Class, parenting and academic stress in Norway: Middle-class youth on parental pressure and mental health

Ingunn Marie Eriksen

Norwegian Social Research, Oslo Metropolitan University, Div. NOVA, Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway

E-mail: imer@oslomet.no

Mental health problems among young people have increased in recent decades, particularly among middle-class youth, a development often related to increasing achievement pressure. This paper explores how young people from the financial and cultural middle classes in Norway experience school stress and their parents' values and practices concerning school achievement. Based on interviews with 53 15–17-year-old boys and girls, the study identifies two narratives. The first narrative is told by youth from the financial middle classes. They talk about their parents' explicit demands and tie the parental pressure to their achievement related mental health problems. The second narrative describes a ceaseless self-drive, told by youth mainly from the cultural middle class. They portray their parents' expectations as implicit rather than explicit, and they see mental health problems as achievement related – but not related to their parents. In both narratives, however, self-worth relies on achievement.

Keywords: youth, parents, mental health, stress, social class, school achievement, elite education, Norway

Introduction

In recent decades, the media image of stress has changed dramatically from a picture of a middle-aged man with a suit and briefcase to the face of a young middle-class girl, ambitious yet burdened with homework and high-stakes tests. The image comes largely from research showing a steep increase in self-reported mental health problems, such as symptoms of depression and anxiety, among young people—particularly girls—in many Western countries (Collishaw, 2015; von Soest & Wichstrøm, 2014). An expanding body of international research has studied the rise in mental health problems in terms of intensified achievement pressure, documenting that school requirements are likely to have had an impact on stress among young people in recent years (Bakken, Sletten & Eriksen 2018; Banks & Smyth, 2015; Modin, Östberg, Toivanen, & Sundell, 2011; Polesel, Dulfer, & Turnbull, 2012).

Another body of research engaging in emotions and education focuses on the cultural reproduction of social class inspired by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1994 [1979], 1999), that is, the 'new sociology of class' (Savage, 2003). Here, the focus is on how people in different ways are affectively engaged with their education through upward mobility (Reay, 2013) as well as the emotional work of living through social change (Aarseth, Layton, & Nielsen, 2016). The two bodies of research rarely interact, however. As Youdell, Harwood, and Lindley (2018) have recently pointed out, mental health research is dominated by epidemiology, psychology and quantitative sociology, and a discussion of stress in education in the qualitative sociological literature is lacking. This is despite the fact that the recent rise in mental health problems in the youth population has challenged some deep-seated sociological understandings of inequality in mental health. Evidence suggests that in Norway, mental health problems in youth are now fairly evenly distributed in terms of ethnicity and class (Sletten, 2015). However, this relative uniformity in distribution of mental health problems in the youth population is new, as statistics suggest that Norwegian youth with middle-class and

ethnic majority parents were far less likely to have depressive symptoms than working-class and minority youth in 1996, whereas twenty years later, this difference is all but erased (Sletten & Bakken, 2016). This implies that middle-class majority youth seem to be largely responsible for the increase in mental health problems in Norway in the past twenty years. This is paradoxical because working-class and ethnic minority youth are likely to have been more exposed to stressful life events (e.g, discrimination, poverty, crime, bullying) than middle-class youth (Bakken, Frøyland, & Sletten, 2016).

This new development makes Norway an apt case for studying how middle-class youth experience school stress, and it calls for an in-depth investigation of how class and mental health are related. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the social mechanisms of the paradoxical development of youth's mental health problems, which have not been subject for much sociological consideration. Based on interviews with 53 young people, this paper presents an analysis of how youth from the financial and cultural middle classes interpret their parents' values and practices regarding their school achievement and the impact those values and practices have on the youth's mental health and stress in relation to schoolwork.

Parenting, class diversity and school stress

In understanding the relative stability of inequality, researchers agree on the importance of parenting in transferring affective patterns, values and practices to children. Much of this research is inspired by Bourdieu's theory about capital (Bourdieu, 1994 [1979]). Different forms of capital—economic, cultural, social and symbolic—are deeply tied to habitus, or 'dispositions', some of which are identified as more worthy and valuable than others (Loveday, 2014; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012). The habitus is shaped by our family practices, informing youth's relation to education and how they envision their future selves (Eriksen and Stefansen forthcoming). In my understanding of how parents may contribute to the regulation

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of 'school stress', habitus plays a vital part. These often subconscious patterns of feeling and acting are likely to affect the way youth invest meaning into school and academic achievement and what importance schoolwork has for them now and for their future. Anthony Giddens' theory of reflexive self-narratives (1991) has been beneficial for understanding identities over time and how people author themselves through narratives, but it is criticised for not taking into account that social context is still part and parcel of people's possibilities and self-narratives (Thomson, 2011; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001).

Irwin (2018) argues that there is a tradition in British and US qualitative sociology of suggesting a causal relationship between class positioning and parenting styles, particularly since Lareau (2003) in the United States suggested that the middle-class parented their children in a mode of concerted cultivation and the working class as natural growth. Parents' involvement with their children in this body of research has mostly been investigated from the parents' point of view (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2013). With Lareau's and related theories as a starting point, much class and ethnicity research has investigated how parents influence their children in terms of 'resourcing' them (Stefansen & Aarseth, 2011), in terms of deciding on future educational trajectory (Hegna & Smette, 2017; Irwin, 2018; Irwin & Elley, 2013; Kindt, 2017) and in terms of installing an entitlement to success (Gillies, 2005) or different forms of motivation (Aarseth, 2017). The parental strategies of the middle classes are often analysed in terms of their emotional work to struggle upwards—as a 'fear of falling' or a way of anxiously installing autonomy and self-drive to maintain their class positions ((Irwin & Elley, 2011; Vincent & Ball, 2007).

In Scandinavian countries, class is rarely overtly named, and in Norway, a country with strong egalitarian values also in the elite (Ljunggren, 2017), the inhabitants tend to downplay the importance of their education (Skarpenes & Sakslind, 2010).. However, in the middle and upper classes, the separation between the fraction dominated by cultural capital

and the fraction dominated by economic capital perseveres (Bourdieu, 2013; J. Ljunggren & Andersen, 2015). In a study of upper-middle-class parenting in Norway, Aarseth (2017) found that in families in the financial middle class, learning is clearly separated from pleasure, and the parents emphasise the importance of working hard to become 'fit for fight'. In families in the cultural or 'symbolic' middle class, pleasure is closely related to motivation and urge to learn. Both groups are achievement-oriented, but the methods to keep up motivation differ. The cultural middle class are driven by inner motivation, whereas the financial middle class are driven by outer motivation. The youth in the financial and cultural elites themselves may also focus on different goals: In elite milieus possessing much cultural capital, we found that young people emphasised and stressed about meritocratic values, while in elite milieus where economic capital predominates, young people were more stressed about inclusion in key social networks (Pedersen and Eriksen forthcoming). We still know little, however, about how these two fractions compare in terms of academic stress and how they see their parents' influence.

Research design

This study is based on 6 group interviews and 24 individual interviews with 15–17-year-olds ($n = 53$). Five different lower and upper secondary schools were selected to enable a variety of participants, and all participants were selected via teachers who were asked to recruit a mix of young people from different social backgrounds if possible. The participants were classified based on their parents' occupation (Statistics Norway, 2018) in terms of amount of capital and along the financial–cultural axis. An analysis that places pre-categorised people into 'classes' may exaggerate differences between classes on the expense of class-internal differences (see for example Ball, Reay, & David, 2002; Irwin & Elley, 2013). I have therefore avoided allowing preset categories of class to guide the analysis. In analysing and coding, I instead employed structured pro formas, which facilitate close studying of individual

cases as well as comparison of cases (Rihoux, 2006), taking their narratives of different parental practices and values as a starting point. On this basis, I have structured the analysis in two distinct narratives that young people told about their parents, their relation to academic achievement and their mental health. The narratives strongly overlap with class, but not completely.

In the interviews, the young people were asked to reflect on their own and their parents' values and practices regarding the youth's schoolwork, career and ambitions. Moreover, the young people were asked the same questions that commonly are used internationally to measure internalising mental health problems (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974): feeling that everything is a hassle, having difficulties falling or staying asleep, feeling blue, feeling stiff or tense, worrying too much about things and feeling hopeless about the future. The questions cannot be used to diagnose, but they are useful for understanding how the participants experience their own mental health.

Analysis: Youth's understanding of school stress and their parents' involvement
The following analysis is structured along the different ways that the young people narrated and interpreted their parents' role. The young people fall into two broad categories: Those who talked about their parents' demands as explicit, and those who talked about their demands as implicit. I consider how the young people in each category talk about the importance of academic achievement for their mental health.

Explicit parental demands

The first narrative tells of parents who have clear and explicit expectations and demands on their children's educational achievement. The youth who describe their parents in this way are all ambitious regarding school grades and future careers. They all have parents in financial upper- or intermediate-middle-class jobs, such as real estate agents or employed in private

businesses.

This narrative centres on their parents' goal orientation, which is evidenced most acutely in that all have systems of rewards and punishments for the youth's schoolwork. Many of the young people receive money from their parents if they do well; one student, Ella, also has to pay her parents if she gets grades below average. Not everyone has a monetary system, however. Fredrik, for example, no longer receives money from his parents after turning seventeen, but if his grades are low, his parents will apply what he calls 'consequences'; they will revoke privileges, such as take away his PlayStation or his mobile phone for a day. These youth all talked about a high, tangible pressure from their parents. Jakob complained particularly about his dad, who emphasised the importance of doing well in school in order to make a great career: 'He wants me to do well and to be on the best team— he uses that as a metaphor'. As in the metaphor 'being on the best team', the narrative in this group revolves around competition, striving towards a goal and 'winning' in life. These elements also resonate with an ethos found in the Norwegian financial middle class: a goal orientation of external rewards and working for the best of the business—or the child (Aarseth, 2017).

All participants in this group tied the pressure to achieve to some level of mental health problems, telling about variations of the same symptoms: that everything was a hassle and feeling hopeless about the future. Several talked about struggling with sleep and being tense, as well as feeling 'sad' or even 'depressed'. Most tied the academic pressure from their parents directly and explicitly to their negative emotions. 'One feels tired', said Jakob, 'and I don't want to say depressed, but sad . . . generally sad. Thinking that things are no fun now. I think: "why do I bother doing all of this schoolwork?" I feel that one can't manage to achieve well in every arena'. Fredrik also worked diligently to achieve good grades but could never do as well as he and his parents hoped. He felt that he constantly underachieved and never could

measure up to his parents' high standards. He talked of his fear of failure and achievement anxiety, describing periodic bouts of depression tied to self-confidence, particularly in relation to achievement but also to social belonging. In particular, these two were connected for him when bad grades caused him to 'get yelled at at home', as well as the 'unhappy' feeling he felt when his mates put him down when he got bad grades.

As the youth in this category narrated it, such 'unhappy feelings' were tied to the consequences of what the young people perceived as failure. Kristian said that he felt already in primary school that it started to be 'a bit heavy' because he realised the following at that time:

> Everything I will ever do for the rest of my life will be measured. That really annoys me. If I get a 3 [a mediocre grade], then my hopes and dreams will be lost. If I get a 6 [the best grade], they may become possible. So when I get a 3 or a 2, I think: 'crap, there's no hope—I'll become a garbage man'.

At the moment, this competition was measured on a transparent scale, their grades. In their near future, however, they knew it was going to be measured by occupation (status) and salary. They were painfully aware of the relationship between grades and future occupation, as is clear in Kristian's account above. They were disheartened not only by the daily hassles of too much work but also by self-doubt related to the perceived importance of 'doing well', which was intrinsically linked to their current school achievement.

Although the young people expressed mental health problems and pressure from parents to achieve in school as a causal relationship, the narratives—and their resistance— were complicated by their own will to excel. Ella, for example, told about an intense and at times almost ruthless pressure from her parents and, in particular, her mother, and she linked this to her eating disorder. She said that her mother 'hated laziness' and was highly invested in her daughter's life, particularly wanting to ensure that Ella was working a lot in school, 'becoming someone,' as well as working out enough and eating healthily. Ella had recently

had mononucleosis without being aware of it while she was ill—she only found out later. While exhausted with the disease, Ella explained that she nevertheless kept up her usual intensity with her schoolwork but felt bad because she only worked out twice a week during this time, instead of her usual six times.

> Ella: I contracted bronchitis afterwards, and then I checked to see if I had had [mononucleosis]. That is what I had had, so it was like a weight lifted from my heart: Ok, I wasn't really inefficient or lazy after all.

> Ingunn: You felt lazy when you were ill—not just exhausted?

> Ella: I felt lazy because of the pressure from my parents because they *did* pressure me.

Ella was critical of her mother, talking with dismay about her mother disregarding Ella's signs of overexertion and eating disorder. Yet despite her struggles and criticism of her mother, Ella's narrative is also largely one of understanding and explaining her parents, reasoning that she agreed with them and that their pressure was reasonable. More than that, her mother's values tallied with her own ambitions, desires and antipathies. Ella said that she herself had an intense aversion to laziness, like her mother. She explained her relief at being exempt from being 'inefficient' or 'lazy', by telling about a period in her life when she had failed to be as productive as was her wont. When she a couple of years ago had gone through a difficult period socially, she had binge-watched Netflix on her laptop in bed all through the night, closing her laptop only when her mother came to wake her up in the morning, pretending to have slept and just then waking up. She went to school as usual and did the same thing the night after. She referred back to this period of her life repeatedly in the interview as an example of what she called 'laziness' and as her lowest point.

There is a remarkable ambiguity in the narratives of these young people, of which Ella's story serves as an example. They consider their parents' decisions to put pressure on them as fair and understandable partly because their goal is the same: for the youth to

'become something great'. This drive, which all the youth in this group share to a large extent, seemed to be what fuels the acceptance of their parents' measures. Kristian would use his parents' system of monetary awards and punishments for his own hypothetical kids, reasoning that good grades award possibilities. He hoped that he would be like his parents when he grew up because he had seen how they 'are at work': 'They are cynical people [in that they] think about what is best for the business and the common good. I hope that I can become like that and think mostly about development, and not be like a kindergarten teacher who thinks that everybody should be happy'. The youth's dispositions, and their sense of an ideal future self who is similar to their parents, make it possible to accept or even embrace their parents' practices and values if they can help them get there.

However, their narratives also contained resentment or resistance that was foregrounded in different ways. For Ella, this ambiguity was evident in that she both acknowledged and criticised her parents' pressure. Her Netflix-bingeing may also be seen as a form of resistance against her mother, which ultimately became self-punishment. On the other hand, Ella described herself as having an enormous amount of drive to achieve in school, and therefore she partly accepted her mother's intense involvement in her life. They all fought with their parents about schoolwork. Fredrik rationalised his parents' system of punishments and rewards by saying that it all came from a good place and that they really cared about his career, but like Line, he resisted at the same time, constantly arguing with his parents, which often led to further punishment of revoking privileges. Jakob expressed it like this: 'It isn't always you can manage to make the effort. We have a lot in common, but we also fight a lot—about school and what I do in general'. Despite telling about feeling sad and joyless, Jakob said that he nevertheless put in the work that he deemed necessary. He did this because: 'There is some inner feeling, a pressure to do well. Thinking that "Ah, why should I bother?" Then at the same time one wants to do well—from the inside'. Yet he ultimately placed this

internal drive as originating from his parents: 'For me, it comes from my parents. They have always, from a young age, been very clear about the importance of doing well'.

Overall, these youth place the pressure to achieve, as well as the responsibility for their mental health struggles, with their parents in a clear externalising narrative. This externalising makes their resistance pronounced and evident. Yet it is nevertheless emotionally complicated to navigate because they seem to have embodied their parents' aims and method; having high ambitions for themselves, they have largely accepted their parents' pressure and systems of punishments and rewards. This is manifested as an ambivalent narrative of resistance and drive.

Implicit parental demands

The youth in the second group mostly have parents with middle-class jobs in the broad cultural realm such as academics, journalists, lawyers and writers. This is not the case for all, however, as Jeanette, for example, has parents who work as accountants. What the young people in this category have in common is their talk of parents whose expectations and demands regarding their children's educational achievement are made implicitly rather than explicitly.

These young people are also mostly highly academically ambitious, but unlike those with parents whose expectations are explicit, these youth portray themselves as independent and self-driven. This could take the shape of a near detachment between parents and school, as was the case for Johannes, who throughout the interview showcased his individuality and independence. He claimed that his parents had not at all shaped his ambitions and that all his achievements in school were by 'his own initiative'. In lower secondary school, his parents did not even know about his good grades until he got the final diploma: 'When I got home with the diploma, they just said: "what?!"', as his grades were—to them—surprisingly good.

These young people nevertheless shared an impression that school achievement was of immense importance to their parents, although they rarely had heard this explicitly stated, and they all emphasised that they were never pressured into working hard and achieving good grades. Rather, the expectations to achieve felt like it came from themselves. Jeanette stated it this way:

> It is something about the expectations I have for myself. I have always felt that I have to do the best, as much as possible. I have never understood [where that desire comes from], both me and my sister have been very dutiful, but I have never felt that it comes from my parents. But I don't know. It has got to have something to do with what kind of family you come from.

The inkling that the expectations also came from her family is hesitantly argued and contrasts with the certainty displayed by the first group of youth. One reason this sentiment was consistently vaguely narrated in this group could be that their parents seemed to communicate their expectations in the form of mild motivation, encouragement and help. Nadira's parents would encourage her and her siblings to do their homework and also make them prioritise homework over visits to their large Pakistani family, which otherwise were mandatory: 'Then it is ok to let this person [who has homework] alone, and then they will perhaps bring in food into her room, quietly without saying anything'. Acts like this, explained Nadira, symbolised that they cared about her education. Kristine's parents went even further in enabling her to achieve as well as she wanted:

> In September when it was a lot of school and work, and when my mom picked me up, I was just so exhausted that I did not manage to speak. Then mom started crying because she felt so sorry for me. They do everything for me, they tidy my room, they buy the food I want, they make my bed. They do everything for me, so I can get what I need. And it really helps that they care so insanely much.

The school she attended was characterised by high academic and social pressure. Kristine's

immensely strong inner motivation met no boundaries from her school environment or her parents—only confirmation, motivation and support.

Another reason for the vagueness of where the urge to achieve originated from, was that parents' expectations were indirectly communicated. The young people vocalised a persistent narrative about their parents' lack of pressure, their open-mindedness and acceptance, saying they could never disappoint their parents unless the parents thought that the youth were disappointed in themselves, which would cause the parents to worry. Jeanette typically reasoned that her parents would worry about her if she did not get into medicine or law studies, as it was out of character for her to fail: 'Because they know that I aim high, so if I should suddenly aim lower, I think they would not be disappointed, but kind of [ask] "what happened"'. Yet her parents' worry would come on top of, and because of, her disappointment, which seemed always to be close to the surface and to stick for a long time: If she got a bad grade, she said, she would 'understand that it is not the end of the world, but that feeling of disappointment is there for a very long time afterwards'. The perceived failure would be her own responsibility because of her own high ambitions.

Mostly, their ambition took the shape of concrete and high goals—they wanted, for example, to study medicine or law. Sometimes the goal was loftier, as Johannes who reasoned that as he was born male and white in wealthy Norway, he was 'on top of the world and have a lot of power, and it is up to me how I want to use that power. I want to make a difference'. Kristine had a far more specific goal, working exceptionally hard to get accepted by a specific Ivy League university in the United States. To manage the workload, she had to quit sports and the gym, noting in passing that she had made sure to adjust her food intake accordingly so that she would not put on weight. She slept too little and never had time to see her friends, yet she did not see any possibilities for slowing down, 'because you just have to push through . . ., and then those periods become longer than they ought, when I have headaches and no

appetite'. At the same time, she said that she liked the pressure, and she loved to learn: 'It is ok because I like school and love to learn, to take notes, and it does not bother me. . . . I feel the pressure, but I like it because it pushes me where I want to go'.

The pressure that these young people talk about is not located with their parents as it is for the youth whose parents had explicit expectations, but with something vaguer 'out there'—society or the educational system—but most commonly, their own self-drive. Those in this group who struggled with mental health problems such as feeling that everything is a hassle, feeling blue, or feeling hopeless about the future, also placed the responsibility for those problems on 'society' or, more often, in themselves and their own ambitions. Nadira explained that she often felt sad and that everything was a hassle, she had aches and pains in her body and she struggled to sleep. She was adamant that the pressure to achieve in school did not come from her parents, but rather 'from society'. Whenever she got a bad grade, she said:

> I get that feeling of sadness back. Then it is hardest, because it is like I won't make it anyway. What happens is that I don't know where I am . . . like I am a bad student or a bad person . . . and I start feeling like a loser. . . . As soon as I get back to the right level of achievement, the happy feeling returns.

She felt that she had the possibility and skill to become something very great, but this was coupled with a high degree of insecurity. As the statement above also indicates, where being a 'bad student' and being a 'bad person' are juxtaposed, grades and her worth as a person were closely linked. The same was the case for several of these young people, such as Jeanette, who also had high ambitions coupled with strong insecurities related to skills and self-worth. She had 'a weird feeling all the time that I am not sad, but that it feels empty, kind of, I don't know how to explain it. I can be happy temporarily, but then the moment quickly passes'. Like the youth with parents with explicit expectations, they tied mental health problems to a precarious future self and their desire to become something great in the future. If they failed

now, they failed their future selves.

These youth are mainly from the cultural part of the middle classes, and they tell tales of ceaseless self-drive, and of supportive, non-pressuring parents who motivate them, whatever they might want to do. Their drive to perform meets no boundaries, only confirmation and support; their disposition is that they *ought* to do well, if not for their parents, so at least for themselves. With their self-worth tightly wound together with their achievement, there is little resistance. In stark contrast to the first category of youth, they feel as though the pressure comes from themselves or 'society'—difficult and ambiguous antagonists.

Discussion

Two distinct narratives have been identified in this study of how young people portray their parents' values and practices regarding academic achievement. Strong indications in the evidence point to their projections of future selves being related to their parents' values and practices. Their parents' way of communicating their expectations for their children seem to have direct consequences for how the young people interpret and negotiate their own achievement stress and where they place the blame for any mental health problems. Through an inductive analysis, the narratives form a strongly classed pattern.

The first narrative is told by young people with parents in the financial middle classes. It centres on the youth's internal tug of war between resistance and drive. Their parents come across as strongly goal oriented (Ball, Reay, & David, 2002), and the young people direct their resistance against their parents' explicit demands which leaves the youth a low degree of independence. Their drive is towards 'being something great' in the future, and their ambitions tally with their parents', making resistance complicated. They understand their mental health problems as related to achievement pressure and tied to the consequences of 'failure', that is, not being able to live up to their parents' and their own expectations.

The second narrative is told mainly, but not exclusively, by young people from the cultural middle class. In contrast to the first group, these youth's parents' expectations are *implicitly* communicated through their support and motivation of whatever the youth wanted to become. This group in particular talk about their self-drive and self-discipline, traits that often are theorised as aspects, or consequences, of neoliberalism (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth, & Rose, 2013; Davies & Bansel, 2007). This may be argued to be relevant also in Norway, particularly after the 'The knowledge promotion reform' launched in education in 2006, placing greater emphasis on measurable outcomes and the national ranking of schools (Bakken & Elstad, 2012; Hilt, Riese, & Søreide, 2018). Harvey and Ringrose (2017) argue that neoliberal trends result in increased competition, accountability and performativity, something that arguably affects both of the two groups of young people. They all strive towards occupations positioned in the upper echelons of society, but the second group, as opposed to the first group, do not place the responsibility for their mental health problems with their parents but rather with 'society' or mostly themselves, as independent and self-driven students.

The main differences between the narratives are whether they see their parents as communicating their expectations and demands explicitly or implicitly and whether they hold their parents accountable for their own achievement stress. *Both* groups of middle-class youth portray vulnerable future selves that are at a high risk for failure unless they can constantly be 'the best'. Young people from the elite have repeatedly been described as displaying a certain confident and casual ease in their academic performances (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Khan, 2011; Pedersen and Eriksen, forthcoming)). Few of the young people represented here display a similar confidence; on the contrary, they rather narrate their stress and anxiety as integral parts of their projects of the self, both in terms of their day-to-day schoolwork as well as their future selves. Potential achievement failure is depicted as a deep existential threat to

their sense of self now and in the future—a type of stressor that is most damaging to our mental health (Thoits, 2013).

I have argued that it is vital to understand the increase in young people's mental health problems also from a sociological point of view in order to increase our understanding of how social class and mental health are related. Through an analysis of young people's narratives, I have linked parental practices relating to young people's educational achievement and the young people's understanding of their own mental health. If the middle-class youth are propelled by explicit or implicit forces into a ceaseless drive towards achievement, this seems to give new valour to the thesis of the fear of falling—that is, of losing status and placement in the social hierarchy (Vincent & Ball, 2007; Walkerdine et al., 2001). This fear is made highly explicit in these young people's self-narratives and in their projects of the self.

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