept card no longer adds any richness to the information it contains; see Haslam & McGarty, 2003) to generate the main themes that ran through the interviews or focus groups as a whole. The first author carried out all of this analysis and checked the final coding with the second author.

The coding practices are very similar to those used in grounded theory (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). However, whilst the goal of grounded theory is to generate a theory of phenomena that is grounded in the data, thematic analysis aims to provide an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions without having to produce a “fully worked up” theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006; see also McLeod, 2001). Moreover, whilst grounded theory is “bottom up” in the sense that issues emerge from, rather
than become imposed upon the data (see Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997), thematic analysis can be either data or theory driven. Thematic analysis was most appropriate here as the semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that the analysis was not “bottom up,” and it enabled us to look for themes (and address hypotheses and research questions) relating to adolescent career aspirations, work, identity and wellbeing.

Results and Discussion

Throughout this section we make reference to the quantitative questionnaire data collected at ages 16, 23, 33, 42 and 50 and the indepth qualitative interview data collected at age 50. Although the quantitative data can provide an indication as to whether the data supports our hypotheses, it needs to be born in mind that the small sample size and narrow sample base does not lend itself to generalisation and only allows for simple descriptive statistics to be used.

In order to explore the way in which (if at all) career aspirations at age 16 are related to career trajectories up to age 50, as well as identity and wellbeing at age 50, this section is organised into 4 main subsections. The first section aims to identify “types” of individuals based on the nature of participants’ career aspirations at age 16. It then looks at the links between career aspirations at age 16 and (a) gender (R1) and (b) family social background (H1).

The second section examines whether adolescent career aspirations influence career development between the ages of 16 and 50 (R2), and in so doing addresses H2, H3, and H4. H2 is that career aspirations at age 16 will map onto adult career attainment. H3 and H4 are that career aspirations at age 16 are more likely to be realised if they are aligned with (a) career expectations at age 16, and (b) parental career aspirations and expectations for their children.
The third section explores the extent to which individuals remember their career aspirations 34 years later and whether these accounts are accurate or not (R3). The fourth explores the themes (from the interviews at age 50) surrounding aspirations, identity and wellbeing. In so doing it addresses the question of whether adolescent career aspirations play any role in shaping personal identities, particularly class and work identities, and wellbeing at age 50 (R4) and addresses H5, H6 and H7. H5 is that perceptions of social class at age 50 will be related to parental social background at age 16, career aspirations at age 16 and whether or not these aspirations were fulfilled in adulthood. H6 is that to the extent adolescent career aspirations are maintained, individuals who feel that they are making good progress towards achieving their aspirations (even if they have not reached them yet), or who have met or exceeded their aspirations will experience greater wellbeing and a more positive sense of self, than those who do not. H7 is that individuals who do not fulfill their career aspirations and consequently adjust them will experience greater wellbeing than those who do not? adjust their aspirations or goals.

**Adolescent career aspirations**

At age 16, 9 participants aspired to professional or managerial positions (the “high” aspirations group, see Table 2 for summary information), 10 aspired to clerical or office positions (the “clerical” aspirations group, see Table 3 for summary information), 4 aspired to manual positions (the “manual” aspirations” group, see Table 4 for summary information), one aspired to an arts-related position and one aspired to become a hairdresser. Using participants’ father’s occupational classification as a proxy for family social background at age 16, 8 participants had managerial/professional family backgrounds, 14 skilled backgrounds, 2 partly skilled backgrounds and one an unskilled manual background. 4 out of 8 of those with professional/managerial backgrounds were in the high aspirations group, as were 5 out of 14 with a skilled family backgrounds and no one with partly skilled
or unskilled family backgrounds. This finding reflects that there is not necessarily a lack of high aspirations among working class families (Schoon, 2006). Reflecting back on their lives as 50 year olds, those in the high aspirations group who came from a skilled (as opposed to professional/managerial) family background either (a) talked about their adolescent desire for social mobility or (b) described their upbringing as “cultured.” An example of one participant’s desire for social mobility is provided by the following extract:

   My dad was an aircraft fitter. But he could never get me in the least bit interested. I was always determined to do something, go into business or whatever and try and earn enough money to make sure I could pay other people to do those sorts of things for me and not get my hands dirty” (Will, Table 2).

An example of one participant’s belief that their parents were “cultured” is given below:

   My parents would have called themselves working class but my father became a teacher, so, you know, half way through his working life, there were lots of books around, they were cultured people” (Karen, Table 2).

In contrast, participants in the low aspirations group, all of whom were from skilled or partly skilled backgrounds at age 16, did not bring up these issues in the interviews. As one male participant in the low aspirations group said, “I like to think that my parents were working class and I’m just carrying on from there, you know” (Ted, Table 4). Ted’s quote fits with previous findings that socio-economic status is transmitted across generations (e.g., Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Sewell & Shaw, 1968). However, in line with previous findings (Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007; Schoon & Parsons, 2002), the reflections from individuals in the high aspirations group with similar family backgrounds to those in the low aspiration group, suggest that personal agency and family socialisation practices can go some way to balancing out this “transmission” effect through encouraging high career aspirations in adolescence.
With regards to gender (R1), males and females differed in their career aspirations at age 16. Male participants were represented in the high and low aspiration groups; 4 out of 7 of all males were in the high aspiration group and 3 in the low aspiration group. Females showed a preferences for “clerical” occupations, (13 out of 18 females and no males were in the medium aspiration group, 5 females were in the high- and 3 in the low aspiration group), reflecting gender stereotypical career choices. Although it needs to be recognised that this sample is made up of a higher proportion of females (18 females and 7 males) the findings are in line with previous studies using large representative samples (e.g., Ashby & Schoon, 2010).

*Do adolescent career aspirations influence career development between the ages of 16 and 50?*

In line with H2, nearly all (23 out of 25) of the participants fulfilled or exceeded their adolescent career aspirations at some point between the ages of 16 and 50. 8 out of 25 achieved exactly the position they aspired to at age 16. In the high aspirations group 6 out of 9 participants entered professional/managerial positions by age 50, half of which were in the exact job aspired to at age 16. In the clerical aspirations group, 5 out of 9 achieved a clerical position, and 4 entered a professional/managerial position by the age of 50. With the exception of 2 participants (one who became a graphic designer and one who became a nurse) all women with clerical aspirations worked in clerical-related professions. In the low aspirations group, 3 out of 4 became manual workers in the exact position that they aspired to at age 16, and the other participant became an office manager. The two women in the ‘low aspiration’ group exceeded their aspirations, one entered a clerical position and the other became a self employed creative professional.

The finding that adolescent aspirations are linked to later adult career development is by no means a new one (e.g., Elder, 1974/1999; Schoon et al., 2007). However, for the most
part, previous studies linking adolescent aspirations to adult career development typically only (a) considered one time point in adulthood and (b) focused on the socio-economic status of occupations not specific occupations per se (e.g., Ashby & Schoon, 2010; Schoon & Parsons, 2002). Through considering participants’ occupational status at a number of time points, as well the specific type of occupation, this study flags up the way in which future quantitative models could potentially be enriched and strengthened by also including more time points and information on specific occupations. A focus on specific occupations fits with Eccles and colleagues’ work (e.g., Eccles et al., 1999), which implies that adolescents’ aspirations are likely to guide them towards (or away from) certain occupations.

We hypothesised that career aspirations at age 16 would be more likely realised if they were aligned with career expectations at the same age (H3) and if they were aligned with parent’s career expectations and aspirations for their offspring (H4). In line with these hypotheses, the lifespan model of motivation and previous findings (e.g., Salmela-Aro et al, 2007; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Vondracek et al., 1986), only one of the eight participants who fulfilled their teenage career aspirations, had different career expectations at age 16, and none were recorded as having differing expectations or aspirations than their parents.

In contrast, the 3 participants in the high aspirations group who did not achieve professional/managerial positions either had (a) imprecise or differing career expectations for themselves or (b) their aspirations differed from their career expectations or (c) their aspirations were different to those their parents had for them (see Table 2). Indeed all of the participants who had imprecise career expectations at age 16, or whose aspiration were not aligned with those of their parents, choose a different field (e.g., an academic instead of a nurse) or job level (e.g., became a manager instead of a clerical worker or vice-versa) than aspired to at age 16.
How do individuals remember their career aspirations — are they accurate accounts or current narratives that serve a function to the individual giving the responses?

When asked to reflect back over their lives at age 50, nearly all (21 out of 25) talked about their adolescent career aspirations, and all appeared to give accurate accounts of the careers that they had aspired to at age 16. At age 50, no participants said that they had aspired to a job that was not recorded at age 16. However, 3 different themes emerged (referred to as strong, imprecise and indifferent aspirations) when the 50 year old participants were talking about their 16 year old career aspirations.

Just over a quarter of participants (7 out of 25; 2 from the high aspirations group, 5 from the low aspirations group) reminisced about having strong or meaningful aspirations at age 16. Their narrative was characterised as knowing what they wanted to do (“I had a career mapped out,” Susan, Table 2) and having a story why that was the case. Participants talked about childhood experiences that had sparked their aspirations or the desire (or not) to follow in family footsteps. As one participant said of his 15 year old self, “I was in the Sea Cadets from the age of about 13 to 16, I always wanted to join the Navy” (Adrian, Table 4). Another said, “I used to go to the hairdresser’s with my mum when I was young and play with my dolls and that’s what I wanted to do, be a hairdresser, and did” (Emma, Table 4).

All 7 of these participants had specified an exact career aspiration when asked at age 16 what they wanted to do (e.g., hairdresser or nurse) not just a job level (e.g., manual worker, professional), and fulfilled this aspiration between the ages of 16 and 50. This finding could imply that having strong or meaningful aspirations at age 16 increases the likelihood that aspirations will be fulfilled. However, equally, it could be that participants “remember” their adolescent aspirations as strong or meaningful in later life, in order to feel better about themselves and their career choices (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). However, the fact that this theme did not emerge for all participants lends support to the idea that
individuals do not just “rewrite” their history by “remembering” adolescent aspirations as strong or meaningful in order to feel better about their adult career choices, but instead, that meaningful or strong aspirations at age 16 help to drive the realisation of these aspirations in later life. However, more research, where data on the strength or meaningfulness of career aspirations is directly collected at age 16, not reflected back on at age 50, is required to unpack this relationship further.

At age 50 ten out of 25 of participants described their 16 year old selves as having imprecise career aspirations (4 from the high aspirations group and 6 from the clerical aspirations group). 5 out of these 10 accounts (3 from the high aspiration group and 2 from the clerical aspiration group) matched the data at age 16 in that only job level or area (e.g., professional, clerical worker, scientific job), rather than an exact career or job was specified at age 16. The other five accounts (1 from the high aspiration group and 4 from the clerical group) specified a more exact job at age 16, such as becoming a secretary or a teacher. However, as one participant, who answered at age 16 that she wanted to be a secretary said, “I left school, went to college, did a secretarial course which my dad advised because I had no idea what I wanted to do” (Liz, Table 3).

Overall, 8 out of 10 participants who remembered having imprecise aspirations reached or exceeded the job level aspired to at age 16. Notably, the participants who “succeeded”, in the sense that they reached or exceeded their teenage aspirations, all mentioned being guided by their parents. Three female participants felt that their parent had guided them towards a specific job (in their case clerical work) and a specific way of training (either through completing a course or getting relevant work experience). One male participant discussed a more direct kind of parental involvement after dropping out of university, “He (John’s father) gave me two weeks to get a job or get out of the house, which was probably the best thing he did, so, I walked into a job” (John, Table 2).
In contrast two out of the ten participants who fulfilled their age 16 job level aspirations did not mention parental advice, and as noted above, at age 16, one participant’s parents did not expect her to achieve her aspiration (Grace, see Table 2) and another had differing career expectations at age 16 for herself (Jane, Table 2). Although more research is required to replicate these findings, they imply that imprecise aspirations at age 16 do not necessarily have a negative effect on career attainment so long as young people receive advice or guidance (in this case from parents) or as Salmela-Aro, Nurmi and colleagues’ (Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007) put it, to have someone to co-regulate their aspirations with.

It is also worth noting though that there is a difference between having imprecise aspirations and being indifferent. The theme of remembering having “indifferent” aspirations arose for 3 participants (2 from the clerical aspirations group and one from the manual aspirations group), who at age 50 described themselves as not enjoying school and not having strong career aspirations. One of these participants said, “I’ve never been striving for a career, I’ve always been happy to have a job. I’ve never wanted to keep going onwards and upwards” (Jan, Table 3). Because of the retrospective nature of this study, it could be argued that participants “rewrote” their history to justify their career choices. However, as adults they all met or exceeded their age 16 career aspirations, which perhaps lessens this concern.

Do adolescent career aspirations play a role in shaping personal identities (in particular class and work identities) and wellbeing?

The occupational status of participants’ jobs at age 50 did not necessarily reflect the way in which they saw themselves in terms of social class. Instead, as hypothesised (H5), perceptions of social class at age 50 appeared to be more tied to (a) parental social background, (b) the nature of career aspirations at age 16, and (c) whether or not these aspirations were fulfilled in adulthood. These findings are notable because they draw
attention to subjective as well as objective interpretations of socio-economic status. At age 50, nearly all of the participants described their upbringing as “working” or “middle class.” While participants’ perceptions of their own socio-economic status at age 50 did not match the objective data collected at age 50, the way in which participants remembered their family social background was in line with the data collected at age 16. That is, participants whose fathers were in professional positions when they were 16 thought of themselves as coming from a middle class background.

At age 50, all of the participants in the high aspirations group who had fulfilled their aspirations as adults (including those from working class background), thought of themselves as middle class, or, more or less reluctantly, in transition from working to middle class. This finding is illustrated in the below extracts — both from participants who described their family social background as “working class” but who achieved professional positions in adulthood:

Class-wise I would see myself, I tend to think working class but it’s churlish to suggest that I’m working class when I earn significantly more than most working class people do (Will, Table 2).

I think I see myself as coming out of working class but sort of like I don’t know whether I’d really even think about sort of like middle class. I suppose if anything, if I had to define myself, I’d probably say that’s where I am now. Most people if they saw me would think that as well (Jess, Table 2)

Participants from the high aspirations group who did not achieve their aspirations (2 who described their upbringing as working class and one as middle class), however, thought of themselves as “working class” at age 50. As one participant said, “I think I’m very working
class. I’ve taken ownership of actually being working class. I’ll say now, Well I live in a
council estate” (Grace, Table 2). The finding might illustrate variations in social mobility
strategies for those from relative privileged background versus those for individuals from
working class backgrounds. Goldthorpe had made a distinction between strategies ‘from
below’ and strategies ‘from above’ (Goldthorpe, 2000), where strategies ‘from below’
involve difficult choices with limited resources, often opting for a more modest route or the
aim to maintain class stability. In contrast, strategies ‘from above’ aim to maintain a relative
privilege status or to avoid downward mobility. In cases where downward mobility had
occurred, the participants seem to rewrite their history to fit their current circumstances. In
cases were upward mobility had occurred, participants appear to hold on to their ‘roots’, or
are more or less reluctant to acknowledge their change in status.

Participants from the clerical and manual aspiration groups, all of who fulfilled or exceeded
their age 16 career aspirations, perceived themselves to be the same social class as their
parents. Specifically, those who perceived their family backgrounds as “middle class”
thought of themselves as “middle class” at age 50, while those who perceived their
backgrounds as “working class” thought of themselves as “working class.” As one participant
who had achieved a professional position but saw herself as “working class” explained, “I
just go out and go to work everyday and earn my living and that’s it. And I need that money
to live, so that’s about it” (Katrina, Table 2).

Jobs versus Careers

At age 50, nearly all of the participants talked about their adolescent aspirations when
asked to look back over their lives in the interview setting. This indicates that adolescent
aspirations remain a salient aspect of people’s life histories. Throughout this article we have
used the terms career and job interchangeably, however, one theme that came out of the data
was the difference between a job and career. For participants, the terms job and career were
not synonymous. There appeared to be an understanding that a career involved actively pursuing progression or “getting ahead.” As one participant who was in the high aspirations group, but who did not achieve her aspirations, explained:

To have a career to me sounds as if you’ve maybe been head-hunted or you’ve gone and been more aggressive in pursuing, like your CV would maybe have four or five employers and you’d have seen clear progressive steps moving from one company to another to get a promoted post (Jane, Table 2).

Whether participants perceived themselves as having a career or a job, and the extent to which this career or job shaped their sense of self, appeared to be tied to the nature of career aspirations at age 16, and whether or not these were fulfilled in adulthood. Individuals in the clerical aspirations group described themselves as having a job not a career, and felt that their “job” was not tied to their sense of self. As Liz said, “I think I have been fortunate to meet some really nice people but I wouldn’t say work has shaped me at all, but perhaps people have” (Liz, Table 3). Over half mentioned that they had never set out to have a career. For example, one participant said, “I could have had a career if I wanted to, but I’m not that way inclined, I just would rather just go to work, earn my money and come home. I’m not very career minded” (Gill, Table 3). Even those who had achieved professional or managerial positions saw themselves as having a job. As one said, “My jobs have just been jobs to me, to be honest, and again I think in most cases I’ve stayed because of the people rather than the job (Liz, Table 3).

There was also a sense that work fitted around family, which given that all participants in this group were female, fits with past research findings (Eccles, 2007). As one participant said:

I’ve not, never had a career, when the children were small I just did odd jobs, evening work, things like that, just to help with money and then I started full-time work about
10, 12 years ago I guess. And then this is my third full-time job and I’ve never wanted a career. (Jade, Table 3)

In contrast, two female participants in the high aspiration group, both of whom, at age 50, described their 16-year old selves as having strong aspirations that they had fulfilled in adulthood, felt that they had always had a career, despite taking time out or changing jobs after having children. One of these participants explained, “even when I was a homemaker/housewife I would have said that was my career at that time” (Jess, Table 2). Both participants felt that their work had played a big role in shaping them as individuals. As the below extracts illustrates, this was also the case for the other 7 participants (4 males and 3 females) in the high aspirations group:

Interviewer: How much do you think your occupation or working life has shaped your sense of who you are?

Beth: I think it’s got about, on a percentage wise it’s probably about 70 percent of my life really. And you’ve got a purpose really by working I think.

Interestingly though, while the 4 male participants with high aspirations, who had achieved them later on in life, saw themselves as having had a career, the 3 female participants with high aspirations who had not achieved them at any point over the last 34 years, said that they could not describe themselves as having had careers. In short, it was not only individuals who achieved the occupations positions they had aspired to as teenagers, who thought of themselves as having careers. This includes five participants in the low aspiration group (Bill, Adrian, Ted, Karen, Emma, see Table 4), all of whom had specified exact career aspirations at age 16 and fulfilled them in adulthood, described themselves as having a career and felt that work had played a role in shaping their sense of self.

Career development and wellbeing

All of the participants described (a) their life as on the up or moving steadily along,
and (b) their general health as good, very good or excellent. Most participants also displayed moderate to high levels of life satisfaction. However, participants varied in levels of job satisfaction and perceptions of their financial situation. In economic terms all of the participants had their “basic needs” met. In line with findings that once basic needs are met additional income does not substantially enhance happiness, those who at age 50 were finding it difficult financially or “just about getting by” expressed similar wellbeing levels to those who were living comfortably (e.g., Ahuvia, 2008). However, that is not to say that some participants did not wish they had more money or a bigger house, they did, it just did not appear to play such an important role for their overall wellbeing.

In line with H6, individuals who had (a) “aimed high” at age 16 and/or (b) had a clear idea of what they wanted to do at age 16 (according to their age 50 interview data), and (c) achieved the occupational status they had aspired to (Paul, Will, Jess, John, Mark, Ted, Adrian and Bill), all described themselves as being “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with their job, and felt that work was linked to their sense of self. With the exception of one participant (Will, Table 2), all described their future as “often” or “sometimes” looking good and most rated their life satisfaction as 8 out of 10 or above. These findings support our hypothesis that individuals who fulfill their aspirations also experience a greater sense of wellbeing than those who do not (H6). However, the fact that Will did not think that the future looked good, reinforces the point that family is just as important for wellbeing as is career attainment (e.g., Gleibs et al., 2010). As he explained, “I’ve got a good job, good income and yet I’m still jealous of people that are earning a tenth of what I’ve got that are happily married with two kids, you know, I haven’t got that side of life” (Will, Table 2).

The wellbeing of those who had fulfilled their “high” or strong adolescent career aspirations (at some point between the ages of 16 and 50), but were in a different type of job at age 50, appeared to be tied to the reason for leaving their “dream” job. In line with H6,
participants who felt that they had achieved everything they wanted to before leaving a job, appeared happier than those who had not. Emma and Karen (Table 4) both had to leave the jobs they had aspired to at age 16 and “loved”, before they felt “ready” — Emma due to a lack of hairdressing clients and Karen due to a big family. Both were dissatisfied in their current jobs and had a mean life satisfaction score of 6 (out of 10). However, this was not the case for another two individuals (Susan, Table 2; Adrian, Table 4), who were in a similar situation, but felt that they had “achieved everything” they set out to before leaving, and described themselves as “happy.” Both said they were either “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with their current jobs and had a mean life satisfaction score of 8 (out of 10). However, Susan pointed out that if she had (a) not fulfilled her aspirations, or (b) left before she was ready, she might have felt differently:

I feel I achieved everything, in fact more than I ever thought that I would achieve. I had the career that I wanted to have and was happy to let family life take over without any regrets. If I was younger I would’ve been striving to do both and I don’t think I couldn’t have done both (Susan)

Letting go of one’s dreams
In line with H7, the wellbeing of participants who did not fulfill their adolescent career aspirations was linked to the extent to which they adjusted these aspirations and/or attributed more value on different tasks or activities. For one participant (Jane, Table 2), refocusing her initial “high” job aspirations to other aspirations/values (that is family and helping people) had brought enjoyment. She had experienced disappointment after being unsuccessful in getting the jobs she felt that she could “really do.” However, she had refocused her energy on jobs enabling her to “help people” and “contributing to making their lives better”. She also described the way in which she had made her “kids her career.” Similarly, Grace, who remembered always aiming high, despite not talking about a specific job per se, also had to lower her initial aspirations due to a difficult childhood. Although this adjustment meant she did not become a professional, it did mean she found jobs that reflected her values of wanting to “help people.” At age 50 Grace reports high job satisfaction, providing further support for the notion that adjustment is the best way to cope with difficulty in reaching one’s aspirations (Eccles, 2009; Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto & Halmesma, 2001).

In contrast, another participant who had not quite fulfilled her high career aspirations (Beth, Table 2), but whose work was tied to her sense of self, displayed relatively low life and job satisfaction. This finding could be due to the fact that she did not fulfill her adolescent career aspirations, yet many other reasons could come into play here. While the experiences of the 3 participants’ outlined above support H7, more research with a larger representative sample is needed.

Nearly all of the participants in the clerical aspirations group (all female) had relatively high life satisfaction scores, which could be due to the fact that they all had fulfilled or exceeded their age-16 career aspirations. However, the qualitative accounts at age 50 suggest that although some of these participants enjoy and are good at their work, work does not play a big role in shaping their sense of self or wellbeing. Instead it appears that
among women wellbeing is more tied to family and activities other than work, which as mentioned, fits with past findings (Eccles, 2007). For some, work also appeared to be viewed as a “means to an end.” For example, Natalie (Table 3) who had archived a professional position did not enjoy her current job but still expressed a high level of wellbeing because she felt she and her husband had fulfilled their goal of working hard and having good pensions, and were now “reaping the benefits.” These findings fit with the idea that certain aspects of life can only affect you to the extent that they are highly valued (e.g., Eccles, 2009; Gleibs et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro et al., 2007).

Limitations

While this study’s qualitative nature is advantageous in providing a rich source of data, its small sample size should be noted. Although representativeness and sample size are not usually seen as key dimensions on which qualitative studies should be evaluated (Elliot et al., 2010), more research, preferably using a quantitative cross-cultural approach is required to replicate and expand these findings. Also, as this study used an existing dataset, we were limited in the quantitative and qualitative measures available to us. In particular, at age 50 there was a lack of measures of eudaimonic wellbeing and some of the measures were based on one-item measures. Nonetheless, this study is one of the few (Clausen, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 2003) to combine both qualitative and quantitative evidence collected in a prospective longitudinal study to explore the role of adolescent career aspirations in shaping individuals’ life courses. Also, although we had a small sample size it included both genders and participants from different types of family backgrounds.

Irrespective of sample size, the fact that the individuals were born in 1958 also begs the question of whether the results can be generalised to adolescents today? This is an issue with all longitudinal research of this nature. Changes in the labour market are likely to mean that the career opportunities for those born in 1958 were less dependent on education and academic attainment than for today’s young people, although with respect to changes in the occupational structure, social mobility rates have remained more or less the same for later
born cohorts (Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2007; Schoon, 2008). Since the 1970s there have however been significant changes regarding issues of gender inequality and socialisation, particularly since the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, which made it unlawful to treat women differently from men regarding access to courses, and educational and occupational opportunities. Since then women have been catching up or overtaking men regarding their academic attainments, although there remain continuing inequalities and persistent disadvantages for women regarding subject choice and opportunities in higher education and the workplace (Schoon, 2010; Scott, Crompton & Lyonette, 2010).

Despite these changes, we would still anticipate the overall findings and underlying mechanisms (as predicted by the lifespan model of motivation) to apply to young people today. For example, in Schoon et al’s (2007) study, both family socialisation processes and family social background played a role in shaping adolescent career aspirations for participants born in 1958 and 1970, and family influences are still important in shaping the educational aspirations of young people born in 1990 (Schoon, 2010).

Another issue with the retrospective nature of the qualitative interviews at age 50 is the extent to which participants “rewrite” their histories or “remember” their adolescent career aspirations in a certain way in order to feel better about themselves and their adult career choices (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). While this is a possibility, the fact that nearly all of the participants’ responses at age 50 matched the data at age 16 lessens this concern.

Final Remarks

This paper extends previous work by focusing on the role of adolescent career aspirations in shaping adult identity and wellbeing. Its focus is important because it contributes to a more rounded understanding of what policy makers and parents are likely to achieve by encouraging young people to “aim high” (i.e., for professional or managerial positions). Overall, our findings provide support for the hypotheses made using the lifespan model of motivation (Nurmi, 2004; Salmela-Aro, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2007). First, they provide
some support for the claim that family social background is transmitted across generations, although personal agency and family socialisation practices can go some way in balancing out this “transmission” effect through encouraging high career aspirations in adolescence (Schoon & Parsons, 2002). An interesting finding in relation to social class is that perceptions of one’s own social class at age 50 appeared to be tied to (a) parental social background, (b) the nature of one’s career aspirations at age 16, and (c) whether or not these aspirations were fulfilled in adulthood, than objective measures of own social status, suggesting the notion of narratives based on a biographical understanding of the self (Eccles, 2009).

The fact that nearly all of the participants talked about their adolescent aspirations when asked to look back over their lives at age 50 indicates that aspirations remain a salient aspect of people’s life histories. This was particularly true for those who “aimed high’ at age 16, or who remembered having strong or meaningful adolescent career aspirations. For these participants, the findings suggest that work acts as an important source of identity and wellbeing. Specifically, higher wellbeing appeared to be tied to job satisfaction and fulfilling, or adjusting, one’s adolescent career aspirations. Also, for individuals with high aspirations who fulfilling their dreams, appeared to be thinking of work as a career and not a job.

However, career success by itself was not enough, and in line with previous findings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), family and social ties acted as a key source of wellbeing. Indeed for participants with clerical aspirations at age 16, or those lacking in strong or high aspirations (all of who were female), adult identity and wellbeing appeared to be primarily shaped by home lives, not work. That is not to say that these individuals did not gain satisfaction from work - many did - for them work was just not as salient for their wellbeing.

In the future more research is needed to determine the way in which (if at all) different kinds of aspirations at age 16 (family, career, and wealth) interact to influence
wellbeing and identity in adulthood. It also seems advisable to measure the strength and value of these aspirations for the individual, as suggested in the expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1993).
References


Eccles, J., Jacobs, J. E., & Harold, R. D. (1990). Gender role stereotypes, expectancy effects,


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Description / Question asked</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Age measure collected</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Social Class</td>
<td>Occupational status (RGCS) of the participant’s father was used as an indicator of parental social class</td>
<td>5-point scale (I=Professional, II=Managerial and technical, III=Skilled non-manual, IV=Partly skilled, V=Unskilled).</td>
<td>At birth</td>
<td>Schoon &amp; Parsons (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career aspirations</td>
<td>“What would you like to be your first full time job?”</td>
<td>Answers were coded by the exact job description and the area of the given job description (i.e., professional/managerial, clerical worker, service worker, manual worker, craftsmen, farming, armed forces, artistic/sport, imprecise)</td>
<td>At age 16</td>
<td>Schoon &amp; Parsons (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career expectations</td>
<td>“What do you think is in fact likely to be your first full-time job?”</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>At age 16</td>
<td>Schoon &amp; Parsons, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental career aspirations</td>
<td>“What type of work would you like your child to do?”</td>
<td>Answers were coded by the exact job description and the area of the given job description (i.e., professional/managerial, clerical worker, service worker, manual worker, craftsmen, farming, armed forces, artistic/sport, imprecise)</td>
<td>At age 16</td>
<td>Schoon &amp; Parsons, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental career expectations</td>
<td>“What type of work do you think your child will do?”</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
<td>At age 16</td>
<td>Schoon &amp; Parsons, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult occupational status</td>
<td>Professions were coded following the Registrar General’s social class (RGSC) developed by the Office of Population and Census Surveys (OPCS, 1990)</td>
<td>6-point scale (I=Professional, II=Managerial and technical, IIINM=Skilled non-manual, IIM=Skilled manual, IV=Partly skilled, V=Unskilled).</td>
<td>Ages 23, 33, 42, 50</td>
<td>Schoon &amp; Parsons, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective life satisfaction</td>
<td>“Please enter the number which corresponds with how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the way life has turned out so far.”</td>
<td>10-point scale (0 = completely dissatisfied and 10 = completely satisfied).</td>
<td>Age 50</td>
<td>Economic and Social Data Service, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>“All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your present job overall?”</td>
<td>5-point scale (5 = Very satisfied, 4 = Somewhat satisfied, 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 2 = Dissatisfied, 1 = Very dissatisfied).</td>
<td>Age 50</td>
<td>Brown, Elliot, Hancock, Shepherd &amp; Dodgeon, 2008-2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of financial situation</td>
<td>“How well would you say you personally are managing financially these days. Would you say you are...?”</td>
<td>5-point scale - Living comfortably, Doing all right, Just about getting by, Finding it quite difficult, Finding it very difficult</td>
<td>Age 50</td>
<td>Brown et al., 2008-2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General health score</td>
<td>As one aspect of a health measure called “SF-36” participants were asked to say which of the following 4 statements were “definitely true,” “mostly true,” “don’t know,” “mostly false,” “definitely false” for them — “I seem to get ill a little easier than other people”; “I am as healthy as anybody I know”; “I expect my health to get worse”; “My health is excellent.”</td>
<td>These 4 measures were combined and coded into a measure of perceptions of general health as follows: excellent health, very good health, good health, fair health, and poor health</td>
<td>Age 50</td>
<td>Ware, Snow, Kosinski, &amp; Gandek, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the future</td>
<td>We would like to know how often, if at all, you think this applies to you? The future looks good”</td>
<td>4-point scale (Often, sometimes, not often, never)</td>
<td>At age 50</td>
<td>Brown et al., 2008-2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
*High aspirations group at age 16*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Parental social class (measured at birth)</th>
<th>Career aspirations at age 16</th>
<th>Way in which remembered teenage aspirations at age 50</th>
<th>Did achieve age 16 career aspirations?</th>
<th>Job at age 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>As strong &amp; precise</td>
<td>Yes since first job</td>
<td>Prof/Man., accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>As strong &amp; precise</td>
<td>Yes since first job</td>
<td>Prof/Man., teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>As strong &amp; precise</td>
<td>Yes from first job to being a nurse manager at age 42</td>
<td>Partly skilled, teaching assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Nursing or welfare</td>
<td>No mention of aspirations</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Skilled non-manual, legal secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Professional/managerial</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Skilled non manual, civil servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Not as such, at age 42 was partly skilled educational assistant</td>
<td>Partly skilled, position in leisure industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Nursing or welfare</td>
<td>No mention of aspirations</td>
<td>Yes in professional/managerial welfare-related position at age 33, in academic position at age 42</td>
<td>Higher education professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Scientific</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Yes, in computer science-related position from first job, in prof./managerial position at age 42</td>
<td>Manager in computer-related position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Yes, in managerial/professional position at age 42</td>
<td>Manager in computer-related position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note, Prof./Man. = Professional/Manual
### Table 3

*Clerical aspirations group at age 16*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Parental social class (measured at birth)</th>
<th>Career aspirations at age 16</th>
<th>Way in which remembered teenage aspirations at age 50</th>
<th>Did achieve age 16 career aspirations?</th>
<th>Job at age 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Exceeded, in clerical skilled non-manual job at age 23 and age 33, in managerial job at age 42</td>
<td>Prof./Man., vocational trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassie</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>No mention of aspirations</td>
<td>Exceeded social status of job aspired to, nurse from first job, in a managerial position at age 42</td>
<td>Prof./Man., Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Council/clerical</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Exceeded social status of job aspired to, in clerical-related managerial position at age 33, in a skilled sales position at age 42</td>
<td>Prof./Man., graphic designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Council/clerical</td>
<td>As indifferent</td>
<td>Yes, doctor’s receptionist from first job</td>
<td>Clerical, doctor’s receptionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Yes, always in clerical roles. Was a building society/bank manager at age 42</td>
<td>Clerical, counter clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Yes, always in clerical roles</td>
<td>Clerical, counter clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jade</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>As indifferent</td>
<td>Yes, always in clerical roles</td>
<td>Clerical, counter clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Partly skilled</td>
<td>Council/clerical</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Exceeded, in skilled non-manual clerical roles at ages 23-42, in prof./man. position at age 50</td>
<td>Prof./Man., computer-related position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Machine operator</td>
<td>As imprecise</td>
<td>Exceeded, in clerical-related prof./man position at ages 33, and 50</td>
<td>Retired cares for mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note Prof./Man. = Professional/Manual
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Parental social class (measured at birth)</th>
<th>Career aspirations at age 16</th>
<th>Way in which remembered teenage aspirations at age 50</th>
<th>Did achieve age 16 career aspirations?</th>
<th>Job at age 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Partly skilled</td>
<td>Engineering (manual)</td>
<td>As strong &amp; precise</td>
<td>Yes,</td>
<td>Skilled manual, tool maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Engineering (manual)</td>
<td>As strong &amp; precise</td>
<td>Yes, in armed forces-engineering related position at ages 23 and 33. In unskilled position at age 42 and skilled position at age 50</td>
<td>Skilled manual, heavy goods driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Wood work (manual)</td>
<td>As strong &amp; precise</td>
<td>Yes, carpenter at all ages</td>
<td>Skilled manual, carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Paper printing (manual)</td>
<td>No mention of aspirations</td>
<td>Exceeded, skilled non manual positions at ages 23, 33 and 42, prof./man position at age 50</td>
<td>Office manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gill</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Hairdressing (creative)</td>
<td>As indifferent</td>
<td>Achieved clerical social status but always worked in office jobs not hairdressing</td>
<td>Counter clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Managerial/technical</td>
<td>Commercial art (creative)</td>
<td>As strong &amp; precise</td>
<td>Yes, was potter/glass maker at age 33 and art teaching professional at age 42, different job at age 50</td>
<td>Skilled manual, cake baker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4**

Manual aspirations group at age 16

