Understanding the reproduction of health inequalities: physical activity, social class and Bourdieu's habitus.

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Abstract

Health inequalities continue to exist in advanced capitalist economies and so-called lifestyle behaviours (e.g. smoking, alcohol consumption, diet and physical (in)activity) play a role in their persistence. Interventionist responses to health inequalities are often posed in terms of either individual agency or social structure – the former being criticised for its shaming/responsibilising effects and the latter for inadequately conceptualising behavioural differences *within* socio-economic groups. In this paper, we attempt to reconcile these two positions by drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus, arguing that health enhancing behaviours are better understood as practices constrained and enabled within social class contexts. As many interventionist health policies target young people in schools, we take the example of physical education and youth sport to illustrate how young people's dispositions towards health practices are part of an emerging class habitus. We draw on data from a sociological study of young people's physical activity and health in which twenty-nine participants (aged 13-14) from four socio-economically diverse school settings took part. The data presented here are selected from 60 focus group transcripts, ethnographic fieldnotes from 6 months of school visits and visual data from participants. Our data indicate that class differences exist in both the kinds of activities practiced by pupils and ways in which they are practiced. We argue that class-based differences are, at least partially, matters of embodied inclinations and dispositions that are already evident at the age of 13/14. Consequently, we demonstrate how school-focused health promotion through physical education and youth sport may contribute to health inequalities as a result of being more or less accessible and appealing to pupils with a different classed-habitus within different educational fields. This paper questions the on-going interventionist policies that position schools as sites for health promotion without adequately accounting for the influence of class cultures.

Keywords: *health inequalities, physical education, physical activity, sport, youth, habitus.*

Introduction

Over the last three decades in Anglo-Saxon countries, income inequalities have grown (Piketty and Goldhammer, 2014). The notion that the affluent live longer, healthier lives than the non-affluent is well established (Marmot, 2015; Buck and Frosini, 2012). Yet, income inequality is not the single cause of poor health (Buck and McGuire, 2015) and there is a need to ask questions of the conditions in which social inequality is experienced (Williams, 2013). In this paper, we focus specifically on one possible contributor to inequalities in health; physical activity. As the health benefits of physical activity have now been widely demonstrated (Horton, 2012; Warburton et al., 2006), the attempt to address inequalities in physical activity is more crucial than ever. Moreover, we recognise that physical activity and, indeed, physical education (PE) can contribute to a richer, broader conception of health and well-being by drawing attention to *learning health* and minimising pathogenic, medicalised discourses (Quennerstedt, 2008). For these reasons, we are concerned that the UK's Active People Survey (Sport England, 2016) and numerous other studies (Elhakeem, 2016; Henning-Broderson et al. 2007; Stalsberg and Pederson, 2010) have shown that lower socio-economic groups tend to be less active.

Attempts have been made to address this problem for some time. However, these have tended to follow in the vein of two central views that have existed since at least the 19th Century about how best to promote health and prevent disease at the population level; by focusing on either (a) modifying unhealthy behaviours or (b) the underlying social and economic factors that primarily determine health outcomes (Baum and Fisher, 2014). While we share the same ultimate goal of promoting health, we find the application of either of these approaches in isolation problematic for several reasons. Firstly, critiques of public health strategies that attempt to modify unhealthy behaviours problematise the extent to which *individuals* are positioned as both the cause of and solution to unhealthy lifestyles (Piggin, 2012). Intervention strategies focus – for example – on raising citizens' "awareness" through campaigns (DH/DCSF, 2008), providing personalised feedback such as step counts (Lubans et al., 2009) and encouraging goal setting (Shiltz et al., 2004). The now well-rehearsed criticisms of such

health promotion strategies highlight particular objections to healthism discourse and the neo-liberal imaginaries that help consolidate the idea that individuals have a moral responsibility to solve social issues by adopting healthy lifestyles (Evans and Davies, 2015).

An alternative approach to addressing health inequalities has been to focus on structural determinants such as material resources, access to health care and the affordability of healthy lifestyles (Ball et al., 2009; Story et al., 2008). This is important to mention because the public health literature has long recognised the importance of a 'social-ecological model' of physical activity that incorporates social and physical environments and policy (Sallis et al., 2008). Of course, in the context of behaviourist approaches largely defining health behaviours as matters of individual choice, a material analysis is welcome. However, structural barriers do not entirely explain the distribution and variation of physical activity levels and preferences that are evident throughout the socio-economic spectrum. Indeed, by focusing on the structural determinates of health, this approach inadequately deals with the issue of agency. That is, behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption, diet, and physical (in)activity are not entirely socially determined and this is why we see behavioural differences *within* as well as between socio-economic groups. In this way, this paper shifts focus towards understanding the social conditions in which 'unhealthy' practices are realised and towards an understanding of behaviours as being grounded in the context of people's everyday lives (Williams, 1995).

Since the 1990s, the role of class analysis in sociological research has diminished (Pakulski and Waters, 1996) with social scientists tending instead towards deploying post-modern/post-structural arguments to address issues of identity politics. However, in line with a number of notable scholars (see Evans and Bairner, 2013; Skeggs, 2004; Reay, 2001; Ball, 2003) this paper returns to the idea that social class still matters. Indeed, we draw some inspiration from the recent exploration of social class in the UK (The Great British Class Survey) which suggests there are now two class fractions below the 'traditional working class', and those occupying the lowest class position (the precariat) experience an increasing level of social isolation, economic deprivation and lack of cultural participation (Savage et al., 2013). Within this developing landscape of vast inequality, this paper is concerned with understanding

the differences in behavioural norms related to physical activity that emerge as problematic. In so doing, we contribute to and extend the body of literature on social class in school contexts which has long understood that inequalities are reproduced through stratified patterns of power involving both the subject and the context (see Willis, 1977; Fine et al, 1997; Reay, 2001). While this previous scholarship is variously concerned with educational inequality, in this paper we use class culture to explore the reproduction of health inequalities related to physical (in)activity.

In an attempt to understand the reproduction of class culture, we focus this discussion on the experience of young people in school settings. This is of particular interest because young people and schools are targets of national intervention strategies (e.g. Healthy Schools, Change4Life) and schools are predominantly the settings used for new physical activity promotion trials and compulsory Body Mass Index (BMI) measurement. While, again, we applaud the health enhancing aims of such intervention, we believe there is a contribution to be made from research taking a class-based approach that provides a theoretical account of physical activity which accommodates both individual agency and social structure. For this, we turn to Bourdieu's habitus.

Thinking with Bourdieu's habitus

In its most basic description, habitus can be understood as a re-working of habit, inclination or disposition. Bourdieu (1984, p.170) asserts habitus is both a "structuring structure" and a "structured structure" and thus the concept bridges the agency/structure dichotomy by contending that through a process of acculturation social structures become embodied. Indeed, for Bourdieu (1984) lifestyles are the "systematic products of habitus" (p. 172) with the body revealing "the deepest dispositions of habitus" (p. 190). A person's habitus, therefore, will lead them to develop a particular "bodily hexis" which "includes both the strictly physical shape of the body ('physique') and the way it is 'carried'" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 64). As habitus is inextricably linked to social class, and Bourdieu maintains classes differ in their relation to the body, the contention is that "different social classes produce distinct bodily

forms" (Shilling, 2003, p. 116) because they develop different "tastes" which are conceived of as expressions of the "symbolic dimension of class relations" (Laberge & Kay, 2002, p. 246). This, we argue, is key to gaining a comprehensive understanding of inequalities in physical activity.

It is worth noting that Bourdieu deals with class differences in sports participation at length in *Distinction* (1984) where he demonstrates how particular activities differ in materially and symbolically significant ways to particular class groups. He argues;

> [economic barriers] are not enough to explain the class distribution of these [sports] activities…We can hypothesize as a general law that sport is more likely to be adopted by a social class if it does not contradict that class's relation to the body at its deepest and most unconscious level, i.e., the body schema (p. 217).

Indeed, Bourdieu clearly sees habitus as emerging from class experiences and that it is helpful to think of social class not as the sum of actual individuals in particular groups but instead as a 'class habitus'. This is described as "the system of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structures" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.85). Bourdieu relates this back to the idea that historical occasions are what inform the habitus and therefore must be to some extent idiosyncratic:

> Though it is impossible for *all* members of the same class (or even two of them) to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for the members of that class (Bourdieu, 1977, p.85).

So the emphasis is less on explicit rules that dictate behaviour, and more on an implicit *likelihood* and *tendency* to behave in ways that groups expect of "people like us" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.77). One's actions are highly contingent on the tacit expectations of how one ought to act as defined by social distance and social position. Of course, Bourdieu is not deterministic in his application of these 'tacit expectations', rather, the concept of habitus requires us to "forsake the false problems of personal spontaneity and social constraint, freedom and necessity, choice and obligation" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.23).

It is important to note that habitus cannot be understood without reference to the social context from which it is formed – what Bourdieu calls 'fields' (Bourdieu, 1977, 1980; Bourdieu

& Wacquant, 1992). Fitzpatrick (2011, p.355) describes the field as an "objective context" and a "specific site of cultural production with particular norms, boundaries and forces of power at work." The term field is necessarily a flexible one given that new contexts are constantly arising and being re-shaped. For example, a school can be considered a field and so too can the subject of PE (see Hunter's (2004) 'PE field') as can the associated power structures surrounding obesity (see Fitzpatrick's (2011) 'obesity field'). Recognising fields are important because, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 127) proffer, "social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside agents". This ties in with Bourdieu's (1984) notion of the "paradoxes of the taste of necessity" (p. 178) whereby he contends that people lower down the socio-economic order "tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us')" (p. 471).

In addition to habitus and field, Bourdieu applies the concept of 'capital' and uses the three together in what Wacquant (1992, p.25) termed a "conceptual triad". Capital refers to the forms of economic, social and cultural resources that individuals acquire in order to gain status and power through interactions with others in the social world (Shilling, 2003). Fields and associated capital are rarely open or acquirable to all. As such, we must take field and capital into account when understanding the influence of habitus on health inequalities. For example, when considering Bourdieu's notion of a classed body, it is possible to view someone with great bulk and strength as having a considerable amount of physical capital, as well as the potential to accumulate economic capital through physical labour (amongst lower social classes) but valued completely differently in a field where slenderness is prized and bulk considered vulgar (amongst middle/upper classes).

Habitus, specifically, has long been recognised for its potential to contribute to our understanding of the different health-related lifestyles and behaviours of social groups. Specifically for readers of this journal, Bourdieu's habitus has previously been used in studies exploring sport (Brown, 2009; Holland-Smith, 2014), PE (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Hunter, 2004; Deluca, 2014), and social class (Stuij, 2015; Henry, 2014). Moreover, Bourdieu's theoretical

framework has recently been put to work in exploring physical culture as it relates to wider society (lisahunter et al., 2014) as well in ethnographic research attending to critical pedagogies in urban schooling (Fitzpatrick, 2013). There is, however, a dearth of scholarship analysing physical activity in the specific context of health inequalities. This paper addresses this in the context of physical (in)activity.

Methods

Our argument is informed by empirical findings from a research project about young people's physical activity and health carried out between 2011 and 2014. Data-collection took place in a Midlands town in England across four school settings; Grove Hill High School, St Andrew's High School, Woodley Grange High School and King Edwards Grammar School (pseudonyms). Schools were chosen based on publically available data for percentage of pupils receiving free school meals (Ofsted, 2011), area-level indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) (Open Data Communities, 2011) and the fee-status of schools (school websites) (see table 1). These measures were used as a proxy for social class at a school level in order to inform our discussion of how class habitus manifested in different school settings.

[INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

After gaining institutional ethical approval and permission from school Head Teachers, 29 pupils in year 9 (ages 13-14) were recruited via their form tutors to participate in the study. In order to generate discussion and inform comparative analysis, a diverse sample of participants were invited based on responses to a questionnaire indicating key characteristics; social class, physical activity levels and gender. As defining social class for young people is conceptually and methodologically challenging (Currie et al., 2008) we decided to pragmatically recruit participants based only on free school meal status – an indicator shown to be a reasonable proxy for household income (Hobbes and Vignoles, 2010; Gorard, 2012). Physical activity was measured using the Physical Activity Questionnaire for Older Children (PAQ-C) (Kolowski et al., 2004) which was considered sufficiently accurate for our

recruitment purposes. At the level of the individual, therefore, participants were diverse in terms of free-school meal eligibility (5 out the 29), physical activity levels (including 5 high active, 8 low activity), and gender (16 boys, 13 girls). All participants and their parents gave consent and their names have been anonymised with unique pseudonyms in line with ethical guidelines.

Over a 6-month period of data collection, the lead researcher (first author) engaged with the participants through focus groups, ethnographic observations, visual methods and participatory action research. The participatory action research was undertaken in the final 6-weeks of fieldwork and involved pupils planning, implementing and reflecting on student-led physical activity interventions (including, for example, a lunchtime sports club, a school-wide physical activity promotion week and a student-voice feedback meeting with PE teachers). Ethnographic fieldnotes were taken from the lead researcher's active participation in school life through fulfilling various different roles (school visitor, PE lesson observer, PE teaching assistant, Health and Personal Social Development lesson observer, action research collaborator and inter-school athletics competition official). A valuable asset of these observations was the sensitivity to otherwise taken-for-granted norms, values and practices at the schools – what Prosser (2007, p.14) describes as the "unconscious culture of the school". In total, the data set consisted of 60 focus group recordings, 42 ethnographic fieldnotes, 95 still photos and 11 video clips (7 minutes 20 seconds in total). While data from all of these methods are not presented here, we feel it is of interest to readers as the combination of these methods increased the rigour and trustworthiness of our claims through providing multiple opportunities to observe the multifaceted nature of social class in action.

Utilising multiple methods in this way, our approach was informed by numerous authors who advocate divergent methods of inquiry (Kinchloe, 2001) and epistemological plurality (Chamberlain, 2011) given that all methods carry their various values and deficiencies (Blaikie, 2000). As such, our approach represented an evolved form of triangulation whereby, rather than deploying multiple methods to discredit diverse empirical findings, the multiple methods sought to reveal new insights into the phenomena (Frost et al., 2011). Importantly, we

do not assign strict ontological or paradigmatic judgements to the methods used as we recognise Sparkes' (1992, p.16) contention that, "the techniques of research are flexible and no method of data collection is inherently linked to any one world view."

Data were compiled and organised in the software programme NVivo 9 before being analysed. Thematic coding was carried out by the lead researcher in line with common iterative and reflexive processes of qualitative analysis (Smith and Sparkes, 2016) and the robustness of this coding was scrutinized by co-researchers. Crucially, the analysis was informed by Bourdieu's theoretical framework. However, in order to move beyond Reay's (2004) critique of the descriptive 'overlaying' of habitus whereby the concept is "assumed or appropriated rather than 'put into practice'" (p.440), efforts were made to use habitus as a tool for interrogating and working with data. In this way, the precise structuring powers of the habitus were not assumed *a priori*, rather the work of the analyst was to identify what those powers were and how they shaped practices in relation to particular fields in the research contexts. To achieve this aim, we found it helpful to apply Jackson and Mazzei's (2013) Deleuzian-inspired metaphor of "plugging in" whereby researchers seek to connect one 'text' (the data) with another (e.g. habitus) to explore the knowledge that is produced. We felt this was in keeping with Reay's (2004) ambitions through allowing "concepts to work via disrupting the theory/practice binary by de-centering each and instead showing how they constitute or make one another" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013, p.264). By encouraging us to let the data and the concept of habitus work together we were able to uncover some of the mundane everyday reflections that participants had about physical activity and theorise how those reflections were shaped by unconscious durable dispositions in relation to their particular social contexts. Our analysis is outlined below in the sections *physical activity 'for the likes of us'* and *classed logics of 'doing' physical activity* before we offer concluding comments about implications of our study.

Physical activities 'for the likes of us'

Participants at the fee-paying King Edwards Grammar School largely explained their activity by giving examples of traditional sports participation. During a focus group discussion, Henry and James gave examples of their typical week:

> **Henry:** On Mondays, I do cross country and then tennis. And then Tuesday I go swimming. Thursday, I don't do anything.
> **Researcher:** Ok, James?
> **James:** Um, Mondays I do football for an hour and a half. Tuesdays we do football like every 3 weeks, which is like fitness work. Wednesdays we do hockey with [local team], which is involved with school, Thursday I do football, Friday I have my day off. Saturday I do hockey. And Sunday I just chill, go out with friends, play golf. Some Sundays I play football.
> **Researcher:** That's a lot.
> **Henry:** I want to do Taekwondo as well though.

By being at a well-funded school that boasted excellence in sporting opportunities and success, these participants' significant inclinations towards sport were made possible by their social circumstances. Henry's final contribution, "I want to do Taekwondo as well though" is perhaps an everyday example of his tacit understanding of the possibilities available to him should he wish to participate – an understanding that was common across the pupils at King Edwards Grammar. Thinking with habitus reminds us that, "agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us'" (1989, p. 64). In this way, our interpretation moves towards the notion that opportunity and resource are the material conditions which first shape pupils' engagement with physical activity, but a disposition that assumes and desires opportunities in future may be what persists in the individual.

However, we ought to note that 'possibilities' are conditioned and conditional. There was, for example, one telling example of pupils reflecting on the appropriateness of certain activities given their socio-economic position. Despite enjoying playing football (soccer), James explained that it was not an option in school because "football's not posh enough for this school". Aja reported the same thing, saying "it's because they class it as, like, a 'lower-man's' sport". While the class position of football (soccer) in the UK has long been recognised (Dunning and Sheard, 2005) it is interesting to note that pupils in our study actively reflected

upon this expectation and explained that most pupils would be happy to play the sport, but it was the teachers who objected:

> **Aaron**: Maybe [we would like to play] football... but our school, like, hates football.
> **Aja:** Yeah it's like rugby and hockey – urgh.
> **Adam:** Because they do rugby and stuff here that's why.
> **Aaron:** Mr Moles calls it 'the F word'.
> **Freddy:** Everyone at the grammar school likes football but the teachers don't let us do it.
> **Researcher:** So why do you think that is?
> **Andrew:** 'Cos it's chavy[1].

This objection to the dominant rules of the field reminds us that habitus (both collective and individual) is constantly working between reflexive powers of human agency and unreflexive habitual practices. Remembering that these participants were 13-14 years old, the tacit understanding of the appropriateness of certain sporting practices demonstrates an early class-based demarcation between active young people of different social circumstances – whether these pupils endorse it in practice at this stage or not. This data is illustrative of people residing in certain social fields and embodying their logic by appreciating themselves in relation to the distribution of capital in fields. The physical and cultural capital that can be accrued from football amongst friends in fields outside of school may not lead to the accumulation of capital within the formal fields of the school. Our data do not show which field will be considered more worthwhile over time as agents reflect on their circumstance and their habituses emerge into durable embodied dispositions, but if we are to assume that schooling has some impact on pupils then we must also assume that pupils come to understand what is "reasonable or unreasonable" for someone of "their station" (Swartz, 1997, p. 103) to do, behave and appear. It is this process that facilitates people discerning what is and what is not "for the likes of us".

At Grove Hill High School (the school with the lowest socio-economic characteristics) many pupils appeared to participate and engage well in PE, often played football (soccer) at lunchtimes in the school grounds and were sometimes part of local sports clubs. However, in

[1] 'Chav' is a term commonly used in the UK as a derogatory term to demonise and stigmatise lower class people and ways of life – for further discussion see Jones (2011).

contrast to the pupils at King Edwards Grammar, there was clear interest and enthusiasm for more informal activities like 'scootering'[2] and 'free running'[3], which are worth expanding on here. Luke first mentioned scootering in an interview by referring to it as a 'new thing' saying, "I don't know if you've heard, there's a new thing called scootering. We all do that." Similarly, Keith - a free school meals recipient - listed it as one of the activities he participates in with friends;

> **Researcher:** Are they [your friends] outdoorsy people?
> **Keith:** Yeah they're always out, biking, scootering, walking... That's the sort of stuff I do.

Rhys' photos and videos of scootering (see figure 1) help add detail to the context in which the activity was practiced (shopping market car parks, local parks) and the clothing that participants from this project tended to wear when doing it (hooded jumpers, branded clothing, sports trainers). As such, it is clear that this physical activity is likely to be recognised as a practice which requires significant investment from agents and one in which there are opportunities to accumulate capital within fields outside school settings. For this to be the case, it is necessary that distinctions are recognisable between able and less able participants. As Rhys and Luke's conversation continued, it was clear that Luke was not as able as other participants and Rhys recognised his lack of capital in that field;

> **Researcher:** Luke, what did you get up to [on the weekend]? Anything active?
> **Luke:** Not really. Went to [skate park] for the first time but...
> **Rhys:** [Laughter]
> **Luke:** I did fail. But I've not done much this week, no.
> **Researcher:** Did you have a nightmare at [skate park]?
> **Rhys:** Mmmm
> **Luke:** Kind of, yeah.
> **Researcher:** Why?
> **Luke:** Um, I wouldn't drop in.
> **Rhys:** It was funny. He tried to drop in and he nearly face-planted
> [laughter]

[2] Scootering is an activity sometimes referred to as 'kick' or 'push' scootering that involves manually riding on a single platform scooter with two wheels and a handlebar.
[3] Free running is sometimes known as 'parkour' and involves running and jumping and acrobatic activities in urban settings.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE]

So while scootering is clearly a physical activity that some participants in our study showed an inclination towards and which carried symbolic value in particular fields, its value was grounded in being an activity that took place in fields outside of school. In a similar way, Keith spoke with interest about free running. A key difference for Keith, a self-identified 'naughty' student, was the notion that free running was an additional way to enact anti-school and anti-authority practices:

> **Researcher:** Ok, so how much do you do it [free running]? In the summer? Some nights?
> **Keith:** Most nights
> **Researcher:** With your mates, or on your own?
> **Keith:** Yeah with my mates, getting police chased! I'm running yeah - have you ever been to [anonymised village]? - there's a school there. The room goes like that [shows a V shape with hands]. My mates used to climb on there. Throw eggs, smoke, drink. Stuff like that… That's how it started off, just getting chased by police. And then we started vaulting and that, and now I'm monkey! You go through the bar like that, yeah [demonstrating]. You run, you've got to put your hand on it, and you've got to jump through like that. I can do that one… I've fell over, I've smacked my face, I've nearly broke my nose, I've got bruises all over me. I've nearly broke my neck, I've nearly broke my legs, I've nearly broke my arm.
> **Researcher:** And did you break your collarbone from that?
> **Keith:** No. That was from falling off a scooter
> **Researcher**: So this free running then, is that good exercise do you reckon?
> **Keith:** Yeah because you're running round, you're diving over fences.

This kind of reflection perhaps alludes to the connotation of free running as an anarchical, post-sport practice (Atkinson, 2013) and one that involves substantial risk. Despite this clear enthusiasm for physical activity in this particular context, it is perhaps unsurprising that Keith was reluctant to take part in PE lessons given his anti-school inclinations. Indeed, when the lead researcher – as part of his role in the participatory action research project – suggested that the school should set up a lunchtime club for free running, Keith dismissed the idea quickly claiming that, "it wouldn't be the same". This speaks to the ability of Bourdieu's framework to articulate how the habitus responds to different fields. Free running is symbolically different within school to outside of school, especially when enacted in the kinds

of ways that Keith explains. Clearly, if we think of this activity as a practice that was commensurate with and constitutive of Keith's habitus then incorporating parkour into school PE would require a compromise of his preferences or disruption of the practice itself.

Not only were parkour and scootering not endorsed by the official institution of their school but participants were aware that they were not endorsed in other public spaces either. When the participants were unable to get to the skate park on the other side of town, they would seek to go scootering in the streets of local housing estates and the nearest supermarkets but often were "kicked off". As Rhys explained;

> **Rhys:** We'd just been, like, messing about or, like, doing what… doing little tricks on the step – which is not where any of the customers go – but the manager said to the security guard to tell us that, um, we're not allowed to come back here again or they'll call the police on us.

Thinking with Bourdieu's theoretical framework, we argue that these contexts are crucial for the emergence of a classed habitus in relation to physical activity. In this case, a classed habitus which tacitly understands that an activity these participants were beginning to embody was not endorsed by more powerful people around them either in school or in public spaces. As Bourdieu contends, and we noted earlier, people "follow the leanings of their habitus" in to order to "find an activity which is entirely 'them'" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.220). If participants see their chosen physical activities as being excluded from official endorsement, it may follow that they see themselves excluded too. In continuing our focus on health inequalities, we find the potential incommensurability between low-socioeconomic status pupils' emerging habitus' and the school contexts most problematic.

Classed logics of 'doing' physical activity

Our analysis also illustrated that class-based differences were relevant to the *ways* in which physical activities were practiced within school. At St Andrew's High School – a school with an intake of children from both the 10% least deprived and the 40% most deprived in England – explicit demarcations between well-behaved and poorly-behaved groups had classed

undertones. Again, given the significance of school settings for the implementation of physical activity policies and initiatives it is pertinent to illustrate how class operates in these fields. Several teachers spoke about the 'range' of pupils who attend the school and often felt they could identify class-based differences in the pupil population from their manifest appearances and behaviours. During conversations with pupils, the word 'chav' was again used as a derogatory label to denote class position. When asked to clarify the identification of 'chavs' in one interview, Emily and Samhita (pupils at St Andrew's and not eligible for free school meals) described behaviour, clothing, and a certain way of walking:

> **Emily:** They don't seem to care. Just like, they're not…
> **Samhita:** They don't always seem to turn up to lessons and…
> **Researcher:** So they wear any different clothes? Could you see them a different way, or have their hair a different way or…?
> **Emily:** They'll have like, jackets over uniform.
> **Samhita:** Or don't wear uniform.
> **Emily:** Or trousers tucked into socks or…
> **Samhita:** Don't always wear the uniform.
> **Emily:** And their walk.
> **Samhita:** It's like a bit of a waddle, I think.
> **Emily:** [laughs] One, two, three, dip! Ah, bless 'em, you have to laugh a little bit don't you?

While the term 'chav' seemed to serve as a description of *deviant* pupils ("they don't seem to always turn up to lessons", "they don't wear uniform"), it resonates with the recent sociological literature whereby middle-class pupils position 'chavs' as being in need of regulation and control (Francombe-Webb and Silk, 2015). Indeed, the condescending and sanctimonious remark, "bless 'em, you have to laugh" acts as a marker of the classed and gendered social positions – of both speaker and spoken about – which are implied in the use of the term. Though not directly related to physical activity, this sort of class-based belittlement is inherently tied to our interest in the 'bodily hexis' as a physical culture that serves to distinguish pupils by their embodied habitual ability to conduct themselves (or not) with the school's version of propriety. Moreover, this very same disposition could be recognized in the particular ways of dressing for some pupils (un-tucked shirts, un-tied shoelaces) and in the particular ways of standing (slouched posture) for others, deemed by teachers and pupils to not be behaving within school expectations. This example illustrates how useful the notion of habitus is in

helping us to understand how contemporary class relations influence exclusion/participation within school physical cultures.

A particularly telling distinction was reflected in some pupils' reluctance to be seen to keenly and obediently apply personal effort in physical activities. For example, several pupils at Grove Hill High School frequently used the term "CBA", a short hand for "can't be arsed":

> **Researcher:** How's gymnastics going?
> **Millie:** Alright. Doing a championship soon so … yay!
> **Researcher:** Yeah? Preparing for it? Getting ready?
> **Millie:** No. CBA! [laughs]

And in a different interview:

> **Researcher:** Are all these the reasons why you don't do physical activity?
> **Keith:** No.
> **Michael**: CBA.

During data-collection none of the participants at the two most affluent schools, King Edwards Grammar and St Andrew's High School, used this term. Indeed, it is consistent with Emily's initial assertion about other pupils that "they don't seem to care". Our point here is not to imply that pupils with low socio-economic indicators are apathetic or that pupils with high socio-economic indicators have a high work ethic. Rather, it is to suggest that the use of "CBA" is not an isolated cultural meme, but a symbolic means to signify that the speaker does not want to openly appear to be applying personal effort. In the same way that educational success for some working class pupils is problematic as it can be seen as an abandonment of one's background (Ingram, 2011), these data suggest that obediently applying personal physical effort towards physical activity was experienced by some students as equally problematic. While it is, of course, possible for pupils to speak in classed ways and yet act quite differently, we suggest that this inclination has at the very least an implication for shaping how pupils in lower socio-economic schools feel they ought to be seen and act.

A more extreme manifestation of this disposition was evident in Keith's and Michael's emerging anti-school habitus. Both pupils demonstrated their recalcitrance on a number of occasions. During an interview, Keith claimed, "since I've been to this school I've done PE, like 5, maybe 6 times". They were into their third year at this school. With some pride, Keith also

declared "we normally go for a fag in PE". With similar enthusiasm, Michael was keen to re-tell his story of deviance; "if you haven't got your kit, like I forgot last week, we walked in and [the teacher] said, 'if you're not going to take part get out my lesson', and I said 'fuck you then' and walked out. Didn't I Keith?" While Keith and Michael's behaviour may not be representative of a unified 'class habitus', as free school meal recipients in the school with the lowest socio-economic characteristics these two pupils are likely to occupy the lowest social-economic position in our study and thus offer insights into class-based dispositions. Their behaviour can be seen as differing in degree, not in kind, from the instances when their peers repeated the "CBA" meme.

In this way, our analysis suggests that class habitus plays a role in mediating the understanding of physical activity as it relates to 'healthism' – the idea that individuals increasingly understand health as being a personal responsibility to maintain a slim, toned body shape through a disciplined exercise regimen (Kirk and Colquhoun, 1989). While there are multiple and varied complexities within the healthism literature, we took particular interest in the aspect of healthism that attends to the calculated rationalities associated with individual effort and discipline towards physical activity (Wright et al., 2006). For Helen (a pupil in the middle of the socio-economic range of our study at Woodley Grange High School), this rationality was evident in the way she described doing Zumba and using the treadmill at the gym as "sometimes about burning off fat, sometimes just to keep healthy". This narrative was similar for other girls in our study who also talked about how fitness activities "make you feel good afterwards" (Angie). While a comprehensive gendered analysis is outside the scope of this paper, it would be remiss not to note that some of these activities point towards the intersection of class and gender whereby the gendered appropriateness of 'healthy' physical activities serve to shape what the girls and boys in this study were likely to engage with. Nevertheless, an endorsement of the principles of healthism was evident for boys too. In King Edwards Grammar, the boys talked about how they understood health and physical activity;

> **Researcher:** What have you learnt about physical activity and health from your school?
> **Adam:** You need to do sport, to have a healthy diet.

James: Just stay fit really. Fit in both ways, like body shape, sport fitness, um, like non-laziness, stuff like that.
Henry: You can see the health part when you are working really hard and then you start to sweat. You can feel yourself getting fitter.

Indeed, Richard in St Andrew's High School also alluded to this understanding and suggested that health consciousness is part of his everyday decision-making; "I like to keep in shape and so I like doing sports 'cos that helps to keep in shape" and also, "I'd say I'm quite healthy. I like to do a couple of sit ups at night." This adherence to healthism as demonstrated by the disciplined pursuit of exercise for health, fitness and virtuousness was apparent in pupils across the socio-economic range with the exception of free school meal recipients. Indeed, the contrast between embodying the virtuous, health conscious, effortful logic of healthism and the cultural meme of "CBA" is quite stark. This is significant in the context of reproducing inequalities in physical activity as, of course, openly exerting effort is fundamental to most physical activities especially within the field of the school setting. This is one everyday example of how pupils are situated in fields that unequally attach value to effortful participation in physical activities. We argue that this reveals one way in which public health interventions that attempt to promote physical activity in schools through the discourses of healthism are liable to reproduce and even exacerbate health inequalities given the limited impact that neoliberal constructions of the responsible, healthy citizen are likely to have on pupils in low socio-economic positions.

Because physical activities are social practices informed by classed cultures, these findings would suggest that efforts to reduce inequalities in activity levels are contingent upon reducing current levels of social inequality that inform and reproduce a pupil's classed habitus more broadly. Returning to Bourdieu, he highlights how, "agents shape their aspirations according to concrete indices of the accessible and inaccessible, of what is and is not 'for us'" (1989, p. 64). Therefore, lower socio-economic classes tend to be impeded in their possible engagement with what is more widely considered to be a 'healthy' lifestyle due to various capital related constraints. Consequently, pupils in low socio-economic positions are liable to

feeling that popularly promoted physical activities are not for people like them, that people like them would not, as well as could not, explicitly live in this way.

Conclusion

In attempt to contribute to debates about health inequalities, we set out to explore how and why young people in different class contexts engage differently in physical activity. We found Bourdieu's habitus to be a helpful analytical framework for this task. The data presented illustrate that scootering, free-running and football (soccer) were agreeable to and helped to constitute the system of dispositions for pupils in lower socio-economic positions, whereas pupils in higher socio-economic positions were more likely to demonstrate inclinations towards a committed engagement with organised sports and fitness activities in school contexts. Indeed, the pupils' reflexive awareness of important embodied distinctions related to social class is a noteworthy finding.

We further suggest that dispositions towards physical activities are classed in relation to the ways in which they are performed. Pupils in the middle and upper socio-economic range of our sample recognised and sometimes embodied the calculated rationalities of healthism, whereas pupils in the lowest socio-economic positions identified with ways of being that largely ran counter to healthism. Thinking of habitus as a *durable* system of dispositions implies a concern for the future trajectories of these pupils given the vast differences in opportunities that will be available to them. Bourdieu contended that this durability is a way of explaining social systems as reproductive, regulated and relatively stable. Through these subtle, everyday examples it is possible to see how pupils' personal histories accumulate into habituated dispositions that are likely to shape how they respond to future contexts and, therefore, to predict why inequalities in physical activity continue to be reproduced. However, Bourdieu also explained habitus as "an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its

structure. It is durable but not eternal!" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). This should give hope to those who wish to reduce inequalities in activity levels.

Finally, our data reveal that engagement in physical activity is, in many ways, irreducible to explanations of individual agency or indeed structural constraints. Class-based differences are, at least partially, matters of embodied inclinations and dispositions that are already evident at the age of 13/14. Here, we echo Shilling's (2003, p. 665) paraphrasing of Marx that "people make their bodies through labour, sport and play, but they do not make them in circumstances of their own choosing". For some of the pupils in our study, therefore, it is difficult to imagine how substantial investment in school-based provision, opportunity and resource would encourage physical activity in the short term, especially if the structural conditions that shape their lives are not meaningfully addressed. Ephemeral policy changes and short-term often school-based physical activity interventions are unlikely to reduce health inequalities because they do not deal with the social conditions that (re)produce durable classed dispositions that differentially position young people in relation to physical activities. Indeed, our data suggest that school-based activities are likely to be more readily taken up by pupils of higher socio-economic status (increasing the relative gap in activity levels) and that pupils of lower socio-economic status would be reluctant to engage with less traditional activities (which they do engage in) within a school setting. As these findings demonstrate, without addressing fundamental structural issues, the cultural norms and personal dispositions that have contributed to a well-established socio-economic gap in activity levels are likely to endure through generations to come.

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