Symbolic Violence, Locality and Social Class: the educational and career aspirations of 10-11-year-old boys in Belfast

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ABSTRACT This article is based upon a comparative, ethnographic case study of two groups of 10-11-year-old boys – one middle-class, the other working-class – living in Belfast. Drawing upon Bourdieu's related concepts of symbolic violence and habitus, it shows how locality can help to explain the very different educational and career aspirations found between these two groups of boys. While the local area in which the middle-class boys live had very little significance to them, the working-class boys' locality played a central role in mediating their experiences and perspectives. The article shows how it tended to represent the parameters of the boys' world-view and thus to significantly limit their educational and future career aspirations. The article concludes by arguing that there is a need to move beyond simplistic notions of power based upon crude freedom/constraint dualisms and, instead, to explore the complex ways in which broader processes and structures of inequality are experienced and tend to reach into and affect the very psyche of individuals.

Introduction

For Bourdieu, the notion of symbolic violence is central to understanding how social class inequalities are reproduced (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990). In essence it represents the way in which people play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalisation and acceptance of those ideas and structures that tend to subordinate them. It is an act of *violence* precisely because it leads to the constraint and subordination of individuals, but it is also *symbolic* in the sense that this is achieved indirectly and without overt and explicit acts of force or coercion. Unfortunately, the concept has tended to be

misrepresented by some who have failed to appreciate the complexity of Bourdieu's analysis. Jenkins (1992, p. 104), for example, chooses to define symbolic violence as 'the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate' and then proceeds to dismiss such a concept as too deterministic. What such a definition and subsequent criticism fails to recognise is Bourdieu's attempt to move beyond the crude dualisms of freedom/determinism and choice/constraint. Rather, as Bourdieu argues, the concept of symbolic violence:

> presupposes on the part of those who are subjected to it a form of complicity which is neither a passive submission to an external constraint nor a free adherence to values ... The specificity of symbolic violence resides precisely in the fact that it requires of the person who undergoes it an attitude which defies the ordinary alternative between freedom and constraint. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 168)

In this sense, the concept of symbolic violence is very different from conceptions of the working class being purposely manipulated in order to manufacture their consent, as evident, for example, in Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony. Rather, it is a much more organic process whereby individuals, through their experience of the social world and of the various institutions and structures that compose it, come progressively to develop taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving that reflect this lived experience. As Bourdieu (1988, p. 21) explains:

> Legitimation of the social order is not the product of a deliberate and purposive action of propaganda or symbolic imposition; it results, rather, from the fact that agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures and which tend to picture the world as evident.

Bourdieu uses the related notion of habitus to illustrate how individuals come to internalise these particular forms of perception and appreciation, and thus how symbolic violence is played out in practice. In this sense habitus can be understood as a set of predispositions individuals develop to approaching, thinking about and acting upon their social worlds that they have come to learn over time as a consequence of their experiences. The more that they employ such thoughts and actions and find them to 'work' within particular social contexts, the more they become a durable and 'habitualised' part of their subconscious.

The increasing influence of the work of social geographers over recent years and the emphasis they have given to the importance of place and space in the construction of people's identities (see, for example, Keith & Pile, 1993; Rose, 1993; Massey, 1984, 1994) has provided

opportunities for developing these concepts of symbolic violence and the habitus further. This is particularly evident in terms of the very different meanings and significance that tend to be attached to locality for working-class and middle-class people. For some working-class families, the lack of opportunities and resources to travel frequently beyond the confines of their local area provides the mechanism by which locality can take on a particular social and emotional significance (see Watt & Stenson, 1998; Reay, 2000; Connolly & Neill, 2001). Moreover, factors such as 'race' (Westwood, 1990; Keith, 1995; Taylor et al, 1996; Webster, 1996) and gender (Massey, 1994, 1995; Saunderson, 1997) tend to contribute further to this enforced localised existence as territory becomes constructed in relation to a local mosaic of 'safe' and 'no-go' areas. For those within particular locales this can lead to the development of stronger shared identities through the construction of what Cohen (1988) has termed the 'nationalism of the neighbourhood', which can at times transcend other differences (see also Hewitt, 1986; Jones, 1988; Wulff, 1995; Back, 1996; Watt & Stenson, 1998).

For others, this construction of, and attachment to, a specific locality is not just an enforced response to broader structures and processes of alienation but can be more strategic. Indeed, Callaghan (1992, p. 31) has argued that a strong emphasis on localism can sometimes be seen as a 'working class strategy for coping with structural change' (see also Jenkins, 1983; Leonard, 1997). As Leonard (1997, p. 113) has argued in her study of women in working-class communities in Belfast, 'high levels of unemployment combined with the shared precarious economic situation of the majority of inhabitants compelled residents to create and maintain supportive relationships within the locality'.

The significance of locality for particular working-class communities can therefore be at the same time an enforced reality and also a more strategic response to broader social structures and inequalities. Moreover, it tends to be a specifically working-class phenomenon. Comparative studies of children's experiences and friendship patterns have shown that while working-class children tend to develop relationships that are situational, middle-class children have the opportunities and resources to forge relationships that have little regard for place or locality and are, instead, based upon shared tasks and interests (Allan, 1979; Ward, 1990; Reay, 2000).

Ultimately, the significance of locality for the working-class habitus can provide the mechanism through which particular forms of symbolic violence occur. This 'local view of the world', as Jenkins (1983, p. 130) has argued, tends to limit children's and young people's aspirations and leads to a situation where 'parents, siblings and the peer group are a font of conventional wisdom about the world'. Indeed, as Wilson (1987) has argued, in the absence of other opportunities, the 'street' can become an

alternative (if not the only) means of success. The insularity and alienation that this tends to reinforce, and thus the symbolic violence that consequently arises, is summed up well by the comments of a youth worker in the USA: 'They think their neighbourhood is their entire world. It cripples them and it defines their sense of self' (quoted in McLaughlin, 1993, p. 55).

Overall, this increasing emphasis on locality has also extended, in recent years, to include a focus on children. A growing number of important studies have emerged that have begun to explore children's use of and identification with place (see, for example, Valentine, 1996, 1997; Ellis, 1999; O'Brien et al, 2000) and, within this, a few studies have focused more specifically on working-class children's attachments to locality, as mentioned above (Watt & Stenson, 1998; Reay, 2000; Reay & Lucey, 2000; Connolly & Neill, 2001). As yet, however, while some research has touched on the importance of locality in working-class parents' choice of schools (Gewirtz et al, 1995; Reay & Ball, 1997), very little work has focused on the impact of locality on children's attitudes towards education.

This, then, provides the focus for the present article. Specifically, we aim to use insights gained to date from research on place and locality, and apply them more directly to the concept of symbolic violence in the context of children's experiences and perspectives on schooling. We aim to do this through a comparative case study constrasting the experiences and educational and career aspirations of a group of 10-11-year-old working-class and middle-class boys in Belfast.[1] The boys in the study went to two schools: one (Helmsford Primary School) a Catholic school in a leafy, suburban middle-class area in Belfast, the other (St Peter's Primary School) a Catholic school in a deprived, working-class area that has experienced high levels of sectarian (largely Catholic/Protestant) tension and paramilitary violence over the years. The names of the two schools and all of the children, as well as all names of streets and other areas, have been changed to maintain anonymity. Also, non-significant details relating to the two areas have been altered to further disguise the location of the two schools.

All the boys in the respective Year 6 (P7) classes were interviewed, comprising 11 boys from Helmsford and 7 from St Peter's primary schools. A series of relatively unstructured interviews was conducted with small friendship groups of boys from both classes over a period of three to four months, when one of us (Julie Healy) spent an average of two days per week in each class. The interviews themselves were conducted in separate rooms in the school away from the main class. More detailed reflections upon the methodology underpinning this approach can be found elsewhere (see Connolly, 1996, 1997).

Through this case study we want to use the experiences and perspectives of the working-class and middle-class boys to show how

notions of locality appear to be a specifically working-class phenomenon and how symbolic violence therefore manifests itself, in part, through the particular constructions of and attachments to locality found among the working-class boys. In doing so, we also hope to demonstrate how the concept of symbolic violence can be used in a way that avoids charges of crude determinism and, instead, helps to illuminate the complex ways in which social class tends to reproduce educational inequalities.

Social Class and Constructions of Locality

Before examining the differences in the boys' experiences of and attitudes towards education, it is important to put these in context in relation to the different concepts of locality for the working-class and middle-class boys. It is worth looking briefly at each of these in turn.

Working-class Boys' Attachments to Locality

The working-class boys live in a segregated area where 94% of the population is Catholic. The area has experienced high levels of sectarian violence over the years, including numerous conflicts between local paramilitary groups (notably the Irish Republican Army [IRA]) and the security forces (i.e. the British Army and the local police force, which, at the time of the fieldwork, was called the Royal Ulster Constabulary).

The area is spatially and visually distinctive and tends to clearly reflect the strongly republican character of the local community.[2] Spatially, it is separated from a neighbouring Protestant and loyalist housing estate by a 5-metre-high wall (commonly referred to as a 'peace line') and, visually, the area is punctuated with political wall murals, graffiti, IRA flags and a shrine built to honour IRA volunteers from the area who have been killed over the years while on 'active service'.

More generally, negative and pathologising discourses exist similar to those found in other research on inner-city housing estates (see Reay, 2000; Reay & Lucey, 2000) that have constructed the area as being socially and economically deprived and run-down. Certainly the local community suffers from high levels of unemployment and poor health. In addition, 'joy-riding' and other anti-social activities are common and sectarian tensions continue to run high between the two communities situated astride the peace line. Physically, the area is dominated by dense rows of housing with few green spaces and badly littered streets and walkways. The only green space available for the children to play in ('the field') is situated at the end of the peace line and thus provides the venue for frequent clashes and stone-throwing between rival gangs of Protestant and Catholic children from the two communities.

For many of the boys interviewed, therefore, their experience was one of feeling under seige. As two of the boys in the study, Declan and

Thomas, explain, there is a constant fear of attack, a fear exacerbated by the lack of trust in the 'peelers' (local police), who are commonly believed by many within this local community to be a partisan, Protestant force:

> *Declan*: They just come down and shoot you through the windies [windows].
> *Thomas*: It's easier for them to get guns so it is.
> *Declan*: Prods [a derogatory term for Protestants] always make the guns so they do. Nearly all the Orange [Protestant] people make the guns … because the peelers are Protestants and all peelers are like Orange people and all Protestants make their guns.

This experience, in turn, leads many of the boys to develop a strong sense of territory and to construct themselves as protectors of that space. Most of the boys interviewed were involved, to one degree or another, in the policing of the interface area around the field and in the almost ritualised conflicts and stone-throwing that occurred there. It is in this construction of an identity, built upon notions of the defence of territory and the aspects of strength and physicality that were associated with this, that the boys tended to identify with the IRA and see them as a legitimate force. For these boys, the IRA was regarded as the main defenders of their community over the last thirty years. The boys' knowledge of local members of the 'Provies' (Provisional IRA) and the social capital gained from this, and particularly their associations with them, is clearly evident in the discussion below:

> *Thomas*: There are too many Provies up there, there's Brian Smith and there's Tommy and there's Danny.
> *Interviewer*: And how do you know the names of them?
> *Thomas*: 'Cos you do.
> *Interviewer*: But how do you know?
> *Paul*: Big fat Gary.
> *Interviewer*: Do they go round telling people or …
> *Paul*: You just know them! [*said impatiently*]
> […]
> *Thomas*: My uncle … was in the IRA.

Interestingly, some of the boys' complaints regarding the fact that there are 'too many Provies' around reflects the fact that the IRA, in its 'policing role', also periodically regulates the behaviour and activities of the boys as well. In this sense the IRA would usually become involved either in response to complaints from local residents regarding the persistent 'anti-social behaviour' of particular boys or when a boys' conflict with rival gangs from across the peace line threatens to escalate out of control.

All of this tended to reinforce the boys' localised existence and to act as a deterrent to venturing out of their own area. It is interesting to note that, of all the discussions with the boys, not once did they talk about visiting other areas on their own or even going into the city centre. It may be precisely because they have developed particular masculine identities built upon defence of their territory that this makes them feel more vulnerable and at risk should they leave the safety of their own area. This sense of threat that the boys felt is evident in the following incident, discussed by Michael and Liam, where the minibus they were travelling in had to stop on the notoriously Protestant and loyalist Northfield Road in Belfast:

> *Michael*: We drove past [the Northfield Road] with [the youth club]. We were driving past the Northfield and Pat had a flattened tyre and we had to get out and fix it.
> *Interviewer*: Were you not worried?
> *Liam*: Yeah I was geeking [hiding from] them like! Sitting in the car like that there [pretends to hide]. Do you know Tommy lives up [near us]? … Well him and his daddy were down and he had a mate and he was blocked [drunk] and they were in the back and they were in the Northfield and they had a busted tyre and this man walked past said: 'Do you need help there?' and he said 'Aye!' So he said to him, 'Could you get me a new tyre' or something. 'No I can't do that, but I can try to get you a couple of wheels like' so they pushed him down onto the Northfield Road and I don't know about where he told us anyway, the man that was blocked waked up and said where are we now and our Tommy said we were at the Northfield Road and the Northfields pushed us down and he didn't believe us and all.

Middle-class Boys and Locality

In contrast to the centrality of locality to the experiences and identities of the working-class boys discussed above, locality was much less significant to many of the middle-class boys interviewed. The school these boys attend – Helmsford Primary School – is situated in one of the most prestigious and sought-after areas in Belfast. The vast majority of houses are semi-detached or detached and set back from the road with ample surrounding gardens. Most of the streets are lined on both sides with trees. The school has an excellent reputation and is significantly over-subscribed. The children come from many different parts of Belfast and most are driven to and from school. Some make a 30-mile round trip each day to attend the school.

Although a small minority of children from a local (nationalist) working-class estate attend the school, the vast majority are from professional, middle-class families. With the resources and opportunities this brings, many of the boys talked about a number of different activities

they were involved in, both through the school in the form of a variety of extra-curricular activities and outside school with their families and friends. Many of these activities did not take place where the boys lived, but involved drives across the city. More generally, and in contrast to the working-class boys interviewed, it was rare for the extended families of these boys to live in the same area as themselves. It was also common for their immediate family to have travelled and lived outside Belfast at some point. This is evident in the discussion below:

> *John*: My mum and dad used to work in London and they made a bucket load of money. I mean my mum, I don't know exactly what she did, but they made like, then about 200 pounds a day, and my dad was getting two thousands a week. And they only lived in a flat!
> *Interviewer*: London is so expensive to live in.
> *John*: Yeah big time.
> *Gerry*: My mum used to work in Scotland and before that she used to work in a massive co-op like Sainsburys. They lived in Scotland for a while.
> [...]
> *John*: My relatives are like half and half, half over in England and half here. But not in Belfast, only one or two most of them are in Derry. The other are in Kent and London.

Overall it is not surprising, given the broader social structures and networks of these middle-class boys, that locality did not have the same significance for them. Their local area was simply where they lived and was little more than a place where they were based. As can be seen from the following conversation, the local area where these boys lived did not appear to be a salient feature of their general experiences or identities. Rather it was simply a nondescript and 'boring' place, with its value being judged partly in terms of how near it is to other areas that the boys wish to visit:

> *Interviewer*: So do you like where you live?
> *John*: Yeah.
> *Gerry*: My street is pretty boring, it's quiet and there aren't that many kids on it.
> *John*: Yeah mine is a bit boring, there's some teenagers but mostly old people.
> [...]
> *John*: I do like where I am if there was a lot more kids it would be better. I like being close to town and close to the park, a skating park would be nice.
> *Gerry*: Yeah we just need a skate park.
> *Steve*: But some people still go out rioting ... like in Southfield.
> *Interviewer*: What about where you live, would people do that?
> *Steve*: No it's really quiet were I live/

Luke: /There's no rioting where I live!

These comments are interesting for two reasons. First, it can be seen that the physical environment – which is much less densely housed than the working-class estate discussed earlier – means that there are few other children living sufficiently locally to develop strong friendships and social networks in their surrounding streets. Moreover, and as already mentioned, 'playing in the street' was not a common practice for these boys, as they would instead either play in their homes or gardens or would travel elsewhere to play with their friends (e.g. the leisure centre, the park or the city centre). As Allan (1979) found, friendships were therefore not based on locality for these middle-class boys, but were rather developed out of shared activities or tasks. The boys thus had very little knowledge of or interest in their immediate area, considering it simply 'quiet' and 'boring'.

Second, the boys were obviously aware of those (working-class) areas that had a reputation for trouble and sectarian violence. While travelling around the city was a taken-for-granted part of their lives, they would make a point of simply avoiding certain areas. This is evident in the discussion below where the boys had begun talking about the Matthews Road, a local Protestant working-class area near the school:

Interviewer: So is the Matthews Road a Protestant area?
John: Yeah.
Interviewer: So would you have any friends from there?
All: NO!
Rod: [*very definitely*] No!
Interviewer: Why not?
Rod: I just don't go down there.
John: I try and avoid those kinds of areas. The nearest I would to go to there is when I go to the Leisure Centre.

This avoidance of such areas is part of a much broader discourse of derision that these boys engaged in relating to working-class areas, whether Catholic or Protestant. The negative and pathologising accounts that the boys gave are similar to those associated with other inner-city estates, as described by Reay & Lucey (2000), and are illustrated in the comments below. Here, the boys are talking about a notorious working-class Protestant area on the other side of the city:

Luke: It's dangerous.
Interviewer: Why?
Luke No matter what they have it's ruined.
[*Others laugh*]
Steve: It's crazy … [they've painted] red, white and blue and UVF [Ulster Volunteer Force] everywhere.
[*All talk at once*]

Interviewer: So why do people up here not do that?
Steve: Well maybe we will do that during the summer!
Interviewer: Would you do that?
Steve: Well if they're doing all that/
Luke: /I know ... well I think people up here are all more politer than [over there] and that's what makes the difference.
Interviewer: When you say 'more politer' what do you mean?
Steve: Like better/
Luke: /Like more sensible/
Steve: /We know how to look after things.

Such opinions were also accompanied by derogatory views of the boys who lived in these areas, as can be seen from the following comments, beginning with Mark describing a boy he saw recently:

Mark: Then he had some elastic thing around his head and he looked like a thug!
Brian: A mugger! [*laughter*]
[...]
John: They just act tough.
Interviewer: Why do you think they act tough?
John: It's just the way they be/
Gerry: /It's to make them look cool.
John: Yeah ... and they wear all these necklaces and big rings, golden ones and all.
Gerry: Yeah rings!
John: The only rings that I would like are the ones in Fresh Garbage [a popular alternative shop in the city centre].

Educational and Career Aspirations

The different perceptions of locality found between the working-class and middle-class boys, as outlined above, provides the context within which the boys' differing attitudes towards education and future careers can be understood. Before briefly outlining these differences it should be noted that at the time of writing Northern Ireland continues to operate a selective post-primary school system. Children in their final year of primary school have the opportunity to sit what is called the 'Transfer Test' (and is also commonly known as the '11+'). Those who achieve the requisite grade in this test then transfer to a grammar school, while those who do not usually transfer to the local secondary school the following year. The interviews with both groups of boys took place not long after their year-groups had been given the opportunity to sit the 11+ exam.

Working-class Boys' Educational and Career Aspirations

None of the working-class boys had even been entered for the 11+ exam. Indeed, only a small handful of children in the school were entered. The approach of the school appeared to be that the children did not have the ability to pass the exam, and thus it would not only be pointless to enter them for it, but it would also risk denting their self-confidence. This is evident from the comments of the boys' class teacher:

> As a Year 7 teacher I sat down individually with each pupil and asked them which school they hoped to go to. They all said the local secondary schools – All Saints' [Catholic boys' school] and St Benedict's [Catholic girls' school]. With the exception of Kathleen and Shauna who wanted to try for Our Lady's [the local girls' Catholic grammar school]. As residents of this area or parish, St Benedict's could not refuse a place to any of the girls – no way – they had a place there as of right. Same for the boys in All Saints'. There was no reason for them to put themselves through the 11+, it would have been a pointless exercise. Realistically, they were not going to pass it and they wanted to go to the secondary schools anyway. We discussed this and the majority decided not to take the exam.

It would seem, therefore, that the significance of locality in relation to the boys' experiences and identities meant that the prospect of attending a grammar school outside their area was just not a realistic part of their world-view or habitus. Rather, the emphasis for these boys was simply to follow their older siblings and/or friends to the local secondary school. This was clear from the interviews; the boys seemed resigned to the fact that they would be transferring to the local secondary school. Indeed, not once during interviews did any of the boys mention the 11+. Moreover, the imminent transfer to secondary school was only discussed once, as illustrated in the transcript below. The boys were in a rather sombre mood, having just discussed the death of a friend of theirs caused by solvent abuse. Thomas tries to change the subject:

> *Thomas*: Something happy this time.
> *James*: Aye I know.
> *Paul*: I can't wait 'til I go to All Saints' to meet the teachers and thing. If I get a bad teacher I'll change.
> *Interviewer*: But you'll get a whole lot of different teachers. It'll be very different – here you just have Mr Clarke all day.
> *Thomas*: Miss, see when you leave this school, you get your T-shirt and all and everybody gives you a mention [i.e. writes on your shirt].
> *Declan*: All the wee boys out of this class are going to All Saints'.
> *James*: Aye, 'cos you don't want to be on your own.
> *Thomas*: I want Liam and Paul to be in my class.

> *Paul*: I want him [James] and Liam to be in my class. Liam has been in my class every year.
> *Interviewer*: It will strange for you then next year.
> *James*: I know it'll be strange going into the class like.

Generally, therefore, school appeared to be simply a place that these boys attended. The importance of education and a commitment to academic success were not significant or important to their own lives. Rather, given the overriding influence of the local area and the way in which it set the parameters for their world-view, their future aspirations were limited to what they knew and had experience of: namely, the types of work that their older brothers, fathers and uncles did, most of which required little, if any, formal qualifications. This is evident in the following discussion among the boys regarding their future career aspirations:

> *Declan*: I'd like to be a footballer or sell cars.
> [...]
> *Thomas*: I'd like to be a security man or something – my daddy is a security man.
> *Interviewer*: Does he like it?
> *Thomas*: Yeah.
> *Declan*: [...] I'd like to be a joiner as well.
> *Thomas*: I'd love to be a bouncer, my brother's a bouncer.
> *Paul*: You're too small and all for it.
> *Interviewer*: You don't know he could end up being 6 foot something.
> *Thomas*: My brother's 6 foot 3.
> *Paul*: See my uncle he's 6 foot 10 or something.
> *Thomas*: You said he was 6 foot 3!
> *Paul*: No, this is my other uncle he lives in England and he's a bouncer – he's built so he is.

Middle-class Boys' Educational and Career Aspirations

In contrast, the middle-class boys demonstrated a significant amount of interest and concern in the 11+ and their impending transfer. This was no doubt partly a consequence of the fact that all of the boys had been entered for and had sat the 11+ exam. Moreover, and as the following discussion demonstrates, the boys did not share any sense of inevitability regarding which school they were going to transfer to. Not only were their minds set on attending a grammar school, but they were also keen to distinguish between the different grammar schools available:

> *Jonathan*: Oh and I got a B1 in my 11+.
> *Interviewer*: Congratulations that's great!
> *Steve*: I got an A.
> *Gerry*: I want to go to St Stephen's or Bartholomew's or Everington College, I don't know yet.

Luke: I'm going to go to St Batholomew's Grammar School or Everington.
Interviewer: Good stuff … why Everington?
Gerry: They have a Golf Club.
[…]
Gerry: There was more people got more A's in the other class.
Interviewer: Just a few more.
Luke: Who got an A in there? Emer, Polly, Gavin, Paul/
Gerry: /No Paul didn't!
Luke: Andrew only got a D … I thought Sarah would have got a B but she got an A.

The concerns that the boys had about attending the right grammar school and the knowledge they had of them shows how working-class and middle-class children adopt similar approaches to school choice as their parents. There is evidence to suggest that the distinction found by Gewirtz et al (1995), between middle-class 'Privileged/Skilled Choosers' and 'Disconnected' working-class parents, is similar to what we have found here. Indeed, just as the working-class boys had developed a habitus based on the inevitability of transferring to the local secondary school, these middle-class boys had developed an equally strong habitus based upon choice and the inevitability of being required to select the most prestigious and/or appropriate grammar school. In fact, success in education was so much a part of the habitus of these boys that, even at this age, none of them was considering leaving school at 16. As can be seen from the discussion below, some were not even aware that this was an option:

Mark: Well I'll stay on at school I mean I don't want to leave when I'm 17 or what age is it?
Interviewer: You can leave on your 16th birthday/
Luke: /I want to go to university after I've been to secondary school.
Kyle: [*surprised*] Why, can you just leave?
Interviewer: Because it's not compulsory after that, you can leave if you want to.
Gerry: And not go into 6th form?

It was clear from the interviews that the boys' discussion of grammar schools and the taken-for-granted belief that they could choose between schools situated all over the city tended to reflect their general routine experience of travelling around the city and, thus, the lack of any attachment to a particular locality. Also, the many different social and recreational activities that they had the opportunity to engage in significantly increased the diversity of their future career aspirations. As the following discussion illustrates, these boys were significantly involved, even at this stage, in thinking about and planning their futures:

Brian: I want to be a vet.
Mark: Do you ... I used to want to be a vet.
Sean: I want to be a psychiatrist.
[...]
Mark: If I wasn't into sport I think I'd be a designer.
Sean: Or a games tester that would be cool [*laughter*].
Mark: Or design games.
Brian: Or if I don't become a vet I would like to be a food critic because you get free food [*laughter*].
Mark: Oh no we'd have to read about you in the paper, reviewing somewhere like a chocolate factory [*laughter*].
Sean: It would be 'Brian says' ...
[...]
Brian: I know I just jump onto the sofa when I get home ... Do you know if I study to be a vet it will take seven years which means I will have been at school for 21 years ... I won't be out of college until I'm 25.
[...]
Interviewer: What university would you like to go to Brian, do you think you'll stay in Northern Ireland?
Brian: Well I have to leave because no university here does Veterinary Science so I'll go to either UCD [University College Dublin] or Cork.
[...]
Mark: I'll probably go to England or maybe Edinburgh University.
Sean: Yes so out of the 21 hundred universities in England which one will you pick?
Mark: Erm . ...
Sean: Somewhere near the sea so then I could go scuba diving.
Mark: Yeah cool.
Sean: Sure you can leave school when you're 16?
Interviewer: That's right.
Brian: But that's so stupid because you won't really get a good job or anything because you don't have any qualifications.
Mark: I'd like to experience travelling the whole world.

Conclusions

This comparative case study, although necessarily brief, outlines vividly the symbolic violence that is experienced by the working-class boys. Through the internalisation of the social structures and processes of inequality that impinge directly on their lives, they have come to develop a world-view (habitus) that contributes to the reproduction of their subordinate position. Both groups of boys have generated and absorbed a distinct class habitus reflective of their differing social positions. The case study illustrates clearly how, as Bourdieu (1988, p. 21) was quoted

earlier as arguing, symbolic violence reflects the fact that 'agents apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out of these very structures'. The objective structures for the middle-class boys are based upon the presence of resources and opportunity. Their habitus is grounded upon a taken-for-granted sense of freedom and choice, both in terms of the activities they engage in and also their movement around and use of the city (and beyond). Within this schema, education is a fundamental prerequisite for future entry into a particular, chosen profession. The fact that these boys may have to travel across the city to attend a grammar school, or move out of Northern Ireland to attend the 'right' university, is little more than an extension of their general approach to life. Not surprisingly, locality has very little meaning or salience in their social worlds.

For the working-class boys, however, the objective structures than impinge upon their lives are very different. They are ones of disadvantage and exclusion. Through lack of economic opportunity, they are effectively prevented from routinely venturing out of their local areas. Moreover, the particular local mosaic of ethnic division and conflict evident in Belfast renders it dangerous to do so. These boys are, therefore, forced to live and physically defend a localised existence. Their habitus is, thus, all too often dominated by a strong sense of locality and a sense that there is very little for them beyond that. Education has little meaning and school is reduced to a ritual of attendance. Their future aspirations are, therefore, restricted to what they know: the insecure, manual work of their older brothers, fathers and uncles. These are, in essence, the 'structures of perception and appreciation' that emanate from the objective structures that the boys are located in and which they are inevitably coming to internalise.

As touched upon earlier, although Belfast is in many ways unique given its history of sectarian conflict, these general processes of locality and the tendency for particular working-class communities to be forced to live a localised existence are far from unique. The general insights gained from this case study may, therefore, be applicable to other working-class and/or minority ethnic communities, especially those that are geographically distinct.

Our concern in proposing symbolic violence for understanding, at least in part, how social class inequalities in education are reproduced, stems from our desire to highlight the complex nature of power and how it operates. As Bourdieu has been at pains to stress, we need to move beyond the simplistic dualisms of freedom and constraint that are based upon both a unidimensional notion of power and also objective, free-thinking and rational agents. We argue here the obvious point that a child's attitudes and perceptions, and more generally their outlook on life (i.e. their habitus), are ultimately a reflection of their social position and life experience. Where such positions and experiences are predicated

upon inequality, as in our current case study, then it is not surprising that children's attitudes and orientation towards education will differ.

Such a position should not be read in any way as 'blaming the victim', nor is it meant to imply that all middle-class and working-class boys adopt the same respective forms of class habitus. Much will depend upon the ways in which social class, gender and 'race'/ethnicity articulate within specific spatial contexts. Each individual has a slightly different biography which will mediate the specific forms of habitus that they develop. Rather, our main argument is that we need to develop a greater appreciation of how power and inequality are not just external phenomena but affect and reach into the very psyche of the individual. Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic violence and habitus provide one useful way of doing this.

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Notes

[1] It is worth clarifying two points concerning our choice of children. First, in terms of our focus on boys, we are mindful of the tendency in some classic studies of social class and education to exclude girls by using the experiences of boys to make generalizations about all working-class children. Our position is that such generalizations ignore the fact that social class is inherently gendered and racialised. With this in mind, any study of working-class children has to be grounded in an analysis of how social class articulates with gender, 'race'/ethnicity and other discourses, where appropriate. Such articulations are complex and, given the limits of space associated with an article such as this one, can be most effectively analysed through focused and detailed case studies. In this article, therefore, we have attempted to look at how gender, social class and ethnicity (in this case religion) articulate for working-class and middle-class Catholic boys. Elsewhere, we have tried to provide a more comparative analysis of working-class boys and girls (see Connolly & Neill, 2001), and we are currently attempting to publish a case study of working-class girls.

Second, in terms of social class, we are mindful of the difficulties in defining the term and the lack of clarity that often accompanies discussion of the 'working class' and 'middle class'. For our present purposes, we have based our distinction between working-class and middle-class children on the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) adopted in 2001 by the Office of National Statistics in the UK (ONS, 2002). The NS-SEC identifies eight principle social class categories and suggests

that these can, in turn, be meaningfully collapsed and 'ranked' into four main classifications: 'managerial and professional occupations', 'intermediate occupations', 'routine and manual occupations' and 'never worked and long-term unemployed'. Such classifications are based upon an individual's market and work situation and attempt to highlight the differences between people in terms of the resources they can attract in relation to their pay and other work-related benefits (i.e. their market situation) and also the degree of authority and control they exercise over their work environment (their work situation). We have based our own definitions on this classification system but have used the more common terms of 'middle class' for 'managerial and professional occupations' and 'working class' for 'routine and manual occupations' and 'never worked and long-term unemployed.' In our choice of middle-class and working-class children, we chose two schools with catchment areas that represented extreme versions of these two categories to facilitate our comparative method.

[2] Given the complexity of the situation in Northern Ireland it is worth briefly explaining a few terms here. Northern Ireland comprises two main groups: Protestants (the majority), who tend to see themselves as British, and Catholics, who tend to see themselves as Irish. Politically, most Protestants would be 'unionist' in that they want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, while most Catholics would be 'nationalist' in that they want the north and south of Ireland to be 're-united'. Both sides have militant, paramilitary factions that feel that it is legitimate to resort to violence to achieve or defend these aims. There are a number of paramilitary groupings on both sides. Those on the unionist side are referred to as 'loyalists', and the group mentioned by the boys in this article is the UDA (Ulster Defence Association). On the nationalist side they are referred to as 'republicans'; the group referred to by the boys is the IRA (Irish Republican Army).

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