

Working class white boys failed

By [Rebecca Hartmann](#)

Monday 14 January 2013

Last week David Willetts proposed that Universities should put working class white boys in the same bracket as other disadvantaged groups, claiming that the talent of white working class boys was being wasted due to underachievement and that Universities should provide more outreach to potential students.

The sad reality is that this is too little, too late for these boys. The real issue is not that Universities do not do enough to promote themselves, it is that our society fails these boys before they are even at an age to consider University.

As Michael Gove wrote in his introduction to the white paper on the education system, "Our schools should be engines of social mobility, helping children to overcome the accidents of birth and background to achieve much more than they may ever have imagined. But, at the moment, our schools system does not close gaps, it widens them." A child from a low socio-economic background will, on average, start school 20 months behind their middle-class peers and the education system exacerbates this. The gap accelerates after the age of 11 and by the time they reach 15 they will be 24 months behind, even if they have attended the same school.

Whilst it is suggested that class attitudes contribute to the low number of working class students this is not where we should place the blame. If working class children are underachieving before they even enter a classroom, and our education system doesn't help them catch up, then how can we expect them to achieve when they leave school?

There are particular problem areas of Britain where underachievement among the white working class is particularly high such as the 'arc of underachievement' in northern England. In towns such as Knowsley, Blackpool and Hull fewer than 30 per cent of white children on free school meals gained 5 A*-Cs at GCSE.

Surely the millions that would be spent on persuading a very small percentage of the population of disadvantaged boys in these areas to apply to Universities would be better spent on improving nursery, primary and secondary school facilities. Thus giving all students in the 'arc' hope of even gaining the GCSE grades they need to apply, let alone the A levels.

Hackney is a prime example of how an area of extreme underachievement (in 1990, only 14 per cent of the Borough's pupils gained 5 A*-Cs) can be turned around. Through investment in schools e.g. the establishment of Mossbourne Academy and programmes such as 'Teach First' and 'The London Challenge', the borough now averages 60.5 per cent of its pupils gaining 5 A*-Cs.

Many areas in the 'arc' are experiencing economic downturn, mainly due to collapse in mining, manufacturing and tourism. There is high unemployment and little aspiration. For University based outreach programmes to be at all effective they need to start inspiring children in primary schools to want to work and achieve academically.

The issue of working class white boys is a reflection of Britain's extremely poor social mobility. According

to the Sutton Trust Mobility report, Britain along with the US has the lowest social mobility of any developed nation.

In Britain 65% of children from High socio economic backgrounds go to University compared with below 20% of children from low socio economic backgrounds; whereas in countries, such as Australia with a much higher social mobility, it is 55% and 25% respectively.

This is not merely a 'quick-fix' problem; it is not an issue that can be solved by more white working class boys going to University, it is a deep embedded part of our society and whilst I agree whole-heartedly that better education would improve the problem of social mobility; better education does not necessarily mean more students at University.



20 comments

Student In The Know

14 Jan '13 at 6:01 pm

White working-class males need our attention, but so do wider issues.

[Report](#)

SS

14 Jan '13 at 8:05 pm

@ Rebecca Hartmann

"Surely the millions that would be spent on persuading a very small percentage of the population of disadvantaged boys in these areas to apply to Universities would be better spent on improving nursery, primary and secondary school facilities."

This just sums up your sexist attitude towards males. If this was the other way around you would be writing articles about misogyny in the education system.

There is a lot of subtle Misandry in the education system.

P.S white working class boys are not a small percentage of the population.

[Report](#)

ray

15 Jan '13 at 7:44 pm

if the UK is anything like the US, then it's spent the last 30 years disenfranchising white males in every possible way, humiliating them in every possible way, ensuring they have no role or place in the kulture, then telling them they should be ashamed that they are alive, because after all, by dint of birth they are Oppressors

now, all your feminist/PC nations are BEGINNING to pay the price of the evil you intentionally did to innocent people, in order to suit your own greed, cowardice, hate, and envy

women, in particular, have proven to embody, and to embrace the Spirit of Totalitarian Hate (if it's in their financial or power interest)

good luck with your future, o nations of the west! lol

hope your fire insurance is paid up!

[Report](#)

A Gordon

16 Jan '13 at 3:57 pm

@ray

I'm not quite sure if you're joking or not.

If you're not joking could you explain how white males are being 'disenfranchised'? A cursory glance at who is in charge of pretty much every political/academic/media/business/financial source of power seems to suggest that, contrary to what you assertion, men have a lot of control over our culture and a great deal of power within it.

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Lee Avery

3 Mar '16 at 11:44 pm

Don't confuse the 1% with white working class males. They are opposite poles.

[▲ Report](#)

SS

16 Jan '13 at 5:41 pm

@A Gordon

political/academic/media/business/financial are run by a very very small group of white men.

Most white men and men of colour do not enjoy such positions at the top

In general, more men are unemployed and are homeless than women.

Have you seen the way the family courts treat men? Even health care, same amount of men die from prostate cancer as women die of breast cancer and yet breast cancer gets double the funding in research.

So if you look at the facts, majority of men are oppressed and women are given special treatment over them. Even the education system has been altered to suit the way women learn and the way boys learn have been neglected. Hence today 40% of men go university and 60% of women go university. No one says anything about that, if you flip the statistics the other way around, there would be cries of sexism and how women are let down.

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Dominic Falcao

18 Jan '13 at 12:41 pm

SS

Firstly, what is then surprising is that despite female-biased university figures (overall - looking inside them is interesting too) is that these "advantages" somehow translate into a society in which men are still paid on average more than women and the majority of leadership positions (and even the idea of leadership) are male.

Secondly, a social group being "advantaged" in some way does not preclude oppression. The fact that more men go to prison than women, for instance, does not show some *general* bias in society against men. It is possible that society is oppressive in a nuanced, complex way, in which both men and women are losers to some extent.

It does not seem productive to try and weigh these up against each other to work out how to prioritise spending (ie the results of such calculus would not aid policy)

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asdf

18 Jan '13 at 3:45 pm

@Dominic Falcao - The gender pay gap is an enormously complex thing. You can't flat out say women are paid less than men solely due to discrimination. Men and women are alike in many ways, but different in others, and the pay gap is hugely influenced by the choices women make. Maternity leave obviously gives men an instant advantage in the careers ladder. Women also tend to settle for relatively low paid jobs as long as it's in an industry they are happy in. Men are psychologically different and tend to go for higher pay over happiness (after all, what woman wants a broke man?)

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SS

18 Jan '13 at 4:53 pm

@Dominic Falcao

Discrimination against men in society has become so entrenched that it is not hardly noticed, partly due to constant bombardment from the media that men are oppressors and women are victims.

On the topic of pay, you have no idea how complex that is.

It is also true what asdf said, men have to be very successful in order to attract women.

A good looking woman can get more partners therefore more choice than a good looking man.

Men need more than looks, they have to be very competitive in order to be dominant.

You fail to understand it is a small minority of men who do well in society. Please take the time and look in to family courts, the way men are treated in their children's custody cases.

[▲ Report](#)[Matt Sharp](#)

18 Jan '13 at 5:40 pm

In some sectors, no doubt women are paid less because they've not reached senior positions. Perhaps that's partly through choice, but it's also because many senior staff will be men in their late 50s/60s because women of the same age group had fewer opportunities to enter the workforce. If women today are becoming more educated than men and are willing to pursue the same careers, then the consequence will be the reverse of today: more women will be senior staff.

"A good looking woman can get more partners therefore more choice than a good looking man. Men need more than looks, they have to be very competitive in order to be dominant."

It's quite easy to come up with evolutionary explanations that would explain why genetically this should be true. But we're not simply the unthinking, automatic product of our genes (at least I try not to be). Why should men care about being dominant? Do men *have* to be very competitive? Or are you simply contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy by repeating such a message?

[▲ Report](#)[Matt Sharp](#)

18 Jan '13 at 6:30 pm

Just to add, I don't think difference in seniority can account for all the difference in pay to date. I believe women have often been paid less to do the same job as a man.

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asdf

18 Jan '13 at 8:25 pm

@Matt Sharp: The psychological differences between men and women hold up pretty strongly, generally speaking. For example, how many families have you seen where the man permanently stays at home looking after the kids whilst the woman works? Probably zero. Money and status is undeniably an attractive male trait.

[▲ Report](#)

Matt Sharp

18 Jan '13 at 10:24 pm

@asdf

There are certainly families out there that do that. But even if there weren't, it wouldn't rebut my argument, which is about questioning the *cause* of such behaviour. If the cause is merely social conditioning, then we can change it. If it's partly genetic and partly social conditioning, then how much is it of each?

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Dominic Falcao

19 Jan '13 at 11:52 am

ss, asdf,

"Men and women are alike in many ways, but different in others, and the pay gap is hugely influenced by the choices women make. Maternity leave obviously gives men an instant advantage in the careers ladder."

"choices women make" here should be substituted for "choices couples make"; that society is still biased against the female partner in a couple that chooses to have a child should worry us - this "instant advantage" is precisely the type of injustice that is both contingent and immanent.

This argument is absurd: "You fail to understand it is a small minority of men who do well in society."

The number of executive positions mean that a minority of the population will always occupy them. The point is that this minority is almost solely of a single social group, and that this minority has a disproportionate amount of power, wealth and influence. Its importance is therefore considerable, as is the homogeneous makeup of that minority.

On the attractiveness argument: "men need to be successful to attract women" - the 1950s paradigm of the subservient wife called; they want their argument back.

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SS

19 Jan '13 at 4:35 pm

@Dominic Falcao

Do not let political correctness cloud your judgement. All the arguments you gave proved that.

Here is another interesting fact.

There are more geniuses among men than women, hence at the top you will always see more men excel, from fashion design to chefs to mathematicians.

Also there are more men with low i.q than women, on the other extreme. And women are in the middle.

[▲ Report](#)

ss

19 Jan '13 at 4:39 pm

~ ~
@Dominic Falcao

On the attractiveness argument: "men need to be successful to attract women" – the 1950s paradigm of the subservient wife called; they want their argument back.

Yes, women are lining up to date broke as men.

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Suren

19 Jan '13 at 5:58 pm

@Dominic Falcao

I think the most important point you missed about this articles is the anti working class boys tone, Rebecca Hartmann tries to hide her prejudice against this large population of society by claiming the money will be better spent on the wider nursery, primary and secondary school facilities argument. Throwing money thinly and untargeted, does not help any group to progress.

Yes, women are just as sexist as men and elitist as men.

I am not white and I am not from a working class background, but I can see the problems faced by these boys due to years of neglect where government polices to address the needs of other groups have negatively impacted on white working class boys.

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Suren

19 Jan '13 at 7:42 pm

@Rebecca Hartmann

"Hackney is a prime example of how an area of extreme underachievement (in 1990, only 14 per cent of the Borough's pupils gained 5 A*-Cs) can be turned around. Through investment in schools e.g. the establishment of Mossbourne Academy and programmes such as 'Teach First' and 'The London Challenge', the borough now averages 60.5 per cent of its pupils gaining 5 A*-Cs. "

Totally wrong! the only reason why more pupils gain more GCSE is due to GCSEs were been made easier! The government use grade inflation to get credit for their failed polices on the education system.

Our standards in Maths and science in GCSE is laughable compared to other counties, It was harder to gain an A grade in GCSE in the 1990s compared to after 2000.

This is the same case with A levels.

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Js

11 Apr '13 at 8:55 pm

@Suren

Where do you get your "facts" from? GCSEs are not getting easier. You cannot compare GCSEs to the qualifications from any other nation since they will not be the same and will not have the same criteria. The International Baccalaureate is an exam system where pupils take a multitude of subjects whilst GCSEs are individual subjects. How can they be the same?

On another note, I am a white working class female who is an adult student at university and is in a relationship with a man, with very little money, who let's me do what I want. My daughter is doing

exceptionally well at school. My son who past just four GCSEs at school is also doing well at his job and has just recently been promoted to management where he works! Which clearly indicates that not everyone learns the same way. This also indicates the sexism that occurs with some firms during the recruitment process. However, he is very good at sales and some women may not be understood by men.

[Report](#)

Js

11 Apr '13 at 8:59 pm

I forgot to write that I think a better education will not be the solution in a cold town in the north of England where there are very few jobs available.

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