'They Employ Cleaners to Do that': habitus in the primary classroom

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ABSTRACT *Pierre Bourdieu suggests that his concept of habitus should be seen as a method; a way of thinking about the social world which invites an understanding of everyday practices as constitutive of social differences. The appeal of habitus lies in its ability to uncover social inequalities in a way that keeps agency and structure simultaneously in focus. However, there are also problems in operationalising habitus, chiefly because of the indeterminacy of the concept. In order to overcome these difficulties I have outlined four key components of habitus and attempted to delineate the aspects of habitus as method that seem most relevant to primary classrooms. Finally, drawing on ethnographic data gathered over 15 months of participant observation in two primary classrooms, the article seeks to explore through the lens of habitus how differences of gender, 'race' and class are produced by children in primary classrooms. Although I make no claims for my own empirical work it does suggest that habitus as method has the potential to reveal the taken-for-granted inequalities embedded in everyday practices.*

Introduction

This article attempts to utilise Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a method for analysing peer group interaction in two urban primary schools. Milner in the inner London borough of Northton is predominantly working-class with a multi-ethnic intake. In the two Year five classes in which I conducted my research 95% of the children going on a school journey required necessitous grants. In contrast, Oak Park 3 miles to the north of Milner has a social composition which is largely white and middle-class. While the main focus of my research has been mothers' involvement in their children's education I also spent 15 months of participant observation in the two schools, focusing on peer group interaction and exploring the extent to which the habitus of the classroom reflected the habitus of the home. This investigation of social processes in the classroom has also been motivated by my desire to expand understandings of habitus to include the influences of 'race' and gender alongside those of social class. However, before I discuss my empirical work it is important to elucidate what Bourdieu means by habitus. From Bourdieu's own work four main aspects of habitus can be identified. Below, I outline

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these four themes and delineate how habitus can be utilised as a research tool before moving on to describe habitus in the primary classroom.

Habitus as Embodiment

Habitus is Bourdieu's attempt to overcome the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism, to reconcile agency and structure. Instead of working with what he considers to be a flawed conceptualisation, that of the 'active subject confronting society as if that society were an object constituted externally' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 190), Bourdieu has developed the concept of habitus to demonstrate the ways in which, not only is the body in the social world, but also, the ways in which the social world is in the body (Bourdieu, 1981).

> The habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 63)

Thus, one of the crucial features of habitus is that it is embodied, it is not composed solely of mental attitudes and perceptions. Bourdieu writes that it is expressed through durable ways 'of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 70).

For Bourdieu, then, key aspects of culture are embodied. This is a repeated theme in his work. He describes the dispositions that make up habitus as 'meaning-made-body' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 43). In his enormous empirical study of French society, there are many references to the ways in which different habitus result in different ways of talking, eating, walking and exercising. Indeed the way in which individuals treat their bodies 'reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 190). I envisage habitus as a deep, interior, epicentre containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any one individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds herself in, her external circumstances. However, within Bourdieu's theoretical framework she is also circumscribed by an internalised framework which makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable.

Habitus and Agency

Bourdieu describes his development of the concept of habitus as an attempt to overcome the latent determinism in structuralist theory (Bourdieu, 1985a). He views the concept as central to his aim of developing a theory of action:

> ...the notion of habitus aims at eliminating: finalism/mechanism, explanations by reason/explanation by causes, conscious/unconscious, rational and strategic calculation/mechanical submission to mechanical constraints etc. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 107)

It becomes apparent from the above quotation that Bourdieu has not only developed the concept as a critique of structuralism but also in response to utilitarian theories of human agency. He cites one of the privileges of the dominant as their ability to bypass rational calculation. All they need to do in order to attain the goals that best suit their interests is to follow their dispositions. These 'naturally' generate practices adjusted to the situation, producing 'natural distinction' (Bourdieu, 1990b). Although habitus has been criticised for being a mechanistic theory, which implies passivity, denies human agency and is ultimately deterministic (Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu, himself, stresses that habitus

does not determine outcome. Rather there is a dialectic interaction between a habitus and a field, the external circumstances in which an individual finds herself. While location in a field shapes the dispositions of habitus, to the extent that dispositions are the product of independent conditions they 'have an existence and efficacy of their own and can help to shape positions' (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 341).

Bourdieu states that habitus does not have a deterministic impact on individuals' behaviours. He writes in terms of the generation of a wide repertoire of possible actions, simultaneously enabling the individual to draw on transformative and constraining courses of action. However, the addendum in Bourdieu's work is always an emphasis on the constraints and demands which impose themselves on people. While the habitus allows for individual agency it also predisposes individuals towards certain ways of behaving:

> The habitus, as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted...this is because the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 77)

Despite this implicit tendency to behave in ways that are expected of 'people like us', for Bourdieu there are no explicit rules or principles which dictate behaviour, rather '*the habitus goes hand in hand with vagueness and indeterminacy*' (Bourdieu's own italics, 1990b, p. 77). The practical logic which defines habitus is not one of the predictable regularity of modes of behaviour, but instead 'that of vagueness, of the more-or-less, which defines one's ordinary relation to the world' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 78).

However, at other times, Bourdieu does point out that the operation of the habitus regularly excludes certain practices, those which are unfamiliar to the cultural groupings to which the individual belongs. Taking the working-class as an example, an individual will be far more likely to make a virtue out of necessity than attempt to achieve 'what is already denied' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54). Bourdieu views the dispositions, which make up habitus, as the products of opportunities and constraints framing the individual's earlier life experiences. They are:

> durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54)

As a result, the most improbable practices are rejected as unthinkable, but, concomitantly, only a particular range of possible practices is considered. Early on in the 'Logic of Practice' Bourdieu lambastes existentialists, such as Sartre for holding up an illusion of limitless choice. Choice is at the heart of habitus, which he likens to 'the art of inventing' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 55), but at the same time the choices inscribed in the habitus are very clearly limited.

Compilation of Collective and Individual Trajectories

It is difficult to decipher the extent to which the habitus of individuals in the same group converge. A person's individual history is: constitutive of habitus but so also is the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of. Thus for Bourdieu:

> the subject is not the instantaneous ego of a sort of singular cogito, but the individual trace of an entire collective history. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 91)

At times Bourdieu seems to be suggesting a degree of uniformity:

> The practices of the members of the same group or, in a differentiated society, the same class, are always more and better harmonised than the agents know or wish, because, as Leibniz again says, 'following only (his) own laws', each 'nonetheless agrees with the other'. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 59)

At other times, Bourdieu recognises differences and diversity between members of the same cultural grouping and writes in terms of the singularity of individual habitus. Habitus, within, as well as, between social groups differs to the extent that the details of individuals' social trajectories diverge from one another:

> The singular habitus of the members of the same class are united in a relationship of homology, that is, of diversity within homogeneity reflecting the diversity within homogeneity characteristic of their social conditions of production. Each individual system of dispositions is a structural variant of the others, expressing the singularity of its position within the class and its trajectory. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 60)

Bourdieu attempts to justify his collective definition of habitus. In reference to class habitus he asserts that:

> interpersonal relations are never, except in appearance, *individual-to-individual* relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction. (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 81)

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

Complex Interplay between Past and Present

Individual histories therefore are vital to understanding the concept of habitus. Habitus are permeable and responsive to what is going on around them. Current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but are internalised and become yet another layer to add to those from earlier socialisations:

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

Therefore, although the habitus is a product of early childhood experience, and, in particular socialisation within the family, it is continually modified by individuals' encounters with the outside world (Di Maggio, 1979). Schooling, in particular, acts to provide a general disposition, a turn towards what Bourdieu terms 'a cultured habitus' (Bourdieu, 1967). Thus, while habitus reflects the social position in which it was constructed, it also carries within it the genesis of new creative responses which are capable of transcending the social conditions in which it was produced. Habitus is 'the product of social conditionings, and thus of a history' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 116). The

range of possibilities inscribed in a habitus can be envisaged as a continuum. At one end habitus can be replicated through encountering a field that reproduces its dispositions. At the other end of the continuum habitus can be transformed through a process that either raises or lowers an individual's expectations. Implicit in the concept is the possibility of a social trajectory which enables conditions of living that are very different from initial ones.

By drawing together these four themes running through Bourdieu's discussions of habitus, habitus can be viewed as a complex internalised core from which everyday experiences emanate. It is the source of day to day practices. Habitus produces action, but because it confines possibilities to those possible for the social groups the individual belongs to, much of the time those actions tend to be reproductive rather than transformative. Dispositions are inevitably reflective of the social context in which they were acquired.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of a Notion which Invites Multiple Readings

According to Cheleen Mahar, Richard Harker and Chris Wilkes, Bourdieu 'works in a spiral between theory, empirical work and back to reformulating theory again but at a different level' (Harker *et al.*, 1990, p. 3). Brubaker states that Bourdieu's concept of habitus is not intended to be 'precise or unambiguous' (Brubaker, 1993, p. 217), while Bourdieu, himself in an interview with Loic Wacquant states 'I do not like definitions much' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 95). This results in problems of indeterminacy and changing notions of habitus within Bourdieu's writing. Paradoxically, the conceptual looseness of habitus also constitutes a potential strength. It makes possible adaptation rather than the more constricting straightforward adoption of the concept within empirical work. There is also a 'messiness' about the concept that fits in well with the complex messiness of the real world.

Richard Jenkins, in discussing the indeterminacy of habitus' dispositions, asserts one consequence is that they have been understood simplistically as 'attitudes', thus sacrificing any complexity. He suggests that an all embracing understanding, which includes affective, as well as cognitive features is called for; not only thinking but feeling (Jenkins, 1992). However, if anything this adds to the ambiguity of the concept. Aaron Cicourel writes:

> 'Habitus' seems in one sense, to be everything, yet hard to pin down observationally. Of all the different writers I have seen who use this notion of 'habitus', including Bourdieu, no one seems to care about this observational problem. Instead, everyone seems to posit a kind of plausible sounding 'force' that's attributable to 'habitus' and then refer to indirect data to document its existence and impact on everyday life. (Cicourel, 20/7/94, personal communication)

The circularity is evident. The danger lies in habitus becoming whatever the data reveals. As Cicourel points out Bourdieu's own attempts to operationalise habitus in his empirical work have been problematic. In particular, aspects of habitus, which are related to the way it is internalised become extremely tenuous when they are applied to 'social class aggregations within complex societies and across different cultures' (Cicourel, 1993b, p. 150). I would suggest that it is these conceptual gaps; the aspects of habitus that remain relatively unfilled, and what Jenkins has described as 'the processual and

ontological mysteries of the habitus (Jenkins, 1992, p. 130), that simultaneously contain its seductions and its pitfalls.

There is a wide spectrum of views about habitus which span the individual agency–structural determinism divide. Cheleen Mahar sees Bourdieu's development of the concept as 'an attempt to create social agents as individuals who construct the world around them' (Mahar, 1990, p. 35). While at the other end of the spectrum Richard Jenkins labels habitus as 'either another version of determination in the last instance, or a sophisticated form of functionalism' (Jenkins, 1992, p. 82), and William Sewell views habitus as 'agent-proof' (Sewell, 1992, p. 15). However, even for writers, who are generally positive about Bourdieu's work 'when an individual only has one option "making a virtue out of necessity" does not resolve the fact that they are no longer an agent' (Harker *et al.*, 1990, p. 204). To be an agent implies choices and at times it appears from his writing that structural constraints reduce some working-class individuals' options to one.

A further difficulty with the concept lies in its duality as both collective and individualised. Bourdieu often refers to a class habitus and recently English sociologists of education have begun to use the notion very effectively in relation to both school and the market (Gewirtz *et al.*, 1994a,b). In relation to a habitus of the market there seem to be unresolved problems which Gewirtz *et al.*, draw out, particularly in relation to their working-class respondents. In evoking a habitus of the market are we to understand it in terms of the predispositions capitalist society develops in all its members? Where then are the myriad adaptations, responses, reactions and resistances to such an organisation of society? It is difficult to discern if Bourdieu himself is conceiving of habitus as a multi-layered concept, with more general notions of habitus at the level of society and more complex, differentiated notions at the level of the individual.

Habitus as Method

> Bourdieu's sociological tools are up for grabs—ready to be used, tested, accepted, or found wanting. (Hage, 1994, p. 37)

The difficulties, inconsistencies, risks of determinism, and aspects of circularity inherent in habitus can be viewed as far less problematic if habitus is viewed as method rather than theory; a way of seeing the world. Bourdieu himself sees his concepts as in a continual process of being reworked. In her interview with Bourdieu, Cheleen Mahar asks Bourdieu what he considers to be the core ideas in his work. He responds:

> The main thing is that they are not to be conceptualised so much as ideas, on that level, but as a method. The core of my work lies in the method and a way of thinking. To be more precise, my method is a manner of asking questions rather than just ideas. This, I think is a critical point. (Bourdieu, 1985, quoted in Mahar, 1990)

Habitus is one of the main concepts of his method. He describes the concept as developing out of an interest in understanding how individuals are moulded by social structure (Mahar, 1990). Bourdieu writing of his conceptual framework comments:

> I blame most of my readers for having considered as theoretical treatises, meant solely to be read or commented upon, works that, like gymnastics handbooks, were intended for exercise, or even better, for putting into practice; that is, as books that put forth so many programs for work, observation, and experimentation...one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world

> unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality. (Bourdieu, 1993a, p. 271)

Empirical work that utilises Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital abound while there are far fewer research studies which operationalise habitus (among the few examples are Atkinson, 1983; Delamont, 1989; McClelland, 1990; Engler, 1990). The appeal of habitus for me is that it lends itself to a focus on social inequalities, but one that demands a complex analysis which both recognises diversity within social groupings and highlights the crucial importance of the context in which actions take place. Furthermore, habitus permits an analysis of social inequality, which is not solely rooted in location. At the centre of the concept are the social practices, which are the outcomes of an interaction between a habitus and a field. The focus is as much on process as on position. Such an understanding of habitus supports Cicourel's assertion that a productive way of employing habitus in empirical research is as a tool for exploring domination in everyday practice (Cicourel, 1993a, p. 111). Cicourel suggests habitus can be used to explore:

> how the child acquires a sense of his or her own power and that of adults and peers, as he or she is assigned and assumes different relationships within and outside the family, peer and school settings. (Cicourel, 1993a, p. 109)

As such habitus provides a way of examining how children use language and physical and emotional displays to dominate or subordinate themselves to others (Cicourel, 1993b).

In his own work Bourdieu uses habitus as a method for uncovering actors' relationships to dominant culture and the ways in which these relationships are expressed in a range of activities, including eating, speaking and gesturing (Bourdieu, 1984). In a parallel process I would suggest that habitus can be used as a way of exploring children's relationships to dominant culture through non-verbal behaviour and use of language. Bourdieu's most recent work (Bourdieu, 1993b) looks at the resulting 'misery of position' for people whose habitus is discordant with their position in the social field. He utilises habitus to explore power dynamics in both ordinary, taken-for-granted situations and those that are much more unusual. In my own research children were primarily in settings normal 'for people like them' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 56). However, I have also attempted to use habitus as a method for examining disjuncture between individual and social context as in the case study of the Black, working-class child in a predominantly white, middle-class school.

Habitus provides a method for simultaneously analysing 'the experience of social agents and...the objective structures which make this experience possible' (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 782). Using habitus-as-method ensures that the research focus is always broader than the social activities of the classroom. While it is important to view children as actively engaged in creating their social worlds, Bourdieu's method emphasises the way in which 'the structure of those worlds is already predefined by broader racial, gender and class relations' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 144). Habitus is a means of viewing structure as occuring within small scale interactions and activity within large scale settings. As such, I suggest, it constitutes a mechanism for responding to the troublesome distinction between macro and micro levels of society.

'Race' and Gender: importing heterology into an holistic framework

Habitus is primarily a method for analysing the dominance of dominant groups in society and the domination of subordinate groups. As such Katherine McClelland asserts that:

> it can easily be applied to the analysis of gender (or racial and ethnic) disadvantage as well. (McClelland, 1990, p. 105)

Habitus can be used to focus on the ways in which the socially advantaged and disadvantaged play out attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority ingrained in their habitus in daily interactions. As McClelland highlights such dispositions are influenced by gender and 'race' as well as social class.

While Bourdieu has begun to write about gendered habitus (Bourdieu, 1990c), he makes no mention of the way in which habitus is differentiated by 'race'. However, it is possible from his extensive writing on the concept to develop an understanding of habitus as shaped by both gender and 'race'. Socialisation is implicit in his elaborations of the concept and, from my readings of his work, has a central role in understandings of the notion. Habitus then is inextricably linked to transmission within the family. In my own empirical study I explore gender and 'race' differences of habitus, alongside the differences of social class that Bourdieu concentrates on. Cicourel argues that there is a need to expand habitus, not only to incorporate gender differences in socialisation, but to explore:

> how such differences are linked to circumstances that can occur within and across cultures and social classes or ethnic groups within larger nation states. (Cicourel, 1993a, p. 109)

While LiPuma asserts that in order to explain Bourdieu's own social trajectory from a peasant background in rural Bearn to eminent Professor of Sociology:

> Bourdieu needs an account of why the internalisation of objective possibilities is socially relative, of how the internalisation processes are organised along gender, ethnic, racial and regional lines. (LiPuma, 1993, p. 24)

Implicit in Bourdieu's work is the notion that the concept of habitus is just as applicable to gender practices as to those of social class. Gender socialisation clearly has an important influence. Early childhood has a powerful impact on the later operations of habitus:

> Through the economic and social necessity that they bring to bear on the relatively autonomous world of the domestic economy and family relations, or more precisely, through the specifically familial manifestations of this external necessity (forms of the division of labour between the sexes, household objects, modes of consumption, parent-child relations, etc.), the structures characterizing a determinate class of conditions of existence produce the structures of the habitus, which in their turn are the basis of the perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences. (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54)

As I have mentioned earlier, embodiment is a key component of habitus. It also shapes its relevance to issues of gender and 'race'. Bourdieu describes king, banker and priest as hereditary monarch, financial capitalism or the Church made flesh (Bourdieu, 1990b). In so doing, I suggest he sets up possibilities for different ways of theorising the situation of women and of people, both male and female, from different ethnic groupings. Female habitus can be surmised as a complex interlacing of the dispositions, which are the consequences of gender oppression, with those that are the product of varying levels of social privilege. Similarly, a recognition of racial oppression would inform understandings of racialised habitus. Prejudices and racial stereotypes ingrained in the habitus of members of dominant groups can affect the life chances of any group who are clearly different in some way.

In 'Men and machines' Bourdieu describes a process of domination as everyday practice, elaborating the ways in which the relationship between the social world and habitus can become 'a sort of ontological complicity' (Bourdieu, 1981, p. 306). His article is gendered, it speaks only to the experience of men, citing the king and his court, the bishop and his see, the employer and his firm. Bourdieu outlines a 'fit' between agents' subjective vocations (what they feel 'made' for) and their objective 'missions' (what is expected of them), and recounts how this harmony may be expressed in two modes of behaviour; firstly of doing what they have to do happily, often manifested in a sense of being 'at home', and secondly of acting with a resigned conviction, which Bourdieu explains as a feeling of not being able to do anything else (Bourdieu, 1981, p. 308). I have used habitus in this sense of 'subjective vocations' and feeling 'at home' in certain activities to explore gender differences in classroom practices and how they mediate differences of social class.

It is the uncovering of gender domination that Beate Krais addresses in her article on 'Gender and symbolic violence' (Krais, 1993). Krais has attempted to theorise habitus as gendered. For Krais gender identity is 'a deeply rooted, bodily anchored dimension of an agent's habitus' (Krais, 1993, p. 170). Gendered habitus is the incorporation of the existing division of labour between the sexes, a division of labour which, for the most part, is accepted unquestioningly by the majority of men and women. This failure to notice, what Dorothy Smith would term the 'taken-for-granted' (Smith, 1988) is made possible in Bourdieu's theoretical framework by the operations of symbolic violence. As Krais comments:

> Symbolic violence is a subtle, euphemized, invisible mode of domination that prevents domination from being recognised as such and, therefore, as misrecognised domination, is socially recognised. It works when subjective structures—the habitus and objective structures are in accord with each other. (Krais, 1993, p. 172)

While an understanding of gendered habitus as internalised sexual division of labour made sense in my analysis of working-class classrooms, it worked less well when I analysed practices in the middle-class classroom. What I did find was a class-based division of labour which I describe in detail in the section 'Acting Powerfully: children in the classroom'.

Bourdieu describes his concepts as 'open concepts designed to guide empirical work' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 107). In an interview with Beate Krais, Bourdieu suggests that the chief strength of concepts such as habitus lies in their empirical relevance:

> Ideas like those of habitus, practice, and so on, were intended, among other things, to point out that there is a practical knowledge that has its own logic, which cannot be reduced to that of theoretical knowledge; that in a sense, agents know the social world better than the theoreticians. And at the same time, I was also saying that, of course, they do not really know it and the scientist's work consists in making explicit this practical knowledge, in accordance with its own articulations. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 252)

Bourdieu describes habitus as 'a system of dispositions common to all products of the same conditionings' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 59). As such it can just as readily be understood in terms of gender and 'race' processes as those of class. My investigation of social processes in the primary classroom has been an attempt to both explore the power dynamics operating within the peer group and to begin to expand understandings of

Bourdieu's concept of habitus to include the influences of gender and 'race' alongside those of social class.

Acting Powerfully: children in the classroom

Very tentatively I have explored the presence of habitus in the children's practices in the classroom. I have utilised Cicourel's suggestion that habitus can be used as a tool for examining domination as everyday practice (Cicourel, 1993a, p. 111) in my own analysis. The lengthy vignette detailed below was my first attempt to link habitus to the data I collected on domination as everyday practice. On one of the first days I went into Oak Park I found myself gravitating to the back of the classroom where four girls were preoccupied with the computer programme they were working on. I quietly drew up a chair next to them and sat down. It was a programme on the Tudors that I was familiar with from my time spent in Milner. The programme was based on the life of Bess, a servant girl, who worked for the landed gentry. Negar was giving the instructions, Sarah was methodically typing them in, while Nancy and Sophie were providing ideas and suggestions. 'Tell her to go upstairs and hurry up.' 'OK I'll type in "go up", that's if she's not too stupid to understand.' Negar typed in 'go up' then started to tap in 'please' 'Don't be silly' said Sophie leaning over and putting her finger on the delete button. 'We don't have to say please or thank you. She's just a servant'. A few minutes later Nancy mischievously said 'Make her run'. Bess was in her mistress' bedroom by now. 'Great idea' said Negar 'make her run downstairs' Sarah typed in 'run'. Sophie, who seemed to be getting heady on the prevailing sense of power and control became impatient with Sarah's typing speed, leaned over and typed in 'run quicker or else'. It was at that point that they noticed me scribbling away. Nancy beamed, noticed my bemused look and by way of explanation told me 'We have to give her orders and be a bit rude because she's the servant.'

It was at that point that I realised that they were doing something quite normal. They were inserting themselves into the game as Bess' mistress. Bourdieu writes in terms of habitus as 'the internalisation of the probabilities of access to goods, services and powers' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 60). The responses of the children in the two schools to the computer programme illustrated very different relationships to 'goods, services and powers'. At Milner where the children had positioned themselves as Bess or else as a stranger in the house I had never even considered the possibility of taking on the role of authority figure. Neither had the children, my field notes have comments such as 'Our bedroom's not very nice is it' and 'Where shall we go next?'. They had either identified themselves as visitors or with Bess herself. But that was not the most logical relationship to assume. Computer programmes work on the basis of being given orders and that was what the four girls at Oak Park were doing. They had naturally, unthinkingly assumed the role of mistress and entered into relations of ruling with Bess (Bourdieu, 1992).

I acknowledge the shortcomings of an example which explicates domination as everyday practice in relation to a fictional character and accept that a flesh and blood Bess would not be treated in the same way. However, what the girls did demonstrate was a very different habitus to the one children played out in Milner classrooms, one that provided very different dispositions and concomitantly very different possibilities to the ones conceived of in Milner. They were demonstrating a particular understanding of the division of labour and their place within it that lay outside the habitus of the children at Milner. Implicit in their dispositions was a conceptualisation of themselves as the kind of people who paid for the services of others. They were also displaying the communica-

tive competence that is integral to the understanding and use of symbolic power. Their habitus revealed that, already at the age of 10, they had learnt 'how to be assertive, use demonstratives, produce requests and imperatives' (Cicourel, 1993b, p. 161). The combination of the socialisation the four girls brought with them to the classroom, plus the ongoing peer group socialisation happening within it, seemed to be teaching them to assume positions of power, at least in relation to other, less privileged females.

Dispositions in the Two Schools: differentiation by gender and social class

However, there were further examples of dispositions acted out in Oak Park that displayed a different relationship to the division of labour to that evident in Milner classrooms. Initially, I took the 'tidying up' in Milner for granted. The good natured scramble when their teacher asked children to tidy up was very familiar—girls rushing around helpfully putting lids on felt tips, pushing chairs in, placing books back on shelves, a few over enthusiastic boys throwing themselves under tables only to emerge moments later clutching a few scraps of paper, the odd boy sidling about doing very little and being 'told on' by an indignant girl were events I had experienced innumerable times myself as a primary school teacher. I comment in my field notes:

> Tidy up time seems like pandemonium but miraculously, and accelerated by the occasional yell from Mandy, the job gets done. (Milner, March 1993)

In Oak Park there was no taking the process for granted. To my surprise most of the children did not want to tidy up. In fact some of them flatly refused to. In my field notes from November 1993 I have written:

> Five minutes before afternoon play Julia tells the class to tidy up. There is little response children are mostly engrossed in finishing off work. Riva and Sophia rush up to the front to ask if they can stay in to finish their story. Thirty seconds later, Julia raises her voice, 'Now, or you'll miss your playtime' and children start to put their own things away and move towards the door. Julia shouts out 'I don't want to find any pens or pencils on the floor today'. After reminding Robyn's table to push their chairs in, I notice a group of children clustered around Moya. She is sobbing, slumped over her table. I go to ask what the matter is. She just continues crying. Sophie says 'It's that' and points to a pile of pencil trimmings on the floor under Moya's chair. 'She says they're not hers so she's not getting them up.' 'Ok' I reply 'You and I can get them up, can you get a dustpan and brush?' 'No, I'm not doing it.' I look round for help 'Can someone get me a dustpan and brush?' No one can so I go and do the job myself.

Surprised I went and asked a group of children after break why they were not prepared to tidy up. Susie said 'It's not our job,' while Oliver interjected 'They employ cleaners to do that.'

Such social distinctions were not a normal part of sense making in Milner classrooms. There these 'cleaners' were children's mothers not to be conceptualised as socially distant from the children's world. Tidying up and helping generally were activities working-class girls in Milner felt 'at home with' (Bourdieu, 1981, p. 308). In Oak Park such activities were both actively and passively resisted not only by the boys but by many of the girls as well. What we learn from these two lengthy vignettes is that the process of cultural capital production generated by habitus is not only a process of generating educational attainment. It is also one of producing social distinction. Lamont & Lareau argue that

a new productive way of conceptualising cultural capital is as a form of social and cultural exclusion (Lamont & Lareau 1988, p. 153). These children's performance in the classroom was not just about working towards academic success, it was also about producing social differentiation. They were working on their social status in the classroom alongside, and even in the process of attending to the school curriculum. They were constructing themselves as the kind of people who are different to either 'Bess' or the cleaners.

Some of the children were also constructing themselves as 'equals' of the teachers. These dispositions were due to the interaction of privileged habitus and a particular educational field. The children's dispositions were simultaneously due to their own work while being reliant on teachers' practices. How much their performance in the classroom could also be viewed in terms of the accomplishment of maternal work is difficult to disentangle. However, to some extent their behaviour reflects the sense of entitlement to question and criticise many of their mothers displayed. In the staff room, the teacher laughingly tells me that the children 'are fairly empowered' and relays an incident that happened earlier in the week. She was discussing the arrangements for the class assembly. Sophie puts up her hand to query the ordering of events. 'Mrs Symmonds I think it's best if we have the music first because we can put the music stands on the stage beforehand then take them off before we do the drama.' The teacher said she replied 'Quite right, Sophie, a much better idea.' The teacher then told me about the message, left on her desk by another girl, which said 'If you want to do some formal English I have some books from my tutor which might be useful', while Katie came up to tell the teacher about 'a good idea I've had for a Maths activity.' In my fieldnotes I have noted an exchange between Sophie and Mrs Symmonds. Mrs Symmonds is illustrating how to do long division by working out an example on the blackboard:

Sophie: Mrs Symmonds, that's not right, it comes to 126 not 136.
Mrs Symmonds: Quite right, Sophie, well spotted.

Sophie displayed many of the characteristics of Walkerdine's Charlotte. She is active and challenging in the classroom context, displaying flair, creativity and 'real learning' (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 50). Her practices in the classroom produced natural distinction (Bourdieu, 1990b). Nowhere in the fieldnotes from Milner is there similar evidence of pupils either acting as 'advisors' and 'curriculum consultants' to the teacher, or challenging the teacher's knowledge. There are many examples of helpfulness and some of challenges to the teacher's authority (from boys) in Milner, but nowhere is there any implicit assumption of equality or of 'knowing better' than the teacher.

Instead, in Milner there were narratives of helping which were largely absent in Oak Park. These narratives were gendered, they were mostly in the tales girls told me about social interaction in the classroom, in their explanations of what 'goes on'. Habitus could be found in 'a system of dispositions to a certain practice' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 77) that was powerfully structured by gender. On the class outing to an urban farm, Rosetta, who is holding my hand as we walk along, explains about Daisy, a new arrival in the classroom. She tells me how Daisy is not used to doing work in English 'But I help her'. On another trip, this time to the library Lucy and Charlene both hold my hand. They are discussing the boys in the class, mostly in disparaging terms, 'some of them are silly'. However, Lucy explains that Stuart frequently sits with them and 'we help him with his work.' Their claims to help were supported by my observations in the classroom:

Lucy has finished her work before anyone else again. She puts her books away

> and goes across to the book corner, I think to choose a book but has ended up tidying up the books on the display shelf. Mandy is still engrossed in explaining decomposition of number to a group of children experiencing difficulties with Maths. Delroy is fidgeting around across the table from me. He screws up his nose and tells me 'I can't do these sums.' As I lean over to look at what he's doing, Lucy comes across. He glances up at her and says 'These sums are hard'. She looks intently at his page, pulls up a chair and starts to help. (fieldnotes, May 1993)

This theme of helping was also commented on by Milner mothers in their interviews:

> I find they do it a lot at Milner, someone helps somebody else who can't do it, like in these reading groups they've got. (Elaine, Milner)

> She's always helping the others do their work not because she has to but because that's what she wants to do, but last week when she was telling me about helping this kid, I did worry. It's funny this has brought it all back. I thought then at the time is it helping her helping other children. Why should she be teaching not learning? (Lisa, Milner)

Walkerdine & Lucey write of the issue of who helps who, and who needs help, being a recurring theme in working-class girls' accounts. They found most of the working-class girls in their sample:

> *Put themselves forward* as helpers. (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989, p. 196, authors' own italics)

Underpinning this disposition to help were school practices in Milner. Milner, like Lise Bird's New Zealand primary school, was an educational setting in which important aspects of classroom organisation were based on pupils supporting each others' learning (Bird, 1992, p. 158). In particular, children were encouraged to hear each other read during the daily reading time. The educational field these children found themselves in, reinforced the disposition girls, in particular, brought with them to the classroom context. The reality was that it was predominantly girls hearing other girls and some boys read. The gendered nature of 'helpfulness' is borne out by Christine's explanation of why Matthew was 'getting into trouble' in the classroom on a regular basis:

> He actually said to me 'It's really boring, I have to listen to other children read.' (Christine, Milner)

Clearly helpfulness is a consequence of the interaction between the girls' own dispositions and teachers' practices. Although Lisa displays serious reservations about the efficacy of helpfulness for academic success, only Julie spells out what she perceives to be the costs for bright girls:

> If they are bright they are told to help other children. Kids don't want that, they're not paid to help others. If they are bright let them get on with something else. They should be given something harder while the teacher helps those who can't read or write.

Most of the other Milner mothers, who mentioned the issue, unquestioningly viewed helping as a normal feature of classroom life. In contrast, from my interview with mothers in Oak Park, the possibility of basing classroom organisation on pupil practices of helping seemed remote. The pressure for academic success in Oak Park precluded classroom practices of helping being acceptable to mothers, instead mothers talked in

terms of extension work: 'There is an awful lot of extension work built into the curriculum' (Pamela) and:

> I've found in Oak Park that they always give children extra work if they've finished early. With Richard his teacher will let him branch out in a different direction. There's a tendency not to let a child develop too far above the general level in the class but to give them something that pushes them to the side more and I think that's very good. That was done with Petra quite a lot, where she would go on and do a Maths investigation on a related topic that pushed her in a different direction. That's certainly the approach that Phillip's teacher took as well. (Laura, Oak Park)

Only a fifth of Walkerdine & Lucey's middle-class girls talked in terms of helping and there was a similar distribution in Oak Park where the norm among both sexes was more one of competitiveness than one of helping. The helping behaviour of girls in Milner and the much lower incidence of helping behaviour in Oak Park demonstrates the way gendered habitus is mediated by social class.

Habitus, 'Race' and Racism

In his introduction to Bourdieu's thought, Richard Jenkins asserts that ethnicity is something that Bourdieu rarely considers except in his early research on North Africa:

> where he takes for granted the existence and group boundaries of the Kabyles, the Sharvia, the Mozabites etc, as things that do not require explanation. (Jenkins, 1992, p. 92)

However, habitus is not only shaped by class and gender, it is also shaped by 'race'. The strategies of exclusion operating in 5S became most apparent when Temi joined the class. She suddenly appeared one morning dressed rather shabbily in a jumper and leggings, which made a stark contrast to the other children's smart uniforms. She looked painfully nervous, eyes darting around the room. The teacher was surprised, no one had informed her a new child was starting. She was also clearly cross about not being forewarned. After a perfunctory glance most of the children went back to their Maths work, except for Nancy, who looked genuinely surprised at having another Black child in the classroom. Mrs Symmonds, catching Nancy's eye asked her if she would mind explaining to Temi what she should be doing, and things seemingly settled back to normal. For the next few weeks I waited and watched, but nothing happened. Apart from Nancy, the other children simply ignore Temi. It was as if she did not exist. There were no racist comments, no overt hostility, there was simply no recognition of Temi's presence at all. Nancy the only child, who seemed to be acting in this context tried to reconcile two conflictual roles, looking after Temi and being an accepted part of the peer group. In the end her desire for incorporation won out and she too started to ignore Temi, apart from the occasions when Temi was clearly upset or had been bullied in the playground.

In contrast to the children's impassivity, the two adults in the room, the classteacher and myself, tried desperately to compensate. In my field notes, I have recorded conversations with the classteacher, where I optimistically suggest that it would make a significant difference if we gave Temi lots of attention, 'that that would raise her status with the peer group.' It did not. I heard her read at length every day that I went into school. Her reading age went up by leaps and bounds—over two years in the nine months I spent in Oak Park, but her popularity with the peer group remained zero.

Frankenberg in her work on social geographies of race stresses the importance of conceptualising in terms of the whiteness of white women (Frankenberg, 1993). Similarly, these privileged white children in Oak Park have a habitus which has been, and continues to be, powerfully structured by their 'race' as well as their social class. The habitus of the peer group was one in which these children were already working on their social status. They were actively cultivating social distinction. Nancy and the small number of Asian children in the classroom clearly felt unable to risk their social position by supporting Temi, so they too ignored her.

Thus the peer group habitus operated to keep Temi invisible through processes so subtle they were barely discernible. For weeks I puzzled over what was, or rather, was not happening. There were no tangible signs of discrimination. It was when I began to focus specifically on silences and absences in the classroom context that I came to an understanding of the social practices underpinning Temi's exclusion. The racism of these middle-class children was not manifested in any action, rather it lay in the absences. Paradoxically, it was there in what was not there, in the lack of care, lack of contact, lack of recognition. bell hooks has written about 'the way in which the absence of recognition is a strategy that facilitates making a group the other' (bell hooks, 1992, p. 167). In describing slavery in the American south she asserts that:

> These looking relations were reinforced as whites cultivated the practice of denying the subjectivity of blacks (the better to dehumanise and oppress) of regulating them to the realm of the invisible. (bell hooks, 1992, p. 168)

The cost to Temi of these exclusionary strategies is difficult to estimate. When the teacher asked all the children to write down two children they felt they could work well with and two children they would like to sit next to, unsurprisingly, no one mentioned Temi. She wrote on her slip of paper to the teacher 'I don't want to sit next to anyone because no-one wants to sit with me but please can I be next to your table.' I would suggest that ingrained in the habitus of these privileged children were prejudices and racial stereotypes which generated their exclusionary practices.

I do not want to overlook Temi's agency in these social processes. Socially her options were heavily circumscribed by the other children's behaviour. However, she did successfully attempt to forge alliances with adults in the school while simultaneously working extremely hard on the academic curriculum. According to Mrs Symmonds she made more educational progress over the course of the year than any of the other children in the class. She was also the one child in the classroom who regularly volunteered to tidy up and often stayed behind, ostensibly to tidy up, but also to chat to her teacher. In contrast to the other children in 5S her habitus was being transformed by circumstances which were very different from those of the previous educational field she had been in. She had transferred to Oak Park from a primary school which had a predominantly working-class, multi-ethnic intake. Although I have focused on the negative aspects of those changes Temi did manage to carve out a positive educational agenda for herself.

Conclusion

Habitus is one way of looking at how gender, 'race' and class work in everyday interactions. In *Distinction* Bourdieu describes many examples of social class embodiment and includes breadth of gesture, elevated posture and slow glances as middle-class characteristics (Bourdieu, 1984; Szczelklin, 1993, p. 14). In relation to Temi the other

children demonstrated their social status, not through any obvious social practices. Rather processes of social differentiation were acted out through their bodies, in averted eyes, through turning away, by a failure to hear; in sum a whole range of bodily gestures which signified that Temi was not important enough to notice. Habitus is above all about embodiment and in these white children's responses to Temi we have an illustration of Bourdieu's meaning-made-body (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 43).

Micheline Rey defines differentiation as:

> an act or a process which tends to create, to make evident, to amplify differences and to constitute subsystems in a system which was previously undivided. It tends to fix frontiers and risks producing partitions. (Rey, 1992, pp. 48–49)

Differentiation in the context of the Oak Park classroom was relayed by processes of marginalisation. Children are not innocent of cultural re/production. They are not simply products of their parents. Practices of social and cultural exclusion were as evident in this primary classroom as Lamont found them to be among the French and American male elites she studied (Lamont, 1992). My understandings of habitus in the context of the classroom in Oak Park are mirrored in the concerns expressed by teachers about the way children treated the dinner ladies, the majority of whom were black. A Year four teacher told me 'the meal supervisors have a hard time here. The children are very dismissive of them', while the Headteacher said:

> Sometimes they are very rude to the dinner ladies. They think they are superior, but I won't put up with it. There is never any excuse for rudeness.

Mrs Symmonds confirmed what the other two members of staff said, 'It's true they don't treat the dinner ladies very well'.

I do not want to make simplistic comparisons. Milner classrooms were not havens of helpful children happily and harmoniously cooperating. They were also characterised by hierarchies in which sexism and racism visibly shaped children's lives. Rather, in Oak Park, sexism, racism and classism were far more hidden. They operated beneath a veneer of civility and good manners. However, in both the attitudes displayed towards Bess and the avoidance of interaction with Temi is evidence of the tendency to perpetuate in their being 'the system of difference and distance constitutive of distinction' that Bourdieu asserts characterises middle-class habitus (Bourdieu, 1993a, p. 274). The classroom is the forum in which the habitus of the home meets the habitus of the school. Children brought with them the dispositions and predispositions of the home, and as Robyn's comment illustrates these often had greater power and efficacy than those of the school:

Robyn: Do you know what my father does?
Mrs Symmonds: No, Robyn.
Robyn: He's a QC.
Mrs Symmonds: Ahh.
Robyn: and you're just a teacher.
Mrs Symmonds: Do you know what you have just said?
Robyn: I said 'you are just a teacher'.

(fieldnotes, June 1994)

The habitus of the home, and the cultural capital it provided, gave these privileged children in Oak Park the power to put 'teachers in their place', to position them as social inferiors. Esme, one of the most popular girls in the class, asked me if my suit 'was a designer one'. When I said 'yes' she asked me which label and said her mother shopped

at Nicole Farhi. She then proceeded to criticise Mrs Symmond's clothes 'she probably gets them from C & A, yuk'. These girls, like Delamont's 'clique 5' had access to material resources, cultural symbols and sources of knowledge which sometimes had greater potency than that of their teachers. They had privileged cultural capital and could on occasions use it 'to commit a form of symbolic violence on their staff' (Delamont, 1989, p. 54). There was evidence of the 'social game embodied' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 63) in these primary classrooms. It could be seen both in the eager activity of working-class girls helping out in Milner and in the barely expressed disdain of white, middle-class children in Oak Park.

Habitus is a way of looking at data which renders the 'taken-for-granted' problematic. It suggests a whole range of questions not necessarily addressed in empirical research; how well adapted is the individual to the context they find themselves in? How does personal history shape their responses to the contemporary setting? What subjective vocations do they bring to the present and how are they manifested? Are structural effects visible within small scale interactions? What is the meaning of non-verbal behaviour as well as individuals' use of language? These questions clearly raise issues of gender and 'race' alongside those of social class. In this study of two primary classrooms I believe the evidence of my analysis illustrates some of the potential of habitus for demonstrating the ways in which individuals continually make and remake structure through their activities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 140).

Reading children's peer group practices through the lens of habitus allows for a conceptualisation of their interaction as both rooted in social location and powered by complex motivations and desires that are generated through the interplay between dispositions and social context. Habitus as method with its emphasis on domination in everyday practices and subjective vocations can provide valuable insights into the power dynamics of gender, class and 'race' relations within classrooms. Children's work in the classroom is much broader than the academic curriculum (Reay, 1991). From the evidence of the helping behaviour of black and white working-class girls in Milner, the exclusionary practices of white middle-class children in Oak Park and Temi's powerful, self-reliant determination to succeed educationally they are simultaneously working on constructing their own particular brand of social 'distinction'. Habitus helps to make visible the taken-for-granted inequalities of gender, 'race' and class embedded in such social processes.

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