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Habitus and cultural capital: the possible impact on the 'final year project module for the social sciences'

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was, 'To explore if Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'Habitus' and 'Cultural Capital' differently impact Huddersfield University students participating in the 'Final Year Project Module for the Social Sciences (FYP)'. The rationale behind this study was due to observations made before and after FYP lectures, in which there were clearly different feelings in terms of confidence approaching the module. Therefore, an understanding of students' experiences of various aspects of it were warranted. The theoretical framework that was utilised in order to understand the participants' experiences is that of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital.

A qualitative methodology was used, which incorporated an opportunistic sampling method. Six semi-structured interviews with three males and females (differing in self-declared social class and ethnicity) were conducted, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. It was found that Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital did differently impact students on the module. However, the impact of habitus and cultural capital were primarily determined by social class albeit mitigated by either ethnic capital, student-supervisor relationships or new skills the module introduced. This was reflective of the critical realist perspective of structure and agency.

Introduction

The aim of this research was, 'To explore if Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'Habitus' and 'Cultural Capital' differently impacted Huddersfield University students participating in the 'Final Year Project Module for the Social Sciences (FYP)'. The use of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital have been applied to a plethora of studies regarding educational experiences (Carter, 2003; Li, 2013; Reay, 1998; Sullivan, 2001), however, having carried out a literature review, this research feels it can add to the academic canon in terms of showing how Bourdieu's concepts can be further explored and applied within the context of the University of Huddersfield and the FYP module. The rationale for conducting this research was due to observations made when attending the FYP module lectures, in which students would openly talk before and after the lecture. Some students sounded prepared for the module, whereas others sounded completely lost and unprepared for the task of having to carry out their own research. Having made this observation, the researcher felt these differing opinions at the start of the module could be explored by looking at the experiences of individuals on various aspects of the FYP module, e.g. literature review, the summative presentation, and FYP supervisor meetings. However, the study needed a theoretical framework to analyse these experiences.

As discussed, Bourdieu's concepts are synonymous with exploring educational experiences - this is due to habitus and cultural capital, and the way these concepts can be applied to individuals and help them to uncover the dispositions they may have and the cultural capital they are able to generate. These can differ between said individuals based on social class and the environment one inhabits (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, using this framework had the potential to provide alternate experiences of the FYP module.

Literature Review

The rationale for this literature review is to summarise, critique and illustrate how the academic sources selected contribute to the aim of this research. This review begins by looking at Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) concepts of habitus and cultural capital and how they provide the basis for this study in the educational field.

It then critically reviews articles that have used Bourdieu's framework within educational institutions. Specifically, the review discusses research that is particularly relevant; it critically reviews studies that have explored the educational experiences, of students, in higher education.

Habitus

One of the foundations of this research is based on Bourdieu's concept of habitus which is defined as, "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" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). While this definition was helpful in providing a starting point for this study's understanding of habitus, especially as it highlights its characteristics ("durable" and "transposable dispositions") and the fact that it can differ depending on environment ("constitutive of a particular type of environment"), it was also necessary to be specific about the meaning of the term 'dispositions'.

Bourdieu's (1977) definition has been interpreted by many scholars, however, Bradbury, Jones and Le Boutillier (2018, p. 133) provide a good description, deemed most appropriate for this study, of the dispositions associated with habitus. "…the agent's practical or common-sense knowledge about the ways of doing things, responding to situations, and understanding what is going on". This assertion not only extended to this study's knowledge on the types of dispositions associated with habitus, but it

also provided an insight into how it might be operationalised within the context of this research.

The relevance of habitus to this project is that it will allow an examination of how the habitus of the participants (and the dispositions they inherit) (Bourdieu, 1977) impacts upon how they experience aspects of the FYP module, which can differ based on social class and environment inhabited.

Cultural Capital

The concept of cultural capital is the second pillar upon which this research is formed. Bourdieu states that cultural capital is:

> …in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body: in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state… (Bourdieu, 1986, p.82).

This definition provides an explanation of what cultural capital is. It also provided a frame of reference when looking at how other researchers and scholars have operationalised the concept within their own research.

When exploring cultural capital, it must be understood that it has a relationship with habitus, which Inglis and Thorpe (2019) interpret as the amount of cultural capital an individual has or can generate as determined by the environment their habitus was formed in. This shows the importance of understanding the two concepts prior to research, as one informs the other. This is important because it may have impacted upon the way this research carried out data collection, e.g. asking questions related to habitus before moving onto questions regarding cultural capital.

The role of the mother and historical habitus

Diane Reay's 'Cultural Reproduction: Mothers' Involvement in Their Child's Primary Schooling', which took place in London (1993-1994) provides an excellent framework for the application of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital. Reay's research is set through the lens of Bourdieu, who sees the family as an institution of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977), thus her aim is to explore the habitus of mothers, and how their habitus generates sufficient or insufficient cultural capital regarding their involvement in their child's

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are seen as aggressive and over-emotional when trying to better their child's educational experience.

Cultural reproduction and the changing face of cultural capital

Bourdieu (1973) believed that cultural reproduction gives an advantage to middle-class pupils and students within the educational field. This is done through using excess cultural capital to gain educational merit. Sullivan's (2001) research attempts to address this theory by surveying pupils both on their own cultural capital and their parents' cultural capital, then looking at the pupils' GCSE results to make conclusions.

Sullivan's (2001) sample was made up of four comprehensive schools (in 1998), in which a self-completion questionnaire was provided to all year 11s. The results showed that cultural capital is related to social class (middle-class students displayed more cultural capital), is culturally reproduced, and that GCSE attainment is positively impacted by it. When controlling for cultural capital however, "Parents' social class retains a large and significant direct effect on GCSE attainment…" (Sullivan, 2001, p. 910). This leaves questions regarding social class, and what other factors explain differences in educational attainment, e.g. economic capital and access to educational resources.

The first issue is the sample which comprised of four comprehensive schools - no private schools were included - which may have affected the representativeness of middle and upper-class families in the study and may change what is constituted as cultural capital.

Secondly, participants were responsible for deciding their parents' social class, what cultural activities they took part in, and their educational credentials (Sullivan, 2001). It could be suggested that not all the participants knew their social class or their parents' educational credentials. They may also have overstated or understated their parents' involvement in cultural activities, therefore rendering some of the findings unreliable. However, the research did find that pupils' cultural activities such as watching TV (programmes about science and art), not commonly seen as cultural capital generating activity, were related to positive GCSE attainment (Sullivan, 2001).

In contrast to Bourdieu's (1986) objectified cultural capital, activities involving music and instruments did not constitute or contribute to cultural capital. It should also be noted that activities such as reading, an aspect of Bourdieu's objectified cultural capital (books) (Bourdieu, 1986), contributed to cultural knowledge and therefore enhanced cultural capital within Sullivan's (2001) study (of the pupils), As a consequence of this, his research should not be dismissed. This assertion could have changed the way that this study incorporated cultural activities into its questioning, not necessarily moving away from the Bourdesian concept of cultural capital generating activities, but instead, also drawing upon more contemporary research.

Non-dominant cultural capital and its impact within the educational field

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been utilised in Carter's (2003) study of how non-dominant and dominant cultural capital is used by low-income African American youths within the educational field and their own communities. Carter's (2003) sample involved 44 low-income African Americans, their ages ranged from 13-20. Data was collected between 1997-1998 using semi to open-ended interviews (Carter, 2003).

Carter (2003, p. 138) refers to dominant cultural capital as, "…powerful, high status cultural attributes, codes and signals", harnessed by powerful people and institutions, whereas non-dominant cultural capital is seen as, "…tastes or schemes of appreciation and understandings, accorded to a lower status group, that include preferences for particular linguistic, musical or, interactional styles".

The main finding from this study that is relevant to the current research project is the issue of non-dominant cultural capital having a negative impact on the relationship between some students and teachers.

For example, a student ('Rayisha') who was deemed to be talkative and asked questions of a teacher (seen as non-dominant cultural capital), believed her grades were impacted as she did not conform to the dominant cultural signals of the educational institution and personnel (Carter, 2003). This could impact participants of the FYP module, specifically so in FYP presentations and supervisor meetings - environments which can pose expectations and the need for dominant cultural capital. Something not all participants may be aware of.

Rural students and the inopportunity of generating valuable capitals

Li's (2013) study deployed Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capitals to explore the experiences of

rural 'class defectors' in their new elite, urban environment. Specifically, Li (2013) focused upon their subjectivities, practices and position-taking. In China, many resources are given to urban schools to develop elite students for the future, whereas in rural areas, educational quality and access to resources is far less available (Chan & Zhang, 1999).

The study was conducted at 'Stone', a top tier university in Beijing. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 52 rural students and 22 urban students and some teachers. A questionnaire was sent out first to determine geographical location, and students were chosen from different study years to assess variances in adaptation (Li, 2013). The findings reported that rural students, initially, had a very difficult time in transitioning into a different field and adjusting to new social positions. Some were able to transform and re-shape their habitus, however, there were still tendencies to fall back into habitual dispositions which were doubly disruptive when lacking in vital capitals (cultural, economic and social) (Li, 2013).

The rural urban divide was applicable to this study, in the sense that students from rural backgrounds face obstacles akin to that of the working-class student (economic, fewer key capitals and dispositions that are unfavourable in their educational environment). Additionally, urban students are comparable to the middle/upper classes here in the UK (surplus of cultural capital and a more developed understanding of the educational field).

Further, the key finding in Li's (2013) study was that some rural students would avoid joining societies that would allow them to accumulate valuable and transferable capital, based on the constraints of being from a rural background (Li, 2013).

As discussed, similar findings were reported by Sullivan (2001), who found that activities which generate capital correlate with educational attainment. So, the idea that students do not partake in capital generating activities due to background, could be applied to this study.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology is often described as a research strategy whereby words and meaning are valuable when considering data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2016). To understand this high value of words and meaning for qualitative methodology, three factors were explored;

epistemology; ontology and the relationship between theory and research.

The philosophical framework these factors will be taken from is a critical realist approach. This sees theory as key to understanding social events and phenomena by helping explain 'causal mechanisms' (observable only by their effects) which may impact individuals within the social world through structures and objects (the effect) (Fletcher, 2017). Looking at the relationship between theory and research, this study used a deductive approach, as theory (Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital) has influenced the development of the aim of this research. However, when considering the analysis of codes, a retroductive approach was used, as this provides the context as to why a causal mechanism may have an impact on participants (Fletcher, 2017).

Epistemologically speaking, this research uses a critical realist perspective, specifically that human knowledge is valuable but also limited. It is concerned with knowledge associated with causal mechanisms and structures that are identified using theory. Thus, it helps explain what happens to participants in the social world (Fletcher, 2017).

Ontologically, this research draws upon a critical realist view. This approach sees social reality split into three levels; 'empirical'; 'actual' and 'real'. The 'empirical' level is one whereby individuals experience social phenomena (due to causal mechanisms) and it is understood through their interpretation of it (Fletcher, 2017). The 'actual' level is a domain in which causation is actualised but is not always experienced by individuals, therefore social phenomena is not interpreted by them (Morton, 2006). The 'real' is where causal mechanisms operate and cause social phenomena for individuals, which is then experienced at the 'empirical' level (Morton, 2006), thus needing theory (Bourdieu) to investigate and explain. This framework is applicable to this study as it begins with theory (Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital) and uses it to explain causal mechanisms/structures (e.g. confidence in expression) which can lead to social events and phenomena (e.g. poor interaction within FYP meetings), therefore providing the framework to help achieve the aim of this research.

Sampling

This study used purposive sampling - specifically, opportunistic sampling. This approach capitalises on the setting one is in to find participants who could provide data relevant to the research and its

aim (Emmel, Seaman & Kenney, 2013). As this research is focused on the experiences of students' participating in the FYP module at the University of Huddersfield, this permitted the utilisation of opportunistic sampling as the researcher was studying there and undertaking the module.

Potential participants were approached after lectures; those interested in the research provided their student email address. Emails were sent to those expressing an interest; a copy of the participant information sheet, participation letter and consent form was attached to the emails. This approach led to the recruitment of the sample.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants: three females (White British working-class) and three males (two White British middle-class and one British Pakistani working-class) (all self-declared).

Each, digitally recorded, semi-structured interview that was conducted took place in group study rooms within the university library and lasted between 14 to 26 minutes. Semi-structured interviews provide a set list of questions (open and closed) on certain topic areas but are not restricted to a certain order of questioning or kept exactly to a fixed line of questioning, as the interviewer can ask follow-up questions in response to the interviewee's answers (Bryman, 2016). This allows for greater detail and exploration into areas which are of interest to this research, essential to the qualitative approach.

Before entering the main line of questioning, a short introduction was read to every participant which explained what the core questions would be about (experiences of the FYP module). Participants were also reminded that they could leave at any time or stop the interview. Closed-ended questions were asked at the start to determine factors such as social class, gender, age, ethnicity and parent's educational qualifications (self-declared), to provide a base for Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital to work from. These were followed by open-ended questions designed to meet the aims of this study. For example, 'Do you feel that you have certain restrictions in your life that may impact your success on this module?', The open-ended nature of these questions allowed the interviewer to gain detailed answers and use follow-up questions. This approach encouraged and sparked further conversation when the interviewee was either unsure or responses were brief (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). However, during data analysis, when listening back to some answers on the

recordings, it was evident that opportunities to ask follow-up questions had sometimes been missed. This serves to highlight that while semi-structured interviews were applicable to this research, interviewers may need prior experience or practice to conduct them effectively.

Ethical protocol

Ethics are important in order to protect the interests of both parties involved in research; this research had been approved by the School of Human and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel. It also followed the British Sociological Association ethical guidelines.

This research took a universalistic stance on ethics. Specifically, the idea that the following principles should never be broken; no harm to participants; informed consent; anonymity and confidentiality; right to withdraw and avoidance of deception (Bryman, 2016). Informed consent was gained using a form which was given to the participant by email and again, on the day of the interview, to sign in person. The consent form made it clear that the interviewee had free choice (voluntary) to participate in the interviews and what they will experience if they do.

Anonymity and confidentiality principles are concerned with the avoidance of participants' identities being recognisable once the research has been published (Lune & Berg, 2017). In this study pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identity.

Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2017, p. 297) state that "thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data". This approach was relevant to this study due to the collection of qualitative data. Each of the stages of Braun and Clarke's (2017) approach to data analysis were employed in this study. The findings reported here evolved from the thematic analysis of data.

Findings

Family involvement in education and their valuing of academic success

In terms of the value of academic success amongst the parents of the working-class and middle-class participant's, the main theme found was that their parents all valued academic success. However, there

was also no pressure to succeed, it was more the case of them doing their best and their parents would be proud:

> *Yeah, just like do your best. They wouldn't like ever pressure me to like, I dunno stay at home and do whatever (university work), they were just like do what you wanna do, just as long as you enjoy it. (Laura, white British, female, working-class)*

> *Just do your best. If you don't succeed you don't get penalised for it, just as long as you try your best in whatever you're doing. That's good enough. (Zara, white British, female, working-class)*

This may appear to be quite a standard response from students whose parents had not attended university and are from working-class backgrounds (Sewell & Shah, 1968). However, this was also the case for both middle-class students. Jason and James, who had one (James) or both parents (Jason) who had attended university, who again valued academic success, but were not pressuring their child or expectant of a great degree outcome.

> *Do what you want when you get home to be honest… there was never like, "Sit down! Do your work and then you can go on your game" or whatever, it was just do it when you're ready, as long as you're on top of it. (James, white British, male, middle-class)*

Jason even added that his dad was not that serious about his education whilst at university:

> *Certainly, at uni he's told me that he would go out drinking rather than (going to) lectures and stuff like that. (Jason, white British, male, middle-class)*

Thus, showing that the educational background and social class of the participants' parents, did not necessarily impact upon their valuing of academic success. This is important to note, as previous studies have shown, that concepts such as social class and educational background, can impact upon the educational aspirations of the child of said parents (Sewell & Shah, 1968).

Parental involvement was operationalised through the question, 'Were family very involved in your education growing up?'. The theme that emerged focused upon participants' education growing up,

their activeness and the responses parents would take to influence their child's educational experience – especially when it involved speaking with teachers about their child's educational progress:

> *Erm unless she really really feels like she has to, I don't think she'd get involved in stuff like that. If I was being treated badly or being bullied, she would get involved because she wants to protect me. Erm I think she trusts me. I think she knows that I'm mature enough to guide myself in my own education. (Zara, white British, female, working-class)*

So, Zara feels as if the reason for her mum's lack of involvement, speaking and conversing with teachers, was due to her feelings of confidence and trust in guiding her own educational progress. However, as Reay (1998) suggests, the working-class habitus of mothers did not allow for the generation of cultural capital, meaning they believed they did not have the right to get more involved in their child's education or felt they did not possess the means (language nuances and tacit knowledge) to do so correctly within the educational field, ultimately limiting their child's educational experience due to inheriting these habitual dispositions.

So, it could be argued that the perception of confidence and trust Zara attaches to her mother's lack of involvement when conversing and interacting with teachers is misplaced. Rather, it may be the fact that her (mother) working-class habitus is negating her cultural capital generation, which would let her enter and interact within the educational field with ease. However, there is clear reluctance to do so as demonstrated through the use of the phrase 'unless she really, really has to…' which could affect Zara's experience on aspects of the FYP module due to these dispositions (language nuances and tacit knowledge) being reproduced and inherited by her.

As discussed, there were differences in parental interactions with teachers about their child's progress:

> *Definitely, yeah, absolutely. So, if there was any issue at primary school or secondary school my mum would be always there, first thing after the bell. So yeah, she would explain what happened (the teacher to his mum). (Ahmed, British Pakistani, male, working-class)*

Here, Ahmed's mum's approach to interacting with teachers, about his progress, is far more direct and involved than Zara's mum. This might be understandable if Ahmed's mum was from a middle-class background. Reay (1998) says those from middle-class backgrounds assume a role in which their habitus and history provides them with the dispositions and ability to generate cultural capital to excel in the educational field e.g. questioning teachers and institutional expectations. However, as Ahmed's mum is from a working-class background, it could be argued that Ahmed's mum is utilising her 'ethnic capital' instead (British Pakistani) to counter the dispositions that are commonly associated with a working-class background (Shah, Dwyer & Modood, 2010) when conversing and interacting with individuals from a field dominated by institutional habitus. This aligns with a study which found that Pakistani parents in Britain utilised their ethnic capital to gain social mobility for their children, in which the normalising of educational achievement and a hard work ethic towards education was encouraged (Shah et al., 2010). This was also done so their child could avoid following their own life trajectories, which often involved long hours, in mainly labour-intensive jobs, which did not provide them with any satisfaction:

> My dad is a taxi driver and my mum is just a housewife. (Ahmed, British Pakistani, male, working-class)

Here the working-class habitus of Ahmed's mum, which is not always conducive within the educational field, is countered by her ethnic capital which promotes educational achievement and a strong work ethic. Thus, this provides her with the focus to be more involved in Ahmed's education and confidently ask questions of his teachers. As seen in Reay's (1998) study, this was beneficial to the children whose mothers were involved in such ways.

Social class difference in experiences of the literature review

When asked, 'How are you finding (or how have you found) the literature review?', there were clear differing experiences. When considering the role of social class, particularly in terms of reading and deciphering academic jargon used within some journal articles and books associated with literature reviews, Bell said:

> Yeah, to be honest, like I have a dictionary app on my phone and I'll always just go to that, cos I wanna learn words that are related to whatever my topic is but… sometimes I do have to read over it again and again to like understand exactly what it's saying. (Bell, white British, female, working-class)

While Jason said:

> Occasionally, but I like to think I have quite an advanced vocab. So, with me I don't think it's too much of an issue. (Jason, white British, male, middle-class)

Here it is clear to see a contrast in confidence when reading literature about the literature review processes. Jason feels he has a good understanding of the jargon due to his advanced vocabulary, whereas Bell feels she must read words and passages repeatedly and resort to using a dictionary to fully grasp some of the literature around her subject.

This variance may be due to differences in cultural capital. Sullivan (2001, p. 3) notes that "…cultural capital consists of the familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated' language". Consequently, with cultural capital varying across social classes this may have led to the experiences reported.

Specifically, Bell's working-class background may be a disadvantage in this aspect of the FYP module, whereas this was not the case for Jason. However, as Sullivan's (2001) study concluded, the activities (regular reading) which individuals participate in, outside of the educational institution, generate more cultural capital than others. There were differences in attitudes towards reading for Bell and Jason particularly when asked if they read often and for what purpose.

For Bell reading was an activity she only did in conjunction with university work, she took no pleasure from doing it. However, Jason explained that he reads often and rather enjoys it and does it away from university work also:

> More to do with uni work, I don't really (otherwise). (Bell, white British, female, working-class)

Thus, it could be argued that due to differing attitudes towards the kinds of cultural activities which generate cultural capital, Bell is more likely to struggle to comprehend academic jargon within the literature. Potentially, the fact that Bell is not regularly immersing herself in cultural activities such as reading, which are conducive to her

educational development, may negatively impact upon her experience of this aspect of the FYP module. Again, Jason, an avid reader with a middle-class habitus, is far more likely to understand the 'educated language' (Sullivan, 2001) that is synonymous within academia, thus benefitting him in his experience of the literature review.

Student confidence in supervision meetings

One-to-one meetings with an FYP supervisor are an essential aspect of the FYP module. This is because it is a chance to receive in-person feedback and guidance directly from a supervisor on different sections of the dissertation. However, there were differing experiences for the participants of this study when it came to these meetings when asked the question, 'Do you feel confident when discussing your work in meetings with your FYP supervisor?':

> Erm, so as I got to know my FYP supervisor a lot more, erm I felt more confident discussing it. But, erm at the start I wasn't that confident in discussing my research. Erm, mainly because I thought it would've been a stupid idea or something… (Ahmed, British Pakistani, male, working-class)

> He's a sociology teacher and my FYP is based on criminology, so I feel like I've got a bit… I know a little bit more. I've read so much about it now I'm quite confident that I know what I'm talking about. But at the beginning when I was telling him what I was doing, I just thought imagine if he was just thinking, "You're an idiot, like why are you even trying to do that?" (Bell, white British, female, working-class)

It is clear to see here that there were confidence issues for these two participants, particularly so in feeling that their knowledge and ideas would not be valuable enough to express to their supervisor. This could be directly linked to non-dominant cultural capital as seen in Carter's (2003) research; students from lower status groups, often working-class, would feel that their grades were negatively impacted due to the dispositions and norms (e.g. linguistic and interaction styles) that were derived from their non-dominant cultural capital.

With Bell and Ahmed, it may be the case that their working-class habitus is providing them with non-dominant cultural capital dispositions and norms.

This may make them feel as if their knowledge and ideas would be under-valued in the educational institution of university, which predominantly rewards middle-class dispositions and norms (Thomas, 2002), thus hindering them when these FYP meetings first began. However, it should be noted that these attitudes and experiences of FYP meetings were at the beginning of the module; as they gained more knowledge about their topic and their supervisor, their experiences improved.

This highlights how Bourdieu's (1992) concept of habitus, which generates cultural capital, is not all-determining. As can be seen, two individuals from working-class backgrounds, have adapted to the initial struggle this new environment provided. For Ahmed, this could also be linked to the ethnic capital he has inherited from his mum. This may have provided him with the drive for educational achievement (Shah et al, 2010).

As discussed, there were differing experiences when it came to the FYP meetings:

> Oh yeah (enthusiastically), I've got (blank), I love (blank). He's very reassuring, erm I think a lot of students need reassurance, I think a lot of students' panic and get anxious over a lot of things and I think my tutor is very reassuring, he's very calm. (Zara, white British, female, working-class)

Here it is clear to see that Zara's experience of FYP meetings is different to that of Ahmed and Bell, who at first felt their ideas and knowledge may be perceived as stupid by their supervisor. Whereas Zara seems to be very comfortable in this one-to-one environment with her supervisor and would have no issues discussing her research either.

A study carried out by Thomas (2002), that focused upon institutional habitus in higher education, found that the tutor-student relationship was important for students who come from backgrounds that are not as frequently represented in higher education. Thomas (2002, p. 432) stated that "If students feel that staff believe in them, and care about the outcomes of their studying, they seem to gain self-confidence and motivation, and their work improves". This can be seen here:

> He treats me like an equal though, that's what I like. He doesn't treat as if I'm less intelligent than him. He doesn't speak down to me, he doesn't make me out like I'm being stupid or anything whenever I might be. (Zara,

white British, female, working-class)

So, it could be argued that Zara's experience of FYP meetings was more positive overall due to the relationship she had with her supervisor. Her supervisor made her ideas and knowledge appear valuable and insightful, thus mitigating her non-dominant cultural capital (derived from her working-class habitus). Therefore, this freed her from the associated dispositions and norms which could have limited her contributions in these meetings.

The relationship between student and tutor may have been something Ahmed and Bell did not have at the beginning of the module, as they both described their ideas as possibly stupid, and this may have negatively impacted their experiences of FYP meetings. It also highlights the differing experiences among one social class within the FYP module.

Previous themes have highlighted the comparative differences between two social classes, thus emphasising the extent to which Bourdieu's concepts can be utilised beyond class differentials. However, when looking at class comparatives of discussing ideas within supervisor meetings, Jason had much the same experience as Zara:

> *My supervisor (blank) is very, always been very erm accommodating, easy to talk too, easy to get hold of. Erm, so yeah, I've never really felt intimidated or worried about it in anyway. (Jason, white British, male, middle-class)*

Again, this experience may be attributed to the idea of a positive relationship with his supervisor which Thomas (2002) refers to. This may have made him feel confident in discussing his ideas within meetings. Although, it could be argued that due to his middle-class habitus this helped generate dominant cultural capital, e.g. educational expectations (Sullivan, 2001). Therefore, Jason, may benefit from such a relationship with his supervisor, and may not require it as much as the working-class participants, due to the dominant cultural capital derived from his middle-class habitus.

Nerves during the FYP presentation?

The FYP presentation was timed and carried out in front of an FYP supervisor and another member of the module staff. It is a summative assessment that gives students an opportunity to present what their dissertation is about and how it would be conducted.

All participants felt their presentations were successful based on the mark they received,

however, what this study wanted to explore was how they felt while presenting and the reasons for this. This was operationalised using the question, 'How do you think you came across in your FYP presentation?'. Bell expressed that she was nervous at the beginning of her presentation but as she went on, she gained more confidence. When asked about why she had these initial feelings of nerves Bell said:

> *Yeah, presentations are always uncomfortable, cos you go through first and second year not really having to do anything like that. When you go to third year you've got so much talking to do to people, so you just have to develop them skills. (Bell, white British, female, working-class)*

It is interesting to note that a reason for Bell's nervousness was derived from the fact that she had not done many presentations in her first year and none in her second year. This meant she had to develop the skills needed e.g. confidence in self-expression and the articulation of ideas in an understandable manner.

Further, it could be argued that this was down to Bell's working-class habitus, in that it does not sufficiently generate the cultural capital associated with presentation skills. These are skills that are assumed and expected to be accrued by all within the educational institution (Thomas, 2002). Thus, Bell feeling uncomfortable at the beginning of the presentation was because she found herself in a scenario that she had rarely engaged in previously. However, this belief that new skills were needed was not just held by Bell:

> *Cause we never really did presentations in year two. I've never had to stand in front of a tutor or in front of a class, so that was the first time I've done it, probably since high school. So, it was daunting in that respect. I think in first and second year you should have more of that, to prepare you for it, cause it's kinda like throw you in at the deep-end, "Here you go, you've got a presentation that you've never done before." (James, white British, male, middle-class)*

Looking at James' FYP presentation experience, and the influence of Bell's working-class habitus on the generation of cultural capital, it may not actually be relevant in this situation. James, who is from middle-class background, appeared to have the same difficulty with the FYP presentation as Bell. He too believed that it was something that he was unfamiliar with and unprepared for, and that he was

also lacking the relevant skills; confidence in self-expression and articulating ideas in an understandable manner.

This contrasts with previous research (Carter, 2003; Reay, 1998; Sullivan, 2001), in that middle-class individuals are able to generate the necessary cultural capital, easily, due to their middle-class habitus. This indicates that Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) concepts can vary in effect depending upon the scenario and individual.

These feelings of being unprepared or lacking in the skills required for their presentations may be related to Burke's (2016) 'time-sensitive' capital which looked at how the capital an individual had was relative to the context they were in; if the possessed capital was not applicable to said scenario, it would be deemed 'time-sensitive'.

These findings are an example of time-sensitive capital in the sense that the FYP module provided participants, no matter the background, with scenarios (in this case a presentation) that required them to accrue or discover skills. These were skills that they felt that they had not yet developed. Further, it may indicate a possible disregard of other areas where cultural capital may have been beneficial to them in previous years, e.g. essay writing and exam preparation. This may have impacted upon their experience on this aspect of the module, but not, necessarily, to the extent where it impacted upon their marks.

Barriers that may have affected progress on the module

Participants in this study were not homogenous; they were from different class backgrounds, gender, and ethnicities. This meant that they may have faced different, if any, barriers that affected their experiences of the FYP module.

All participants worked part-time alongside their studies, which proved to be a mild hindrance. However, all participants felt that they were so used to part-time work at this stage in their studies, that it did not affect their experiences of the module greatly:

> I've worked throughout high school, college and university so I think I'm kind of used to it now. Like I've got the skills of organising my time properly. (Bell, white British, female, working-class)

This finding, whilst from a single participant, appears to contradict Li's (2013) research which found that rural students felt they were restricted from capital generating activities due to their part-time job. This consequently affected their higher education experience. However, as this study did not do a geographical comparison, this did not apply to either the working-class (most comparable to the rural students) or middle-class students in this instance.

The most interesting themes that emerged from some of the participants came with the follow-up question, 'Finally, do you feel other students may be better or worse equipped to succeed in this module than yourself':

> Probably yeah, depending on where you come from. Like if your parents have got the money to see you through without having to work and stuff you've got plenty more time. Maybe throughout like school and stuff you had tutors or whatever and you've still got connections now… and like if their parents have got a degree then they'll know how to write essays and they'll know like what to expect. Whereas if I turn round to my mum or dad and asked them about an essay or writing they'd have no clue. (Bell, white British, female, working-class)

It is clear here that Bell feels that her working-class habitus is a barrier, in numerous ways, when it comes to succeeding on this module. She mentions her parent's lack of academic knowledge, in comparison to that of students whose parents have a degree, and who may have done a similar module themselves, and thus have cultural capital in this area. Similar findings are reported by Sullivan (2001), whereby parents have cultural capital abilities, specifically related to knowledge and understanding of institutional expectations. Their knowledge transfer could ultimately benefit their child.

Bell also mentions that she perceives herself as quite disadvantaged due to her working-class habitus and the lack of cultural capital. These are aspects of the concepts of Bourdieu (1986) which, while not the primary focus of this study, highlight that certain aspects of economic and social capital are features of a class that Bell is not privy to. Concepts such as economic and social capital allow access to private tutors, which in turn allows for contacts who, again, may provide knowledge that is associated with cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This may have

been beneficial to Bell on aspects of the FYP module. Bell's feelings and perception of herself as quite disadvantaged, due to her working-class habitus and the lack of cultural capital are clear, but this is not consistent with others from a working-class background:

> I know that I'm not as intelligent (as others), I don't think, cos I've never achieved an 'A' at school. I'm not the smartest one in a class basically, but I tend to work the hardest, so I think that's been one of the most erm ways I've been able to achieve quite well at university. (Ahmed, British Pakistani, male, working-class)

Ahmed appears to accept that he may not be best equipped to succeed on this module in comparison to others. Initially, this may be due to his working-class habitus and the fact that it does not provide him with confidence in the educational field. However, he feels that attributes, such as hard work, can help overcome these dispositions. It could also be argued that this may link back to the ethnic capital his mum tried to instil in him during his early years. Within the educational field, a hard work ethic and a drive towards academic achievement (Shah et al, 2010) was essential to break from the dispositions associated with a working-class habitus, as seen with Bell. Ahmed on the other hand, believes he is no worse equipped to succeed on this module than other students, who may have a middle-class habitus, despite the fact that being middle-class has been perceived to be more conducive to meeting the expectations of educational institutions (Thomas, 2002). Ahmed says:

> Yeah, I think a hard work ethic is one of the main reasons why I'm doing quite well and I'm able to do a lot of stuff outside of university as well. (Ahmed, British Pakistani, male, working-class)

A lack of ethnic capital may be the reason as to why Bell feels less equipped than Ahmed. She has not been socialised to develop these dispositions and cultural capital to alleviate the pressures of the working-class habitus she was born into. However, as noted earlier, habitus is not all determining; it can adapt and transform to the environment it is in (Bourdieu, 1992).

As seen with Bell who managed to develop the skills related to organisation and time management through her external work. Further, key attributes were also developed e.g. meeting the deadlines for

various sections of her dissertation, therefore her lack of cultural capital did not affect Bell's experience and success on the module.

Conclusion

This research sought 'To explore if Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'Habitus' and 'Cultural Capital' differently impact Huddersfield University students participating in the 'Final Year Project Module for the Social Sciences (FYP)'.

A critical review of the literature about habitus and cultural capital found that it impacted the way in which participants understood academic jargon and discourses within the literature they were reading. Bell, who had a working-class habitus, felt that cultural capital generating activities such as reading were only relevant when done in conjunction with university work. She did not undertake such an activity otherwise. Bell felt that she struggled with the academic language found in the literature and that this was a hindrance when producing her literature review. Whereas Jason, who had a middle-class habitus, believed that cultural capital generating activities, such as reading were not only significant when doing university work, but also in his free time – he thought of himself an avid reader regardless. Jason believed his understanding of the academic language was strong due to his advanced vocabulary, which may have been derived from his middle-class habitus. Thus, his attitudes towards cultural capital generating activities, such as reading, benefitted him when undertaking his literature review.

Looking at FYP meetings, it can be argued that the non-dominant cultural capital of Ahmed and Bell, derived from their working-class habitus, provided them with dispositions that make them feel as if their ideas are and knowledge may be 'stupid' (Carter, 2003). This improved over time, showing how Bourdieu's concept of habitus is not all determining. The initial lack of confidence about their own ideas was contrasted by Zara, also from a working-class background, whose non-dominant cultural capital was negated by the positive impact her FYP supervisor provided. This provided her with the confidence to express her ideas within these meetings. Therefore, non-dominant cultural capital did not impact all participants. It could also be suggested that having a middle-class habitus further benefitted participants who had a positive student-supervisor relationship, as seen with Jason.

In the case of FYP presentations, this provided the challenge of developing new skills, whereby the cultural capital that had been previously held by

participants was no longer useful to them. In some instances this was 'time-sensitive' - it was not relevant to the context of the presentation (Burke, 2016). This applied to Bell, who possessed a working-class habitus, and James, a middle-class habitus. This contrasted with previous research (Carter, 2003; Reay, 1998) which found that the middle-class were able to generate the necessary cultural capital to fit the institutional needs. Ultimately this point suggests that Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) concepts can vary in affect depending on the individual and scenario. In this case, it did not affect either participant.

Looking at the barriers that may impact some of the participants' success on the FYP module, it was clear that habitus was restrictive for some more than others. Bell, a working-class habitus, felt that her family's lack of academic knowledge and experience may be a hindrance to her success. They were unable to provide her with the cultural capital (institutional expectations and valued ways of knowing) that Sullivan (2001) described, and that may have been beneficial to this module. Ahmed, however, did not feel as restricted by his working-class habitus, due to the ethnic capital he inherited from his mum. His values - focus upon academic success and a hard work ethic - were promoted (Shah et al, 2010), and he felt that this aided his previous academic success at university. Consequently, this shows that having a working-class habitus is not restrictive to all.

So, it can be said that Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) concepts of habitus and cultural capital impacted students participating on the FYP module differently. The impact of habitus and cultural capital were primarily determined by social class but were mitigated by either ethnic capital (restrictions to success on the FYP), student-supervisor relationship (FYP meetings) or new skills the module introduced (FYP presentation). This illustrates why Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) concepts may not be determinist and therefore different for each individual.

These findings are also reflective of the critical realist perspective when referring to structure and agency, "People choose what they do, but they make their choices from a structurally and culturally generated range of options – which they did not choose" (Carter & New, 2005, p. 6). The structural options in this study, habitus and cultural capital, did impact the ways in which individuals experienced aspects of this module, e.g. Bell during her literature review, but could also be mitigated by the agency of participants in varying forms, e.g. Ahmed's ethnic capital and Zara's positive student-supervisor relationship. This suggests that the structural options an individual inherits are not all determining and can be alleviated through forms of agency.

Study limitations

In terms of study limitations, it could be argued that as this was a small sample and was therefore not representative of the student population undertaking this module. However, this is often the case in qualitative research that focuses on collecting in-depth data (David & Sutton, 2011).

In retrospect, it may have been beneficial to incorporate a self-complete questionnaire prior to semi-structured interviews, as this would have provided further information about social class, gender and ethnicity (O'Leary, 2017), meaning the sample could have been more representative, e.g. greater inclusion of middle-class females may have provided differing experiences to middle-class male participants.

Recommendations

The findings presented in this study may be utilised by staff or others associated with the delivery of a final year project module. Importantly, this study highlights areas which may help improve student experiences in the future, e.g. developing a positive student-supervisor relationship and including more presentation preparation workshops.

Acknowledgements

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