

## Working with Bourdieu's Concept of *Habitus* in Educational Research on Social Class

Diane Reay\*

### **Abstract**

The backdrop to this article is my own critique of the use of *habitus* within educational research (REAY, 2004) where I argue that it is used pervasively but mostly as intellectual display without doing much if any analytic work. Reinforcing this tendency to utilize *habitus* superficially as a form of academic gravitas rather than an active analytic tool are the ways in which it is regularly deployed independently of the concept of field. So this article is attempting to do a number of different things. Drawing on data from research into choice of higher education in the UK, it examines the utility of the notion of *habitus* in empirical work but also its limitations. Using interviews with both parents and students, the analysis demonstrates the tendency when working with *habitus* to stress the pre-reflexive and 'taken for granted' rather than engage with acts of invention. However, despite such tendencies, the article is seeking to make connections between *habitus* as a conceptual tool and the possibilities it holds for contributing to theoretical explanations not only of social reproduction but also of social transformation.

**Keywords:** *Habitus*, educational research, social class

\* BA in Politics and Economics (Newcastle), PGCE (Newcastle), MA in Human Rights and Education (London University), PhD in Social Sciences (South Bank University). Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge. E-mail: dr311@cam.ac.uk.

## Trabalhar com o conceito de *habitus* de Bourdieu na pesquisa educacional sobre classe social

### Resumo

O pano de fundo para este artigo é a minha própria crítica do uso do termo *habitus* na pesquisa educacional (REAY, 2004), na qual eu argumento que este conceito é usado de forma generalizada e, na maioria das vezes, aparece mais como uma exibição intelectual, escassa ou isenta de qualquer trabalho analítico. Reforçar a tendência de utilizar o conceito de *habitus* superficialmente, como uma forma de demonstrar academicismo ao invés de tratá-lo como um instrumento analítico ativo, é a maneira pela qual este termo é com frequência empregado independentemente do conceito de campo. Este artigo pretende cumprir diferentes propósitos. Baseando-se em dados de uma pesquisa sobre escolha no ensino superior do Reino Unido, este trabalho examina tanto a utilidade do termo *habitus* no trabalho empírico como as suas limitações. Por meio de entrevistas com pais e estudantes, a análise demonstra a tendência, quando se trabalha com *habitus*, de salientar o que seria pré-reflexivo e 'dado como certo', em vez de se envolver com atos inventivos. Entretanto, apesar da existência deste tipo de tendência, o artigo procura traçar conexões entre *habitus* como uma ferramenta conceitual e as possibilidades que ele apresenta para contribuir às explicações teóricas, não apenas sobre reprodução social, mas também sobre transformação social.

**Palavras-chave:** *Habitus*, pesquisa educacional, classe social

## Trabajar con el concepto de *habitus* de Bourdieu en la investigación educacional acerca de clase social

### Resumen

El telón de fondo de este artículo es mi propia crítica del uso del término *habitus* en la investigación educacional (REAY, 2004), en la cual sostengo que este concepto es utilizado de modo generalizado y, en la mayoría de las veces, aparece más como una pantalla intelectual, escasa o exenta de cualquier trabajo analítico. Reforzar la tendencia de usar el concepto de *habitus* superficialmente, como una manera de demostrar academicismo en lugar de tratarlo como una herramienta analítica activa, es el modo en que este término es con frecuencia empleado independentemente del concepto de campo. Este artículo pretende cumplir diferentes propósitos. Basándose en datos de una investigación acerca de la elección en la educación superior de Reino Unido, se analiza tanto la utilidad de la noción de *habitus* en el trabajo empírico, sino también sus limitaciones. A través de entrevistas con estudiantes y sus padres, el análisis demuestra la tendencia al trabajar con *habitus* de hacer hincapié lo que sería pre-reflexivo y 'dado por sentado', en vez de comprometerse con actos inventivos. Sin embargo, a pesar de estas tendencias, el artículo procura hacer conexiones entre *habitus* como una herramienta conceptual y las posibilidades que el presenta para contribuir a explicaciones teóricas, no sólo acerca de la reproducción social, sino también de la transformación social.

**Palabras claves:** *Habitus*, investigación educacional, clase social

## Introduction

In this article, I criticise *habitus* through the lens of my own empirical work on social class in education. In the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) research on choice of higher education (HE) together with Stephen Ball and Miriam David (REAY; DAVID; BALL, 2005) I looked at how HE choice is exercised in different ways for different groups of students utilizing Bourdieu's theoretical framework. In a second ESRC project, this time exploring white middle class identities in the context of urban comprehensive schooling<sup>1</sup>, I, Gill Crozier and David James were trying to make sense of the identities and identifications of white middle class families who appear to be 'acting against self-interest' (REAY; CROZIER; JAMES, 2011). In both projects, the concept we found most useful for thinking with was *habitus*.

Despite accusations of determinism, *habitus* is a dynamic concept, a rich interlacing of past and present, individual and collective (REAY, 2004). *Habitus* then can be understood as a compilation of collective and individual trajectories. Bourdieu conceives of *habitus* as a multi-layered concept, with more general notions of *habitus* at the level of society and more complex, differentiated notions at the level of the individual. A person's individual history is: constitutive of *habitus* but so also is the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of. Thus for Bourdieu 'the subject is the individual trace of an entire collective history' (BOURDIEU, 1990b, p. 91).

Thus a collective understanding of *habitus* is necessary in order to recognise that individuals contain within themselves their past and present position in the social structure 'at all times and in all places, in the forms of dispositions which are so many marks of social position' (BOURDIEU, 1990b, p. 82).

*Habitus'* duality as both collective and individualised offers theoretical potential, but also, as Cicourel (1993) points out, conceptual difficulties. Bourdieu often refers to class *habitus* and a number of researchers have also worked with the concept of class *habitus* (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1979; BRIDGE, 2001; HARTMANN, 2000; JA-

MES, 1995; SAWCHUK, 2003). The largest and most comprehensive research study of class *habitus* is Bourdieu's own study of *Distinction* in French society (BOURDIEU, 1984). Although the study draws on both quantitative and qualitative data, because *habitus* cannot be directly observed in empirical research and has to be apprehended interpretively, much of *Distinction* is devoted to a qualitative study of the myriad artistic/culinary preferences and practices which cluster in each sector of social space, that is within each class and class fraction, in order to identify the specific *habitus* that underlies them (WEININGER, 2004). However, as well as the utility of spatial notions of *habitus*, temporality is another productive aspect of *habitus*. Bourdieu actually writes that *habitus* 'refers to something historical, it is linked to individual history' (BOURDIEU, 1993, p. 86). Individual histories therefore are vital to understanding the concept of *habitus*. *Habitus* are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them. Current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but are internalised and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socialisations:

*Habitus* as the product of social conditionings and thus of a history is endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it, when embodied structures of expectation encounter structures of objective chances in harmony with those expectations, or in a direction that transforms it and, for instance, raises or lowers the level of expectations and aspirations. (BOURDIEU, 1990b, p. 116)

In fact, for someone who is regularly accused of determinism, Bourdieu uses the term transformation a lot. Schooling, in particular for working class children, often provides a source of transformation:

The *habitus* acquired in the family is at the basis of the structuring of school experiences (...) the *habitus* transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences (...) and so on, from restructuring to restructuring. (BOURDIEU, 1972, cited in BOURDIEU; WACQUANT, 1992, p. 134)

Therefore, *habitus* is a product of early childhood experience, and, in particular socialisation within the family, and provides a basis for the conceptualization of

a familial *habitus*. So the notion of familial *habitus* - the deeply ingrained system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions family members share (REAY, 1998) helps us to make better sense of gendered and intra-class as well as inter-class differences in both secondary school and HE choice practices.

### ***'Too true to warrant discussion': the middle classes and university choice***

The research study on choice of higher education focused on 17 and 18 year old in six educational institutions (REAY; DAVID; BALL, 2005). We administered a questionnaire to 502 students across six institutions, using tutors to select representative tutor groups for us. The six educational institutions comprised an 11-18 mixed comprehensive with a large minority working class intake, a comprehensive sixth form college which serves a socially diverse community, a tertiary college with a very large A-level population, an Further Education College which runs HE Access courses, and two prestigious private schools, one single-sex boys and a single-sex girls. All of the institutions are in or close to London.

Individual interviews were then conducted with 120 students across the six institutions. At first we interviewed those who had volunteered through the questionnaire but then we attempted to broaden the sample to both address imbalances, notably in relation to gender, and to include a range of interesting cases, for example, first generation students and those students in state schools attempting to gain admission to Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge universities). We also interviewed 15 sixth form tutors and other key personnel in these institutions, and a sample of 40 parents. Supplementing these three data sets were field notes from participant observation. I attended a range of events, parents' evenings, HE careers lessons, Oxbridge practice interviews and tutor group sessions on the university application process. We used *habitus*, field and cultural capital as sensitising concepts in the analysis of data. *Habitus* proved to be both the most generative concept but also the most difficult to operationalize. We ended up working with notions of not only individual *habitus* but also institutional and familial *habitus*.

An important aspect of familial *habitus* is the complicated compilation of values, attitudes and knowledge base that families possess in relation to the field of education. It is profoundly influenced by the educational experiences of parents.

Thus for a majority of the middle class families in the HE research project university attendance was taken-for-granted. Allat (1993) writes about the 'taken for granted assumptions' embedded in middle class family processes where the expectation of going to university does not need to be articulated. It is 'too true to warrant discussion' (DOUGLAS, 1975, p. 3-4). We saw such assumptions over and over again in the middle class transcripts. Familial *habitus* results in the tendency to acquire expectations that are adjusted to what is acceptable 'for people like us' (BOURDIEU, 1984, p. 64-65). In relation to higher education, Bourdieu and Passeron argued that:

Depending on whether access to higher education is collectively felt, even in a diffuse way, as an impossible, possible, probable, normal or banal future, everything in the conduct of the families and the children (particularly their conduct and performance at school) will vary, because behaviour tends to be governed by what is 'reasonable' to accept. (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1979, p. 226)

A significant majority of middle class applicants in the study were engaging with higher education choice in contexts of certainty and entitlement. Established middle class familial *habitus* generate the pursuit of advantage and the defence of distinction. And we can see this clearly in Mrs Cope's words. Her claim that choosing was an unscientific process emphasises the importance of affective aspects of *habitus*;

Choosing was a very unscientific process actually. My father went to Trinity College, Cambridge to do law and he was always very keen to show her Cambridge and his old college, which he did when she was probably about thirteen. And she fell in love with it. And she decided that was where she wanted to go there and then. (Mrs Cope, middle class parent of a private school student)

But the quote also underlines how within established middle class familial *habitus* going to university is part of a normal biography, simply part of what people like us do, and often too obvious to articulate, Mrs Mattison provides another example of this apparent seamlessness:

Diane: When did you first consider what Tim would do after finishing A levels?

Mrs M: (laughs) Like when he was born. It's always been an expectation. I think it's always been implicit because the academic world is part of our life and very familiar to Tim. I just assumed he would go. I suppose it was just seen as natural. (Mrs Mattison, middle class parent of private school student)

Later, talking about the league tables she asserts that Tim did not need to refer to them because:

In a sense he just knew which the best ones were. And it wasn't the league tables. It's just the sense of the university, the location, the history and just a kind of knowing that people just do know what's good.

Here we can see the reproductive strategies that privileged families produce without consultation or deliberation which have 'the effect of contributing to the reproduction of existing positionings and the social order' (BOURDIEU, 2000, p. 146). As Bourdieu argues those who have a feel for the game do not have to pose the objectives of their practice as ends because they are absorbed in the doing, in the 'coming moment'. *Habitus* is evident in its very inexplicitness. And we have a very clear articulation of established middle class *habitus* and what Bourdieu calls 'the paradox of natural distinction' in which:

One of the privileges of the dominant, who move in their world as fish in water, resides in the fact that they need not engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best suit their interests. All they have to do is to follow their dispositions which, being adjusted to their positions, 'naturally' generate practices adjusted to the situation. (BOURDIEU, 1990a, p. 108)

These examples of white middle class choosing exemplify the pre-reflexive rather than the conscious, the practical

rather than the discursive, the ways in which dispositions are 'objectively adapted to their outcomes without a conscious aiming at ends' (BOURDIEU, 1990a, p. 53).

The established middle classes, and in particular private school students, talked of going to University as 'automatic', 'taken for granted', 'always assumed'. The decision to go to university is a non-decision. It is rational and it is not; what Bourdieu calls 'intentionality without intention' (BOURDIEU, 1990a, p. 108). Decision-making comes into play in relation to which university and often their understanding of the right sort of university for them is ingrained, tacit, taken for granted. They do not even need to articulate the divide between old and new universities because going to a new university is just not what someone like them does. Rather we see 'the self-assured relationship to the world' (BOURDIEU, 1984, p. 56) of middle-class *habitus* reinforced and augmented by the elite institutional *habitus* of private and selecting schooling, layering privilege upon privilege:

Well, just since I've been born, I suppose it's just been assumed I am going to university, because both my parents went to university, all their brothers and sisters went to university and my sister went to university and so I don't know if I've even stopped to think about it. I've always just thought I am going to go to university, and I don't know, I have kind of grown up with the idea that's what people do, most people do that. I mean, quitting school has never been an option for me. If I really wanted to I think my parents would probably support me, but I've just never even considered it as an option, I have always assumed I have been going to university and the choice has just been which university, rather than will I go at all, I suppose that's just the way my parents are, they just send us to university. (Nick, middle class student at a private school)

There is little sense in the middle class students' words of *habitus* as 'the art of inventing' (BOURDIEU 1990a, p. 55). As Omar, a middle class Iranian student, explains in relation to his private boys school:

If you take a group of ten people and nine people have applied to these sorts of universities,

like London ones, or you know, prestigious ones, and you don't really want to feel like - I am going to apply to this place just because I want to. And they will say - why are you doing that? Why don't you join the flow? This tends to happen. (...) You sort of find you've done it without realizing it. (Omar, middle class, private school student)

Throughout the middle class transcripts we see repeatedly how processes of class internalization become externalized.

### ***'Fish out of water': working class students choosing elite universities***

Just as cultural capital works well as a concept that makes sense of middle class ways of being and acting but is more problematic in understanding the working classes as anything other than deficient, so *habitus* as pre-reflexive and operating beneath the level of consciousness is not particularly helpful in understanding working class applicants to university. For our working class students the pre-reflexive has had to become reflexive and predispositions evolve into new dispositions. In this quote, Fiona hints at the unsuitability of her working class *habitus* for dealing with the process of HE choice:

All of us in my family are very short-term people, we don't think about the future that much until it arrives. Which is good to some degree but not really in situations like sorting out university because you don't sort of get what you need to get done. (Fiona, working class student at a state comprehensive)

Here Fiona is elaborating a working class *habitus*. But when I point out to Fiona that she clearly did sort out university as she has been offered a place to read History of Art at Edinburgh, she tells me 'I had to have a very clear plan of action and work everything out in advance - not very me really'. We could almost talk in terms of Fiona having an 'out-of-*habitus*' experience. But maybe it makes better sense to talk in terms of an 'out of field' experience. While our middle class students were firmly located in familiar social fields our working class students were already in transition and dealing with the unfamiliar field of predominantly middle class sixth forms. Schooling for these students

is generating new dispositions, a turn towards what Bourdieu terms 'a cultured *habitus*' (BOURDIEU, 1967, p. 344). In 'Outline of a Theory of Practice', Bourdieu writes that the principles embodied in *habitus* 'are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness and hence cannot be touched by voluntary deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit' (BOURDIEU, 1977, p. 93-94). But while an understanding of middle class *habitus* as 'beyond the grasp of consciousness' worked well in terms of our data it made little sense for many of our working class students struggling in unfamiliar fields. So Shaun who went to Sussex to study English said:

Socially, or through my family, I don't know anybody who has completed university, you know, I don't know anybody well, who has completed university. My uncle, was the first person in my entire family, like, ever, to go to university and complete it, but he died in 1993, so I don't know, I didn't really have time to talk to him about it, or find out anything or get any encouragement, advice or anything like that from him. So I suppose that's maybe why I didn't know about the reputations of the universities or any sort of things like that. Apart from what I was told by the prospectuses, the brochures, computers, what my teachers told me, although they didn't really help much. I sort of had to get to grips with it and work it out as I went along, play it by ear. (Shaun, working class student at a state comprehensive)

Working class students like Fiona and Shaun are characterized by conscious deliberation and awareness, they unlike their middle class counterparts are engaged in acts of invention or more accurately reinvention.

### ***The limitations and possibilities of habitus***

Bourdieu developed *habitus* in part as a means of countering the undue emphasis on consciousness in social science (WARDE, 2004). And as we have seen the concept works particularly well in capturing 'the too obvious to articulate', those reproductive moments when *habitus* and field are in harmony. However, McNay (2001, p. 146) asserts 'there has been an increasing emphasis in Bourdieu's more recent work on moments of disalignment and tension between

*habitus* and field, which may give rise to social change'. In 'In Other Words', Bourdieu writes about reflexivity emerging 'in situations of crisis which disrupts the immediate adjustment of *habitus* to field' (BOURDIEU, 1990b, p. 108). In particular, in 'The Weight of the World' (1999) there is a great deal of striving, resistance and action aimed at changing current circumstances as many of the poor and dispossessed, interviewed by Bourdieu and his colleagues, search around for ways of changing and transforming their lives. Bourdieu takes the example of upward social mobility, arguing that the movement of *habitus* across class fields can result in:

A *habitus* divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and its ambivalences, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of the self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities. (BOURDIEU, 1999, p. 511)

It is not a lack of action that is the problematic in relation to *habitus* but rather firstly, Bourdieu's over emphasis on pre-reflective dimensions of action and secondly, the negative connotations embedded in notions of 'a divided *habitus*' with its associations of instability and neuroses.

I want to deal with pre-reflexivity first. As Sayer (2005) convincingly argues, Bourdieu overplays the unconscious impulses and aspects of *habitus*, neglecting mundane everyday reflexivity; what Sayer terms 'our inner conversations' (see also Archer, 2003). In doing so he marginalises the life of the mind in others. In a similar vein, Farnell (2000) asserts that in Bourdieu's formulation of *habitus* individuals' adjustments to the external world are all apparently unconscious, or less than conscious. Crossley (1999, p. 658) makes an identical criticism that *habitus* as a concept levels out the distinction between reflection and the pre-reflective and that 'it needs to recuperate the reflective and creative aspects of practice'. As Noble and Watkins (2003, p. 529) argue by dismissing conscious calculation, Bourdieu 'empties ordinary cognition of its conscious elements: in making the valuable argument that belief is corporeal, he overstates his case to argue that cognitive structures are not forms of consciousness but dispositions of the body'.

Implicit in the concept is that *habitus* operates at an unconscious level unless individuals confront events or new unfamiliar fields which cause self questioning whereupon *habitus* begins to operate at the level of consciousness and the person develops new facets of the self. Such disjunctures between *habitus* and field occur for Bourdieu when individuals with a well developed *habitus* find themselves in different fields or different parts of the same social field. So according to Bourdieu (1990b, p. 11) 'consciousness and reflexivity are both cause and symptom of the failure of immediate adaptation to the situation'. However, as Sayer (2005) argues, and I think correctly, disjuncture and the resulting striving, resistance and/or new awareness (what Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) terms socioanalysis) can occur during the formation of *habitus* and indeed can be constitutive of the *habitus*.

Although the emphasis on 'protension' - 'the feel for the game' rather than calculation and strategising is an important counter to rationalism, Bourdieu seems to leap straight from a rationalist interpretation to an anti-rationalist one. One key consequence, according to, is that Bourdieu's focus on the unconscious and the pre-reflexive does not allow for the development of the ethical dimensions of the *habitus*. Crossley (2001, p. 138) makes a related point when he argues that *habitus* needs to include 'dialogues with oneself'. In 'Sociology in Question', Bourdieu writes that *habitus* includes ethical dispositions (BOURDIEU, 1993, p. 129) and argues that it is not just dispositions but convictions that constitute *habitus*, but because of his emphasis on protension these aspects of *habitus* remain under-developed in his writings. Sayer's important work (2005) recuperating ethical dispositions or 'moral sentiments' for *habitus* enhances the possibilities for and of *habitus* and allows us not only a richer understanding of the strivings, struggles and disenchantments of those burdened by the 'Weight of the World' (1999). It also provides the potential for a broader conceptualisation of *habitus* that makes space for 'cares, concerns and commitments', and weaves together conscious deliberation with unconscious dispositions so that we can attempt to grapple analytically with aspects of identity such as our personal and political commitments and values that current conceptualisations of *habitus* marginalise.

I want to focus now on disjunctures between *habitus* and field, the extent to which they lead to a questioning of already existing predispositions and generate potential for social transformation. One of the most persistent debates about *habitus* revolve around whether it is essentially static or capable of changing dynamically in different conditions and circumstances (Hillier; Rooksby, 2005). Bourdieu makes brief reference to situations of discordance between disposition and position, the mismatches and misfires, but accepts that *habitus* has degrees of integration and change in response to new experiences (BOURDIEU, 2000, p. 157, 160–161).

In my recent study we focussed specifically on the white middle classes choosing inner city, ethnically diverse comprehensives (REAY; CROZIER; JAMES, 2011) we interviewed at least one parent from 125 white middle-class households who had chosen inner city comprehensive schooling in three cities in three different geographical areas of the UK: 180 parent interviews in total. In addition, we interviewed 68 middle-class young people (39 young women and 29 young men) from our 125 households. For the middle class parents in the study facing an unfamiliar field was more likely to generate a protective reinforcement of white middle class *habitus* and a mobilisation of capitals in order to defend against the discomforts of the field rather than any long-lasting change in *habitus*. There was a strong focus on the advantages to be gained from attending multi-ethnic urban schooling of the gains to be made from multi-ethnic, urban schooling. As Richard Harding's quote indicates, there is a large degree of self-interest mixed in with these parents' apparent altruism:

Sophie will be, already is, totally different to us, all our friends are white and middle class, hers are from all sorts of class and ethnic backgrounds. And to be honest I'm quite uncomfortable with people from different backgrounds I never had the experience either at school or university and we didn't want that for Sophie. We wanted her to be a fully paid up citizen of the twenty first century and I think she is and that is all down to the school. She has a real social confidence and can get on with anybody. (Richard Harding, middle class parent of student at a state comprehensive)

Despite high levels of anxiety, both parents and children rarely questioned their class and race privilege even in multi-ethnic working class contexts where their privilege was very apparent. So, Dan Adkins, a film director, commented:

Emily for example goes to a school where predominantly it's a kind of working class environment, a lot of children come from difficult yes difficult, disadvantaged domestic situations. And it's roughly 50% non white. And so she's got this kind of middle class background and goes on middle class holidays with a middle class family, and has got reasonably wealthy grandparents who have left an inheritance for her kind of thing. And she goes and spends several hours a day with people who come from very different backgrounds, so she's exposed to both and is totally comfortable with both. (Dan Adkins, middle class parent of student at a state comprehensive)

The parents continued to operationalise their class advantages whilst, for the most part, not apparently recognising them. Only occasionally were there glimpses of the reflexive *habitus*. Yet, this was clearly not the case for our working class applicants to elite universities. Working class students' experiences of choosing universities and later attending them resulted in a disjunction between field and *habitus* that means that nothing could be taken-for-granted. The conjunction of working class *habitus* and the middle class field of the sixth form and the elite university generated adaptation, critical assessment and added impetus to the refashioning they had already had to engage in in order to become academically successful students. However what both the working class students and the middle class families did share was an ambivalence and anxiety about the contexts in which they find themselves. Skeggs (2004) argues that Bourdieu cannot account for the ambivalence that lies at the heart of being human. That is true in the normal course of events, for Bourdieu when *habitus* and field are in agreement. Ambivalence arises, as Bourdieu himself demonstrates in the 'Weight of the World' (1999), when individuals find their dispositions no longer fit the economic and social fields they find themselves in.

However, while both the middle class students in working class contexts and the working class students in middle class contexts were managing high degrees of dissonance they responded with very different degrees of receptivity, openness and acceptance in the field. I would argue that this is because 'the dialectical confrontation', which Bourdieu describes between *habitus* and field, leads for the middle classes in multiethnic working class fields to a reinforcement of 'originary *habitus*' while for working class students in the middle class field of higher education *habitus* is 'being restructured, transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structures' (BOURDIEU, 2005, p. 47). Both the white middle class families and the working class students have incorporated the principles of vision and division constitutive of the dominant social order (BOURDIEU, 2000), and as a consequence the middle classes feel they have little if anything to learn from the working classes unlike their attitudes to those of other ethnicities. There are issues here around the incentives of the field. It is only by seeing fields in terms of the extent to which they represent dominant and dominated spaces in relation to *habitus* that we can make sense of why rupture generated transformation in one case and not in the other. Most of the middle class families with their dominant cultural capital who choose to send their children to working class comprehensives could and did employ their cultural capital to ensure their children occupied dominant spaces within the top sets and gifted and talented programmes. Bourdieu's 'dialectical confrontation' resulted in a tendency for white middle class *habitus* to transform the objective structures according to its own structure through strategies of advantage that ensured their children monopolised scarce educational resources. And for the most part their children brought a familial *habitus* grounded in an intrinsic sense of class superiority which mitigated against any class mixing and protected their class interests, but was often no protection against ambivalence and anxiety.

This was not the case for our working class students applying to elite universities. They brought a sense of 'not quite fitting in' which generated dispositions of self-scrutiny and self-transformation – almost, as we have also found in our study of working class students attending

elite universities, 'a constant fashioning and re-fashioning of the self' but one that still stubbornly retained key valued aspects of working class self. As with the white middle classes in unfamiliar fields there were high levels of ambivalence and anxiety but the incentives of the field generated new learning and social change to a far greater degree. However, while *habitus* was clearly being continually modified by individuals' encounters with the outside world (Di MAGGIO, 1979), there was none of the wholesale 'escaping of the *habitus*' that Friedmann (2005) writes about in relation to upward social mobility. Far from 'disappearing into a new world' (FRIEDMANN, 2005, p. 318) these student were determined to hold on to former aspects of self even as they gained new ones.

Both social mobility studies and those on the working class tend to depict working class cultures and the *habitus* they generate as either limited or lacking in some way (CHARLESWORTH, 2000). As Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005, p. 120-121) point out, 'the issue here is the perennial difficulty of understanding working class *habitus* through the lens of intellectualized and culturally privileged academic research'.

## Conclusion

Skeggs (2004) challenges the usefulness of *habitus* as a conceptual tool, arguing that the more we use models of *habitus* the more we as researchers perform middle-class politeness and will not be able to understand the different forms of (non) sociality that we are supposed to be able to analyse. And I would agree that notions of *habitus* as well as those of cultural capital result in a predominantly middleclass-centric view of the world. Despite Bourdieu's criticisms of privilege and elitism, and particularly the role of academics in perpetuating both, his concepts of *habitus* and cultural capital work implicitly with notions of the middle class as normative in a way that residualises the working classes, especially if they refuse the dominant principles of vision and division.

But I would argue that *habitus* is still rich and generative as a conceptual tool as long as we ensure our data leads the analytic direction rather than allowing the conceptual framework to dominate. And that it is in the ruptures, the

disjunctures, the edges of coherence between *habitus* and field that the most interesting theory lies. In 'Weight of the World' we see *habitus* as internally contradictory and fragmented, and in Bourdieu's self-autoanalysis (BOURDIEU, 2004) he writes about his own experiences of a cloven *habitus* beset by tensions and contradictions. Yet while those in the 'Weight of the World' often appear overwhelmed by the ravages of a divided *habitus* (McROBBIE, 2002) his own experiences of living and working through a divided *habitus* have clearly been extremely creative and generative. The possibilities for socioawareness and social change lie in the jolts that unsettle *habitus* through either exposure to unfamiliar fields or turbulence in a familiar field, and this is as true for us academics, including Bourdieu, as it is for those we research.

## Notes

1 In the UK 93% of children between the ages of 3 and 18 are in education in state-funded schools without charge. English secondary schools are mostly comprehensive although the intake of comprehensive schools can vary widely, especially in urban areas with several local schools.

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