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Within School and Beyond the Gate: the complexities of being educationally successful and working-class

Abstract

Much educational research on working-class boys has tended to focus on their failure and lack of aspiration. In contrast, there has been little research on working-class boys' experiences of success. Moreover, the very idea of being educationally successful and working-class is problematic as success has been argued to be dependent on the abandonment of aspects of class background. This article highlights the difficulties that some working-class grammar school boys are facing in reconciling their identity with educational success. For these boys the issue of identity is complex and there is a conflict between their identity, based on their background and their identity in terms of being an aspiring student. Using Bourdieu's theory of habitus, this article explores the complexities associated with identities that are developing in social fields different from those in which they originated and discusses the ways in which this impacts emotionally on working-class boys.

Being Clever and Working-Class

"I have long experienced myself being read through the grid of elitist values – a powerful complex of ideologies and cultural practices which splits cleverness…from working-classness" (Hey 1997, p.142). Inherent in this quote is the question of whether it is possible to be working-class *and* clever, or more accurately: is it possible to be perceived as working-class and perceived as being clever? This article contributes to the discussion on working-class culture and educational success by exploring the ways in which working-class teenage boys are currently attempting to reconcile their identity,

formed within the context of a working-class background, with educational success. Much of the debate around being successful and working-class has drawn on the educational experiences of female academics from working-class backgrounds, who offer critical feminist perspectives on the issue (Mahony & Zmroczek 1997; Hey 2006). Some work exists which draws on the working-class male emotional experience of success within the education system (Nainby & Pea 2003; Hughes 2008; Dempsey 2008) but again this work is from the perspective of successful academics remembering and sharing their lived experiences. The experiences of working-class boys attempting to successfully negotiate their way through the education system while grappling with their sense of identity has been a neglected area of research. Even Lacey's (1970) classic study '*Hightown Grammar*' focuses on the relative *underachievement* of working-class boys and explains this in terms of cultural deficiency. Brown (1987, p.105) argues that educational success for working-class pupils "often requires the pupil to change his or her educational identity in important ways, and the school is an important means to that transformation." It is with this in mind that this article focuses on working-class boys' educational success; the difficulties this presents for their social identity; and the complex ways in which they negotiate these issues.

Although working-class boys have been the focus of much research within education this research has tended to highlight their underachievement rather than success. In the past cultural deficiency tended to be offered as an explanation for a lack of success (Willis 1977; Lacey 1970; Corrigan 1979). Willis (1977), for example, maintains that class background structures working-class boys' attitudes toward schooling and these attitudes in turn preclude academic success. He argues that the working-class counter-school attitude with its culture, as displayed by language for example, does not fit with that of the school and "the working-class student must overcome his inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the wrong class culture and the wrong educational decoders to start with" (Willis 1977, p.128). The implication here is that *being* working-class and embodying that culture is in itself a barrier to success. Therefore, in order to overcome the disadvantage, one must first overcome *being* working-class and modify ones behaviour to the 'right' middle-class way. Corrigan, in his study of working-class boys argues that the

purpose of schooling is "to impose an education system on the working class which is specifically designed to change, to civilize, their behaviour" (Corrigan 1979, p.70) and it is the failure to understand, but not to necessarily accept the value of, the cultural context of working-class pupils' backgrounds that creates a struggle between teachers and pupils and thus ultimately leads to underachievement.

While much of this research is insightful, in terms of understanding and theorising the ways in which working-class masculinity relates to inequality, it stops short at challenging the assumption that working-class culture is deficient. However, despite a subsequent shift in educational literature towards challenging the cultural deficiency model (see e.g. Connolly 2004; Mac an Ghaill 1988, 1994; MacLeod 1987; Reay 2004) the idea that working-class boys, who wish to succeed in education, must somehow modify their identity to compensate for their cultural deficiencies is a powerful one that continues to impact on schools and their pupils. In a study of boys and schooling Connolly (2004) for example highlights that in order to compensate for the perceived cultural and social lack in its working-class pupils the school focuses on pastoral care rather than academic achievement. In this we see the persistence of the concept of working-class deficit within society and the education system. The development and continuation of pathologising discourses on the working-class, the impact this discourse has on school children and their strategies for negotiating the stereotypes imposed upon them is discussed by Reay (2004) in her study of an inner city London comprehensive. She highlights the devalued positioning of working-class children. Within schools working-class culture is not often valued but is instead misrecognised and challenged (Ingram 2009). This article not only further explores the idea that working-class culture is constructed as deficient but is one of the first studies to highlight the emotional difficulties that some educationally succeeding working-class boys are experiencing in negotiating an acceptable identity within the context of school. The focus is on working-class boys who are high achieving within a grammar school rather than those who are seen to be a problem or low achieving pupils (although the wider research project does incorporate this range). The article aims to discuss the difficult identity issues that can arise for boys who are both working-class *and* succeeding in education. The analysis is

Bourdieuian in perspective and this article contributes to Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 2000, 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990; Maton 2009) by offering three new typologies for understanding habitus in relation to the influence of multiple fields.

Ambivalent identity: Habitus and 'structural double binds'

In analysing the findings of this research Bourdieu's concept of habitus is particularly useful as a way of theorising the misalignment of the dispositions and practices acquired through early life experiences growing up in a working-class culture, and the different dispositions generated through new life experiences e.g. attending a grammar school, hanging out in crowds of 'alternative' youth etc. In explaining habitus, Bourdieu writes, "The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1977, p.72). The term habitus places emphasis on the structuring forces of life experiences and conceptualises dispositions as the internalisation of the schemes that these experiences produce. Although the habitus is a subjective concept (everyone has different experiences and so habitus differs from one person to the next) the concept also stresses that a commonality of structures produces a modality of dispositions; and so the concept does not isolate the individual from the groups they relate to. Because individuals experience life in social groups they acquire schemes of perception in accordance with the groups they belong to; and so people who share similar backgrounds share similar habituses. Bourdieu writes:

> 'Since the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his group or class, *each individual system of dispositions* may be seen as a *structural variant* of all the other group or class habitus, expressing the difference between trajectories and positions inside or outside the class (Bourdieu 1977, p.86).'

Therefore, when people share similar life experiences by, for example, growing up in a particular working-class neighbourhood they should acquire dispositions in line with those of their families and neighbours. This article, however, questions the straightforwardness of the social reproduction theory inherent in Bourdieu's concept of habitus by recognising that the habitus can be generated within two not wholly compatible fields: the field of origin (incorporating family background; geographical location and social class); and the social field of the grammar school and the peer groups developed through the process of becoming educated. It could be argued that in these conditions the habitus is destabilised as it is caught in a tug between two conflicting social fields. Bourdieu writes of conflicting external forces, "Thus it can be observed that to contradictory positions, which tend to exert structural 'double binds' on their occupants, there often correspond destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering" (2000, p.160).

In relation to a misalignment between habitus and field Bourdieu writes, "Where dispositions encounter conditions (including fields) different from those in which they were constructed and assembled, there is a 'dialectical confrontation' between habitus as structured structure, and objective structures" (2002, p.31). It could be argued that the dialectical confrontation between habitus and field (other than the field of origin) results in a *degree* of accommodation where the habitus accepts the legitimacy of the new field's structure and is in turn structured by it; thus enabling a modification in the habitus. Yet the habitus is still constrained by the structuring forces of the field of origin. In this case the new habitus is made up of conflicting elements: the internalisation of new experiences and schemes of perception can lead to the internalisation of conflicting dispositions. This can be conceptualised as a 'habitus tug', where conflicting dispositions struggle for pole position and the individual can at times feel pulled in different directions. This may create a 'destablised habitus' where the individual is not 'a fish in water' in either field. In some cases the conflicted habitus causes division, leaving an individual alienated from the practices within a field. This article offers these three typologies for exploring the processes involved in negotiating the structuring forces of multiple (and sometimes conflicting) fields.

Methodology

Statistics supplied by the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINS), on the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) website (http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk, accessed 4th September 2009), indicate that this neighbourhood is one of the 5% most deprived wards within Northern Ireland, out of a total of 582 wards; and in terms of education, skills and training it is within the lowest 20%.

This research took place in a Catholic post primary boys' school situated within a working-class neighbourhood in Belfast. It is a grammar school and its pupils have been selected according to academic success in the Northern Ireland 11 plus exam, which is an exam sat by primary seven pupils in order to determine access to a grammar school education. Although the school is selective there is a perception among staff, pupils and the wider community that this school is, in the words of a teacher within the school, "becoming more like a comprehensive" and pupils often commented, "you can get in with a grade D". The school has been steadily increasing the amount of grade D entrants it admits over the past 5 years in order to fill its places at a time when the school aged population is falling. As a result it is "loosing its reputation as an academic grammar and some parents who want that sort of education for their children are sending them elsewhere", commented a teacher in another local school who is also a local community worker. With a change in its entrance requirements and the resulting impact on its reputation the school fails to attract as many middle-class families as it used to. Consequently, the vast majority of its intake are boys from the surrounding working-class communities.

The research involved 15/16 year old boys from three different year 11 classes. The classes are not streamed but there is to some extent a degree of academic sorting through the number of GCSEs studied. One of the classes is made up of pupils who are

studying additional mathematics GCSE as an extra subject and are therefore seen to be more academically able than the boys in the other two classes.

Initially the research involved classroom observation. The aim of this part of the research was to get to know the pupils and start to build a relationship with them. I spent three days a week over a four week period, dividing my time between the three classes, following the pupils from lesson to lesson. Once the boys had become familiar with my presence and we had started the process of getting to know each other, through discussions about music, clothes, sport and leisure, I asked for five/six volunteers from each class to participate in the rest of the research, explaining what this entailed. At this point I did not attempt to differentiate according to class background. However, during the interviews I collected information on family background, including parents' level of education, current occupations and locality in which they live. All, but four of the 17 pupils interviewed live in the local area. Two of the others have recently moved from the local area to estates outside of the city. One pupil lives in a working-class area in another part of the city and one pupil is from a more affluent area of Belfast. Of the participants discussed in this article, all are from the estates in the local area. Their parents' occupations are as follows: shop assistant (Ronan's mum), community development worker and builder (Jonty's mum and dad), community sports club manager and full-time mum (Mick's parents), nurse and retail manager (Peter's mum and dad) unemployed single mum (Aidso), joiner and secretary (Gerry's dad and mum). With the exception of Peter, whose mother is a nurse, none of their parents have experience of higher education. While I am presenting all of these boys as working-class I recognise that Peter's and Mick's families occupy an ambivalent class position, as the parents have been socially mobile. This ambivalence is discussed later in the article.

I conducted a one hour focus group with each of the sets of boys, getting to know them by asking open ended questions about themselves and their lives. A second focus group session was then arranged which also served as an art workshop. The boys sat at tables arranged in a circle and I gave each of them some plasticine in a range of colours. After some initial playing around with the materials I asked them to create two models,

one which represented their identity 'within school' and one which represented who they are when they are 'beyond the gate'. We defined the term metaphor and I explained (without providing any examples) that their model could be metaphorical. With the boys' permission their conversation was recorded during this process and I briefly took the opportunity to discuss each boy's models with him. This was within the group setting so I refrained from asking probing questions, allowing each boy to divulge as much or as little information as he liked. The final stage of this process was to interview each boy individually about their models. For each boy this interview lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and was divided into two parts. The first was an unstructured part, where each boy was asked to tell me about his models, which became the basis for a conversation. After this took place I then asked each boy the same set of open-ended interview questions on the topics of school and locality.

Using model making proved to be a very worthwhile research activity. It was, for a start, fun and so helped to engender a relaxed atmosphere, which in turn encouraged a flow in conversation. Also, as each model took about 15 to 20 minutes to make, the process actually allowed time for reflection on what was being asked – "Who are you inside school?" and "Who are you beyond the gate?" Gauntlett (2007, p.185) has argued in relation to his own research, where participants created identity models with Lego, that "Research participants need reflective time to construct knowledge". Allowing participants the time to think about the questions and their response leads to a more considered and nuanced engagement with the research. As will be evident in the results that follow, the reflective time built into the model making activity afforded the participants the opportunity to present thoughtful and complex responses to the research questions.

Another advantage of using this method is that while the research questions were personal and probing the process of making something gave the young people a degree of control over what and when they communicated. This degree of control was achieved through: the 'product' they created (being able to reflect and decide what to make and what not to make); what they said/withheld about this in the group; and what they

expressed in subsequent interviews. There was also the potential for participants to withhold information about their identity during group discussion and interviews even if they had originally represented this in visual form. This was partly achieved through the fact that there was no attempt on the part of the researcher to interpret the identity models that were produced. Instead, the young people themselves ascribed their own meaning; thus placing them "at the centre as 'expert' on their own worlds" (Leitch 2008, p.51). Using this method helped to enable articulate expressions of the complexities of identity where the young men had the opportunity to explore the question before providing a response.

Habitus Tug (when pulled by the forces of different fields simultaneously)

As already mentioned this article focuses on the complex and nuanced expressions of identity among the participants and where they view their place in their social world, whist drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In particular I wish to highlight the ambivalence that was often expressed, the internal conflict and the tug between two social fields. This is neatly captured and expressed, for example, in Mick's model and subsequent discussion.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Mick produced a model (see figure 1) representing the pull or tension between his background (which he describes as working-class) and what he describes as his "music side". His model incorporates a small green ball on one side and a larger blue ball on the other, both balls attached by a white cylindrical shape with a white spiral coiled around the middle. In discussion about his model he explains that the green (smaller) side represents his working-class background and the blue side represents his "music side". He confers not only his musical tastes and lifestyle choices onto the 'blue side' but also his manner of speaking and his academic success. He distinguishes it as something other than his working-classness; and the part of his identity that he values more and "puts

more in to". Over all his model promotes the idea that there are two distinct aspects to his identity that, although not necessarily compatible, are part of a unified whole.

> 'It's really… it's simple. There are two completely different parts to it. There's one really big part and there's… they're both different in size, they're both different in colour and they're on two different ends of the stick but they're the same thing, you know what I mean? It's the same person but you don't know which one you're going to get, basically.'

In describing how these different parts of him operate in everyday life and how he negotiates the potential conflict, Mick used the metaphor of a curtain being drawn over him.

> If I see people on the street that I know from when I was younger I can instantly feel something being drawn over me like a curtain. Like you're not going to show this right now (blue side) you're going to show this (green side).

It is questionable whether Mick is able to consciously decide to operationalise the different aspects of his identity. The fact that he does not claim to draw the curtain over himself (rather it is drawn over him) as well as statements such as "most times I don't really notice" (when switching dispositions according to social field) would suggest that he has internalised the different sets of dispositions and they are 'second nature' to him. He does, however, show that he is conscious of having these different dispositions. Although they conflict, both sets of dispositions – his green side and his blue side – are part of his habitus. Experiencing life simultaneously in juxtaposing fields creates a habitus tug.

While using the concept of a habitus tug implies a plurality of dispositions it is important to note that these are not just two sets of dispositions that carry equal weight within the habitus of an individual. One disposition may outweigh the other in terms of being the dominant disposition and the balance is able to change over time and from one

context to the next. Mick discusses how the working-class aspect of his identity has diminished over time and in response to his life experiences but acknowledges that he thinks it will always be a part of him.

> N: Is your green side your past or is your green side who you are now?

> M: It's kinda like a percentage of what I am, like maybe it started off a lot and then it just gradually went down to this and it's probably going to subliminally go along my life and always be there but it's not going to always be like how I act.

> N: In some of the things you've said you've been talking about it like it's a past you and then in other things you've said you've been kind of framing it like a part of you.

> M: It's complete past because that's what I *was* basically and who I used to know and then… and as I grew into some other people and grew into more life it grew smaller. Like, I didn't act like that anymore but… and it's still there and I can act like that if I want. And most times I don't really notice. It's just something in my mind that goes…it's like saying this is blue; this is green. This is the way – you're supposed to act *this* way.

He goes on to further demonstrate a shifting of positions in relation to fields or at least an ability to tap into the working-class (green) side of his habitus. In the following section, and throughout the rest of this article, the term *smick* is used. It is a local slang term for someone who typifies a working-class laddish identity in terms of their dispositions, their manner and their appearance. The term is not claimed by working-class people as a positive identity label, and in the cases presented in this article it is always used pejoratively. In disidentifying with smicks, the boys distinguish themselves from the 'rough' working-classes, in a similar way to Skeggs' (1997) working-class women. In doing so they also present a socially mobile working-class identity that is more congruent with middle-class values.

M: We were down the Waterfront and these smicks walked past and they were staring at us and I was staring at them, like "what are you staring at" and then they came over and they started walking over to me, they started getting ready for a fight and I was like "here, mate don't be doing anything" and I started like acting like 'green' and they just walked away.

N: Ah, so you were able to communicate with them.

M: On their level.

N: Ah.

M: It kind of comes in handy. Like if that was some posh goth or whatever and they were like, "Hey man, don't be coming over here" [in funny posh laid back voice].

N: Laughs.

M: They'd be like, "What the hell!" And they might stab me, or something!

Even though Mick doesn't "put much into" the green side of his identity, his ability to communicate with smicks "on their level" could be attributed to having previously embodied similar dispositions. It is interesting that he nonetheless seems to be able to draw on this 'green side'. Mick distances himself from peers in his neigbourhood but at the same time, on some level is able to relate to them.

N: And who are the people who didn't change, who you were initially friends with and are still friends with now but but…?

M: Yeah, they weren't as close friends as the people I changed with but like… they're people who were in my primary school and I would see them about like my street and they'd sit and talk to me and whatever.

N: And what are they like?

M: Well, usually they're hooligans

N: They're hooligans?

M: Yeah, like there's a guy who has a baby and he's like 15!

N: OK

M: Like I didn't realise and I was walking home from school and he just stopped and talked to me and… I was like – I must still have that aspect that appeals to him, that he would still like…

N: You would still?

M: Get on with people.

N: Yeah? Do you think that that's… um… is that unusual?

M: Mm, well I don't know. Sometimes it is, like if someone… like if I was talking to them with one of my other friends, one of my music friends, like they would say, [in a disparaging tone] "look at them two smicks over there".

N: Yeah.

M: And I know *them* as well.

N: Yeah, that sounds like a… like a kind of tricky thing to eh…

M: Balance?

N: Yeah, balance is a good word that you use cos this [referring to the model] actually made me think of… like a seesaw.

M: Yes, and one of the sides is bigger. The blue side is the music side (referring to the larger ball). This is the side I put most in to and it's the side I get most out of.

N: But this side is still there (green smaller side).

M: Yeah but I don't put much into it. I would stop and talk to people and they would like talk to me but I wouldn't put much into it.

Mick's discussion of his identity is complex. We can see that he is pulled between conflicting dispositions that typify the habitus of those within the two main fields in

which his life is currently unfolding. He tries to strike a balance but recognises that one side is more important to him and one side is developing while the other is diminishing. This would suggest that he is already starting to reject aspects of his "working-class" habitus. At the same time Mick is critical of those friends who devalue smicks.

Destabilised Habitus (when "No one knows who you *actually* are")

Some boys demonstrated ambivalence in terms of their identification with a macho working-class habitus and at times articulated this with reference to a concept of a real self. Peter's response to creating models of his identity was to create two figures dressed in different clothes and with different hairstyles. The meaning he ascribes to these two models indicates that he thinks of his identity as a complex thing and articulates this in terms of real and fake concepts of self. One of Peter's models (figure 2) is dressed in sports wear and is wearing a baseball cap while the other is wearing flares and has long hair. The figures represent him inside and outside school respectively. Peter refers to the figure with the baseball cap as a 'smick'. The term is always used in a derogatory way and it is interesting that Peter uses this description for himself inside school. However, as he elaborates, it becomes clear that his identification with the term is complex and ironic. Prior to the following conversation Peter had stated that he is not a smick. In fact he did not have any of the usual signifiers of being a smick and instead had long hair and a posh accent. Peter is on the cusp in terms of social class and it interesting that as he negotiates his position at this boundary he demonstrates ambivalent identification with a particular type of working-class identity. Peter arguably exemplifies that working-class identity is not homogeneous or static. However, in transcending the traditional working-class young male identity he also shows signs of inner conflict. His gendered and classed identity becomes destabilised by his precarious position at the interface of two fields. As Lois McNay points out, "while habitus draws attention to the entrenched nature of gender identity, it is important to consider the extent to which its effects may be attenuated by the movement of individuals across fields" (McNay 1999).

FIGURE 2 HERE

P: A smick is like a hood and he wears like tracksuit bottoms and all, and he talks like he's hard. That's what I get on like in school.

N: If you don't think that you're actually a smick and you're *being* a smick in school… em, how does that work? How do you… like, are you being yourself/not yourself? Who are you? – that sort of thing…

P: When you're being a smick?

N: Yeah.

P: You're not being yourself.

N: You're not being yourself?

P: No. You're being completely different, and eh, especially me because I'm not like that at all. I just do it cos I think it's funny. But other people do it because they *are* smicks and that's just the way they talk.

Peter and others describe an uneasy tension between their identification and disidentification with being a smick. Peter later tells me that he utilises 'being' a smick as a way of being subversive in the classroom through annoying teachers but he emphasises that he is "not like that at all". The boys tentatively distinguish their identity in part "from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference" (Bourdieu 1984, p.172). They do not want to appear to be working-class and so reject an obvious working-class identity, but at the same time they waver in their commitment to this rejection.

FIGURE 3 HERE

Another boy, Ronan, also demonstrates an uneasiness with 'smick' identification. Ronan created a head wearing a protective helmet that partially covered the face to represent his identity beyond the school gate (see figure 3). When asked about his model whilst in the group setting Ronan said it was about "being hidden" and "hiding" but when I asked further questions he showed signs of embarrassment and so I said we could talk about it more in the one to one interview. The following is an excerpt from this interview:

N: This is the one with the guy with the protective helmet on. You were talking about being hidden and hiding…

R: It's like people see you differently, depending on who you are with. No one knows who you *actually* are.

N: Right.

R: Cos you are always, like, acting different. You feel like you have to.

N: Do you? That's how *you* feel?

R: Yeah, and with some people I can just act normal.

N: So… with what groups would you feel that you have to act not normal or feel that you have to act in different ways?

R: With some friends you can't like say stuff, cos they like make fun of you.

N: Can you give me an example? ... If you can.

R: It's like if you don't like something they say, "aye you're weird". Like if you don't like football some of them think it's strange.

N: So you have to act in a particular way with some people?

R: Yeah

N: And ok tell me about these different groups then… that you have different ways of being with… these different groups.

R: Like smicks make you wanna act hard or stronger, think you can do more but then with my normal mates I can do whatever I want. Act normal.

N: Ok. So you're saying to me that there is this part of you that you see as the normal part of you? So how does that work? Then the other bits are you?

R: It's me but hidden. It's just there.

Ronan, like Peter, invokes the concept of a 'normal me' but he indicates a compulsion to behave in different ways with different groups. Notably he talks of being compelled to "act harder" when with smicks and his image of protecting himself by hiding under a helmet is a very powerful one. Although the protective model was Ronan's representation of his identity outside school, during discussion he talked about hiding himself with reference to smicks both inside and outside school and in particular also talked about his and some of his 'normal' friends' difficulties with smicks within the school setting. Although both boys are from working-class backgrounds their habitus is somewhat destabilised and they show evidence of an internalised struggle in terms of their identity. While I don't wish to suggest that there is only one way of being a working-class young male in Belfast I would like to highlight that in a neighbourhood where a 'smick' identity is common, embodying other types of working-class identity involves a rejection of a 'smick' identity, which can create explicit and implicit conflict. Ronan's story, in particular resonates with Reay's research. She writes about how combining working-class masculinity with educational success creates a divided habitus and "generates heavy

psychic costs, involving young men not only in an enormous amount of academic labour but also an intolerable burden of psychic reparative work'' (2002, p.221).

Disjunctive Habitus (when the divided habitus causes division)

When the habitus is characterised by internal conflict this can create tension with one or more of the fields in which it operates, resulting in a disjunction between habitus and field(s). In this study there is evidence from most participants of ambivalence in identification with a smick identity, which is a typical identity for those who live in their neighbourhood. In these cases it can be seen that the habitus, although formed partially within the field of a working-class neighbourhood and background acts in a disjunctive way leading to tensions between the boys' habitus and a working-class identity. I am focusing here on some of the boys who particularly highlight this tension and in the folllowing section would like to present some of the ways in which these tensions manifest in their daily lives. I am mindful, however, that the tensions are not confined to those between the habitus and the field of origin. In some cases the tensions manifest between the habitus and the field of education as the boys attempt to negotiate a conflicted habitus and the following section will also present an example of this.

In some cases these tensions are evident in the boys relationships with their home environment or family background. For example, Gerry talks about his dad's response when his friends arrive at the door, "all wearing skinny jeans and bright shirts and hair done in different ways".

G: … but my dad just says, "The freaks are at the door".

N: (Laughs).

G: He says it seriously. My mum loves it! She likes things that are different.

Gerry displays an identity that is at odds with a typical and expected (by his dad in this case) identity for a young working-class male and while this expression of identity is ridiculed by his father Gerry interestingly finds validation through his mother. He also finds acceptance at school through his friends and validation through his teachers who

approve of him. He is described as being, "very quiet… a good kid" by his form teacher. He strongly disassociates with smicks through his choice of music and his style of clothes (he also explicitly states his dislike for smicks) and in doing so is perhaps able to present himself as someone who does not have the 'wrong' disposition and attitude toward school. He transcends the stereotype.

For others, the rejection of a smick identity does not necessarily mean a complete embracement of the 'right' attitude and there are of course differences in boys' dispositions toward school and differences in their embodiment of a working-class habitus. Aidso, for example, vehemently rejects smicks as "wankers" and is keen to distance himself from smicks whilst retaining a working-class accent and mannerisms, which aren't always well received by teachers. He is perceived as being cheeky and would at times get into trouble in class for the manner in which he speaks to teachers (even if his intentions are misrecognised). It would appear that his habitus is not well aligned with either field. The following is his discussion of tensions with regard to his background:

> N: It seems that the labels are not very nice. Like smick is what people say when they're being nasty about somebody.
>
> A: They are cos they're wankers like.
>
> N: Smicks are?
>
> A: Yeah!
>
> N: So any time you are using that term you are actually insulting someone?
>
> A: No, not insulting them like, they're just people who think they're hard. Just standing on street corners, sniffing glue and drinking.
>
> N: Do you get much of that where you live?
>
> A: Yeah, I live in like Towerview [a deprived working-class estate].
>
> N: So would you say there are a lot of smicks in that area?

A: Yeah, all the hoods and all come up to the park and drink and like, steal mopeds.

N: So, areas like that… I live in an area like that… and if you're not like you know… like most people there…

A: Yeah!

N: Then how does that work? Is that a problem? Is that OK?

A: They slabber to you about the way you dress and all cos my mate has like long hair, you know, like stylish hair and stuff and he gets slegged and all for that.

For Aidso, unlike Gerry, it is not easy to wholly embody a more socially 'acceptable' identity. Another boy, Jonty, also demonstrates ambivalence in his sense of identity. Jonty is described by his friends as either a '"scene kid" or an "emo". He has a dyed fringe, which he meticulously styles so that it crosses his face (a style which is ridiculed by smicks). He clashes with smicks and in his interview, his friend Ronan tells me about a fight after school between Jonty and another boy Mark who is described as a smick. Despite this apparent disidentification Jonty is actually very attached to his working-class background. He has a strong working-class accent, he supports the football team Celtic (a Scottish team which has strong support from working-class Catholics in Northern Ireland) and identifies strongly with republicanism (the local area is renowned for its affiliation with the republican movement). It is interesting that Jonty's habitus is overtly influenced by, both his background, and his associations with his peer group (school and city centre). However, he gives a distinct impression of not being a 'fish in water' in school as he often conflicts with teachers. In some ways Jonty can be seen to blending his 'emo' and traditional working-class Belfast Catholic identity with success (and is in fact well liked by his friends). However, his teachers often react negatively to his blunt, outspoken manner and he is often challenged because of his 'attitude', which bears the hallmarks of his working-class background.

These boys express complexity in their expressions of identity. In some ways their habituses align with both the field of school and the field of their working-class

background. In other ways their habitus is misaligned with either or both fields. Because the habitus is engaged with two fields exerting different influences it can become characterised by conflict.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that most literature on working-class boys focuses on their underachievement, some working-class boys are doing well at school. However, this article highlights that for working-class boys who are high achieving there are potential emotional difficulties involved in the process of forging an identity that is seen to be compatible with a successful pupil and one that is different from that which is typical for someone from their background. For the working-class succeeding participants of this study the acceptance of the legitimacy of social fields (such as the social field of school) beyond that of the field associated with their background creates "structural 'double binds'" (Bourdieu 2000, p.160). The impact of these conflicting forces engenders a sense of contradiction and ambivalence in terms of habitus (manifesting in terms of identity or practices), which I conceptualise using three related typologies, which are not mutually exclusive. These are, 'habitus tug', destabilised habitus' and 'disjunctive habitus' These typologies are compatible with Bourdieu's over all theory of habitus, which stresses a constant interaction between habitus and field, resulting in habitus fluidity. However, this article stresses that a habitus does not always develop neatly in response to one field but may have multiple influences from different fields (Lahire 2003, 2008) and explores the complexities associated with a habitus that is not only developing in a social field different from that in which it originated but *also* continues to feel the force of the field in which it originated. The resulting "'dialectical confrontation' between habitus as structured structure, and objective structures" (Bourdieu 2002, p.31) creates a habitus tug which impacts emotionally on the working-class boys of this study making it difficult for them to continue to operate successfully in both the field associated with their background and the one associated with their school. Operating at the boundary of two fields requires a lot of emotional work and this may have consequences for the boys' social mobility. Therefore, the psycho-social aspect of social mobility for working-class successful boys is an interesting area for future research.

The associated difficulties in operating at the boundary of different fields suggests that in order to continue on the path of success the boys must continue to diminish their affiliation to a working-class identity. However, Reay et al assert that the high achieving working-class students at an elite university in their study "displayed the ability to successfully move across two very different fields with what are seen to be classically middle-class academic dispositions, a versatility that most had begun to develop in early schooling" (2009, p.1105). It could be argued that in the case of these grammar school boys we can see the development of this reflexivity in their ability to shift (albeit awkwardly) between fields. However the ability to be reflexive does not always allow an escape from one's habitus. Instead, it points to the "complex coexistence of reflexive awareness and habitual dispositions" (Adams 2006, p.522). With reference to Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the embodiment of reflexive dispositions in relation to multiple fields Bernard Lahire (2008, p.186) writes:

"Sometimes contradictory socialising experience, can in/cohabit the same body; … mental and behavioural dispositions, internalised to a greater or lesser extent, can manifest themselves or be put on standby at different moments in social life (according to the area of practices) or the course of a biography".

However, it is important to also recognise that the boys demonstrate that this versatility is not necessarily easy to achieve or maintain and while it is possible that reflexivity may become internalised as part of the habitus (Reay et al 2009) it does not necessarily afford an individual the ability to slip seamlessly in and out of different social fields. In the case of these particular boys the plurality of socialising influences can be seen to have engendered complex and sometimes contradictory dispositions. Some of the boys show a capacity to manifest different dispositions in accordance with different fields. However, for some this shifting of dispositions appears to be unwieldy and difficult to manage. We can also already see examples of an erosion of aspects of their working-class identity. As Mick asserts in relation to his 'green side', "it's probably going to subliminally go along my life and always be there but it's not going to always be like how I act." This article has attempted to show that for these boys reconciling a

working-class identity with a successful learner identity creates tension in their lives which impacts on them emotionally. It is the complexity of this tension that needs to be recognised and understood by educational professionals. Furthermore, the emotional impact of living class as a conflicted identity for socially mobile working-class young people warrants further research, as does the issue of working-class heterogeneity.

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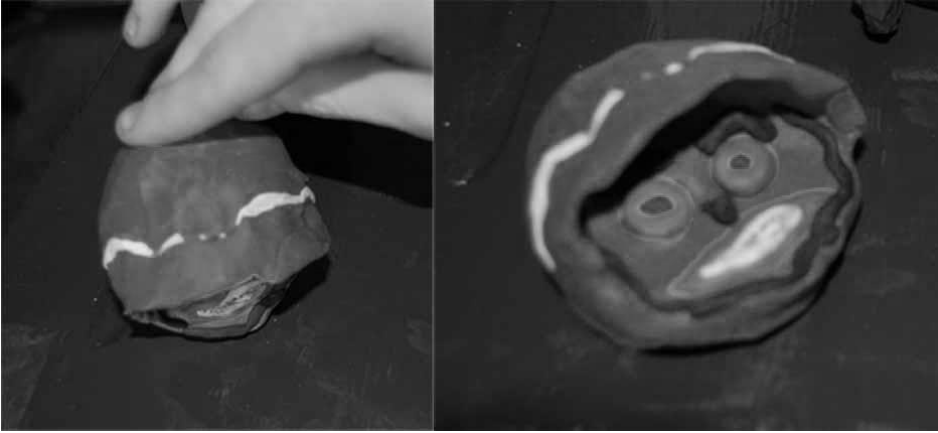**Figure 1 Mick's Model: 'Green Side, Blue Side'**

Figure 2 Peter's Model: 'Me, the Smick'

FIGURE 3 Ryan's Model: 'Hidden Underneath'