

Understanding working-class learning with Bourdieu: Yorkshire, 1820-
1900

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I am sincerely grateful to Malcolm Chase for the support and inspiration he has provided me with over the past five years.

Abstract

Working-class adult learning was a significant feature of political agitation, industrial religion, and civic associations between 1820 and 1900. The importance of learning was such that all working-class political movements had stated educational aims, and most religious denominations used adult education to retain the loyalty of their congregations. The educational efforts of so many impoverished adults initially seem to challenge Pierre Bourdieu's theory that social inequalities are reproduced because individuals in subordinate groups are discouraged from acquiring cultural capital. Nevertheless, working people saw knowledge as socially valuable, and generally prioritised forms of cultural capital that Bourdieu regards as 'legitimate'. Therefore, using Bourdieu's conceptual tools to understand adult education offers a way of understanding the complexities of motivations to learn as well as the methods and impact of learning for working people. Research has demonstrated the dialectical nature of the relationship between learning and political agitation before 1850. Historians tend to overplay the significance of a subsequent shift towards individualist middle-class educational values after 1850. Using Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, capital, and field to analyse the working-class learning in mechanics' institutes and mutual improvement societies in Yorkshire demonstrates that this is an oversimplification. Whilst working-class individuals and associations unconsciously recreated aspects of bourgeois culture in their learning, we should reject the implication that learners accepted the bourgeois logic of the social and political field.

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Abbreviations

ARYUMI: Annual Report of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes

ARHMI: Annual Report of the Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute

SDUK: Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge

YUMI: Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes

Adult learning: the historiography

Adult learning during the nineteenth century has been the subject of much contemporary commentary and historical research. Working-class adult learning as an auxiliary to political movements has been well researched.¹ In addition, historians have researched adult education because of its potential to illuminate aspects of inter-class relationships and its significance to the concepts of 'aristocracy of labour' and 'respectability'. Research has attempted to explain the reasons for adults' desire for education, the methods used to learn and the impact of education on individuals and popular culture. The contribution of historians to these three areas of research will be considered before making the case for the use of Bourdieu's theory in an analysis of adult learning.

Contemporaries and historians recognise elementary skills were the most significant acquisition for working-class learners before the 1870 Elementary Education Act. Mabel Tylecote's comprehensive study of mechanics' institutes in Yorkshire and Lancashire found provision of elementary education was necessary to the popularity and utility of the institutes.² J.F.C. Harrison's study of working-class learners in the West Riding found adult education was 'almost inevitably utilitarian,' because children did not have sufficient schooling to learn to read.³ In 1856, sixty-nine percent of children in Church of England schools had been in school for less than two years.⁴ Growing interest in adult elementary learning after 1820 is attributed to the influence of political agitation. For E. P. Thompson, 'the articulate consciousness of the self-taught was above all a political consciousness.'⁵ Chartism and Owenism emphasised education's significance in achieving political aims.

¹ For example, Emma Griffin, "The Making Of The Chartists: Popular Politics And Working-Class Autobiography In Early Victorian Britain.", *The English Historical Review*, 129.538 (2016), 578-605; Andrew J.H. Jackson, "The Cooperative Movement And The Education Of Working Men And Women: Provision By A Local Society In Lincoln, England, 1861-1914", *International Labor And Working-Class History*, 90 (2016), 28-51; Brian Simon, *The Two Nations And The Educational Structure, 1780-1870*, 2nd edn (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974).

² Mabel Tylecote, *The Mechanic's Institutes Of Lancashire And Yorkshire Before 1851*(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957).

³ J.F.C. Harrison, *Social Reform In Victorian Leeds: The Work Of James Hole 1820-1895* (Leeds: The Thoresby Society, 1954) p. 41.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working-Class*, quoted in Christopher Radcliffe, "Mutual Improvement Societies And The Forging Of Working-Class Political Consciousness In Nineteenth-Century England", *International Journal Of Lifelong Education*, 16.2 (1997), 141-155 p. 154.

Brian Simon shows that Owenism valued education as necessary in reforming society to follow the 'laws of nature.' Owenites pursued a rational understanding of the world, the rejection of superstition and of irrational social practices.⁶ Similarly, from 1840, Chartism was increasingly committed to education as part of its argument for manhood suffrage. Scriven argues, 'between 1842 and 1848 the dominant belief among Chartists was that moral and social improvement would bring political power.'⁷ Despite classes and discussion groups connected to political movements, Harrison argues these movements gave working people the desire, though not necessarily the tools, to learn. For example, he suggests, 'the ferment rather than the facts of Owenism,' produced 'educational effort among adults.'⁸

Working-class learning occurring separately from political movements was, nonetheless, motivated by political unrest. Watson and Radcliffe's research of mutual improvement societies in Lancashire and Yorkshire show they attracted new members at times of 'political excitement'.⁹ Societies not directly associated with a political movement still acted 'as a forum for controversial topics.' By stimulating and satisfying 'a demand for political knowledge and analysis,' they created and elevated political consciousness.¹⁰ Mutual societies 'giving readings and talks in language comprehensible to their members, followed by... democratic discussion,' inspired the less politically aware to pursue both education and politics.¹¹ Watson notes Charles Shaw's (b.1832) conviction that 'no members of the Imperial Parliament ever go with a prouder joy to their great House than we went on Saturday nights to our meetings.' Shaw's learning was inspired by politics, often feeling 'as if the fate of a nation depended on that night's debate.'¹² Matthew Bevis shows political debate inspired learning; the significance of political oratory and of 'the orator moving mass crowds,' rose as the century progressed.¹³ Early in the century, educational associations attracted members by offering a forum for the debate of radical politics and, whilst

⁶ Simon, pp. 194, 240.

⁷ Tom Scriven, *Popular Virtue* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 103.

⁸ Harrison, p. 156.

⁹ M. I. Watson, "Mutual Improvement Societies In Nineteenth-Century Lancashire", *Journal Of Educational Administration And History*, 21.2 (1989), pp. 9-10.

¹⁰ Radcliffe, p. 142.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹² Shaw, *When I was a child*, 1903, p. 223 quoted in Watson.

¹³ Matthew Bevis, *The Art Of Eloquence: Byron, Dickens, Tennyson, Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 20-21.

commitment to radicalism weakened, debate did not lose its political significance as oratory became increasingly influential in politics both in and outside the House of Commons. The enduring significance of political aims for learners after 1850 has been somewhat overlooked by historians. The prioritisation of improving self-expression at a time when oratory in politics became increasingly significant suggests debate held political significance even when the subject was not explicitly political.

David Vincent's research using working-class autobiography suggests learning in the early-nineteenth century was radicalising. Increases in books published and a decrease in cost of reading material, coinciding with the war on the unstamped press, ensured working people were more motivated and more able to read.¹⁴ As numbers of learners increased, their attitude to learning was shaped by awareness of the difficulties they faced as learners, creating elements of radicalism in their learning culture. Industrialisation made reading impossible at work and reduced the amount of spare time available. Vincent argues, 'continuing difficulties experienced by those who sought book knowledge... threw them together and led to the growth of a distinct culture of self-improvement.'¹⁵ Material restrictions motivated working-class learners as learning became an attempt 'to isolate the pursuit of knowledge from the inequalities of class relations.'¹⁶

Historians argue that the collective aims shown by learners in the early century became increasingly individualistic after 1850. Harrison suggests education in non-political associations dampened learners' commitment to radicalism.¹⁷ Working-class learners were compelled to learn in mechanics' institutes and were aided by publications such as the *Penny Magazine*, published by the middle-class Society of the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) between 1832 and 1845. Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*, published in 1859, is also accused of diluting the significance of collective aims as inspiration for working-class learners. Harrison juxtaposes the radical learners of the 1830s and '40s, who aimed to raise the

¹⁴ From 1836 the Pickwick Papers allowed learners to acquire reputable literature for 1s per volume. The average number of books published each year from 842 in 1828 to 2,500 in 1853. David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge And Freedom* (London: Methuen, 1982) p. 116.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁷ Harrison, p. 156.

economic, moral and political status of the entire working class, with learners who were part of the individualistic tradition of self-help. Thompson portrays self-help as essentially middle class as it encouraged aspiration to a higher social and economic status for individuals rather than for the collective. For Harrison, education for personal gain indicates a 'process of assimilation...facilitated by the absence of any genuinely popular philosophy of education which might have provided an alternative to middle-class ideals of "instruction"'.¹⁸ Harrison argues that by 1860, despite enduring working-class educational organisations, learners were motivated by 'social liberalism' and accepted personal elevation by individual effort over collective elevation through 'radical change' to the social world.¹⁹ However, this overstates the extent to which middle-class ideals were inculcated by working-class learners and historians now recognise greater levels of continuity between early- and late-nineteenth century learning.

The view that Smilesian ideology seduced working people to middle-class individualism existed from the late-nineteenth century. Frank Owen, hero of *Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, thought *Self-Help* was suitable only for 'broken spirited poor wretches who contentedly resign themselves to a life of miserable toil and poverty.'²⁰ In the 1980s Asa Briggs restored to Smiles the complexities of his politics.²¹ He notes the foundations of *Self-Help* were delivered in lectures to Leeds mutual improvement societies in the 1840s. His message developed at a time of social conflict and came from, 'the background of Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League.'²² The similarities between the education of radicalism and self-help is reflected in Smiles' 1842 speech to the Bradford United Reform Club. He insisted education helped a learner to perceive 'a higher and attainable good,' inspiring him to

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 250.

²⁰ Robert Tressell *Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* cited in R.J. Morris, 'Samuel Smiles and the genesis of *Self-Help*; the retreat to a petit bourgeois utopia', *The Historical Journal*, 24, 1 (1981) pp. 89-109.

²¹ Morris lists the charges against him as being responsibility for publicising the Victorian myth of upward social mobility, attempts to make the working class in the middle class' image, responsibility for creating a cult of respectability which placed harsh pressures upon the poor and the rejection of state action to improve social conditions, p. 91. For a challenge to the traditional view see Morris, John Hunter, *The spirit of self-help: a life of Samuel Smiles*, (London: Shephard Walwyn, 2017), Asa Briggs, 'Samuel Smiles: the gospel of self-help', *History today* 37 (1987), 5 pp. 37-44.

²² Briggs, p. 38.

agitate for democracy.²³ Smiles' politics had lost some of its radicalism by 1859 but, Richard Cobden and Joseph Hume's presence in *Self Help* suggests his ideology did not necessitate a break from agitation for reform.²⁴ Briggs argues that 'through his philosophy of education... Smiles blurred any divisions that others might have made between "self-help" for the individual and "mutual self-help" for the group.'²⁵ In addition, Tom Scriven argues working-class learners' commitment to Smiles' form of self-help does not imply they had adopted middle-class attitudes as working-class educational self-help grew from an 'indigenous position within working-class politics' and was not an 'abrupt transition into crass materialism and apologetics for capitalism.'²⁶ Moreover, a study of mutual improvement societies after 1850 shows self-help literature was interpreted as support for egalitarian and democratic, rather than individualistic, social theory.

Scriven's study of moral Chartism in the 1840s and '50s shows learning continued to be motivated by political aspirations, arguing that educational self-help was 'one of the most popular but overlooked legacies of Chartism's improvement culture.' Educational aims avoided repeating 'tired arguments about revolution and violence from 1839,' suggesting that the prioritisation of learning was a compromise after political failures.²⁷ Working-class learning avoided the rejection of radicalism but, as Scriven argues, accepting education as a prerequisite to political representation signified a shift towards liberalism. Thus, educators became 'increasingly elitist and critical of sections of the people.'²⁸ Owenite and Co-operator George Jacob Holyoake's *Self-Help by the People* claimed workers 'made things bad for themselves and for their masters by their want of knowledge.'²⁹ Similarly, Vincent cites Lovett's belief that, 'if useful knowledge is... extensively disseminated among the industrious classes... it would soon be found that their vicious habits would yield to more rational pursuits.'³⁰ It will be shown that working-class learners classified themselves as

²³ Samuel Smiles *The diffusion of political knowledge among the working classes, an address delivered before the Bradford United Reform Club*, (1842), p. 14.

²⁴ Briggs, p. 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁶ Scriven, p. 181.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

²⁹ George Jacob Holyoake, *Public Speaking And Debate*, (1895), p. 6, Scriven pp. 179-8.

³⁰ Lovett, *Life and Struggles of William Lovett*, p. 58 in Vincent, p. 156.

superior to other working people by using the same language used to legitimise bourgeois superiority. However, this does not imply rejection of collective aims. Instead, it indicates a shift in political tactics; education's appeal in bourgeois and working-class culture made its pursuit an appropriate compromise for radicals who recognized agitation had failed in achieving their aims.

Vincent recognises the common language used by working- and middle-class educators, accepting that it demonstrates the influence of bourgeois values on self-help culture. Ideas about 'elevation' and 'useful knowledge' were repeated at both mechanics' institutes and exclusively working-class associations.³¹ Furthermore, working-class learners chose works, 'which belonged to a culture which had hitherto been the preserve of the educated classes.'³² Unlike Harrison, Vincent challenges the view that working-class learning after 1850 was motivated by desire for middle-class respectability. He suggests where common language was used, there was 'a decisive difference of interpretation.'³³ For working people, 'useful knowledge' was not technical skill but knowledge with the power 'to effect a transformation in [their] consciousness and in [their] relationship with the external world'.³⁴ When literature valued by bourgeois society was read, these cultural choices were, 'made by the reader himself, according to his own criteria.' Indeed, desire for literature was, 'presented as a spontaneous attribute of the working man.'³⁵ As will be shown, working people, in making these choices, saw themselves as taking ownership of a dominant culture which had previously been withheld from them.

Cultural similarities can also be interpreted as a form of protest. 'The culture of working-class self-improvement,' according to Vincent 'developed in isolation from the middle-class radicals who had hoped to define it.'³⁶ He suggests working-people read Shakespeare or Milton despite middle-class attempts to prevent them to do so, noting the SDUK excluded fiction in their publications. Mechanics' Institute libraries attempted to do the same, only an

³¹ Vincent, p. 165.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 165.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

increasingly middle-class membership prompted the inclusion of fiction. Emma Griffin's study of working-class autobiography also finds learning was motivated by desire for independence from, rather than emulation of, the dominant classes. She cites Holyoake's view that 'Intellectual bondage is worse than physical... to be free, we should be in a position to dare the judgement of the wise.'³⁷ Robert Hall notes that at the 1839 convention, John Deegan saw it as delegates' 'duty to prepare the people by proper instruction for the great change which must soon take place in the institution of the country.'³⁸ In the 1840s, Chartists saw students of science as committed to the 'struggle to overturn religious and political oppression and corruption and to bring about social and political change.'³⁹ After 1850, Hall suggests education was still pursued to free people from superstition and oppression, but was increasingly seen as a necessary, rather than a desirable, prerequisite of universal suffrage.⁴⁰

Whilst historians have shown that learners in the first half of the century were motivated by gaining political power and becoming literate, the analysis of motivations for learners after 1850 has been less conclusive. Research has sought to explain educational effort at a time when radicalism lost strength and when collaboration with the middle-class, both educational and political, became more common. Whilst the use of working-class autobiography has facilitated a more complex understanding of motivations to learn, Bourdieu's work offers the potential for greater clarity. Firstly, his theory of habitus argues dispositions are the product of personal history. In an analysis of working-class learning, habitus allows a historian to consider the enduring impact of active participation in politics on the dispositions of individuals. It is possible to suggest that agitation for change inculcated a sense of agency and heightened expectations, making education more attractive. Secondly, Bourdieu's concept of social field suggests behaviour is motivated by competition for available capital. Bourdieu suggests competition is most effective when actors understand the 'rules of the game' and that these rules are established by the dominant actors in the field. Using this analysis, aristocratic and middle-class politicians

³⁷ Holyoake, *Practical Grammar*, (1870) p. 7, quoted in Griffin, p. 169.

³⁸ *Northern Star*, 27th April 1839, quoted in R. G. Hall, "A United People? Leaders And Followers In A Chartist Locality, 1838-1848", *Journal Of Social History*, 38.1 (2004), p. 191.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

determined the 'rules' of the political field. Arguably, individualist or middle-class aspects of working-class education after 1850 represents a successful adjustment by working people to a field in which education was more likely to win them political capital than agitation.

Educational institutes before 1850 are well researched because mechanics' institutes, whose working-class membership was small after 1850, provide historians with a wealth of evidence, whereas mutual improvement societies, which continued to be relevant until after 1900, were less well documented. There is limited evidence of the educational activities of the Co-operative societies though we know these were numerous until they were amalgamated into the Workers Educational Association in 1903. Even less well documented and possibly far more important is the individual effort of learners occurring outside educational associations which was a far more constant feature of learners' lives.⁴¹

Mechanics' institutes opened across Britain in the 1820s. Initially aiming to provide a scientific education to mechanics, the institutions were increasingly dominated by members of the lower middle-classes. Tylecote's research shows their best contribution was the provision of elementary education. Over a quarter of male and over half of female members in Yorkshire were under eighteen in 1852, and 'among these young people... some of the most important work of the mechanics' institutes was done.'⁴² From the 1840s onwards, women attended institutes in Keighley, Huddersfield, Leeds, Holbeck and Wakefield and were prolific borrowers from the library.⁴³ In Huddersfield, where women had their own institute, they also had a separate library which Theresa Gerrard and Alexis Whedon investigated. The most popular of the 572 books in the library were fiction, making up fifty-three percent of loans. This was despite the stated aims of the institute being 'to teach sewing, reading, arithmetic, geography, history, and other branches of a sound and moral,

⁴¹ Vincent, p. 128.

⁴² James Hole, *"An Essay On The History And Management Of Literary, Scientific And Mechanics' Institutes And Especially How Far They May Be Developed And Combined For The Well Being Of The Country"*, 1853, pp. 19-20 and Tylecote, p. 260.

⁴³ *Annual Report of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes*, 1847, p. 13.

and secular education.’⁴⁴ Though books reflected a ‘middle-class understanding of working-class gender roles and led to a practical and proscriptive curriculum... the working-class women readers made their own choices from their library,’ and books served ‘a variety of purposes.’ Individual needs led women to select ‘books to aid their chances of employment in domestic service, to find out about the world, and -perhaps principally- for the entertainment of themselves or their family.’⁴⁵ The education of women and teenagers in the institutes shows their value to groups who would otherwise have been neglected.

Smaller institutes provided more effectively for the needs of the small communities they served; in Ripley and Pately Bridge one in six and one in ten inhabitants respectively attended their local institute.⁴⁶ In contrast, few of the larger institutes contributed more than literacy skills because of ‘the lack of a sense of fellowship and common purpose.’⁴⁷ Tylecote suggests institutes were characterised by ‘an individualistic purpose [which] created a competitive rather than a co-operative atmosphere.’⁴⁸ Whilst recognising enduring working-class presence in many institutes in Yorkshire, Tylecote argues the mechanics’ institutes were less effective for learners than ‘the “saloon” or the political club,’ where ‘working men met their fellows and shared their interests.’ At Institutes working people suffered from ‘the strain of unusual social contacts combined with the effort to be mentally alert.’⁴⁹

Harrison supports this conclusion, arguing ‘the type of class and the method of instruction in the institutes were felt to be alien to the ordinary working man.’ He takes the argument further by showing middle-class managers responded to their failure to provide a scientific education by moving towards a provision of a moral distraction and space for mixing social classes. This, Harrison argues, rendered the institutes useless to working-class learners.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁴ Teresa Gerrard and Alexis Weedon, "Working-Class Women's Education In Huddersfield: A Case Study Of The Female Educational Institute Library, 1856–1857", *Information & Culture*, 49.2 (2014), 234-264.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁴⁶ Tylecote, p. 68.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁹ Tylecote, p. 115.

⁵⁰ Harrison, p. 87.

1971 Edward Royle challenged this view, arguing Yorkshire's and Lancashire's institutes had a larger working-class membership than historians have appreciated, with youths and workers making up forty percent of Leeds members.⁵¹ Royle further argues mechanics' institutes restricted political debate in a similar way to working men's colleges. He concludes divisions between the institutes and working-class associations were 'more theoretical than real.'⁵² More recently, whilst not rejecting Royle's argument that institutes were valuable to many workers, historians argue mutual improvement societies were more effective because they provided companionship and support.⁵³ Vincent argues working-class associations provided a 'valuable source of psychological encouragement in times of particular difficulty or self-doubt.'⁵⁴ Whilst ideas about the value of companionship are valuable, Bourdieu's concepts offer the potential for a more rigorous analysis of the reasons for the failure of the mechanics' institutes.

Mutual improvement societies came in many forms. Larger mutual societies before 1850 were attached to the Owenite and Chartist movements, but details of their activities are limited. Smaller societies were groups of learners meeting in the house of a member. In the second half of the century, the growing Co-operative movement adopted the principle that twenty per cent of each society's annual profits be put aside for 'intellectual improvement' but records of this are scarce.⁵⁵ Andrew Jackson's study of the Lincoln Co-operative Society, one of the few to keep detailed records of their educational activity, shows that starting an educational fund in 1863 was a way of boosting membership as education was 'one of the more compelling social and cultural benefits of cooperation.'⁵⁶ More common after 1850 were mutual improvement societies associated with chapels and churches as the religious

⁵¹ Hudson cited in Royle, 'Mechanics' Institutes and the Working Classes, 1840-1860', *The Historical Journal* (1971) vol. 14, 2, p. 311.

⁵² Royle, p. 317.

⁵³ Harrison argued that mutual societies 'represented the working man's own solution to his educational needs,' which were primarily the three Rs and the freedom to place 'emphasis on discussion classes and debates.' Harrison, p. 53.

⁵⁴ Vincent p. 127.

⁵⁵ By 1871 Co-operative societies in England had recruited 250,000 members. Andrew J.H. Jackson, "The Cooperative Movement And The Education Of Working Men And Women: Provision By A Local Society In Lincoln, England, 1861-1914", *International Labor And Working-Class History*, 90 (2016) pp. 30-31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

organisation provided a meeting space and recruiting ground. In fact, Radcliffe argues that after 1850 'in many areas no Sunday school was considered thoroughly equipped without [a mutual improvement society].'⁵⁷ In a final stage of evolution, mutual societies after 1880 were increasingly found within rationalist societies and secular schools or labour and socialist clubs.⁵⁸ Whilst mutual societies were varied in outlook and interests, they can be broadly defined by their use of members as teachers and by activities which prioritized speaking exercises, reading aloud followed by discussion and the reading and critique of members' essays. The popularity of mutual improvement societies in the second half of the century suggests learners preferred to be educated in a working-class social field. Using Bourdieu's concept of field allows for an analysis of the potential for working-class autonomy in associations with a working-class membership. Exploring the differences between working-class educational fields and the wider social field can contribute to the debate about the extent of middle-class individualism after 1850.

Members of mechanics' institutes and mutual societies, at least until the 1870s, were overwhelmingly male. Female members were mostly unmarried and often only had access to domestic classes. Historians including June Purvis, Kate Flint and Kelly Mays demonstrate that learning for women was drastically more difficult than for men. Girls attended school for less time, less regularly than boys and their education was increasingly dominated by domestic learning.⁵⁹ Day and dame schools taught girls sewing but gender-specific learning became more entrenched after 1870 when political agendas could be expressed in compulsory education. As adults, women were prevented from learning by lack of time. Elizabeth Robert's collection of the recollections of the population of Barrow and Furness for the period 1890-1914 often found the response to the question 'What did your mother do in her spare time?' was 'She never had any.'⁶⁰ Whereas male working hours reduced

⁵⁷ Radcliffe, p. 151.

⁵⁸ In Bradford there were over 20 labour clubs in the early 1890s. In these organisations there were classes for adults as well as socialist Sunday schools in the labour churches. Ben Turner attended a socialist Sunday school in Huddersfield from 1878. Radcliffe, p. 151.

⁵⁹ Jane McDermid, 'Women and Education', in June Purvis ed., *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945, An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1995) pp. 91-2.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Roberts, 'Learning and Living – Socialisation Outside school', *Oral History*, 3 (1975) p. 14

through the century, women's typically did not.⁶¹ Florence Bell's research in Middlesborough found in 1907 that for most families, 'the husband is a great reader... the wife would be but has not time.'⁶² Joanna Bourke argues 'relative to other members of the household, the housewife did not get her "fair share" of leisure. In one sense, *her* work facilitated *their* leisure.'⁶³ Flint and Gommersall show when women were encouraged to educate themselves it was to make themselves better wives and mothers, rather than better individuals.⁶⁴

Gendered education, domestic work and the commonly held conviction that female education was an unnecessary luxury meant most women had no time or were criticised for their attempts at educational improvement. Therefore, female membership of mechanics' institutes was largely middle-class whilst mutual improvement societies were often aimed at 'young men'. Women educated themselves largely through reading in the home. They benefited from public libraries founded in the second half of the century, particularly once women's reading rooms were installed. But women were forced 'to struggle on alone and unaided,' were given little useful advice about what to read and found that the only reading time they had was 'stolen study – in the midst of continual distractions and interruptions.'⁶⁵ Bourdieu argues working-class women represent a dominated group within a subordinate class, suggesting that placing limited value on female education is a form of 'symbolic violence.' Using the theory of habitus facilitates an explanation of how and why many women in the nineteenth century learned to avoid learning.

Historians agree that members of institutes or mutual societies, whether male or female, rarely experienced material change to their lifestyle. Though Tylecote has shown that some

⁶¹ Kelly J. Mays, "Domestic Spaces, Readerly Acts: Reading(,) Gender, And Class In Working-Class Autobiography", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 30.4 (2008), p. 358

⁶² Florence Bell, *At the works: a study of a manufacturing town (Middlesborough)* (London: Edward Arnold, 1907) p. 267 quoted in Mays, p. 358.

⁶³ Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: gender, class and ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 67.

⁶⁴ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) p. 99; Meg Gommersall, *Working-Class Girls In Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 89.

⁶⁵ Marison Reid, *A Plea for Women*, 1843 pp. 174-7, 196 in Kathryn Gleadle ed., *Radical Writing On Women, 1800-1850* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 66-7.

mechanics' institute members became designers and inventors, she recognises that financial success was not a common consequence of adult learning.⁶⁶ Harrison argues social, rather than financial, status was most likely to shift; to be perceived as a 'learned man' commanded respect and consideration for roles in political movements.⁶⁷ Griffin agrees, arguing that 'the most talented entered the doors in search of literacy, but walked out with the capacity to lead, organise and manage.'⁶⁸ Thompson argues that 'various forms of chapel or educational or economic self-help,' were given 'political expression' by the Independent Labour Party, suggesting self-educators became members and leaders of the Party.⁶⁹ Vincent echoes this view, arguing to have 'the name of being a great reader, to be known in the community as a "lover of books", signified an individual who could be clearly distinguished from other working men by his outlook and behaviour.' This made political leadership possible as 'virtually every working-class organisation made use of written communication and as such was dependent upon the skills of literate men.'⁷⁰ But this visible difference between the educated and the uneducated also created, 'constant tension at the level of both ideology and personal relations.'⁷¹ Therefore, learning may well have provided some financial and political opportunities but it simultaneously made social relationships more difficult. Nevertheless, Vincent argues that for all the writers in his research, 'in spite of the sometimes divisive and destructive consequences of their pursuit of knowledge, they remained working men, both in occupation and outlook.'⁷²

Historians argue that most learners gained something less tangible than new employment or a leadership position within a political movement. Griffin notes, 'clubs, societies and a little education gave ordinary working men a measure of status and importance in their own eyes as well as in those of their neighbours,' and that learning gave men like John Lincoln, who used his education to become a preacher, 'freedom, and even a small drop of power, despite his poverty.'⁷³ Harrison agrees, 'the greatest value' of educational activity was not,

⁶⁶ Tylecote.

⁶⁷ Harrison, p. 44.

⁶⁸ Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2014), p. 183.

⁶⁹ Thompson cited in Radcliffe, p. 152.

⁷⁰ Vincent, p. 153.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁷³ Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, p. 183, 18.

in the long run, 'the acquisition of the three Rs, but membership of a small and active community.'⁷⁴ Furthermore, educational effort, 'succeeded in alleviating some of the starkness and brutality, endemic among unswept streets, lit only by the gas jets of the public house and the gin palace,' and it lifted people's expectations by giving them 'confidence in their own intellectual abilities.'⁷⁵ Using Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital in this analysis can make these 'intangible gains' more tangible. He argues a social actors' position in any social field is determined by possession of both economic and cultural capital. Additionally, positions in the wider social field are relative to each other and constantly shifting due to competition between actors. Though working people in the nineteenth century rarely moved out of their social class, cultural capital encourages a historian to consider how learning changed an actors' position within their class and the benefits they enjoyed as a result. Furthermore, the involvement of so many in adult learning makes it possible to suggest that the position of the working-class as a collective gained a higher relative position resulting from their possession of cultural capital. If this is the case, working-class learning enabled competition for political capital in the form of access to the franchise and working-class representation in parliament.

Habitus, cultural capital and field as thinking tools in cultural history

Bourdieu's key concepts of symbolic capital, habitus and field have considerable value as thinking tools for historical research. However, as Gunn noted in *History and Cultural Theory*, Bourdieu's work, 'has something of a ghostly presence in cultural history. Historians frequently reference Bourdieu, but rarely apply his ideas in any detail.'⁷⁶ Those historians who have used Bourdieu's theoretical framework more rigorously have found them valuable tools in the analysis of power, as will be shown in the next chapter. Bourdieu's theories are constructive because they were developed to ask, 'How can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?'⁷⁷ For a historian these concepts resist the

⁷⁴ Harrison, p. 197. This is in reference to the Zion society at New Wortley.

⁷⁵ Radcliffe, 1986, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Simon Gunn, *History And Cultural Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), p. 20.

⁷⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* Richard Nice tr. (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 50.

dominating tendencies of structuralism whilst still accepting the influence of social structures on individual agency.⁷⁸

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital are primarily concerned with an explanation of how individuals operate within enduring structures of power. Bourdieu argues the social power of individuals is dependent on possession of economic and cultural capital which, when combined, determines their relative position in the wider social field. Cultural capital has an arbitrary and relative value and includes a huge range of products, skills and practices, including general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, use of language and even physical movements.⁷⁹ Distinctive to Bourdieu's argument is that the value of cultural capital is derived from the dominant class' possession of it in large quantities. Dominants assign high value to the skills and cultural products they possess. Cultural capital gained in a bourgeois upbringing has no more intrinsic value than that gained in a working-class home, but children of the dominant class are perceived to have cultural traits with higher value. Cultural capital is 'imbued with social value and therefore constitute[s] resources in state competition.'⁸⁰ Whilst Bourdieu sees economic as the most fundamental form of capital, he argues cultural capital can also be exchanged for advantages in several institutions and fields. For example, culturally wealthy homes and the school system reward the same skills and cultural traits and therefore wealthy students appear more articulate to their teachers because they 'speak the same language'.⁸¹ The dominant class retain economic and social advantages because as well as possessing economic capital which makes them dominant in wider society, they also occupy dominant positions in the fields of education, politics, law and finance. In these varied fields, they define cultural values and in doing so determine the cultural capital required for success.

As well as ensuring cultural capital gained within middle-class homes gains economic privileges in various fields, Bourdieu argues the bourgeoisie portray their cultural capital as

⁷⁸ Gunn, 2006, pp. 70-75.

⁷⁹ David Swartz, *Culture & Power: The Sociology Of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 75.

⁸⁰ Michèle Ollivier, "Revisiting Distinction", *Journal Of Cultural Economy*, 1.3 (2008), p. 264.

⁸¹ Crossley, 'Social Class' in Michael Grenfell ed., *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), p. 95.

intrinsic rather than bought. This allows dominant groups to legitimise their position by portraying themselves as having natural cultural superiority and presenting working-class culture as less cultivated than their own. What is perceived to be superior culture corresponds with social class because cultural capital that is valued in society such as understanding of classical music, literature, and dining room etiquette, can only be acquired if the social actor has a certain 'distance from economic necessity' that would allow for sustained pedagogical effort necessary to embody knowledge and skills like these. Bourdieu therefore differentiates between a 'taste for freedom' possessed by the middle and upper class and the 'taste for necessity'.⁸² He argues freedom from poverty allows the wealthy to prioritise form over function. In contrast, cultural products with more substance than style have a low value in society because they are chosen by those who 'have a taste for what they are anyway condemned to.'⁸³ Whereas the taste for necessity would value products that perform a function, the taste for freedom might classify this choice as one made in poor taste. When applied to art, Bourdieu suggests, a piece of art with high cultural value would have limited continuity between art and life, it would require 'the conscious or unconscious implementation of explicit or implicit schemes of perception and appreciation,' or a cultural code. In a bourgeois world, this cultural code includes understanding of art history, allowing the possessor to unlock the deeper meaning of the painting. In contrast, art with low cultural value would correlate with our understanding of life and therefore require limited cultural awareness to appreciate it.⁸⁴

In cultural capital, as in Bourdieu's other concepts, relativity is crucial. He argues that classification of bourgeois culture as valuable is only achieved by defining it in opposition to working-class culture; 'the tastes of freedom can only assert themselves in relation to the tastes of necessity, which are thereby brought to the level of the aesthetic and so defined as vulgar.'⁸⁵ The significance of opposition in retaining the middle-class position is most clear when dominant culture denies the cultural preferences associated with a culture of necessity. This, for Bourdieu, is 'the denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile- in a word,

⁸² Bourdieu, 1994, p. 56.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

natural-enjoyment,' and it is this denial which 'implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures.'⁸⁶ In classifying cultural taste as 'vulgar' the dominant class perform 'symbolic violence.' This is especially effective because working people, viewing themselves as 'dominated by ordinary interest and urgencies,' accept dominant taste as having 'legitimate superiority' over them.⁸⁷ Therefore, 'art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.'⁸⁸ In viewing dominant culture as legitimately superior, the dominated class accept the dominant 'rules of the game,' strengthening the existing social hierarchy.

In Bourdieu's analysis, when capital is embodied, it becomes habitus. Habitus is a system of 'durable, transposable dispositions,' which result from learned experiences.⁸⁹ Informal development of habitus involves unconscious socialization according to the tendencies of a social actor's class, ethnicity and gender, whilst formal development occurs through education.⁹⁰ Habitus orientates a person in a field, contributing to their perception of and behaviour within it. Bourdieu classifies habitus as 'developed' if it embodies a range of high value cultural capital which the actor could exchange for success within various fields. A developed habitus identifies possibilities within a field, expects success and formulates the strategy most appropriate to competing for the capital available. For Bourdieu, habitus is not habit, nor is it deterministic. Habitus produces different behaviours in different fields and behaviours cannot be 'deduced either from the present conditions which seem to have provoked them or from the past conditions which have produced the habitus...[but from their] interrelationship.'⁹¹

Competition is crucial to Bourdieu's explanation of the interaction of field and habitus. He argues behaviour can be conceived as 'strategy' developed by habitus to allow competition

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 56.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸⁹ Bourdieu, 2002, quoted in Jason D. Edgerton and Lance W. Roberts, "Cultural Capital Or Habitus? Bourdieu And Beyond In The Explanation Of Enduring Educational Inequality", *Theory And Research In Education*, 12.2 (2014), p. 195.

⁹⁰ Karl Maton, 'Habitus' in Grenfell eds. pp. 49-64.

⁹¹ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford Univeristy Press, 1990), p. 56.

for capital. Swartz defines strategy as an 'attempt to move through a maze of constraints and opportunities' within a range of fields which individuals 'grasp imperfectly' through their habitus.⁹² Bourdieu suggests a working-class habitus has a more 'imperfect' conception of a field making their strategy less effective.⁹³ Moreover, because habitus is embodied capital, capital that is embodied later in life is distinguishable from that embodied in the home. Bourdieu argues differences in habitus reveal 'the manner in which the culture has been acquired' and that these differences 'distinguish the different- and ranked- modes of cultural acquisition, early or late, domestic or scholastic, and the classes of individuals which they characterise.'⁹⁴ Therefore, habitus acts as a social marker, reproducing social inequalities. This correlates with nineteenth-century history as when working people gained extensive knowledge and skills through adult education they rarely left their class. Instead, the language and ideology of those who learned through mutual education became its own social marker, a signal of distinction from other fractions of the working class.

Nick Crossley notes that Bourdieu's 'analysis of cultural life maintains a strong focus on class, prioritising it in a way that is unusual' in the twenty-first century.⁹⁵ Bourdieu determines an individual's position in the social field by calculating their possession of economic and cultural capital. Bourdieu identifies those who occupy a similar position in the social field as 'classes on paper', arguing actors who share similar positions generally experience similar social conditions.⁹⁶ He emphasises the historical nature of habitus, its formation and evolution in social conditions. A working-class habitus, developing in social conditions typical to its class, bears some similarities to another working-class habitus. Whilst middle-class individuals enter many fields feeling securely distinguished, the working class share the experience of being classified as relatively less distinguished and of being reminded of their limited 'horizon of possibilities'.⁹⁷ Furthermore, individuals with a similar habitus often have contact and strengthen the similarities between them. However,

⁹² Swartz, p. 99.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Bourdieu, 1994, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁵ Nick Crossley, 'Social Class' in Grenfell ed. p. 87.

⁹⁶ Crossley, p. 93.

⁹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D Wacquant, *An Invitation To Reflexive Sociology* (New York: Polity Press, 1992), p. 124.

Bourdieu contends that habitus continually evolves; experiences of an individual can either confirm or throw in to doubt expectations and possibilities. Terry Eagleton argues the historical nature of habitus and its intersection with field means the concept allows for a 'matching of the subjective and the objective, what we feel spontaneously disposed to do and what our social conditions demand of us.'⁹⁸ The evolution of habitus allows for the possibility of behaviour that is original or unexpected without overlooking social inequalities. The increase in educational activity amongst working-class adults after 1820 represents a significant social change which can be understood through habitus. Working-class habitus evolved in a changing social field, producing changes in behaviour that nonetheless were shaped by enduring social inequalities.

Bourdieu's concept of field adds conceptual depth to capital and habitus. Fields are, 'arenas of production, circulation and appropriation' of cultural, political or economic capital.⁹⁹ In contrast to 'context' or 'social background' field sufficiently recognises 'latent patterns of interest and struggle,' that shape social arenas.¹⁰⁰ To compete for capital within a field, an individual must understand its 'logic' or the 'rules of the game'. Each field differs according to the capital it prioritises and possession of this capital determines the 'hierarchical set of power relations among the competing individuals.'¹⁰¹ Field recreates social privilege because, as each actor competes for the most valuable capital to adjust their position within a field, they legitimise the existing 'rules of the game' and the existing hierarchy of capital which, as has been shown, tends to reflect the hierarchy of wealth in wider society. Moreover, 'structural homologies' exist between fields, meaning the positions social actors occupy in the social field are reflected in other fields.¹⁰²

Whilst Bourdieu accepts that a field has *relative* autonomy, he argues the internal logic of a field is never free from external influences. Therefore, in all fields, opposition between refined and vulgar tastes, are 'almost universally applicable and are based... on the social

⁹⁸ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London: Longman, 1994) p. 157.

⁹⁹ Swartz, p. 117.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁰² Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 83-83, cited in Swartz, p. 134.

opposition between the 'elite' and the 'masses'.¹⁰³ This means those with a dominant position in the social field appear 'naturally more cultured than others,' in all fields.¹⁰⁴ Using Bourdieu's concept of field can improve our understanding of the relationship between middle-class educational values and working-class learning culture. Working-class associations partially reproduced dominant values but did not reproduce the social hierarchy in the wider social field. Because working people dominated in exclusively working-class fields, a relatively autonomous culture developed within them. Therefore, Bourdieu's concept of field is a tool for analysis of the similarities and differences between bourgeois and working-class educational values.

Bourdieu and nineteenth-century history

Bourdieu's work has contributed to nineteenth-century research. For Andrea Jacobs, his theories provide, 'useful tools to think with,' as they conceive agents as 'both determined and determining.'¹⁰⁵ Jacobs' study of the influences of class and gender on late-Victorian school girls demonstrates the value of using Bourdieu's concepts in analysing a dominated group. Her recognition of the differences between Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, which is more objectivist, and his theory of practice, which Jacobs argues, 'must be viewed as the counterbalance,' is valuable.¹⁰⁶ She considers the structural restrictions female students experienced whilst also explaining why changes to the field of education produced new behaviour and, eventually, adjusted habitus. The dual nature of Bourdieu's framework can also explain adult education's growing popularity after 1820. His theory of social reproduction explains why adult learning was difficult and success was limited. However, his theory of action explains why, despite difficulties, the number of adult learners increased.

Modern sociologists use Bourdieu's concepts to explain why experiencing poverty makes individuals less disposed to enter higher education or less likely to experience academic success.¹⁰⁷ Simon Charlesworth's study of late-twentieth century Rotherham led him to

¹⁰³ Bourdieu, *La noblesse d'Etat: Grands corps et grandes ecoles*, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1989) p. 385 quoted in Swartz, p. 131

¹⁰⁴ Bourdieu et al. 1990, quoted in Crossley, p. 96.

¹⁰⁵ Andrea Jacobs, "Examinations As Cultural Capital For The Victorian Schoolgirl: 'Thinking' With Bourdieu", *Women's History Review*, 16.2 (2007) p. 249.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Bourdieu, 1994, pp. 6-7.

argue that working people's experience of poverty creates a habitus defined by, 'a sense of the limits of their lives,' which set 'parameters to their way of dealing with the world,' and which, 'one hears clanging around their speech like the tolling of a bell.'¹⁰⁸ Charlesworth found individuals were unlikely to engage in cultural activities because there was, 'little incentive,' to develop 'other forms of consciousness,' beyond 'coping skills.'¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu argues the skill of coping results from a 'smooth working of the habitus,' which, 'does not mean happiness; it means bodily submission, unconscious submission which may indicate a lot of internalised tension, a lot of bodily suffering.'¹¹⁰ Charlesworth concludes poverty leads to avoidance of activities other than those that 'minimise... awareness of suffering.'¹¹¹ Nineteenth-century working-class habitus was also limited by poverty. Chartist Thomas Frost argued agitation was more difficult for those whose thoughts were full of 'how to get the next meal, to replace some worn-out garment, or to pay the rent.'¹¹² Furthermore, manual labour involved lack of variety and physical suffering which convinced workers like William Dodd, who was crippled by the factory system, that machines had the 'power to destroy or render [the human body] useless.'¹¹³ Work and living conditions could make workers feel powerless and less disposed towards cultural activities that promised to improve their lives. Holyoake recognised the damaging effect this had on workers' motivation. Remembering a lecture at Rochdale in the 1840s he recalled, 'they came in one by one from the mills, looking as damp and disconsolate as their prospects,' the picture haunted Holyoake who, in 1879, could still 'see their dull hopeless-looking faces.'¹¹⁴ Therefore, the experience of poverty, long hours and physical exertion, created a habitus more disposed to avoid cultural acquisition.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Charlesworth, 'Bourdieu, social suffering and working-class life' in Bridget Fowler ed. *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture* (Sociological review monograph series: 2000) p. 52.

¹⁰⁹ Charlesworth p. 54.

¹¹⁰ Bourdieu and Eagleton (1992) p. 121 cited in Charlesworth, p. 62.

¹¹¹ Charlesworth, p. 54.

¹¹² Frost, *Forty Years' Recollections*, p. 255, quoted in Hall, p. 194.

¹¹³ Dodd describes the experience of factory work for the labourer: 'he hears nothing but the rumbling noise of the machinery, or the harsh voice of the overlooker-sees nothing but an endless variety of shafts, drums, straps, and wheels in motion', William Dodd, *Narrative of the Experience and Sufferings of William Dodd A Factory Cripple Written by Himself* (first edititon, 1841, London: Cass, 1968) p. 311 quoted in Gagnier, pp. 142-3.

¹¹⁴ George J. Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation in England*, vol 2 (London 1879, reprint New York 1971) p. 18 quoted in Hall, p. 194.

A nineteenth-century working-class habitus might be less disposed towards adult learning because of experience of education. At Sunday, dame and board schools, students were generally 'passive learners,' educated through, 'repetition and obedience not enquiry.'¹¹⁵ Students often left school unable to read or write well and even skilled labourers found employment that made little use of their limited education. It is likely that many working people considered extension of their education as among the 'most improbable practices.' Bourdieu argues these improbabilities are 'excluded as unthinkable' by the habitus and that this is 'a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.'¹¹⁶ Negative experiences in education and employment were absorbed by the habitus, confirming to individuals that education was not for them and that educational effort was not worth the economic, social and personal cost.

Bourdieu argues that for working-class people competing for cultural capital, their cultural subordination is even more restricting than their economic subordination. Bourgeois dominant culture, by portraying their own culture as legitimate, classifies working-class people as culturally inferior. Gunn shows that this analysis of bourgeois culture is applicable to the nineteenth-century middle class who consciously classified culture to legitimise social superiority. Expensive schooling and payment for subscription to libraries, literary and philosophical societies, admission to exhibitions and to concerts allowed the bourgeoisie to pursue distinction. These 'cultured' behaviours were portrayed as natural rather than bought.¹¹⁷ This reflects what Bourdieu sees as 'symbolically shifting the essence of what sets [the bourgeois] apart from other classes from the economic field to that of culture.'¹¹⁸ Gunn shows the bourgeois press presented 'high society' and 'high culture' as intrinsically linked, reinforcing his suggestion that in late Victorian England the 'social' and the 'cultural' were 'scarcely distinguishable from one another; they had become mutually interpenetrating and reinforcing.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn*, p. 181.

¹¹⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 54.

¹¹⁷ Simon Gunn, "Translating Bourdieu: Cultural Capital And The English Middle Class In Historical Perspective", *The British Journal Of Sociology*, 56.1 (2005), pp. 49-64.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Gunn, 2005, p. 52.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Bourgeois social positioning meant portrayals of working people in literature, even when sympathetic, were usually one dimensional. Regina Gagnier notes this tendency in Dickens' work. In *Oliver Twist* the middle-class represent the good, unemployed thieves the bad. Gagnier argues working people read Dickens for 'what Bourdieu would call his "moral agreeableness"... rather than his representations of themselves'.¹²⁰ In education, bourgeois classification of working-class culture was prominent partly because of the influence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) and middle-class leadership of the mechanics' institutes. Both organisations pushed working-people towards a scientific, technical or moral education. The intentions of most philanthropists were undoubtedly progressive, as individuals they were convinced a limited education for working people was the best way to improve the lives of the majority. However, Bourdieu argues the middle class unconsciously legitimise their economic dominance by placing a higher value on the cultural attributes they learn in the home. Thus, belief in their own distinction becomes embedded in their habitus. Therefore, when individuals formed groups which provided an appropriate education for workers, they subconsciously revealed their conviction that the culture of their own class was naturally superior. Furthermore, middle-class philanthropists often prevented working-class learners from accessing this knowledge.

Prior's analysis of the bourgeois-sponsored National Gallery of Scotland, completed in 1851, demonstrates a typical example of how high-value culture was monopolised. The catalogue of the gallery 'was patterned according to a relational set of knowledges that privileged the cultivated gaze and its ability to decipher the invisible codes and make them coherent – that could place works and artists into recognisable movements, schools and styles.'¹²¹ As a further way of preventing or discouraging cultural acquisition, the lower classes were, 'kept at one remove or controlled in the gallery space itself. The Board of Trustees directed its guards to check for any 'misconduct' and to 'refuse admittance to suspicious characters.'¹²²

¹²⁰ Regina Gagnier, *Subjectivities* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 104.

¹²¹ Nick Prior, "A Different Field Of Vision: Gentlemen And Players In Edinburgh, 1826-1851", in *Pierre Bourdieu And Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations* (New York: SAGE, 1997), pp. 157-8.

¹²² Ibid.

This symbolic violence reinforces the status quo, legitimising and naturalising the position of the subordinated classes.

Bourdieu argues the social field's logic is defined by the middle-class who dominate it and who are therefore able to determine the capital valued within it. Subordinates in the social field are forced to partially accept middle-class rules of the game to gain economic and social benefits. A study of working-class learners reveals the culture they saw as 'legitimate' was the same as that valued highly by the middle-class. Similarly, working-class learners emulated the bourgeois in their use of classifying language such as 'low' and 'vulgar' in contrast to 'higher' and 'pure'. William Dodd's conviction that his life as 'a factory slave' was full of 'the mists of ignorance' and his subsequent realisation that he 'was intended for a nobler purpose,' reflects working people's use of bourgeois language to classify culture.¹²³ Texts that provided advice to working-class learners such as William Ellery Channing's *Self-Culture* or Smiles' *Self-Help* consistently classified activities like drinking as inferior and encouraged learners to view non-learners within their class critically. Therefore, Bourdieu's theories of field and capital show working-class ideas of legitimate behavior were a reflection of middle-class values and resulted from the domination of the bourgeoisie in the wider social field.

The work of Jacobs and Gunn demonstrates the dominance of the bourgeoisie in society and in the field of education. This dominance, when combined with the experience of industrial work and poverty, meant nineteenth-century working people were more likely to view learning as impossible or unappealing and more conducive to sacrificing material benefits than gaining them. And yet, rather than relying on coping mechanisms that limited their understanding of the world and the experience of their own suffering, a significant minority of working people throughout the nineteenth century were actively involved in learning. This cultural work saw them deliberately opening their eyes to what lay beyond their immediate surroundings, they challenged themselves to confront their suffering and to

¹²³ *A narrative of the experiences and sufferings of William Dodd, a Factory Cripple, Written by Himself*. 2nd Ed., 1841, p. 288 quoted in Kelly J. Mays, "Domestic Spaces, Readerly Acts: Reading(,) Gender, And Class In Working-Class Autobiography", *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 30.4 (2008), p. 345.

overcome it with cultural rather than economic capital and they refused to accept the apparent limits to their lives. Experiencing grueling living conditions, unskilled manual labour and limited formal education meant a habitus which was under-developed. A strong sense of their limits risked shaping working people's perception of new cultural fields as 'not for me'. And yet, they formed and joined associations, societies and libraries in large numbers for over a century. This might initially seem to challenge Bourdieu's concepts. However, Bourdieu's argument that behaviour is produced by an interaction between capital, habitus and field, all three of which are changeable and responsive to each other allows for a more flexible view of adult learning that can shed new light on the reasons for, and the experience of, adult learning.

Jacobs shows social change can produce change in the strategy produced by a habitus. Although dominant society perceived the 'future role of a middle-class girl' as marriage and motherhood, changes to the field of education produced greater disposition to learn in some women.¹²⁴ Many girls avoided education because female education had little social value, in fact, 'the woman who deviated from the retiring domestic ideal was in constant peril: at any moment she might become one of the threatening, dangerous, unsexed, monsters incarnate, so abhorred by the conservative press.'¹²⁵ Despite this, Jacobs argues, the introduction of a system of examinations and scholarships encouraged girls to value cultural capital, and an increasing number of opportunities for them to enter skilled employment confirmed this.

Prior's work has similarly shown that shifts in the social field, particularly when one social class augments its relative position, effects other fields. In the late-eighteenth century, the middle class began to displace the aristocracy. This change was reflected in the artistic field as the aristocracy were usurped in their role as classifiers of artistic value. The new classifiers of culture were bourgeois artists, professionals and financiers who were members of the Scottish Academy of Painting Sculpture and Architecture. Prior suggests 'such struggles between the "ancients and the moderns," mirrored those elsewhere, and in this

¹²⁴ Jacobs, p. 251.

¹²⁵ Sara Delamont, *Knowledgeable Women*, (Oxford: Routledge, 1989) p. 136, quoted in Jacobs, p. 251.

sense the broad game of conflict was universal.’¹²⁶ All fields became increasingly meritocratic and were, ‘used to facilitate the constitution of a more distinct sphere of professional, bourgeois values.’¹²⁷ Prior’s work provides an insight in to the ways that Bourdieu’s theories explain social change as well as continuity. When the bourgeoisie became increasingly able to compete with the aristocracy for economic, social and political power, this competition was expressed in attempts to reinterpret cultural value and production.

Whilst, at the turn of the century, success in the competition for social power was confined to the upper-middle class and the aristocracy, in the second-quarter of the nineteenth century the soon to be enfranchised lower-middle class and the disenfranchised working-class competed for and began to win an augmentation of their own position in society. Mass involvement in competition for political power and the extension of the suffrage in 1832 shifted the relative positions of individuals within the social field, altering its nature.¹²⁸ Changes in the social field intersected with working-class habitus to produce different behaviours, most notably participation in political and cultural movements. Over time, changes to the social field and changing patterns of behaviour within it represented a ‘social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from initial ones,’ and resulting in a working-class habitus more disposed to compete for cultural capital.¹²⁹ The arrival of a new political movement saw many working people taking local leadership roles, giving them a sense of personal agency and quickly developing their skills as speakers and writers. Eagleton argues ‘active political struggle,’ is transformative, suggesting ‘direct confrontation with the power of the state,’ irreversibly alters ‘political consciousness.’¹³⁰ Participation in movements that aimed to radically change the logic of the social field required individuals to perceive new possibilities and to have higher expectations of themselves. Over time these

¹²⁶ Prior, p. 157.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

¹²⁸ Gunn has noted that for some critics, Bourdieu’s analysis fails when applied to periods of change: ‘sudden or significant historical change... whether radical political change or new cultural movements..., can be difficult to explain..., since continuity and conformity are routinely emphasised over rupture and dissent.’ *History and Cultural Theory*, p. 77.

¹²⁹ Bourdieu, *In Other Words: essays towards a reflexive sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 116, quoted in Edgerton and Roberts, p. 200.

¹³⁰ Eagleton, p. 223.

expectations were rewarded by gaining enough cultural capital to augment social position in relation to other working-class individuals. In other words, the changing social field provided opportunities for working-class activists to gain status within their class. For thousands more, the relative success of these working-class activists was evidence that cultural acquisition won social benefits. Whilst historians have accepted working-class learning was inspired by political movements of the nineteenth century, considering the impact of political competition on the habitus, not only on political views has the potential to demonstrate the long-term impact of competition for political representation on working-class culture.

Griffin's study of the autobiographies of working men and women involved in social activism supports the view that working people's expectations of their potential were transformed in the second-quarter of the nineteenth century. She shows before 1820, eleven of over 300 writers had entered the world of public affairs. The five who were politically active and further six members of mutual improvement societies constitute just six percent of writers who reached adulthood before 1820. In contrast, between 1820 and 1850, twenty-five percent were members of cultural societies or had a leadership role in church or chapel, a further twenty percent were politically active.¹³¹ Whilst the writers represent a cultural, and to some extent economic, elite, such a dramatic shift in behaviour even in a minority group demonstrates dispositions were responding to changes in the logic of the social field. The direct challenge mounted against existing structures of society represented a collective recognition of a new potential for working-class success in the competition for a greater share of political, cultural and economic capital. Therefore, even when cultural acquisitions were not explicitly politically motivated, working-class learners were motivated by new possibilities for success revealed by working-class political competition.

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- The next paragraph explains reasons for learning after 1840.

Bourdieu argues that successful competition within the social field relies on the acceptance of its middle-class logic. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that what has previously been

¹³¹ Griffin, 'the Making of the Chartists', p. 599.

portrayed as an alliance between the middle class and the ‘aristocracy of labour’, represents working people adopting the ‘logic’ of the social field or accepting the ‘rules of the game’ to compete. Evidence of progression from educational associations to political leadership is rare but working-class learners often used acquisition of cultural capital to legitimise working-people’s right to political power and this was a form of competition. The significance of learning in the later Chartist movement resulted partly from the work of Lovett and Collins whose ideas, through the publication in 1840 of *A New Organisation for the People*, ‘became accepted as a core aspect of Chartist political culture.’ By 1842, according to Scriven, ‘Chartists across the movement highly valued moral, physical and mental improvement and saw it is a prerequisite for any meaningful social or political change.’¹³² The emergence of working-class cultural acquisition as crucial to competition for political capital contributed to continued commitment to adult learning. Scriven insists aspects of improving culture ‘were strategic interventions rather than dilutions of the movement’s objectives and aspirations.’¹³³ Similarly, Hall argues the failure of the radical platform to achieve real change in the 1840s encouraged local Chartist leaders to divert energy into, ‘the quietist world of democratic dinners, lectures, discussion classes, book funds, and libraries.’¹³⁴ Hall argues self-improvement became increasingly significant as it ‘represented a necessary first step in freeing “the people,” from ‘superstitious fears,’ and in educating the rising generation in sound democratic principles.’¹³⁵

Whilst the radicalism of the second-quarter of the century faded in the more prosperous third-quarter, the culture of mutuality emerged out of traditions of radicalism. When working people turned to education or ‘rational recreation’ in the 1840s and ‘50s, they often explained their reasoning for doing so in radical terms, it was a way of demonstrating that their class deserved a higher relative position in the social field. John Ludlow, the middle-class Christian Socialist, and Lloyd Jones, the working-class Co-operator, published *The Progress of the Working Class* in 1867, justifying working-class claims for political power

¹³² Scriven, p. 103.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 187.

¹³⁴ Hall, pp. 195-6.

¹³⁵ Hall, p. 196, quotes from *People’s Paper*, 12th February 1853 and *Northern Star* 9th November 1850.

through their view that temperance, co-operation and education had improved the working-class. They included a testimony from a reformer in Norwich whose father bought pikes in 1848, and who was now 'the best of our local preachers, and a Sunday-school teacher.' This preacher argued the new 'leaders of the people in working-class agitation or in the Reform movement, are different men from the old Chartist leaders, more moderate, more reasonable, more moral, less violent in temper and language.'¹³⁶ After 1850, therefore, self-improvement culture and mutuality helped working people compete for political capital using strategies that were more acceptable, and more effective, within a bourgeois social field. Therefore, activists did not abandon political aims but accepted **that** working people needed to legitimise claims for political and social advantages using more bourgeois strategies and challenging the notion that legitimate culture was the preserve of the bourgeoisie.

Working-class radicals partially accepted the bourgeois logic of the social field by pursuing what **were** routinely referred to as 'higher' or more 'noble' aims. Similarities between working-class learners and the bourgeoisie have formerly been interpreted as attempts to gain respectability, securing economic and political advantages through an alliance with the middle class. However, similarities between bourgeois cultural values and those of working-class learners did not mean that self-improvement culture was incompatible with radical politics. Interestingly, Prior shows that even when bourgeois society was displacing the aristocracy as the classifiers of culture, they continued to value the cultural products and knowledge viewed as most legitimate by the aristocracy. The Glasgow Academy excluded needle-work, shell-work, artificial flowers, cut paper and models in coloured wax from exhibition. These were all artistic forms that, because they had no antecedents in high culture, required limited artistic knowledge to appreciate and conferred limited legitimacy to the cultural consumer. They were rejected originally by the aristocracy and later by the bourgeoisie.¹³⁷ Historic art forms allowed the bourgeoisie to legitimise their position as they celebrated their distinction through the process of making judgements based on their own

¹³⁶ John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, *Progress Of The Working Class 1832-1867*, (1867). p. 178.

¹³⁷ Prior, pp. 147-152.

cultural knowledge. Therefore, the middle class used knowledge of traditionally aristocratic cultural forms to legitimise their claims to previously unattainable social benefits.

Prior's argument could suggest that the high value of bourgeois cultural products in working-class culture was a natural product of competition. Cultural acquisition can be interpreted as a challenge to bourgeois society because working people explained cultural value on their own terms, often claiming ownership of this legitimate culture. For example, whilst Russell argues 'a surprisingly large proportion of the music offered to the community was drawn from the canon of high culture,' humble choirs and brass bands played Handel, Mendelssohn, Wagner and Bach to demonstrate their ability to do so and therefore their right to access high culture.¹³⁸ John Nicholson, a woolcomber poet, encouraged fellow working-class learners to attempt, 'not merely to absorb the high artistic tradition, but themselves to add to it.'¹³⁹ And, as Scriven argues, 'an important aspect of this culture was its central and social critique.'¹⁴⁰ Working people used dominant culture to legitimise their demands for social change, just as the middle-classes had done so in their attempts to usurp the landed classes.

Nevertheless, exploring the relationship between working-class learning and middle-class culture brings to light justifiable concerns about using Bourdieu's concepts to explain subordinate cultures. His insistence that working-class culture is never autonomous is understandably problematic to some historians.¹⁴¹ Whilst not directly critiquing Bourdieu, Phil Gardner's warning in his study of board and dame schools is relevant here. He insists historians should avoid, 'conceiving working-class elementary educational behaviour purely as a response to the facilities that were institutionally provided,' as such an approach 'may lead us to offer explanations conceived simply as negatives of middle-class sponsored provision.'¹⁴² If working-class learning is explained only in relation to dominant bourgeois

¹³⁸ David Russell, "Bradford Leisure", in *Victorian Bradford: Essays In Honour Of Jack Reynolds* (Bradford: City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, Libraries Division, 1982), p. 216.

¹³⁹ quoted in Russell, *Bradford Leisure*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ Scriven, p. 103.

¹⁴¹ Gunn, 2006, p. 75.

¹⁴² Phil Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools Of Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 2-3.

culture its complexities are not understood. Yet, Bourdieu's analysis is relational and therefore, at the same time as arguing 'the working-class "aesthetic" is a dominated "aesthetic" which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetic,' he also argues bourgeois culture is never entirely autonomous because it defines itself in opposition to 'taste of necessity'.¹⁴³ Therefore, in Bourdieu's work, the relationship between dominant and subordinate culture is not one sided but, as Gunn has shown, reasserts working-class culture's 'dialectical relationship with legitimate culture.'¹⁴⁴

Working-class learning in mechanics' institutes and mutual improvement societies could not avoid defining itself in relation to middle-class culture. In the institutes, working-class learning took place in a middle-class field and Bourdieu's theories can show why this was unsuited to working-class learners. In contrast, working-class learning achieved relative autonomy when exclusively working-class societies formed and produced a working-class educational field. Here, working-class learners acquired cultural capital and developed a semi-autonomous cultural value system prioritising working-class independence, claims to ownership of dominant culture and social critique. Even in their assertion of their independence, working-class learners made reference to middle-class culture, using cultural capital to legitimise aspects of their own culture and compete for a higher collective position in the middle-class logic of the wider social field.

[Mechanics' institutes and social reproduction](#)

For a short time during the 1820s and '30s mechanics' institutes attracted a significant minority of workers. At a time of social unrest, workers endorsed institutes managed by men who many viewed as oppressors. This phenomenon reflects the increasing value of education in the eyes of working people. Exponential increase in learning activity also emphasises the significance of political agitation in effecting the popularity of the institutes.

Research has focussed on the institutes' failure to provide education to mechanics.¹⁴⁵

Bourdieu's analytical tools are invaluable in explaining why institutes gained and lost their always limited popularity amongst working people. In Bourdieu's analysis, dominant groups

¹⁴³ Bourdieu, 1994, pp. 41-3

¹⁴⁴ Gunn, 2006, p. 75.

¹⁴⁵ See Harrison, pp. 38-74; Rose, pp. 58-83.

within a field can determine its nature or logic.¹⁴⁶ Constrained by convictions of the middle-class habitus, the men who dominated the institutes were unable to conceive and implement a curriculum suited to working-class learners. Bourdieu's analysis of behaviour [(habitus x capital) + field = strategy] can explain why working people's historical experience made them unable to produce an effective strategy to compete for capital in a middle-class field, making failure likely.¹⁴⁷ Failure to compete for capital confirmed the assumptions of a working-class habitus, encouraging individuals to limit their perceptions of cultural possibilities. Competition for capital was less motivating because middle-class members relegated working people to subordinate positions making them unable to determine what or how they learned. In addition, the institutes' homology with the wider social field meant working-class members and their culture were consistently portrayed as inferior by management. Working people who learned within the institutes experienced symbolic violence that threatened to produce an acceptance that learning was not for them. Thus, working people's commitment to the institutes was temporary.

Yorkshire's first Mechanics' Institute opened in Keighley in 1824, Leeds and Huddersfield opened the following year.¹⁴⁸ In 1851 there were 610 institutes in England with a membership of over 600,000 and in 1850, 3,054 lectures were delivered to 16,029 members.¹⁴⁹ The highest concentration of institutes by far were found in Lancashire and Yorkshire.¹⁵⁰ Whilst learners joined institutes for a variety of reasons, their popularity corresponds with the strength of radicalism in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Whilst learning outside the home was rare before 1820, it became common.¹⁵¹ Using Bourdieu's analysis [(habitus x capital) + field = behaviour] leads to the conclusion that changes to the social field produced changed behaviour.

¹⁴⁶ Peter Swartz, p. 128 and Joseph J. Ferrare and Michael W. Apple, "Field Theory And Educational Practice: Bourdieu And The Pedagogic Qualities Of Local Field Positions In Educational Contexts", *Cambridge Journal Of Education*, 45.1 (2015), pp. 43-59.

¹⁴⁷ Karl Maton, "Habitus", in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), p. 51 see also Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D Wacquant, *An Invitation To Reflexive Sociology* (New York: Polity Press, 1992).

¹⁴⁸ Glasgow was the first Mechanics' Institute, opening in 1821, followed by London in 1823.

¹⁴⁹ Department of Adult Education: University of Nottingham, *The 1919 Report: The Final Report Of The Adult Education Committee Of The Ministry Of Reconstruction 1918-1919* (Nottingham: Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, 1980), p. 14.

¹⁵⁰ Tylecote.

¹⁵¹ Griffin, 'The Making of the Chartists'.

The prominence of the unstamped press, Owenism, the anti-poor law movements and Chartism in Yorkshire's West Riding transformed the social field, with mass competition for political capital occurring for the first time. Before 1830, Yorkshire's radicalism relied on a small group of men, mostly self-taught, whose education was crucial to their activities. The significance of education is reflected in the 'group of free thinkers,' who founded a mechanics' institute in Bradford in 1825 'along truly radical and populist lines.'¹⁵² Financial ruin followed their support of the failed Great Worsted Strike in the town but these educated working men became the leaders of growing numbers of radicals in the 1830s.¹⁵³ Squire Farrar, one of the founding members of the institute, was prominent in Bradford Chartism. When an 1838 meeting found overwhelmingly in favour of arming, Farrar was one of three who voted against the motion.¹⁵⁴ Voting in favour was the publican Peter Bussey (b. 1805) who 'took a prominent part' in Bradford radicalism and opposition to stamp-duty during the 1820s. The fact that he was literate and a capable organiser meant he was a leader in the 1830-31 agitation and the opposition to the Dorchester labourers' trial. Bussey's status grew as secretary to the Bradford Radical Association from 1836 and upon his election as delegate for the 1839 Chartist Convention he became a national figure.¹⁵⁵ Thus, men formerly relatively unknown to the masses, gained fame from their political activism, facilitated by their education.

Similarly, the printer Joshua Hobson (b. Huddersfield, 1810) was self-educated and gained experience as an organiser in Richard Oastler's campaign for factory reform. Hobson gained influence in 1833 after his widely-reported speech defending his sale of the unstamped *Voice of the West Riding*.¹⁵⁶ It was natural after moving to Leeds in 1834 that he took a leading role in the Owenite and Chartist movements. The rarity of working men like Bussey and Hobson, educated and capable of political speech and organisation, ensured their place as leaders of rapidly growing radical movements and demonstrated that education could transform the status of individual working men.

¹⁵² Theodore Koditschek, *Class Formation And Urban-Industrial Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 309.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹⁵⁴ Alfred James Peacock, *Bradford Chartism, 1838-40*, (Borthwick Publications: Bradford, 1969) p. 19

¹⁵⁵ *The Charter*, 5th May 1839, and Koditschek, pp. 484-487.

¹⁵⁶ Simon Cordery, "Joshua Hobson And The Business Of Radicalism", *Biography*, 11.2 (1988) pp. 109-111.

In Bourdieu's terms, radicalism was competition for political capital. The West Riding's participation in this competition was matched only by that of Lancashire. In Bradford, woolcombers previously detached from politics now became, 'almost without exception rabid politicians... enthusiastic adherents,' of Chartism whose 'one book of study was the *Northern Star*.¹⁵⁷ The significance of Yorkshire to the strength of the *Star* was not solely that the paper was printed by Hobson in Leeds; the original costs of the paper were covered by one pound shares which raised £690, £500 of which came from Leeds, Halifax, Hull, Bradford and Huddersfield.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, almost half of the *Star's* early circulation of over 10,000 copies a week came from these towns.¹⁵⁹ The 1830s was transformative for the thousands who took part in political competition as it involved challenging formerly held convictions of the habitus and widened the horizons of possibilities, both political and cultural.

As Chartism grew in strength, the education and oratory skills of its leaders became more prominent. The second mass meeting in support of the Charter was held in Yorkshire in October 1838. Of the twenty-one rousing speeches, most were delivered by working men.¹⁶⁰ The *Star* exposed readers to the superior abilities of some workers through its reporting of local agitation. It proudly noted that radicalism's great speakers would be unknown outside the localities 'had it not been that all were here represented in one common mirror, truly reflected.'¹⁶¹ The literate could see their own letters published in a national journal, increasing their status amongst other radicals and confirming the value of their learning. Chartists read of intrusions which saw working people speaking alongside and coming in to direct conflict with members of elite society. For example, in September 1839 at a public meeting Hobson got himself elected as chair in favour of MP Edward Baines Sr., prompting Baines and his supporters to leave the stage in protest.¹⁶² Reports like this showed working people that challenges to the dominant culture's claims to superiority were possible when they were educated.

¹⁵⁷ Frank Peel, *The Risings of the Luddites*, pp. 329-43, quoted in Koditschek, p. 486.

¹⁵⁸ James Epstein, *The Lion Of Freedom: Feargus O'connor And The Chartist Movement 1832-1842* (London: Croom Helm, 1982). p. 62.

¹⁵⁹ Epstein, p. 67.

¹⁶⁰ Malcolm Chase, *Chartism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007) p. 44.

¹⁶¹ *Northern Star* 27th April 1839, quoted in Epstein, p. 64.

¹⁶² *Northern Star* 7th September 1839.

Whilst the political views of members of mechanics' institutes cannot be precisely established, working-class people who joined institutes in the 1820s and '30s were exposed to, and possibly participated in, movements that relied on working people who were skilled orators. These individuals demonstrated that acquiring cultural capital was possible and helped the working-class habitus recognise a wider range of cultural possibilities. In addition, the prominence of educated leaders and the value of education in political competition increased the value of learning in working-class culture, meaning those who possessed them gained a higher position in the social field relative to others in their class. Therefore, working-class experience of the 1830s provided greater incentive to acquire cultural capital and demonstrated that acquisition was possible.

In politically active Yorkshire and Lancashire, both political participation and interest in education spiked in the 1820s and '30s. This facilitated growth of institutes in major cities along with towns like Skipton and Richmond and villages like Pately Bridge.¹⁶³ By 1837 this justified the founding of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' and other Literary and Scientific Institutions. Membership was initially male and included skilled and unskilled workers along with those from the lower-middle classes.¹⁶⁴ Membership was affordable for this group; when annual fees are divided, most institutes charged around 3d. a week for membership.¹⁶⁵

The nature of membership varied between different institutes. Lists of members' occupations reveal that in smaller villages and towns, unskilled or agricultural workers and youths made up around one third of the membership, a third were artisans, clerks or from

¹⁶³ See Tylecote.

¹⁶⁴ See the lists of occupations in the ARYUMI, eg., 1840, p. 21 and 1841, p. 16.

¹⁶⁵ For examples see *Keighley Mechanics' Institute Rules*, 1843, *Leeds Mechanics' Institute Rules*, 1847. Tylecote cites the cleric Thomas Hogg who pointed out that as the price of a pint of ale was two and a half pence, the workman was likely to value a weekly education of the same cost similarly to his drink. Tylecote p. 91 Potentially more of a problem was nature of the payments. The Leeds Institute asked for bi-annual payments, the Keighley Institute for five shillings a year on top of two pence a week. Salaries were received weekly and therefore payment of a bi-annual or annual fee required considerable financial planning. In addition, irregular payments meant that circumstances such as illness or temporary unemployment could not be taken in to account. Some institutes were better organised to suit the financial situation of workers. For example, at Huddersfield, the annual cost of membership was similar to at Leeds – three pence per week – but fees were collected fortnightly. This meant workers did not have to save up for their membership fees and that if members were ill or in financial difficulty they could suspend their membership for months at a time and return when their circumstances improved.

the lower middle-classes, and a further third were professionals.¹⁶⁶ Bradford was more working-class in nature than other large institutes like Leeds and York. In 1847, 476 were juveniles attending the elementary class and paying six shillings annually, almost all juveniles were children of workers.¹⁶⁷ A further 291 paid ten shillings annually without the additional ten shilling entrance fee that would make them eligible for office, suggesting that these members earned weekly wages.¹⁶⁸ In Halifax, a town which, like Bradford, had a high level of class antagonism owing to the numbers of skilled wool workers being replaced by unskilled machinery operators, of the 418 members of the institute in 1840, eighty-eight were listed as working in middle class professions, forty-one were juvenile, the rest of the membership had a manual profession.¹⁶⁹ Working class membership of Halifax and Bradford was seventy-eight and eighty-one per cent respectively. In contrast, at Leeds, where there was a less antagonistic relationship between the middle class and the working class who were predominantly skilled or factory workers, only around a third of members were working-class in 1843.¹⁷⁰ In some ways it is surprising that in towns where class antagonism was high, such large numbers of working people would choose to learn in a middle-class organisation. It is unlikely that members of institutes were committed radicals; militant Chartists were critical of the mechanics' institutes. Nevertheless, the high number of working-class learners prepared to pay to access cultural capital suggests that in towns like Halifax and Bradford, changes to the political and social field that occurred during radical agitation, had an effect on those who were not explicitly connected to a radical political movement. Furthermore, in Leeds, where Chartism was less transformative, it seems relatively fewer working people were interested in becoming members of the institutes.

Over the course of the 1840s and 50s the proportion of working-class members fell steadily. In 1840, the committee of the Yorkshire Union noted a truth 'universally acknowledged', that members of mechanics' institutes were, 'nineteen-twentieths of them, not of the class of mechanics, but are connected with the higher branches of handicraft trades, or are clerks

¹⁶⁶ This is the case with the Otley and Goole institutes ARYUMI, 1840, p. 21 and 1841, p. 16

¹⁶⁷ 'Juvenile members... [at Bradford] as elsewhere, nearly all belonged to the working class.' Tylecote, p. 230.

¹⁶⁸ ARYUMI, 1847, p. 25 the six shilling fee was for women as well as juveniles but in 1852 there were still only seven female members out of a total of 920.

¹⁶⁹ ARYUMI, 1840, p. 15.

¹⁷⁰ Harrison, *Living and Learning*, p. 69.

in offices, and in many instances, young men connected with liberal professions.¹⁷¹ By the 1850s, disappointment was even more acute when the committee noted 'the miserably small proportion of the working classes who participate in the advantage which these institutions ought to confer.'¹⁷² Whilst evidence of members' professions or the numbers who paid each class of fees is sporadic, the best evidence for the increasingly middle-class membership of the institutes is the declining significance of the classes. As will be shown later, when working people attended the institutes they did so to make use of the classes, particularly in elementary subjects. It is significant, then, that in 1844, 1,711 of the 4,581 members of the fifteen institutes in the Yorkshire Union attended classes but, by 1853, just 2,792 of the 13,388 members in seventy-nine institutes attended classes.¹⁷³ Therefore, in nine years the proportion of members attending classes at the institutes fell from thirty-seven percent to just twenty percent. This demonstrates working-class members were far less significant as a proportion of the whole by the 1850s.

Bourdieu argues a field's logic is the cultural capital valued and available within it, as well as the legitimate strategies of acquisition. He suggests individuals possessing more of the capital valued in the field occupy higher positions from which they can define its logic. Inevitably, the dominant group define the capital they possess as most valuable to confirm their superior position. The increasingly middle-class membership of the institutes was significant because it ensured the logic of the field was defined by the middle-class. Before the institutes accepted middle-class aid, it was possible for manual workers to occupy dominant positions in the field and to define its logic. However, as those with a middle-class education joined, the positions in the hierarchy occupied by working-class members became relatively lower. Even when a considerable working-class membership remained, proportionally it was not enough to prevent the shift towards the bourgeois because those from middle-class professions were almost guaranteed to possess more cultural capital than workers and therefore occupied more powerful positions within the institutes. This shift is

¹⁷¹ ARYUMI, 1840, p. 7.

¹⁷² ARYUMI, 1853, p. 14.

¹⁷³ ARYUMI, 1844, p. 5, 1853 p. 10.

reflected by the complaint of a contemporary commentator that in the 1840s the institutes were 'swallowed up by the vortex of gentility.'¹⁷⁴

The recreation of the social hierarchy in the institutes was emphasised by the membership options introduced in the larger institutes to benefit the poor. At Leeds, those who had made a large contribution to the institution became life members, this esteemed group were followed by the first class of members who could pay an entrance deposit of £2 along with an annual subscription of fifteen shillings. A reduced membership fee, of twelve shillings per annum, was for those receiving weekly wages who were followed by female members paying ten shillings a year who, according to Hole, were almost entirely middle-class.¹⁷⁵ This group was followed by the fifth and sixth classes of members including those under eighteen who paid 8 shillings a year and the elementary class who paid six pence per fortnight.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the external hierarchy was not only recreated by the relative lack of cultural and economic capital possessed by working-class members, but by an official ranking of members whose economic contribution to the institute was necessarily less.

The superiority of middle-class members in the institutes assured their positions of authority; the management of the institutes was generally bourgeois. In the Leeds Institute's formative years Lord Brougham revealed bourgeois concerns about working-class management when he wrote to John Marshall recommending the institute, 'avoid falling into the error of giving too much of the direction of the establishment of the mechanics themselves.'¹⁷⁷ Working-class resistance to this advice was futile as of the new institute's twenty-one supporters, sixteen were initial founders of the Leeds Philosophical Society in 1819, and therefore occupied powerful positions in the hierarchy of social society in civic Leeds.¹⁷⁸ Twelve years later, the committee permitted ordinary members to form half the

¹⁷⁴ *The 1909 Report*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁵ James Hole, "An Essay On The History And Management Of Literary, Scientific And Mechanics' Institutes And Especially How Far They May Be Developed And Combined For The Well Being Of The Country", 1853. pp. 35-8.

¹⁷⁶ *Rules of the Leeds Mechanics' Institute*, 1847, (West Yorkshire Archives: Wakefield) QE30/16 .

¹⁷⁷ Brougham to J. Marshall Jnr. 12th January 1825, quoted in Tylecote, p. 62.

¹⁷⁸ Ian Inkster, "The Social Context Of An Educational Movement: A Revisionist Approach To The English Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850", *Oxford Review Of Education*, 2.3 (1976), 277-307. p. 284.

number on the committee but their inferior position was reflected in their exclusion from votes on matters affecting property management.¹⁷⁹

In the 1830s, most committees were dominated by middle-class members and supporters. For those institutes, such as Bradford, Keighley and Halifax, who started as small groups of working men teaching each other, control of their institutes was lost when they accepted middle-class philanthropy. Wealthy supporters facilitated rapid growth, allowing for provision of larger and more suitable premises as well as teachers, books, and equipment. These supporters expected control of the rule book.¹⁸⁰ In Bradford the second institute was started by hatter Joseph Farrar with the support of the local elite. Whilst Farrar was the leading figure on the committee until his resignation in 1848, in 1847 767 members were prevented from running for office by the requirement that prospective committee members pay a ten shilling entrance fee, as well as the ten shilling annual fees.¹⁸¹ Even so, the President insisted, 'except in one or two of the earliest years, the working classes have always been represented on the committee, not by arrangement, but by the free choice of the members.'¹⁸² By excluding less wealthy members from standing in elections, middle-class management ensured the institutes were homologous with the wider social field.

Though most committees included some working-class members, their ability to influence decisions was limited. Bourdieu argues a field's logic is determined by 'clashes which... always depend, *in their outcome*, happy or unhappy, on the correspondence they have with external clashes (those which unfold at the cores of the field of power or the social field as a whole) and the support that one group or another may find there.'¹⁸³ The working-class committee members were restricted by the fact that views of their middle-class colleagues had greater correspondence with dominant views in the external social field. Working-class committee members' lack of influence is reflected in Hole's advice that although 'the management of the Institutes should be as popular as possible', the employers, who

¹⁷⁹ *Annual Report of the West Riding Union of Mechanics' Institutes*, 1838, pp. 25-6.

¹⁸⁰ Rose, p. 67.

¹⁸¹ Only 62 members were eligible for office under this rule. ARYUMI 1847, p. 25 This rule was removed in 1848, after which all members over the age of 18 were eligible for office. Tylecote, p. 230.

¹⁸² Godwin, *The Bradford Mechanics' Institute*, p. 3 quoted in Tylecote, p. 230.

¹⁸³ Bourdieu, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules Of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 252, quoted in Ferrare and Apple, p. 46.

possessed 'more administrative talent and experience,' should be responsible for 'conduct[ing]... organisations and introduc[ing]... improvements.' In contrast the working-class, 'are needed to secure due attention to the interest of the operative members, and to give them confidence in the management.'¹⁸⁴ In other words, working-class committee members were there for appearances only. This is confirmed when Hole argued democratic organisation usefully, 'disarms the management of the semblance of injustice, and stops the objects of cavillers among the working classes themselves.'¹⁸⁵ This suggests that the influence working-class committee members could have on defining the logic of the field was minimal.

Middle-class committee members were genuinely committed to the provision of an education to working people and were bitterly disappointed when they felt they had failed. However, managers with a middle-class habitus, imbued with a sense of their own distinction, were convinced that the institutes should provide cultural capital that their dominant culture possessed and valued. Their decisions reflected middle-class priorities and unintentionally favoured the growing middle-class membership of the institutes. Middle-class membership guaranteed middle-class management, both of which guaranteed that institutes had a middle-class logic. In modern sociology, middle-class management of educational institutions has been used to explain conflict between working-class habitus and sub-fields of schools and universities. Ferrare and Apple argue in modern schools, the transmission of institutional advantages to working-class students is effected by, 'how the class, race and gender contexts of... childrearing practices result in disparate levels of symmetry with the social organisation of schools.'¹⁸⁶ In modern and nineteenth-century fields, their middle-class logic means working-class students are less equipped to compete for the capital available than their middle-class contemporaries.

Middle-class management of institutions was particularly problematic in the 1830s and '40s because political agitation meant that self-government was a working-class priority. Holyoake's main justification for the importance of learning oratory and political debate was that 'the political genius of the people lies in self-government,' and their 'liberty depends

¹⁸⁴ Hole, p. 117.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁸⁶ Ferrare and Apple, p. 44.

upon the capacity of stating its claims.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, middle-class management meant that the curriculum and style of learning reflected middle-class priorities, both cultural and economic. The institutes were initially intended to provide a scientific education to mechanics in the hope, which Harrison argues was ‘widely held,’ that, ‘working men, through a grounding in the principles of scientific knowledge, would be able to make original contributions to scientific discovery.’¹⁸⁸ At Leeds the institute’s aim was the provision of ‘...instruction in the various branches of science which are of practical application to their several trades or occupations.’¹⁸⁹ This purpose was seen to be mutually beneficial as ‘a more thorough knowledge of their arts will greatly tend to improve the skill and practice of those classes of men, who are so essentially conducive to the prosperity of this large manufacturing town.’¹⁹⁰ Scientific education was conducive to economic strength but also allowed middle-class monopolization of knowledge of the ‘legitimate’ arts. Bourdieu argues dominant groups ‘impose the skills they have mastered as necessary and legitimate and include in their definition of excellence the practices at which they excel.’¹⁹¹ It is therefore noteworthy that institutes initially discouraged acquisition of the cultural capital provided by their own schooling. Bourgeois knowledge of artistic and literary culture meant they valued it above the scientific. In implying that working people were more naturally suited to technical and scientific education the elite of Leeds portrayed themselves as superior. They also, however subconsciously, avoided the possibility of working people’s acquisition of cultural capital damaging the myth that bourgeois cultural understanding was derived ‘wholly from individual merit, independent of social status.’¹⁹² For the patronising employers of Leeds, scientifically able mechanics were more both more useful and less threatening than culturally highbrow ones.

A minority of working-class members of institutes gained the technical and economic advantages they had been promised. At Leeds, one of the chemistry class students ‘settled in London to superintend works for making extracts of dye woods’, and a second ‘left for a

¹⁸⁷ George Jacob Holyoake, *Public Speaking And Debate*, 1895, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Harrison, p. 64.

¹⁸⁹ *Rules and Regulations*, Leeds Mechanics Institute, (1824), p. 3.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Edgerton and Roberts, p. 196.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

neighbouring town, to superintend a chemical manufactory.'¹⁹³ At Bradford the president proudly called attention to the 'unbroken stream of youths, sons of working men, rising to positions of responsibility' in their places of work because of 'the knowledge and the connections acquired in this Institute.'¹⁹⁴ However, according to Harrison, 'the failure of a policy of science for artisans became apparent,' within five years.¹⁹⁵ At Leeds, though membership grew from 332 in 1839 to 2,166 in 1853, the chemistry class shrank from nineteen to thirteen.¹⁹⁶ In Harrison's view, 'the uneducated grew disinterested because they could not comprehend.'¹⁹⁷ In 1844 the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes accepted the criticism, 'that we have endeavoured to form colleges before we have had schools.'¹⁹⁸

The futility of science classes for men with such limited education meant the most valuable form of capital available at the institutes quickly became basic literacy skills.¹⁹⁹ At Huddersfield, the secretary of the Mechanics' Institute predicted that the average education of new students was four and a half years at Sunday school and four years at day and Dame school. Nevertheless, over a period of three years, one third of new students could not read or could read only badly and over one third had no mathematical skills.²⁰⁰ Therefore when twenty percent of Yorkshire members attended classes, 'four-fifths are in the elementary classes,' a fact that the Yorkshire Union interpreted as a failure.²⁰¹ In contrast, at Bradford where the working-class membership was high, 'the chief value, as educational establishments, of such Institutions as this, lies mainly in the efficiency imparted to this [the classes] branch of their operations.'²⁰² Those institutes who responded to the working-class

¹⁹³ ARYUMI, 1840, p. 19.

¹⁹⁴ Godwin, *The Bradford Mechanics' Institute*, p. 5 quoted in Tylecote, p. 230.

¹⁹⁵ Harrison, pp. 66-7.

¹⁹⁶ Hole, p. 35.

¹⁹⁷ Tylecote, p. 93.

¹⁹⁸ ARYUMI, 1844, p. 7.

¹⁹⁹ Though Bourdieu does not define literacy as a form of cultural capital, if we take Michele Olivier's definition of cultural capital as a trait or skill that is 'universally desirable but something that remains unequally accessible', this would certainly make literacy a form of cultural capital. Michèle Ollivier, "Revisiting Distinction" *Journal Of Cultural Economy*, 1.3 (2008), p. 267.

²⁰⁰ Huddersfield Mechanics Institute, *Annual Report*, 1849, p. 3 Even more students could not write, in 1839 two thirds of adult weavers in Bradford could read but not above a quarter could write. Reports from the Assistant Handloom Weavers Commissioners 1840, III, p.570 cited in Harrison, p. 41.

²⁰¹ ARYUMI, 1853, p. 15.

²⁰² ARYUMI, 1847, p. 27.

need for elementary classes significantly increased attendance at all their classes. Though between 1853 and 1856 the number of institutes offering classes fell from fifty-nine to thirty-two, the numbers attending these increased by nearly 300 to 2,406.²⁰³

Despite the success of elementary education, making working people literate was not a goal which the founders or managers of the institutes ever prioritised. Scientific and technical learning was eventually replaced, not with elementary classes, but with cultural lectures and entertainment that reflected the priorities of middle-class supporters and members. At Leeds before 1837, general literature was excluded in the library whilst classes and lectures were exclusively scientific or technical. This was despite the complaint of 'a working man' who wrote to *the Leeds Times* suggesting the formation of a working-class institution 'with a range of subjects as varied and interesting which should possess attractions for working men.'²⁰⁴ Amalgamation with the Literary Society in 1837 meant an influx of middle-class members and a new range of literary, historical and musical lectures. Charles Dickens even spoke there in 1848.²⁰⁵ The amalgamation achieved its economic aims by attracting a larger number of members, 750 by 1842. Increased income allowed the institute to spend £90 annually on lectures which members could attend for free, whilst members were expected to fund the classes by paying for them individually.²⁰⁶ Clearly the numbers and finances of middle-class members ensured their needs were prioritised. It is unsurprising that at Leeds in 1853, of the 2,166 members, 876, or forty per cent, were members who had paid the fees reserved for juvenile or working-class members, and just twenty-seven per cent were working-class adults.²⁰⁷ Similarly, at Ripon concerns that the expense of the elementary teacher could no longer be met despite the class being 'the greatest inducement to mechanics,' suggests the institute did not prioritise working-class members' needs.²⁰⁸ Middle-class members with their higher contribution to the institutes' finances were,

²⁰³ ARYUMI, 1856, pp. 12-13.

²⁰⁴ *Leeds Times*, 26th January 1839.

²⁰⁵ Tylecote, p. 237 The library also adapted, providing an increasing number of novels, and books on travel or general interest. This ensured that at least 700 families in the neighbourhood were provided with enjoyable reading materials. Hole, p. 27.

²⁰⁶ Juneville members gained access to the classes with the price of their membership

²⁰⁷ Hole, p. 18.

²⁰⁸ ARYUMI, 1840, p. 22.

however unintentionally, more valued. They could therefore define the strategies that were accepted methods of competition for capital.

Middle-class members generally preferred lectures to classes because they facilitated access to the cultural capital they valued through a method of acquisition both entertaining and unchallenging. In addition, 'entertaining' lectures could, it was argued, divert the working-class away from drinking and radicalism thereby creating 'a new era of class integration.'²⁰⁹ Thus, at York after 1840, the institute would not only provide 'useful and entertaining knowledge,' it also existed for 'the rational amusement of its members and the cultivation of their tastes.'²¹⁰ Learning provided by lectures was sporadic' Hole noted 'out of one hundred lectures recently delivered at forty-three institutes... there were on the average, scarcely two lectures on the same subject.'²¹¹ This suited those who wanted simply to elevate their knowledge of a partially familiar subject. As Harrison argues, the cultural knowledge, preferences and practices of the upper-middle class became those that were most valued within the institutes, leading the lower middle-class, 'of clerks and shopkeepers who frequented the institutes,' to value, 'not science and the discipline of study, but the opportunity of acquiring a little of the cultural elegance which they had noted as a peculiar adornment of their social superiors.'²¹² In Bourdieu's terms, members expected the institutes to provide the capital most valued in elite society as this would be most conducive to raising their position in the external social field.²¹³

The 'rational recreation' provided by the institutes in the 1840s and '50s suited bourgeois political as well as personal aims. In 1841, the Yorkshire Union hinted at political turmoil by expressing concerns about the 'kind of information diffused among the mass of the people.' In view of this, it argued 'a sound intellectual and moral culture has become indispensable,

²⁰⁹ Russell, *Bradford Leisure*, p. 204.

²¹⁰ It was also concluded that York's, 'success and usefulness... has been commensurate with... the provision of popularly interesting lectures, and the means of rational amusement in the form of Excursions and meetings for social intercourse.' Evidently entertainment rather than education was prioritised. ARYUMI, 1842, pp. 42-44.

²¹¹ Quoted in *1919 Report*, p. 16.

²¹² Harrison, p. 67.

²¹³ Bourdieu argues an actors' position in social space is determined by a portfolio of economic and cultural capital. Dominant social groups determine the value of cultural capital. Therefore, the capital most conducive to raising an individuals' position is that which elites already possess in large quantities.

not only to the order, peace and happiness of society, but to its very being.'²¹⁴ Literary, historical and geographical lectures reflected middle-class aims for harmony in the social field. At Leeds, lecture-concerts were celebrated for their 'civilising influence' because they involved, 'substituting pleasures which elevate and refine the mind for those of a gross and sensual nature.'²¹⁵ Institutes' role in providing a moral distraction for workers was used to justify abandoning scientific subjects. In 1854, the Bradford Institute's Annual Review argued literary topics were necessary to 'secure for the refining pleasures of the intellect a fair chance of successful rivalry with sensual and degrading pursuits.'²¹⁶ The institutes hoped to replace radicalism with temperance and morality. The 1909 *Report on Adult Education* saw institutes as a 'mixture of piety, genuine philanthropy and political apprehension.'²¹⁷ Through prohibiting political discussion, working people might avoid 'the dangerous doctrines of "the Owenites, the Cooperites, and the Huntites".'²¹⁸ Providing newspapers at the institutes was portrayed as allowing rational recreation to compete with drinking; 'the exclusion of newspapers from Mechanics' Institutions is a positive temptation to intemperance.'²¹⁹ Newspapers were introduced with caution; 'the rules of a News-room forbid political discussion.'²²⁰ This was necessary to ensure 'the admission of newspapers into the Reading-rooms of an institute will not produce dissension or lead to the formation of political parties amongst its members.'²²¹

Therefore, cultural capital available and methods of acquisition in institutes were defined by the middle-class members and management, making the institutes unsuitable for working-class learners. Working-class members' relatively small contribution to the financial prosperity of the institutes made them less able to influence the logic of the field. This is reflected in the complaint at York that 'the cost of classes has been part of the dead weight expenditure of the institution.'²²² Teaching all non-elementary topics through lectures meant members lacked support and could not identify the best strategy for 'the

²¹⁴ ARYUMI, 1841, p. 7.

²¹⁵ *Leeds Mercury*, 24th March 1849.

²¹⁶ *Bradford Mechanics' Institute Annual Review*, 1854, p. 4.

²¹⁷ 1919 report, p 11.

²¹⁸ 1919 report, p. 14.

²¹⁹ ARYUMI, 1841, p.39.

²²⁰ ARYUMI, 1842, p. 7.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² ARYUMI, 1842, pp. 43-44.

development of their intellectual powers.’ Instead, a man was ‘left entirely to his unaided judgement as to what classes he shall attend, and what books he would do well to read, in what order to read them, and how to test... the progress made.’²²³ In other words, the working-class habitus, faced with an unfamiliar field, understood the field ‘imperfectly’ and, without guidance, was likely to produce a strategy unsuitable for competition within it.²²⁴

Furthermore, reading newspapers in a silent reading room was less inviting to those whose interest in education came partly from hearing or reading political debate. Similarly, whilst the Yorkshire Union’s recommendation that institutes start mutual improvement societies or discussion groups was genuinely meant to appeal to working-class members, the restrictions on political discussion rendered the classes less interesting. Two attempts to found mutual improvement classes at Leeds faltered, one started in 1840 but in 1841 ‘can scarcely be said to exist.’ A second attempt in 1849, noted problems with attendance in 1850.²²⁵ Rules against political discussion were intimidating for a habitus unused to school discipline. Keighley Institute insisted ‘the discussion of religion and politics shall be entirely excluded,’ if any attempted to ‘speak of, or introduce them for a second time, on the same evening, he shall forfeit six pence.’²²⁶ Gardner suggests day and dame schools suited working-class learners as ‘the relationship between teacher and pupil was very similar to that between parent and child at home. The two agencies operated with moral and cultural expectations that were substantially the same.’²²⁷ Therefore, even for those with considerable schooling, strict rules may have been another confirmation that they did not belong in the institutes.

A further way that the bourgeois logic of the field ensured working men and women felt unwelcome was the implication of working-class cultural inferiority. This implication could be found in attempts to provide ‘rational amusement’ or to ‘cultivate’ working-class ‘tastes’ and was made more explicit when the committee noted the tendency of working people to be disinterested in learning as adults. Management repeatedly portrayed the working class as naturally less inclined to learn than themselves. Low working-class membership was

²²³ ARYUMI, 1850, p. 52.

²²⁴ Swartz, p. 99.

²²⁵ ARYUMI, 1841, p. 28, 1849, p. 66; 1850, p. 52.

²²⁶ Keighley Mechanics’ Institute Rule Book, 1825.

²²⁷ Gardner, p. 97.

perceived as resulting from ‘the absence of an early and sound intellectual moral training.’²²⁸ Emphasising the need for moral education meant behaviour was understood as resulting from naturally inferior morality rather than poverty. Furthermore, the committee argued, even when workers were educated, ‘what is taught fails to originate and strengthen taste for reading, or a desire for the attainment of general knowledge.’²²⁹ Portrayal of continued working-class inferiority, despite middle-class efforts, was a common form of symbolic violence. At York the ‘apathy and indifference of the working-class,’ was seen as among the ‘chief obstacles which have retarded the prosperity of the Institution.’²³⁰ Aside from learning and religion, all forms of working-class culture were disparagingly referred to as ‘sensual and debasing pursuits’ and blamed as responsible for rejection of rational recreation.²³¹

Whilst it is more difficult to ascertain what the impact of middle-class classification of working-class culture as ‘low’ or ‘degrading’ had on working-class members of institutes, there is clear evidence that this experience made the mechanics’ institutes unattractive places of learning. One member noted, ‘It was no easy thing to mix with employers and representatives of the higher ranks of industry,’ and to take ‘the time and trouble of suitably attiring themselves to appear in the company of the middle classes.’²³² A *Sheffield Iris* correspondent wrote he and others would be unable to pay subscription to a library if he was required to do so at banks or newspaper offices because, ‘one half of us can scarcely meet our Masters without palpitating hearts, and yet you wish to send us to such places as those and assume a consequence we are not possessed of.’²³³ Clearly exposure to the economic and cultural capital possessed by middle-class members made working people more aware of their own disadvantage.

Structural homology of the institutes with wider society confirmed and reproduced inequalities that existed in the wider social field. Whereas in the newly formed mechanics’ institutes of the 1820s, relatively well-educated working-class founders occupied the

²²⁸ ARYUMI, 1840, p. 6.

²²⁹ ARYUMI, 1840, p. 6.

²³⁰ ARYUMI, 1842, pp. 43-44.

²³¹ ARYUMI, 1853, p. 14.

²³² Quoted in Tylecote, p. 115.

²³³ Sheffield Mechanics’ and Apprentices Library, *Meeting Minutes*, 1923, pp. 16-17.

highest positions in the hierarchy, by the 1840s, the institutes, like wider society, were dominated by industrial employers and professionals. Professional men with high value cultural capital embodied in the home and public school set the new standard for what cultured meant in the institutes and occupied their seemingly natural place at the top of the hierarchy. Shopkeepers and office men with their superior education and access to cultural products from a young age entered the institutes already in possession of the cultural capital which working-class members were working to acquire. Furthermore, these groups possessed less tangible forms of cultural capital such as middle-class manners and speech, as well as the economic capital that allowed them to dress in a way that distinguished them from manual labourers. Therefore, working-class members were relegated to their new subordinate positions in organisations that became increasingly incompatible with their habitus. It is possible that for these learners the uncomfortable experience of attempting to learn in a middle-class field confirmed to them that, despite the social changes that may have inspired them to learn, education was, after all, not for them.

For others, the middle-class field of the institutes produced the opposite response, a confirmation of the need to reform society and a commitment, not just to acquire culture, but to take ownership of it, something that was clearly impossible within the institutes. For example, Frost identified the causes for the failure of the institutes as being working men's dislike of being, 'treated like children,' and having, 'the books they shall read chosen for them.'²³⁴ He went on to educate himself and to campaign for political change. The author of one essay in a collection 'by working men of Bradford' criticised those members of his own class who 'contend that there is [in mechanics' institutes] too much acting by rule; too much standing in awe of superiors and directors; and, they add, that individual opinion, when it runs counter to the general tone, is too frequently hunted down.'²³⁵ It is likely that men with these views were among those who formed new societies where they could express their opinion freely.

In the mechanics' institutes, learners exposed to working-class competition for political capital were not likely to take kindly to views like those of Brougham's argument, in his

²³⁴ Frost, *Forty Years' Recollections*, pp.198-203, quoted in Rose, p. 65.

²³⁵ *Four Essays by Working Men of Bradford on the most practicable means of promoting rational recreation among the people*, Bradford (1858) pp. 5-6, quoted in Russell, *Bradford Leisure*.

address to the Manchester Mechanics' Institutes, that 'learning and improvement make their way in society... always in one way, and that downwards.' The image of philanthropists trying 'by their exertions and their money, kindly applied and judiciously bestowed, to spread to the class below them a little of the same feeling, the same love of learning, which they possess themselves,' was patronising and surely unpopular.²³⁶ For these learners, their lack of agency in the institutes was a major reason for leaving them. The significance of independence from middle-class patronage was repeatedly expressed by learners in their autobiographies. Christopher Thompson saw 'free exercise of thought' as crucial to achieving freedom from middle-class control. Thompson criticised men who did not learn because 'the free exercise of thought would have taught him self-dependence and moral elevation, instead of selfish cringing crumb picking.'²³⁷ The mind's significance amongst a working man's limited possessions made the direction of his own learning more important. This view is expressed by John Yojinger who, viewing his mind 'as the only wealth of property [he] should ever possess in this world... determined to take care of its health.'²³⁸

In the mechanics' institutes, working people repeatedly found that only those at the top of the hierarchy could influence the nature of the field. Furthermore, the possibility of ever reaching the top of that field was prevented by the lack of cultural capital possessed by learners who had limited education in early life. The impossibility of dominating the field meant working-class members of the institute had little chance to direct their own learning and responded by finding fields to learn in that were more suited to their habitus.

Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute: success within a limited market

Whilst the examples given above were typical for larger mechanics' institutes like Leeds, Bradford and York, institutes serving smaller communities had more numerous working-class members. It was estimated by the Union that in fourteen small towns with a population of between five and ten thousand, the proportion of the population in an institute was one in thirty-seven. Even more strikingly, in twenty-five towns of under five

²³⁶ Henry Brougham, 'Address to the Members of the Manchester Mechanics Institution, July 31 1835' in *British Eloquence: literary addresses*, 2nd series (London, 1855), pp. 180-2, quoted in Vincent, p. 164.

²³⁷ Thompson, *The Autobiography of an Artisan*, 1847 p. 8, quoted in Vincent, p. 164.

²³⁸ Quoted in Vincent, p. 164.

thousand inhabitants, one in twenty-seven were institute members.²³⁹ Tylecote suggests the smaller institutes tended 'to develop, from the outset, a system of class instruction, often in the form of mutual instruction, instead of relying chiefly upon the lecturer.' Consequently, Tylecote concludes 'in no other respect did the humbler foundations more clearly prove the value and importance of their popular origin.'²⁴⁰ The success of the smaller institutes suggests the working-class habitus was better suited to learning in a field where the market was more limited. The capital possessed by the membership of smaller institutes was more limited allowing individuals lower in the hierarchy to have a greater influence on the field's logic. Furthermore, limited membership meant working-class learners were more likely to achieve a higher position relative to other members, making them more motivating places to learn.

Whilst smaller institutes provided an education better suited to working-class members, the Huddersfield institute was most successful. At Huddersfield, the field was overwhelmingly working class, allowing workers a significant role in defining the logic of the field. The relatively few middle-class members meant competition for a higher position within the field and the status this conferred on members provided motivation for acquisition of cultural capital. Its working-class membership meant that Dr Hook, vicar of Leeds, described Huddersfield as, 'the only mechanics' institute which has any pretension to meet the needs of the people.'²⁴¹ James Hole agreed, stating 'it reaches the working man and it teaches him.'²⁴² It was founded as a mutual improvement society in 1841 by five of John Frederic Schwann's employees.²⁴³ Its rapid growth from 100 members in 1841 to 410 in 1843, was an increase 'chiefly among operatives.'²⁴⁴ In 1846, 389, or sixty-seven per cent of members, were fortnightly subscribers receiving weekly wages. A further forty-nine, or eight per cent

²³⁹ In Patery Bridge, one out of ten inhabitants were said to be members of the Mechanics', Institution and in Ripley one out of six. Tylecote, p. 68.

²⁴⁰ Tylecote, pp.63-4.

²⁴¹ Quoted in Hole, p. 39.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 34.

²⁴³ ARHMI, 1844, p. 6.

²⁴⁴ ARHMI, 1844, p. 7.

of members, were presentees, attending the institute for free with the support of a lifetime member.²⁴⁵

High working-class membership was a symptom and cause of the field's working-class logic. Working-class committee members were influential, members who occupied the highest positions in institute's early days continued to do so, three of the five founders were on the list of directors in 1845.²⁴⁶ The committee proudly stated in 1851 that their success was attributable 'to the liberal constitution of the society, which gives to every one of its members a direct and personal interest in its government and prosperity.'²⁴⁷ Whilst other institutes promoted the significance of working-class committee members, Huddersfield's relative independence meant they were genuinely influential. In 1853, the institute's income was £650, £507 came from members' fees, only £143 was 'derived from persons who do not directly participate in the benefits of the institution.'²⁴⁸ This ensured the institute's success depended on retaining ordinary members' support rather than attracting middle-class donors. Therefore, in comparison to other institutes, working-class members at Huddersfield had greater ownership of their learning and the 'constant contact of the members with the Committee and officers of the institution,' ensured 'a good understanding... throughout the entire body of the association; and hence the real and manifest pleasure which all parties feel in belonging to it.'²⁴⁹ This, along with Schwann's genuine commitment to working-class independence, allowed working-class cultural values and dispositions to have far more influence in determining the logic of the field.²⁵⁰

Working-class influence is demonstrated in decisions made by the committee. Tylecote notes that the larger mechanics' institutes tended to erect buildings that were 'pretentious

²⁴⁵ ARHMI, 1846, pp. 4-5 the fortnightly subscribers included 101 woollen and cotton workers, 130 in skilled trades, 56 who were listed as 'trades, various,' 35 were warehousemen, 29 were schoolmasters, clerks or shopkeepers, and 34 were boys.

²⁴⁶ John O'Connell, *The Making Of University: The Path To Higher Education In Huddersfield* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2016), p.3

²⁴⁷ ARHMI, 1851, p. 3.

²⁴⁸ Hole, p. 93 and O'Connell, p.5.

²⁴⁹ ARHMI, 1851, p. 3.

²⁵⁰ Schwann was remembered by the Mechanics' Institute for his commitment to what was right rather than what was socially fashionable. On his death it was noted that, 'He did not wait to see what part Parliament or Government would take [in working-class education], or to consider the contentions between the Church and dissent, but put his hand to the plough and worked with all his might to promote the education of the working man.' *Huddersfield Chronicle* 29th April 1882.

in style,' citing the attempt at Leeds to imitate a version of Giotto's tower.²⁵¹ In contrast, at Huddersfield the committee proudly stated in 1859 that, 'not a penny has been spent on useless decoration,' for their new building. This was true to such an extent that one resident of the town complained that it was 'not only plain but positively ugly.'²⁵²

The relative dominance of workers at Huddersfield is further reflected in the way the working-class community was portrayed. Rather than labelling non-members as morally deficient or as preferring 'debasing' activities, the committee recognised some students 'are deferred from continuing [their studies] on account of the difficulties which beset them at the commencement.' Not laziness but 'hard circumstances which may have operated against their education in early life,' were to blame. To short-term members, the committee offered 'only a friendly and faithful admonition,' and suggested they had not 'given a fair trial of [their] own strength against the armed power of knowledge.'²⁵³ Commitment to fortnightly fees shows a similar appreciation of the effect of poverty as membership could temporarily lapse during hardships. Financial inconveniences of fortnightly fees were, 'counterbalanced' by the possibility of including those otherwise 'excluded from the benefits of the Institution.'²⁵⁴ In contrast, the Leeds institute elementary class charged six pence a fortnight but required weekly attendance; 'continuance in the Class is only permitted on a fortnightly certificate of attendance and good conduct.' Rather than appreciating the effects of poverty, the committee at Leeds revealed their ignorance of it stating, 'in offering this great boon to the working classes,' it was necessary to 'take ample precautions that the privilege may not be abused.'²⁵⁵

Huddersfield's relative autonomy meant the committee did not forbid political discussion directly though the institute was 'unconnected with any party in politics, or sect in religion.' Whilst teaching 'any special religious creed, or party politics' was prohibited, it was only 'the

²⁵¹ Tylecote, pp. 113-4.

²⁵² O'Connell, p. 14.

²⁵³ ARHUMI, 1847, p. 7.

²⁵⁴ ARHUMI, 1846, p. 6.

²⁵⁵ ARYUMI, 1852, p. 54 Schwann's comparatively understanding approach is demonstrated when, finding that many of his fifty-one students could not regularly attend the grammar class that he taught, ('from the nature of their employment or other causes') he decided to teach natural history instead as this subject did not require 'the same uninterrupted application.' ARHUMI, 1847, p. 7.

incurment of opinions adverse to religion,' that 'shall not be allowed.'²⁵⁶ Thus, 130 members could discuss and sign a petition against a bill on religious instruction in factory schools in the 1850s.²⁵⁷ Classes to improve written and spoken expression were also more attractive because expressing political views was not prohibited. Classes helped aspiring public speakers; one teacher noted with pleasure that students of a reading class had made 'decided progress,' and now read 'in their more *natural* mode of reading, in the absence of the former monotonous singing kind of delivery.'²⁵⁸ Another elocution class aimed 'to inspire literary tastes as well as to communicate a fluent and graceful delivery.'²⁵⁹ Two years later, the teacher noted the students' progress, they could now 'emulate that strength, and beauty of style which form the attraction of the authors, with whom they have made themselves familiar.' Students may have moved beyond reading the work of others as their work apparently helped students, 'to develop nobility of mind and to foster independence of thought.'²⁶⁰

Style of acquisition, rather than capital available, distinguished Huddersfield from other institutes. Mr Nelson's reading class covered topics which, as lectures, had failed to attract audiences. In class, students welcomed the chance to read 'natural philosophy, mechanics, machinery, hydrostatics, hydraulics, pneumatics, optics... chemistry and physiology,' alongside, 'the English poets and... Cowper.'²⁶¹ Learning with a dedicated teacher and students of a similar level was conducive to rapid progress. In a typical reading class, the text was read, 'with comments only on the style of reading,' followed by 'questioning of the class and teacher during a second reading.' Like the lower-middle class at other institutes, Huddersfield students seemed keen to acquire 'cultural elegance.' Before literary readings, 'the teacher gives a sketch of the author's life and institutes comparisons between his work and those of other authors of various ages and countries.'²⁶² This cultural awareness was

²⁵⁶ Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute, *Rule Book*.

²⁵⁷ Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute, *Minute Book*, 1851-4.

²⁵⁸ ARHMI, 1845, p. 5.

²⁵⁹ ARHMI, 1845, p. 8.

²⁶⁰ ARHMI, 1847, p. 20.

²⁶¹ ARHMI, 1849, p. 9.

²⁶² Harrison in reference to the lower-middle class students of institutes like Leeds and York, ARHMI, 1849, p. 9.

similar to that embodied in middle-class schools and provided workers with a cultural code facilitating access to 'high culture'. However, the strategy employed to acquire this cultural capital was necessarily different. Huddersfield was the only larger institute to prioritise classes and was therefore uniquely suited to working-class learners.

Huddersfield was suited to learners with limited cultural capital. New students attended a probationary class where, 'their attainments and capacity,' were tested before placement 'in the class for which they are best fitted.'²⁶³ This helped the 'large portion' of new members 'unacquainted with even the first rudiments of knowledge.'²⁶⁴ Subsequently, six pence a fortnight bought members access to unlimited classes, six days a week.²⁶⁵ 'General lectures,' were restricted so as not to interfere with, 'the more necessary branches of elementary instruction.'²⁶⁶ Gratuitous services of teachers from Huddersfield College facilitated the provision of classes but it was the working-class logic of the field that ensured classes were the priority.²⁶⁷

At Huddersfield, students' progress beyond the elementary was supervised closely. This, as far as possible, protected the working-class habitus from the experience of failure which could be so damaging. Teachers and collective effort were more conducive to progress than individual work in lecture or library. In 1847, the teacher of a grammar class noted as students could now, 'readily analyse any sentence brought before them,' he had, 'commenced a course of instruction upon the etymological combination or construction of the English language.'²⁶⁸ This was clearly effective as, 'in this branch of knowledge, the class has equalled my highest expectations.' He next suggested the students write essays on any subject familiar to them and, 'of these compositions, some evinced habits of close observation and independent thought.'²⁶⁹ Classes did not always overcome the limiting effect that poverty had on the habitus. The committee observed many new students who

²⁶³ ARHMI, 1845, p. 4.

²⁶⁴ ARHMI, 1844, p. 7.

²⁶⁵ In 1851 there were forty-seven classes and eighteen subjects being taught. Tylecote, p. 203.

²⁶⁶ ARHMI, 1844, p. 11.

²⁶⁷ O'Connell, p. 3.

²⁶⁸ ARHMI, 1847, p. 14.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

left 'in utter despair of achieving the mastery of the commonest rudiments of learning.'²⁷⁰ However, the encouragement and support that students received in classes, from teachers who evidently took great pride in their students, was far more likely to challenge individuals' assumptions about their own limitations than the distant style of learning in the lectures.

Furthermore, success was more tangible and there was more to gain from competition in the Huddersfield Institute. Differences in members' economic and cultural capital were limited meaning working people occupied a higher position in the hierarchy with potential for raising their position further. Whereas in larger institutes, working-class culture was portrayed as inferior, at Huddersfield, it had greater value. The fact that members were 'legitimate workers' was portrayed as a proud achievement and the committee were keen to at least appear to celebrate members, 'whose hard and iron hands attest the nobility of their occupations.'²⁷¹ Learners' achievements had the potential to confer real status within the institute. Members whose, 'specimens of penmanship' covered the walls of the institute could feel real pride. 'Recitations by members of the elocution class' at the monthly meetings was something close to presiding over a public meeting.²⁷² Crucially, progress in the class system meant these achievements seemed within reach of beginners. Thus, in 1851, two railway labourers, aged forty-six and forty-eight, 'who could scarcely read, write, or sum' attended the elementary class and persevered through the winter season, during which they, 'acquired a creditable proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic.'²⁷³

Students acquiring cultural capital in the institute were rewarded partly through praise. Secretary, George Searle Philips, reported on his forty-six students' progress in the advanced history class, celebrating 'the clearness of the narrative,' in their essays as well as 'the reflections of the students, and the beautiful language in which these reflections have been clothed.'²⁷⁴ Progression to more advanced classes, and therefore augmentation of

²⁷⁰ ARHMI, 1847, p. 6 According to the Committee, 'not above a third' of students 'have sufficient courage and perseverance to go through a regular course of instruction.' Meeting minutes, 1848, quoted in Tylecote, p. 197.

²⁷¹ George Searle Philips in *The People's Journal*, 1847, p. 23 quoted in Tylecote, p. 192.

²⁷² ARHMI, 1846, p. 15.

²⁷³ ARHMI, 1851, p. 6.

²⁷⁴ ARHMI, 1848, pp. 19-20.

hierarchical position, was also motivating. In one English class, 'several young men, who when they first entered the class were the worst readers in it; but who, from their own diligence and attention, have raised themselves so far above the rest that they may now be safely removed to a higher class.'²⁷⁵ Furthermore, election to the committee or progression to the position of teacher provided a level of status close to impossible in one of the more middle-class institutes. One student who joined in 1848 'could not then sign my own name,' but, after three years, was learning French and 'Logarithms in Bonnycastle's algebra,' and was a pupil teacher. This student identified a strategy to achieve a position of greater influence, they 'intend[ed] to qualify myself to take a first-class school.'²⁷⁶

The literature pursued at Huddersfield and the rejection of some elements of working-class culture suggests bourgeois values were recreated in this working-class field. Schwann reflected on 'how willingly' his students adopted, 'any suggestions as to neatness and cleanliness in dress and person.'²⁷⁷ Furthermore, the main objection to employing voluntary teachers was their, 'provincial dialect,' that lingered despite teachers having a, 'most willing disposition to overcome it'.²⁷⁸ The grammar teacher noted 'vulgar provincialisms' had a great hold over students' minds and could not be loosened as, 'so few are the opportunities they have of conversing with persons who speak good language that the ridding themselves of our barbarous northern dialect is a work of no easy accomplishment.'²⁷⁹ In these sentiments can be found a clash between respect for and rejection of their natural culture. The committee noted 'persons become confirmed in the peculiar dialect of their district, and however hearty and honest the dialect may be (as is the case with that of Yorkshire), it very materially militates against those who can speak no other and have to push their fortunes where the English language is more purely spoken.'²⁸⁰ Elements of embodied culture were therefore rejected for utilitarian reasons. Use of language such as 'vulgar' and 'barbarous', suggests this rejection involved elevation from other working-class people. In these aspirations the teachers and, it can be assumed, a significant proportion of members

²⁷⁵ ARHMI, 1849, p. 9.

²⁷⁶ ARHMI, 1852, p. 5 .

²⁷⁷ ARHMI, 1846, p. 6.

²⁷⁸ Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute Committee, *Meeting Minutes*, quoted in Tylecote pp. 201-202.

²⁷⁹ ARHMI, 1847, p. 8.

²⁸⁰ ARHMI, 1847, p. 8.

demonstrate that they perceived some elements of the dominant culture as legitimising and desirable.²⁸¹

The popularity of classes at Huddersfield suggests limited resentment of the suggestion that visible signs of working-class identity be rejected. Members may have accepted the committee's insistence that, 'it was not enough to know how to speak correct English – but this knowledge must be put in to practice *at all times, and on all occasions*; whether by the fireside, in the street, or in the factory...'²⁸² Rejecting local dialect meant, in Bourdieu's terms, 'denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile- in a word, natural – enjoyment.' This rejection meant a conscious or subconscious effort to secure cultural superiority to other workers.²⁸³ Cultural acquisitions would have enhanced differences between members and their family and colleagues, it is possible that for some members, this separation was desirable. Working-class culture at Huddersfield was not always celebrated as autonomous from dominant culture. Therefore, a higher proportion of working-class members may have made the cultural field more suitable for working-class learners but it did not necessarily lead to rejection of dominant culture or society. Instead, learners were motivated by acquisition of certain aspects of middle-class culture which would lead them to occupy a higher position in the field relative to others of their social class. Using Bourdieu's concepts to analyse learning in mechanics' institutes reveals working-class learners wanted to acquire cultural capital that they recognised as legitimate and that this recognition resulted, however unconsciously, from of its high value in dominant society. In Bourdieu's analysis mechanics' institutes are fields of cultural competition. An individuals' success within a field depended on the level of symmetry between habitus and field. Bourdieu's framework therefore allows us to identify the middle-class logic of larger institutes as the reason for their failure to provide an education to working people. In contrast, when a similar education was provided in a working-class field, it was highly valued by working people.

²⁸¹ This appears to confirm Bourdieu's contention that popular culture, 'is a dominated "aesthetic" which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetic,' and therefore cannot be autonomous. Bourdieu, 1994, pp. 41-3.

²⁸² ARHMI, 1847, p. 8.

²⁸³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 7. Changing their way of speaking appears to confirm Bourdieu's argument that 'cultural consumption [is] predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences.' 1994, p. 7.

Mutual Improvement Societies: competition in a working-class field

Contemporary writers and historians recognise that when learners rejected mechanics' institutes they moved towards mutual improvement societies. Some were connected to the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics Institutes, others to political movements; Chartism, Co-operation and Owenism all ran schemes for the provision of literacy. Political societies were not well documented, but many of the Yorkshire Union societies and many others attached to nonconformist chapels published annual reports or kept minute books. Simon Green's research of religious mutual societies suggests that in the 1860s 2000 young men in Halifax and nearly 1000 in Keighley were members.²⁸⁴ The almost exclusively working-class membership of mutual societies was their most distinctive feature. As at Huddersfield, the limited field meant working members occupied higher social positions and therefore determined the capital available and acquisition strategies. Elementary classes, political discussion and debate, composition exercises and readings were suited to working-class habitus allowing a successful strategy of acquisition to be identified. Moreover, the exclusivity of the field meant when members acquired capital they adjusted their position, gaining influence and prestige. At the mutual societies the competition for a higher social position was a motivation for learning. This is supported by sociologists Grignon and Grignon who encourage the use of capital and habitus to analyse variations between fractions of the working class. They demonstrate that competition for social benefits exists within classes when there are variations in cultural capital between different fractions.²⁸⁵ Despite being defined by their mutuality, these societies contained members competing for social benefits.

Working-class members had almost complete control over mutual societies. Harrison argues their 'flexibility, and informal, democratic nature,' was crucial to their success.²⁸⁶ The Yorkshire Union societies celebrated their working-class membership in annual reports. At Dogley Lane, near Huddersfield, 'the institution is principally supported and conducted by

²⁸⁴ S.J.D. Green, "Religion And The Rise Of The Common Man: Mutual Improvement Societies, Religious Associations And Popular Education In Three Industrial Towns In the West Riding Of Yorkshire", in *Cities, Class And Communication: Essays In Honour Of Asa Briggs* ed. by Derek Fraser (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 25-43, p. 30.

²⁸⁵ Grignon, Claude, and Christiane Grignon, 'Style d'alimentation et gouts populaires' *Revue Francaise de Sociologie* 21 (1980), pp. 531-69, cited in Swartz, p. 175.

²⁸⁶ Harrison, p. 55.

labouring men.’ Members were not disheartened by the society’s dependence ‘upon the state of trade in the locality for its prosperity.’²⁸⁷ The Birstall Society, founded in 1846, was almost entirely supported by its members ‘who are chiefly operatives.’²⁸⁸ Societies drew their management from normal members through democratic election. Griffin argues mutual societies ‘depended upon quickly transforming their most able students into teachers, managers, and leaders,’ providing countless success stories and sources of inspiration for new members who could aspire to future leadership roles.²⁸⁹ At Holbeck, normal members had ‘sole management’ and responded to the membership’s changing needs when they rearranged the content of the classes ‘from the simple alphabet to a course of historical and geographical reading and the elements of composition.’²⁹⁰

Working-class influence on the field was expressed in a variety of ways. Fees were often cheaper than the average three pence weekly fees at mechanics’ institutes. St John’s, Clayton, charged one penny a week, at Hunslet labourers paid four shillings a year and mechanics six shillings.²⁹¹ Hours were adjusted according to members’ needs. At Hunslet the reading room was open six days a week from six to ten o’clock.²⁹² Starting meetings later, usually around eight o’clock, meant that all could attend. Rural societies did not meet regularly between May and October.²⁹³ Rules were minimal, ensuring congruence between working-class habitus and field. Sutton Baptist Society in Cravendale agreed, ‘to have as few rules as possible,’ introducing only two: ‘the society meet every Wednesday evening in the Chapel vestry,’ and ‘proceedings should always begin and end with prayer.’²⁹⁴ At Holbeck rules were inclusive; ‘no one is excluded on account of religious belief.’²⁹⁵ In addition ‘no opinion or view was ever treated lightly, and, however we differed in conclusions, all were

²⁸⁷ ARYUMI, 1849 p. 34.

²⁸⁸ The working-class membership was ‘a fact which sufficiently proves that its advantages are duly appreciated by them, and it is also a fact that augurs well for its future prosperity and usefulness’. The society did not join the Yorkshire Union until 1849, ARYUMI, 1849, p. 25.

²⁸⁹ Griffin, 2014, p. 584.

²⁹⁰ ARYUMI, 1851, p. 47.

²⁹¹ Clayton St John Mutual Improvement Society Rule Book.

²⁹² *Leeds Mercury* 26 September 1846.

²⁹³ This was the case at Sutton in Craven, Sutton Baptist Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book.

²⁹⁴ Sutton Baptist Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book.

²⁹⁵ ARYUMI, 1850, p. 37.

treated with respect.²⁹⁶ At Clayton society, members 'quoting any sentiment expressed in the class for the purpose of ridicule,' would be dismissed.²⁹⁷ A similar rule was introduced at Bradford where 'no speaker shall be allowed to criticise any previous speakers unless such speakers desire him.'²⁹⁸ This suggests members were protected from feeling they were unsuited to the cultural field. Though the field was competitive and dominant members are always identifiable in the minute books, the difference between the dominant and subordinate was less great. Competition with individuals who had embodied valuable cultural capital from a young age was avoided, protecting a habitus disposed to expect failure. The difficulties of learning alongside middle-class individuals is reflected in a members' complaint that, 'the great mass of people do not and cannot be expected to understand the meaning of a large number of words used chiefly for professional and other educated men.' Educated men refused to put in to practice the theory that 'the end of speech is not ostentation but to be understood.'²⁹⁹ In contrast, society members spoke the same language, making success seem more achievable. The price, hours, rules and membership of the societies all challenged the expectations of failure that could be produced by poverty in childhood, making learners more disposed to learn.

Because workers determined strategies of acquisition, mutual societies prioritised elementary classes which were usually taught by the members themselves. At Birstall the committee decided to discontinue lectures because they 'prevent the classes from attending.'³⁰⁰ In smaller religious societies typical of the later century, elementary learning occurred more informally in the weekly activities of the society with reading aloud being a feature of most meetings. That these strategies of acquisition were effective is clear; at Parkgate Wesleyan Society in Rotherham, members learned to read and could present a 'moderately good essay of their own composition' within two years. Even though, 'these first steps in education are not directly pointed out or taught,' members progressed rapidly

²⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 36.

²⁹⁷ Clayton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1882.

²⁹⁸ Bradford Friends Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1868.

²⁹⁹ A Few Thoughts on Speech' *Bradford Friends' Mutual Improvement Society Magazine for Members* no. 2 (1871).

³⁰⁰ ARYUMI, 1851, p. 47.

because 'the anxious learner is stimulated and assisted to their attainment.'³⁰¹ Holbeck Society took pride in its commitment to mutual learning. More skilled members guided students' development from analysis of grammar to substituting 'other words bearing the same sense, and then to compose sentences themselves... beginning with simple descriptions of some object,' before progressing to essay composition. This style of learning clearly suited students who initially lacked confidence; 'though it was difficult to get them to try, yet when they overcame their first backwardness, and the fear of being laughed at for failing, they were both surprised and pleased at the extent of their powers.' It seems the habitus of these learners adjusted to the experience of success as 'they came to feel they had powers of observation and judgement, and to exercise them.' All of this meant 'the school was a place of enjoyment and did not appear to be endured merely as a duty.'³⁰²

Members' success within societies extended far beyond the elementary. Jonathon Rose argues that the societies gained popularity 'after the achievement of mass literacy but before radio and television,' and that in this period, 'working-class culture was saturated by the spirit of mutual education.'³⁰³ The educational aims of mutual societies were more limited than at Huddersfield. Huddersfield's advanced classes were substituted for reading and discussion groups that enhanced members' ability to form and express opinions. Whilst this reflects the societies' comparative lack of resources, it also suggests quality of expression was valued over knowledge. At a typical meeting, a few members would read an essay of their own composition, and questions, encouragement and criticism followed. Occasionally, the essay was re-read after changes had been made. Members unwilling to read essays or join in discussion were known as 'silent members' and extempore speaking was often introduced to help increase their confidence.³⁰⁴ In extempore speaking and essay reading, confidence and quality of expression generally mattered more than breadth of knowledge.

³⁰¹ David Gough, "The Advantages Of A Mental Improvement Class: An Essay Read Before The Parkgate Wesleyan Methodist Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society" (Huddersfield, 1869)

³⁰² ARYUMI, 1849. p. 36.

³⁰³ Rose, p. 77.

³⁰⁴ For example, Green found that Northgate Society in Halifax used a debating device known as 'sharp practice'. Various subjects in a hat were passed round; each member had to speak for five minutes on their subject. Harrison Road Society had a similar activity, blank cards, if drawn, allowed the member to talk on a topic of their choice. Green, pp. 34-5.

Sutton-in-Craven's Mutual Improvement Society used extempore speaking to make their society more inclusive. In November 1878 there were, 'attempts made by the President to persuade several of the younger members to contribute to the conversation but they persisted in keeping their seats.'³⁰⁵ An extempore speaking session was planned for the following week; only nineteen attended, just twelve agreed to speak. The society persevered and, over the following year, new names appeared on the lists of essayists. General labourer, John Laycock, was, at nineteen, a speaker for the first time, as were Gill, Riley, Green, Ellison and Hill.³⁰⁶ By February 1883, extempore speaking was more successful; all twenty-four members present spoke, many of whom had not yet presented an essay. The activity was unthreatening as members chose their own subjects. Topics in 1883 varied from agricultural, including 'will pigs pay', and 'will rabbits pay', to anthropological, 'what is the form of marriage observed by the North American Indians,' to the more personal 'is woman indispensable for the comfort and well-being of a man.' In the 1890s the extempore speaking continued to be used for more practical discussions including: 'why does fire burn,' 'what do you think of hay making on a Sunday in very uncertain weather,' and 'what is your opinion on the saying, the least said the soonest mended.'³⁰⁷ These topics, that many autodidacts would have called 'frivolous' or even 'vulgar', were a way of persuading those with relatively little cultural capital to take part in the activities of the society and to gain confidence. Unlike in the mechanics' institutes, the interests of the members received free expression. Whilst it is undeniable that dominant culture often influenced the cultural values and choices of working people, the relative autonomy of the mutual societies is evident in the regular return to the topic of 'will pigs pay,' or the evenings dedicated to holidays taken by members. In adjusting the cultural capital available and the methods of acquisition, working people constructed a field uniquely suited to their habitus.

The formation of ideas and their expression were the skills most valued in societies. In an essay read to Parkgate Society 'learning to read, spell and write,' was listed as the most important of the society's advantages, followed by 'a good and proper language,' which is

³⁰⁵ Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 22 November 1878.

³⁰⁶ Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 20 December, 1878; *England Census*, 1881.

³⁰⁷ Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 26 January, 8 February 1883.

'studied and acquired,' along with 'a knowledge of composing.' 'Writing and private study,' and the 'advantage of conversing with each other,' were also among the most valued.³⁰⁸ Prioritisation of self-expression is testament to the significance of changes to the social field in adjusting working-class behaviour and later working-class habitus. Bourdieu argues habitus will only produce effective strategies for acquisition of capital when it is disposed to recognise the potential for success. He therefore argues, the habitus of subordinate groups has a limited idea of what is possible and avoids attempts to become more dominant in a field because it is convinced of the likelihood of failure.³⁰⁹ In the nineteenth century, the many working-class individuals who gained a higher position in the social field *relative* to the rest of their class tended to do so through written and spoken communication of ideas. Self-expression was valuable because most who gained an influential position relied, not on economic capital or technical skill, but by the fact they were literate, well-read and eloquent. After 1820, working people became more disposed to learn because social changes meant skillful self-expression could be rewarded by greater social influence *within* their class. Therefore, members of societies who worked to improve their self-expression arguably did so because changes to the social field had taught their habitus to recognise the social value of these skills and the success of working people who acquired them.

Active members of mutual societies achieved a limited form of success in the form of higher positions within their society's field. Some acquired enough capital to achieve a correspondingly higher position in wider society. This might be expressed as social status in the community, through access to economic opportunities or through competition for political representation. Members of societies who gained social or political status acted as examples of the success that other working-class learners could achieve, forcing the habitus to acknowledge new possibilities. Moreover, the experiencing academic or managerial success for a habitus unused to this feeling must have been transformative.

Societies provided a range of positions of influence which represented opportunities for success. It was typical for the President to be from the clergy or notable member of the

³⁰⁸ Gough, *An Essay*, 1869.

³⁰⁹ Karl Maton, pp. 49-64.

community. At Armitage Bridge, a society started in 1873 the position of President was filled by J. Brooke Esq. However, normal members occupied the two Vice President positions, and the seven positions for Librarians and Committee members. Committee members organised, managed, and took credit for social activities, including the annual *conversazione* and various excursions.³¹⁰ In 1897, the committee were also responsible for disciplining members who brought beer into the *conversazione*.³¹¹ This influence was not only to be enjoyed within the confines of the society, managers and teachers also represented their societies at the annual Conference of Mutual Improvement Societies. These representatives were usually among the most vocal of the members, as was the case with Carey Smith who was sent by the Sutton Society in 1878.³¹² Alternatively, some particularly skilled speakers gained recognition from other societies. Mr Attack, a regular speaker and member at Bradford Friends Society, visited Keighley's Society twice in 1886 and again in 1890 to deliver essays on Buddha, Mohammed, and George Fox.³¹³

The significance of relatively small amounts of cultural capital in conferring social status on men like these in working-class communities is reflected in Joseph Lawson's description of his life in Pudsey in the early-nineteenth century. He describes one of the few literate men in the community who read the newspaper to a group of other men. This service to the community meant 'he was looked upon as a very learned man,' and even when he made errors and was corrected by a stranger, his normal pupils 'voted him in the right,' reflecting the status he gained as a result of the high quantity of cultural capital he possessed relative to the others in his community.³¹⁴ Lawson's account gives an insight in to the social advantages of possessing cultural capital. Therefore, the acquisition of cultural capital within the societies can be interpreted as competition for status within the wider community.

³¹⁰ For example, in 1895 the Society visited Hardcastle Craggs, Armitage Bridge Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1895-1899.

³¹¹ The committee were given the power to deal with the incident and the accused attended a disciplinary meeting though the punishment was not recorded. Armitage Bridge Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 4, 25 October and 30 December 1897.

³¹² Sutton Baptist Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 2 March 1878.

³¹³ Keighley Mutual Improvement Society Adult School Minutes, 1882-97.

³¹⁴ Joseph Lawson, *Progress In Pudsey* (Sussex: Caliban Books, 1978) p. 59.

The mutual societies regularly drew praise from middle-class society. Holbeck's report to the Yorkshire Union in 1851 demonstrates an awareness of what bourgeois supporters wanted to hear. Holbeck's success was attributed to 'a growing feeling of the importance of culture among the better class of operatives, (among whom the institution solely labours) and from the fact of their measures being fitted to that object.'³¹⁵ The Union's publication of these reports is testament to bourgeois approval of mutual society members and suggests that members had a higher social status in dominant society than other working people. The possible social advantages of this is reflected in the experience of the forty-five members of the Bowling Congregational Mutual Improvement Society who, in 1869, attracted 600 guests to their first annual soiree. Members enjoyed praise from Reverend Chown who announced they had resisted the 'self-indulgence,' that characterised the young men both in the class above them and in the less respectable of their own class. These learners and others may well have enjoyed the social advantage which Chown predicted for them, that of gaining a wife. Cries of 'hear, hear' and laughter greeted the declaration that members were 'very properly watched' by young women who, Chown advised, should pay great attention to 'the acts and proceedings of all young men with whom they might form any connection.'³¹⁶

Men from humble backgrounds could reach relatively great heights within the limited market of a mutual society. James Clough, a Sutton member, was the son of an agricultural labourer who died before James was ten. His mother worked as a housemaid to support a household of six children and four grandchildren. His siblings worked in agriculture or worsted factories but at nineteen Clough was a tailor.³¹⁷ He joined the society in 1867 when he was twenty-five. Other members likely had similar interests and a similarly limited education. The exclusive market made competition seem both less threatening and more motivating as it was likely to be rewarded by gaining influence within the society. Clough's dedication is revealed in 1877 when he delivered a 'lengthy but instructive essay entitled

³¹⁵ ARYUMI, 1851, p. 47. Further evidence that Holbeck was trying to appeal to the Yorkshire Union's middle-class supporters can be found in their claim that many members could 'now take... positions in life they could not have approached, had it not been for the knowledge and the powers gained with us.' ARYUMI, 1849, p. 37.

³¹⁶ Bradford Observer, 9th November 1869.

³¹⁷ *English Census* 1841, 1861.

“Isle of Man” which had some very interesting historical facts.³¹⁸ The secretary of the society wrote ‘great credit,’ was ‘due to the essayist for the time and labour it must have cost in acquiring such an amount of information.’³¹⁹ The following year Clough’s efforts gained him a dominant position in the field; he became Vice President. In 1878, he impressed with his essay ‘a Holiday Tour to London and Paris,’ in which he could ‘exhibit views of many of the places he had visited during his stay in the French capital.’³²⁰ His ability to afford this holiday was partly a result of his position as mechanical engineer at a worsted factory. He secured this role sometime before 1881 and it was a considerable promotion for a former tailor.³²¹ Clough’s pride in his role is evident, he presented a paper ‘to a very large audience,’ on ‘the steam engine, its use and progress.’ His exhibition of equipment ‘showed the effect which the atmosphere had upon a vessel from which all air had been abstracted but which was full of steam, on the steam being suddenly condensed and a vacuum formed in the interior.’³²² However, his interests went far beyond the technical, in 1882 Clough’s paper on the crisis in Egypt ‘dealt mainly with the system of taxation introduced by the Europeans by which the native population were heavily taxed and the Europeans went nearly free from taxes,’ and noted ‘this to be really the cause of the present crisis.’³²³ In 1891 he established the society’s cricket club.³²⁴ Through his role in the society, Clough gained an education that probably contributed to his improved station in life but he also gained considerable influence and status within the society and raised his position relative to others in his community. This must have felt like a considerable achievement for the son of an agricultural labourer.

Men, like Cough, who did not use cultural capital for explicitly political aims, were in the majority in the societies; they were motivated by evidence that cultural capital could be exchanged for social influence and undoubtedly benefited from their reputation as ‘the best among their class.’ This supports the characterisation of working-class learning after 1850 as

³¹⁸ Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 28 September 1877.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid, 9 October 1878.

³²¹ *English Census*, 1881.

³²² Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 28 February 1879.

³²³ Ibid, 8 September 1882.

³²⁴ Ibid, 23 October 1891.

individualistic. However, political leaders provided the most prominent examples of working men who gained and used cultural capital. Political change was never insignificant to socially ambitious learners, as is clear from Clough's criticism of imperial taxation.

A striking difference between the capital available in mutual societies and that in mechanics' institutes, was the political knowledge provided through discussion groups and reading rooms. Hole argued 'no teacher in this country will gain the ear of the working man unless he is willing to have his opinions and statements canvassed, to invite the utterance of conflicting opinion, and to give truth fair field and no favour.'³²⁵ Political groups arguably benefited from the institutes' restrictions; the Leeds Charter Debating Society was formed in 1841 'to cultivate that talent which, for want of opportunities, has lain as long dead.'³²⁶ Criticism of rules at institutes and radical movements' provision of elementary classes and discussion groups, suggests the opportunity to discuss politics freely, was significant to working-class learners. Mutual societies, even those connected to the Yorkshire Union, placed no limits on political discussion; at Hunslet it was only in 'delivery of lectures and papers of literary and scientific subjects,' that 'party politics and controversial divinity be excluded,' there was no attempt to limit discussion within classes.³²⁷ The fifty-two members of Birstall Mental Improvement Society chose topics for debate when their turn came to lead the fortnightly discussion class. As Birstall was 'under no sectarian control' and admitted 'as Members persons of all sections of religion and party politics,' regular political discussion seems likely.³²⁸

The influence of radicalism in motivating adult learning is evident in the newspapers and journals taken by the societies which included the standard papers like *The Times*, *Manchester Guardian* and *Leeds Times* along with *The People's Journal*, *Working Man's Friend* and *Northern Star*.³²⁹ Moreover, unlike the institutes, where a room was set aside for

³²⁵ Hole, p. 66.

³²⁶ *Northern Star*, 27th March 1841.

³²⁷ Hunslet Mutual Improvement Society Rulebook.

³²⁸ ARYUMI 1851 p. 33. A lecture was delivered by R. Baker Esq. on 'the present position of the working classes, morally and socially considered.'

³²⁹ See Horsforth Mutual Improvement Society, and Holbeck Mutual Improvement Society in ARYUMI 1851 p. 41, 1852 p. 49.

silent reading, silence was not enforced, permitting free discussion of varied political commentary. The titles of lectures or essays from the societies suggest members were interested in working-class social and cultural independence: 'the history of the working classes in Britain' and an essay on 'the compatibility of labour with literature' were read at Beeston Society in 1851.³³⁰ Beeston members were proud and gratified 'to think, that there are those who are alive to their position in society and who work well for the elevation of their brethren.'³³¹ Griffin uses the autobiographies of Thomas Cooper and John Leatherland to show organisation of mutual societies meant learners became political leaders when Chartist fervour reached their neighbourhoods. Experience in the societies, 'broadened their intellectual horizons by introducing them to the previously closed world of political thought,' and, 'also provided basic training in the art of public speaking.'³³² The societies' reliance on their own members for management has led Griffin to suggest that, 'along with raising levels of literacy, these societies instructed their members in the business of governance,' that 'could be, and frequently was, later transferred to other causes.'³³³ Some members seem to have been motivated to acquire cultural capital conducive to competition for a higher position for their class in the field of power.

A greater level of social harmony in the mid-century did not mean political knowledge and its potential to gain political power became less valuable. At Sutton, arrangements were made for Thomas Cooper to visit the society in 1877 and the evening was clearly a success as in March 1879 it was 'resolved that Mr. Thomas Cooper be asked to lecture again,' a further invitation was extended in 1882.³³⁴ Cooper's visits reflect an enduring interest in, and at least partial support for, radical politics. Most societies discussed socialism and a wide range of opinions were clearly present. In Halifax in 1902, one member read a paper on Robert Owen which gave 'a very favourable account of his efforts at new Lanark' and challenged those who criticised Owen's rejection of competition, calling this 'the tyrants'

³³⁰ ARYUMI, 1851 p. 30.

³³¹ ARYUMI 1852 p. 41.

³³² Griffin, 'The Making of the Chartists', p. 587

³³³ Ibid. p. 584.

³³⁴ Sutton Baptist Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 14 September 1877 and 28 March 1879 and 24 February 1882.

ever ready excuse.³³⁵ Members continued to be motivated to learn in adulthood by their political ambitions for themselves and their class and some who acquired cultural capital surely used this to contribute to political movements.

After 1850, societies continued to provide leadership for working-class political movements. McKibbin suggests associations connected to chapels and churches assumed a 'quasi-political associational function,' helping people acquire 'the rhetorical and organisational skills that set their parliamentary careers in good stead.'³³⁶ He references Labour MP Arthur Henderson who 'served his elocutionary and political apprenticeship,' in a Keighley mutual society.³³⁷ Green's study of mutual societies in the West Riding takes McKibbin's claim further, arguing the societies could encourage individuals to loosen commitment to church or chapel and commit instead to political agitation. After time in societies, 'individuals versed in the art of speaking, debate and disciplined organisation might have been well prepared for an official career in an early twentieth-century trade union.'³³⁸ The best evidence of this comes from Northgate Society where regular discussion of the merits of socialism was followed by an address by Rev. Francis Milson's who noted that some members had left to join the newly established Labour church. Milson felt that this seemed particularly unjust as his congregation had been so 'actively sympathetic,' to 'working people,' and was 'democratic in its constitution.'³³⁹ The contribution that the society had made to the labour movement in Halifax was evident when Milson noted that the new Labour Church had a 'congregation five times as numerous as ours,' and with 'people whose religious... opinions our School and Chapel have formed.'³⁴⁰ The society continued to take interest in the fortunes of this new congregation, noting the result of the general election in Halifax in March 1897, when Mann, the Labour candidate, received 2000 votes.³⁴¹

³³⁵ Northgate End Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 2 January 1902.

³³⁶ Ross McKibbin, 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?', *English Historical Review* 99 (1984) p. 263, quoted in Green, p. 26.

³³⁷ McKibbin, p. 308 quoted in Green, p. 26.

³³⁸ Green, p. 39.

³³⁹ Rev. Francis Milson, 'Address' 29th January 1894 p. 17-18 quoted in Green pp. 35-9.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Northgate End Unitarian Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1 March, 1897.

Application of Bourdieu's conceptual framework to the mutual improvement societies demonstrates that, as at Huddersfield, an almost exclusively working-class membership determined the logic of the field. The mutual societies were designed by their members to allow working-class habitus to produce a successful strategy for cultural acquisition. Though the societies defined themselves as mutual, Bourdieu would conceive them as competitive. This is useful as it shows that it was partly the possibility of a higher social position that motivated working people to learn in these fields. Indeed, success within mutual societies contributed to a nineteenth-century culture of mutuality which encouraged many workers to see cultural elevation as within their reach. Over time, therefore, mutual societies contributed to the adjustment of the habitus of working people. There is evidence that some learners used cultural capital to compete for political capital whilst most simply enjoyed a higher relative position in their own communities. However, the relative autonomy of the mutual societies from dominant culture meant even those who never developed explicitly political aims were encouraged to see their learning as raising the position of their social class.

Mutual improvement societies: a relatively autonomous field

Bourdieu's theoretical framework suggests working-class individuals are less equipped to compete for a higher position in the wider social field. As middle-class individuals dominate the field, a higher position is reliant on acquiring capital which is already embodied in the bourgeois home. Bourdieu therefore suggests that competition for social benefits limits the autonomy of working-class culture. As has been suggested, learning in mutual societies facilitated competition for a higher social position. This raises questions on the extent to which the learners in mutual societies conformed to the logic of bourgeois society. Bourdieu's theory of field argues separate fields are never free from external influences and that dominant values are reflected in all fields.³⁴² It is therefore important to ask how far mutual societies were autonomous from dominant culture.

In mutual societies, cultural forms with high value reflected dominant cultural hierarchies. The style of self-expression society members aimed for also partially emulated bourgeois

³⁴² Swartz, p. 128.

oratory. Yet, this should not be interpreted as evidence that working-class cultural fields had no autonomy. Instead, dominant cultural forms and practices were used to explicitly challenge the bourgeois logic of the wider social field. Prior similarly found the cultural products valued by the late-eighteenth century middle class remained those of aristocratic culture even when middle-class social power became increasingly independent from old elites. Yet, meritocracy replaced aristocratic patronage as the best justification for cultural value. Highlighting skills and professionalism in analysis of aristocratic cultural forms allowed the middle class to legitimise their increasingly dominant position.³⁴³ Whilst working-class learners lacked economic independence, mutual societies achieved relative autonomy from middle-class culture because dominant social hierarchies were not replicated in hierarchies of society members. In this field, as with the middle-class in Prior's study, dominant cultural values were recreated but explained differently. In mutual societies, acquiring knowledge of bourgeois culture was portrayed as part of class competition; working people took ownership of a monopolised culture that was their rightful 'inheritance'. Whereas bourgeois groups legitimised their dominance by implying that they were *naturally* intellectually and morally superior, mutual societies justified their right to education by arguing for man's *universal* moral and intellectual *potential*. This style of analysis is mirrored in nineteenth-century working-class writing and autobiography. Bourdieu argues a bourgeois upbringing and education provides the habitus with a 'cultural code'. This teaches middle-class children to interpret all forms of culture, from painting to food, in a distinctive way. It is possible to suggest members of mutual societies acquired a uniquely working-class cultural code that prioritised the egalitarian and democratic rather than the refined. Learners used their understanding of dominant culture to compete for a higher position in wider society, implying an acceptance of the middle-class 'rules of the game'. Nevertheless, their cultural analysis explicitly challenged the bourgeois logic of the field.

Mutual societies had myriad sources from which to draw an autonomously working-class form of cultural analysis. Amongst the most significant was Unitarian William Ellery Channing (b.1780). Channing's *Self Culture* (1839), printed by Chartist John Cleave, 'became

³⁴³ Prior.

a key concept in Chartist ideas.³⁴⁴ Cooper taught 'Channing's Self Culture,' at his mutual society.³⁴⁵ In 1906 Labour MPs Thomas Burt, Philip Snowden, and John Johnson cited Channing as among their most influential authors.³⁴⁶ Channing, a committed reformer, argued the power of 'acting on, determining and forming ourselves,' was among the most noble of human powers.³⁴⁷ This view was still being expressed in societies sixty years later when Ellis Brook argued, 'we possess the noble power of acting on, determining and forming ourselves.'³⁴⁸ Smiles' *Self-Help* also provided inspiration, selling a quarter-million copies by 1900. His egalitarianism helped George Gregory (b.1888) to realise 'my lack of education was not decisive of what I might become,' inspiring a life in education.³⁴⁹ Morris argues Smiles' withdrawal from political agitation and greater commitment to education did not mean he abandoned 'his central respect for the individuality, independence and rationality of human nature.'³⁵⁰ Both authors therefore encouraged working men to see learning as vital to achieving man's universal potential.

Popular journalism provided access to a similarly egalitarian and democratic culture. Cassell's *Working Man's Friend*, (1850-52), *Popular Educator* (1852-1865), and Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* (1871-84), according to Jesse Selbin's research, encouraged readers to see reading as essential to the reform of bourgeois society as 'reading [was] a central practice of good citizenship – not just personally formative, but politically and socially instrumental.'³⁵¹ Mutual societies purchased Cassell's work for private study and communal readings.³⁵²

³⁴⁴ Scriven, p. 104.

³⁴⁵ Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872) p. 164.

³⁴⁶ "The Labour Party And The Books That Helped To Make It", *The Review Of Reviews*, 33 (1908), 568-582.

³⁴⁷ William Ellery Channing, *Self-Culture* (London: John Cleave, 1839) p. 24.

³⁴⁸ Ellis Brook, *Mutual Improvement Societies: the needs of the age*, (Handwritten Essay Delivered to Halifax Mutual Improvement Society: December 1903) p. 6 He continued, of all the discoveries which young men need to make, the most important at the present moment is that of the self-forming power treasured up in themselves.'

³⁴⁹ Gregory was the son of an illiterate Somerset miner. He took evening classes and achieved great success, owning 1000 books in his later life. George Gregory, *untitled*, quoted in Rose, p. 69.

³⁵⁰ R. J. Morris, "Samuel Smiles And The Genesis Of Self-Help; The Retreat To A Petit Bourgeois Utopia", *The Historical Journal*, 24.1 (1981), p. 100.

³⁵¹ Jesse Cordes Selbin, "'Read With Attention": John Cassell, John Ruskin, And The History Of Close Reading", *Victorian Studies*, 58.3 (2016), pp. 493-521, p. 496.

³⁵² Thomas Burt, Labour MP wrote 'Cassell's and Chambers's educational books, especially 'Cassell's popular educator,' etc., helped me greatly. I studied carefully many of the lessons as they came out in the weekly or monthly numbers of the popular educator.' 'The Labour Party and the Books that

Cassell, like Channing, preached equality, democratisation of education and self-government.³⁵³ Use of culture to reject bourgeois society is evident in Cassell's confession 'that we never expect to see the middle and higher classes become what they ought to be until the working people push them on... learning with them has been little better than a mechanical, parrot-sort of drudgery.'³⁵⁴ Ruskin, cited by seventeen early Labour MPs as among their most influential authors, used *Fors* 'as a platform to promote the fundamental redistribution of what he sees as a collective cultural inheritance,' encouraging popular ownership of high culture.³⁵⁵ Alternatively, learners drew inspiration from Kingsley's *Alton Locke* and Gaskell's *Job Leigh*, both personifications of 'fantasies of working-class autodidacticism,' and its potential for achieving change.³⁵⁶ This literature encouraged acquisition of bourgeois cultural traits with the purpose of achieving working-class advancement. Social critique was central to the educational 'toolkit' that was provided and literature aimed 'to foster a more critical citizenry,' rather than a more compliant one.³⁵⁷ Interestingly, Selbin notes, Cassell's journalism, like the mutual societies 'aspired towards bourgeois institutions while still regarding them with a heavy dose of scepticism.'³⁵⁸ Elements of bourgeois culture present in working-class education and in mutual societies were not a simplistic recreation of dominant cultural values. Instead, learners used ideas about equality and democracy to justify cultural acquisitions and criticise bourgeois society.

Phrenology provided further inspiration for mutual societies' egalitarian culture. Franz Gall's theory of multiple mental organs with specific functions was the first to treat mental capacity as purely scientific. Phrenology symbolised a rejection of superstition long after its science was labelled as erroneous by doctors in the 1840s. Roger Cooter's study of

Helped to Make it,' *The Review of Reviews*, p. 569 Sutton Mutual Improvement Society bought Cassell's *History of England* for £3 15s at the same time as Smiles' *Thrift*. Between 1969 and 1970 three readings were given from the *Popular Educator*. Sutton Society Minute Book, 14 March 1877, 29 December 1869, 23 February 1870, 2 November 1870.

³⁵³ 'Away, then, with the aristocratic sentiment that none but the wealthy can appreciate poetry, or science, or literature.' 'Books and Reading' *Working Man's Friend*, 25th May 1850, p. 255 quoted in Selbin, p. 503.

³⁵⁴ 'Books and Reading' *Friend*, 1 June 1850 p. 259, quoted in Selbin, p. 503.

³⁵⁵ Selbin, p. 507.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 499.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

phrenology's cultural endurance shows it captured the imagination of working-class learners and radicals. The publication in 1835 of a cheap edition of phrenologist George Combe's *Constitution of Man* saw it sell 40,000 copies by 1838.³⁵⁹ Combe argued the natural powers of every man could be damaged by external conditions but the brain could nevertheless be perfected with self-discipline. The self-directed strengthening of the brain found considerable support amongst Owenites, Chartists and self-improvers wanting independence from external or patronising influence.³⁶⁰ For one co-operator, phrenology demonstrated that, contrary to middle-class teaching, in the brain there were 'no prejudices to encounter, no errors to root out, no ill-habits to overcome.' Instead, phrenology showed everyone had 'no less than thirty-five powers or faculties, that is distinct organs,' giving the individual, 'thirty-five powers to be developed, to be duly exercised and properly directed,' and these powers existed 'in every human infant.'³⁶¹ For learners, phrenology provided a scientific challenge to the middle-class portrayal of working people as naturally inclined to immoral or irrational pursuits.

Generally, middle-class writers, lecturers and philanthropists endorsed phrenology to encourage working-class temperance and individualism. In contrast, radicals and autodidacts interpreted phrenology as evidence of the universal powers of the human brain and used it to democratise science. Phrenology's simplicity allowed a Sutton member to choose it for impromptu speaking in 1891.³⁶² Members of Clayton society enjoyed 'a very amusing night with Mr Jowell on 'phrenology, illustrated.'³⁶³ Phrenology was exciting because it combined the thrill of science with the promise of better self-understanding. A major attraction was audience participation; the society at Northowram enjoyed 'the

³⁵⁹ Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning Of Popular Science* (Cambridge (GB): Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 8.

³⁶⁰ Owenites like A. J. Hamilton, upon discovering phrenology, was convinced that 'the deep mysteries of life had now been simply solved,' and that if he had come across the science earlier he might not have 'missed that success in life to which he thought he was entitled.' Hamilton quoted in Alexander Cullen *adventures in socialism: new Lanark establishment and Orbiston community* (Glasgow: 1910) p. 196 For the mutual societies, Combean phrenology was attractive for its 'methodically categorised understanding of human nature,' which 'spelled out a theology for self-discipline and self-restraint.' Cooter, p. 167.

³⁶¹ Contained in a speech on moral accountability at the London Co-operative Society's Rooms, Red Lion Square, May 1826. *Co-op Mag.*, 1 (August 1826), p. 264.

³⁶² Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minutes book, 23 October 1891.

³⁶³ Clayton St John Mutual Improvement Society Minute book, 1880-1897.

examination of three members' by William Bentley in 1883.³⁶⁴ Examinations involved an analysis of the skull and connected personality traits. Cooter argues this 'late Victorian do-it-yourself phrenology' had a 'deliberate emphasis on the 'plain and practical', which bordered on 'on anti-science.'³⁶⁵ The science therefore appealed to egalitarian mutual culture that encouraged universal participation.

Phrenology was also used to endorse self-government and reject bourgeois dominance. William Mathieu Williams (b. 1822) was the son of a fishmonger who attended the London Mechanics' Institute. Williams' *Phrenology Vindicated* emphasises working-class ownership of phrenology, defining it as 'a popular science, *the* popular science, the science of the vulgar multitude, the common property of all, down to the poorest of the poor.' For Williams, phrenology's rejection in dominant society increased its value; it existed 'in a state of invigorating adversity, sheltered, sustained by the radical democracy of the intellectual world, by those who think for themselves and dare to carry out their convictions, even though they are not in accordance with prevailing conventional fashions.'³⁶⁶ Mutual societies' continued study of phrenology despite its rejection by bourgeois culture reflects their partial autonomy. Cooter argues phrenology's endurance was 'the plebeian response to.... The myth that science governed over by intellectuals and scientists was necessarily a better and freer place to live.'³⁶⁷ It seems likely that the popular science acquired in mutual societies contributed to a cultural code through which learners expressed their commitment to equality and self-government.

Phrenologists' arguments about strengthening the brain to resist external influences was echoed in the moral arguments of radical and self-improvement culture. Radical phrenology of the 1830s sewed 'the seeds of the association between physical, moral and intellectual

³⁶⁴ Northowram Mutual Improvement Society, December 1883.

³⁶⁵ Cooter, p. 265 He also argues that Chartist and popular journalism moved away from publishing the work of 'orthodox medical professionals' and towards 'anti-establishment heterodox medicine by people with no formal training,' which 'became an increasingly visible and prominent aspect of Chartist culture.' Cooter, p. 112.

³⁶⁶ William Mathieu Williams, *A Vindication of Phrenology*, (London, 1894) p. 308, quoted in Cooter, p. 264.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

improvement,' which blossomed in mutual societies.³⁶⁸ Scriven argues late Chartism's rejection of drinking, smoking and gambling was part of a recognition that to effectively agitate for a reformation of 'British politics so that it corresponded with natural law... the social and moral consequences of a society that contravened natural law needed to be remedied.'³⁶⁹ It was not only for radicals that 'the pursuit of knowledge... held out the prospect of achieving freedom from the influence... of various forms of non-rational behaviour, the most significant of which was drunkenness.'³⁷⁰ James Burn was typical in his conviction of the significance of sobriety to achieving man's natural state; 'How humiliating it is to see a man come down from the high and god-like dignity of his reason and leave his moral nature behind him that he may revel in madness!'³⁷¹ This echoes a Sutton member's view that self-culture 'was moral, religious & intellectual,' and achieving it involved 'put[ting] down the animal passions.'³⁷² Similar connections between tobacco and mental capacity were made at Armitage Bridge, in a debate on 'the injurious nature on the habitual use of tobacco upon the mental, moral and intellectual capacities of mankind.'³⁷³ Evenings dedicated to similar discussions suggest self-control was in itself, a valuable form of capital that could be acquired.³⁷⁴ Moreover, rejection of immoral pursuits was portrayed as essential to an egalitarian society.

Similar moral topics were the subjects of lectures in mechanics' institutes. However, in mutual societies morality and self-control was portrayed as natural, thereby rejecting the view that some individuals possess a naturally superior morality. Working-class writers also used their morality to criticise middle-class culture which, in their view, prioritised the meritocratic over the moral. Morality could be used to legitimise working-class culture in

³⁶⁸ Scriven, p. 112.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

³⁷⁰ Vincent, p. 169.

³⁷¹ For Burns, and other self-improvers, 'self-control' was at the centre of their 'affirmation of an alternative way of life,' and their 'hostility,' towards those who chose to reject it. James Burn, *The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy*, (1855) p. 50 quoted in Vincent, p. 171.

³⁷² Sutton Baptist Mutual Improvement Society Minutes, 25 January 1884.

³⁷³ Some 'very animated discussion ensued,' but, 'no argument advanced by the opposition,' could challenge the 'marked proofs of the fatal effect of a continued use.' Armitage Bridge Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1897.

³⁷⁴ Sutton Society also discussed 'the evil influences and effects of tobacco.' Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minutes, 15 October 1873.

opposition to bourgeois culture's 'beautifully developed wrongness.'³⁷⁵ Regina Gagnier argues working-class autobiographers distinguished themselves as worthy of being read through stressing their modesty and moral superiority.³⁷⁶ Mutual societies also emphasised morality over skill. From essayists at Holbeck, 'the perfect, or even the excellent, we could not expect, but the force, warmth and unsophisticated simplicity of their efforts... were sometimes of the most gratifying kind. Everything came from them with an originality truly delightful.'³⁷⁷ Holbeck's members, in presenting themselves as humble and unskilled, seem to consciously vulgarise their learning. Bourdieu argues that dominated culture is vulgar because 'judgements make reference, often explicitly, to the norms of morality or agreeableness.'³⁷⁸ Though Victorian bourgeois culture also valued temperance and humility, working-class learners' self-conscious celebration of morality in opposition to meritocracy reflects their cultural autonomy. Mutual learners likely agreed with Channing's that 'the exaltation of talent, as it is called, above virtue and religion is the curse of the age.' Challenging bourgeois politicians and academics who 'acquire power without the principles which alone make it good,' allowed working-class learners to legitimise their own claims to self-government.³⁷⁹

Alongside moral topics, literature and music were generally the most popular choices. Here, homologies between dominant and working-class cultural hierarchies are revealed. The Halifax society that in the 1890s debated and lost members to socialism interspersed political debate with literary topics: a lecture on William Cowper, readings from Tennyson, discussions on the contributions of Coleridge, Ruskin, Hood, and Stowe, a reading of Spencer's 'Fairy Queen', and a lecture on Tennyson's 'idyls of the king.' The final subject attracted forty-five members, average attendance that year was twenty-nine.³⁸⁰ Bowling society, near Bradford, included in its library *the Life of Charlotte Bronte*, *Oliver Goldsmith's Life and Works*, *Macaulay's Essays*, and the works of Shakespeare, Cowper, Milton, Young

³⁷⁵ Stephen Reynolds, *A Poor Man's House*, (1909) quoted in Gagnier, p. 147.

³⁷⁶ Gagnier, pp. 139-148.

³⁷⁷ ARYUMI, 1850, p. 36.

³⁷⁸ Bourdieu, 1994, p. 5.

³⁷⁹ Channing, pp. 34-5.

³⁸⁰ Northgate Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1890-1903.

and Scott.³⁸¹ Musical evenings became more common as chapels and churches tried to compete with the expansion of commercial entertainment. A paper on the composer accompanied the music, allowing members to gain cultural awareness valued in bourgeois circles. In 1892, Sutton Society presented a paper on Mendelssohn followed by a collection of music.³⁸² Little Horton had a lecture and performance of Beethoven in 1896.³⁸³ These activities provided enjoyment but also reflect an interest in gaining cultural capital valuable in dominant society.

However, in mutuality's cultural code, literature and music were a working-class inheritance. Channing saw no issue with exclusion 'from what is called the best society,' but insisted on universal access to 'the Sacred Writers' with whose company, 'I shall not pine for want of intellectual companionship, and I may become a cultivated man.'³⁸⁴ A society member in 1903 expressed similar sentiments; 'If Bacon, Carlyle, Emmerson and Ruskin will teach us the high philosophy of human life and if Darwin, Hartley and Kelvin will enrich us with their scientific discoveries, we shall not pine for want of intellectual companionship and our societies ought to be the mediums whereby we can enter into the friendship of the noblest and the best.'³⁸⁵ He argued for universal ownership of dominant culture, noting 'if we are anxious to mutually improve each other, we must more and more make use of that noble literature, bequested to us at the richest legacy that can possibly be left to a grateful country.'³⁸⁶ Portraying culture as a form of wealth and its acquisition as noble suggests that working people used dominant culture as part of a competition for social elevation. Crucially, social elevation was explained as a collective effort, with dominant culture a way of 'mutually' achieving elevation.

Shakespeare was among the most popular authors and historians argue working-class interpretations of Shakespeare challenged rather than emulated bourgeois culture. Productions of Shakespeare surged in popularity between the 1840s and 1870s, largely due

³⁸¹ Muffield Bowling Old Lane Mutual Improvement Society List of Library Books.

³⁸² Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 11 March 1892.

³⁸³ Little Horton Centenary Annesley Wesleyan Mutual Improvement Society, 14 February 1896.

³⁸⁴ Channing, pp. 65-66.

³⁸⁵ Brook, p. 23.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p 27.

to sale of tickets for the pit.³⁸⁷ Rose argues Shakespeare's popularity was not 'out of deference to middle class tastes.' For many theatre goers 'Shakespeare was a proletarian hero who spoke directly to working people.'³⁸⁸ Anthony Taylor quotes the Chartist *People's Advocate*, 'Homer, the great poet, once sage of the world, was a beggar: our own Milton and Shakespeare, neither of them were aristocrats.'³⁸⁹ Taylor argues Shakespeare should be included in the 'bards' of the radical movement who 'dignified and elevated the struggle for reform, and provided a historical and constitutional pedigree.'³⁹⁰ Smiles' speech at Leeds reveals mutual societies, like Chartists, claimed ownership of radical bards. Smiles argued, 'the very greatest name, not only in English literature, but in the worlds' literature' was, 'unquestionably SHAKESPEARE. And he was a wool-comber, Burns was a ploughman, Ben Johnson a bricklayer, John Bunyan a Tinker.'³⁹¹ Armitage Bridge Society may have expressed similar sentiments about Shakespeare's origins during two evenings discussing Warwickshire, 'the place of birth of Shakespeare.'³⁹² Whilst middle-class individuals might classify cultural forms based on understanding of schools and periods, it seems learners in mutual societies classified Shakespeare as valuable partly because of his work's place in their autonomous cultural heritage.³⁹³

³⁸⁷ A reviewer of one performance in 1885 wrote, 'the pit has had a dramatic education... and the pit knows at once what is good, bad or indifferent. The criticism of the pit... if rough and ready, is formed on a sound basis. Listen between the acts to the remarks passed around you on a new exponent of a celebrated part, and you will hear comparisons drawn between the present performance and all the great ones who have trod the boards.' Rose, p. 122.

³⁸⁸ Rose, p. 122.

³⁸⁹ *People's Advocate*, 10 November 1849 quoted in Anthony Taylor, 'Shakespeare and radicalism: the uses and abuses of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century popular politics,' *The Historical Journal*, vol. 45 no. 2 (June 2002) p. 360.

³⁹⁰ The other bards he lists are Bunyan, Burns, Milton and Shelley. Taylor, p. 358 See also, Kathryn Prince: 'while it is true that Shakespeare was sometimes used as a representative of an elite culture to which working class readers should be convinced or coerced to aspire,' in a working-class field, 'Shakespeare's life and works, stripped of their middle-class pretensions, helped working-class readers to resist that hegemony and to imagine alternatives to their continued subordination.' Kathryn Prince, 'Shakespeare in the early working class press,' *The Working Class Intellectual* pp. 129-142, p. 140.

³⁹¹ Samuel Smiles 'Address to the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society', *Leeds Times* 29 March 1845.

³⁹² Armitage Bridge Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1894-99.

³⁹³ This is supported by the women of the Huddersfield Female Institute who showed a clear preference for books written by working-class females. Gerrard and Weedon, p. 257.

It is even possible that some society members followed in radical footsteps and used Shakespeare to legitimise arguments for democracy and reform. The *Northern Star's* 'Chartism from Shakespeare' series encouraged readers to find radical meaning in quotations divorced from their original context.³⁹⁴ Chartist Andrew Carnegie discovered republicanism through reading *Julius Caesar*, in which Brutus heroically opposes dictatorial rule.³⁹⁵ When Halifax society's readings from *Julius Caesar* 'comprised nearly the whole play,' the discussion may have touched on these themes. Discussions of Shakespeare were especially valuable to political members as knowledge of Shakespeare was required for understanding the radical press. Kathryn Prince notes *Figaro's* 1833 depiction of King George as a royal puppet in a production of *Othello* with Lord Brougham playing Iago.³⁹⁶ This provides further evidence of a uniquely working-class cultural code in which dominant cultural knowledge was used to legitimise a critique of middle-class society. Whilst it is impossible to know how the mutual societies interpreted Shakespeare, many working-class people clearly justified Shakespeare's value in ways that challenged the bourgeois cultural monopoly.

When working-class journalism referenced literature and music they not only legitimised their arguments, they also expected a high level of cultural knowledge which many working-class readers would not possess. For Bourdieu, painting, music and literature are 'the most legitimate areas of culture,' and are the best markers of social class.³⁹⁷ Mutual societies' idolisation of writers like Shakespeare and the use of their work in political journalism suggests they also used legitimate culture as a social marker. Throughout the century, working-class learners used morality and pursuit of learning in difficulty to distinguish themselves from others, including those within their class. The cultural code learners' acquired in mutual societies and through self-help literature, whilst committed to man's universal potential and the creation of an egalitarian society, highlighted individual distinction at the same time as arguing for collective improvement. Thus, George Nicholls (b. 1864), MP for Northampton, defined himself as 'a lad with scarcely any education, in a very

³⁹⁴ *The Northern Star* ran a five-part series 25 April, 2, 9, 23 May, 6 June 1840.

³⁹⁵ Andrew Carnegie, *Autobiography*, (London, 1920) pp. 9-10 quoted in Taylor, p. 365.

³⁹⁶ *Figaro in London* vol. 52 (2nd March 1833) p. 1 cited in Prince, p. 133.

³⁹⁷ Bourdieu, 1994, p. 5.

humble home, without wealth or influence behind me.’ His education and entry to politics was guided by God who ‘led me and made my way plain, not easy.’³⁹⁸ This was typical of the language used by learners who contrasted their modest background with the nobility of their educational efforts. Men who gained their understanding in the field of mutuality surely believed their own claims that their object was ‘not to make an ostentatious display of our superiority,’ yet they clearly saw themselves as superior to those who hide ‘their deficient knowledge- their rude and uncultivated minds,’ behind a ‘veil of vanity.’³⁹⁹ Bringing the great authors in to humble social fields and being in the presence of greatness was an established method working-class learners used to elevate the practice of reading, emphasising their own virtues. Thus, when Keir Hardie read Carlyle, ‘in the attic... by the light only of my collier’s lamp’ he felt ‘in the presence of some great power.’⁴⁰⁰ Therefore, whilst working-class learners saw themselves as employing legitimate culture to acquire mutual benefits and to challenge bourgeois culture, they also, perhaps less consciously, used it to mark themselves as a distinct group that was superior to the rest of their social class.

One aspect of dominant culture that learners acquired and explicitly used to challenge middle-class monopolisation of political power was oratory. Like the Huddersfield Mechanics’ Institute, mutual societies encouraged learners to use ‘proper’ English. Channing limited the potential for autonomous working-class self-expression when he argued, ‘To have intercourse with respectable people, we must speak their language.’⁴⁰¹ Clayton required members to address each other as Mr. and insisted that, ‘as far as possible the Queen’s English shall be used and enforced.’⁴⁰² Quality of speech was classified using bourgeois language and this emphasised the superiority of learners within their social class.⁴⁰³ David Gough at Parkgate Society advised members to ‘lay aside the rudeness and

³⁹⁸ ‘The Labour Party and the Books that Helped to Make Them.’ pp. 577-8.

³⁹⁹ Gough, 1869.

⁴⁰⁰ ‘The Labour Party and the Books that Helped to Make Them’, pp. 570-571.

⁴⁰¹ Channing, p. 46.

⁴⁰² Clayton St John Mutual Improvement Society Rules, 1882.

⁴⁰³ This was unsurprisingly resented. Growing up in Pudsey Joseph Lawson found that ‘a young man learning to speak the English language properly... was often charged with ‘wanting to talk fine,’ and wishing to appear above others, by those who had no taste for rising above the multitude.’ Lawson, p. 61.

vulgarism of our earlier language and advance yet onward to a more proper, refined, and elegant one, which enables us to maintain a friendly conversation and correspondence with propriety and elegance.⁴⁰⁴ Channing's argument for the importance of 'pronunciation and grammar' which are not 'superfluous to any class of people,' and which gain 'a man access to social advantages, on which his improvement very much depends,' demonstrates the willingness of working-class learners to conform to the rules of middle-class society. However, the power of speech was explained in egalitarian terms. Channing argued, 'speech is one of our grand distinctions from the brute.'⁴⁰⁵ Opposition to animals distinguishes the whole of humanity, rather than an elite group. Thus, a typically bourgeois style of cultural classification was used to verify equality of the natural mental powers and therefore legitimise claims for wider political participation.

Speech symbolised independence for learners as it facilitated autonomous formation of moral and rational conclusions. Channing argued through 'the power of utterance... not only does a man influence others, but he greatly aids his own intellect by giving distinct and forcible utterance to his thoughts.'⁴⁰⁶ A Sutton member in 1884 expressed similar sentiments; 'the power of utterance,' and freedom 'from the power of human opinions except so far as they commended themselves to our minds,' were deemed necessary to 'self-culture.'⁴⁰⁷ Thomas Wright's first requirement for an 'intelligent artisan,' was the skill 'of forming opinions for himself,' upon topics that 'particularly affect the well-being of his own order, and of expressing those opinions in plain and proper language.'⁴⁰⁸ Self-expression was therefore valued partly for its facilitation of judgement or independence of thought. Speaking skills allowed a Halifax member to make an impressive contribution to the debate, 'is war ever justifiable.' He brought 'the question into an abstract focus,' by 'explaining that by 'justifiable' he understood not defensible but equitable.'⁴⁰⁹ These skills would be valued by dominant society, and their acquisition was crucial to equipping workers

⁴⁰⁴ Gough.

⁴⁰⁵ Channing, p. 45.

⁴⁰⁶ Channing, p 45.

⁴⁰⁷ Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 25 January 1884.

⁴⁰⁸ Thomas Wright, *Some Habits And Customs Of The Working Classes* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1967) pp 3-4.

⁴⁰⁹ Harrison Road Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1896.

to compete for political capital. John Naylor saw the acquisition of the 'art of public speaking,' as the most significant advantage of the mutual societies which were 'the training schools of our municipal statesmen.'⁴¹⁰ Janette Lisa Martin's research shows that Chartists, like mutual societies, preferred methods of speech that were more acceptable in middle-class society.⁴¹¹ Throughout the Chartist period Martin suggests 'meetings held indoors in the context of a chaired public meeting,' were perceived to be 'more conducive to rational debate and meaningful participation.' Indeed, 'Chartist, Owenite and League made a great deal of the gentlemanly approach to discussion,' as, 'by behaving with restraint, dignity and decorum and minutely observing the rules of engagement, they emphasised the morality of their cause.'⁴¹² Therefore, working people throughout the nineteenth century acquired skills of self-expression highly valued in bourgeois society but used this cultural capital to legitimise working-class culture and political competition in opposition to the logic of middle-class society.

As with literature, mutual societies valued a style of self-expression which, whilst emulating the bourgeoisie, also emphasised working-class autonomy. Learners advocated a clear unpretentious style; 'the best language,' a member argued, is 'the shortest, clearest, and easiest way of expressing one's thoughts.'⁴¹³ This made skilled debate seem achievable and all learners were portrayed as possessing this potential. Channing argued, 'the principle distinction between... gentlemen and the vulgar lies in this, that the latter are awkward in manners, and are especially wanting in propriety, clearness, grace, and a force of utterance.' These traits prevented a man from achieving that to which 'his native good sense entitles him.'⁴¹⁴ Mutual societies adopted this view; man was 'endowed with powers, gifted with faculties which elevate him far above the animal world, which are capable of the noblest enlargement,-capable of all the necessary knowledge of God, of nature, and of himself,-capable of producing all those gems of good theory and good practice which mark the

⁴¹⁰ Naylor, *Some Factors in the Making of the Soul in Halifax Parish*, (Halifax: 1911) p. 14 quoted in Green, p. 29.

⁴¹¹ Janette Lisa Martin, "Popular Political Oratory And Itinerant Lecturing In Yorkshire And The North East In The Age Of Chartism 1837-60" (unpublished Ph.D, York University, 2010).

⁴¹² Ibid. pp. 79-80.

⁴¹³ Gough.

⁴¹⁴ Channing, p. 46.

dignity, form the ornamental crown, and constitute the glorious prerogative of our race.’⁴¹⁵ Ideas of nobility and royalty were used to emphasise universal potential. The essay writer, whilst accepting that some had superior skill, encouraged learners not to view this as natural. Even when an individual seemed ‘possessed of so much natural ingenuity,’ that ‘everything seems to flow from him without effort,’ as ‘spontaneous language of nature,’ this skill was in fact ‘not to be attained without study and practice.’⁴¹⁶ In rejecting pretentious language and insisting superior self-expression was universally attainable, working-class learners vulgarised speech, employing it to elevate the whole working class, not just themselves.

Working-class learners’ use of speech, not only their justification of its value, supported egalitarian and democratic principles. Discussion in most mutual societies, whilst rarely explicitly political, often eluded to working-class independence, implicitly rejecting middle-class dominance. In 1845, the Leeds Society Chairman declared ‘it was better... that the working man, without waiting for extraneous help, should commence with the work of mutual instruction themselves.’ This was necessary as ‘a national or government education was not to be looked for, in consequence of the angry rivalry of sects.’⁴¹⁷ Even if national education was introduced, Smiles, at the same event, feared ‘that its education would be a servile one- calculated not to make men’s minds free, but to keep them in quiet bondage.’⁴¹⁸ Independence, not only from political and social authority figures, but also from the clergy, was important. At a conference of societies in February 1894, a speaker from Halifax demanded independence from religious bodies which criticised those who demanded ‘reasonable evidence for the claims of theology.’ He argued scepticism ‘was the only attitude possible to the young man who values truth above sect or party.’⁴¹⁹ Support

⁴¹⁵ Gough.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., Whilst this handwritten paper was only one of two I found written by a society member, it is likely that the essays delivered on ‘mutuality’ which constantly recurred in each society contained similar ideas.

⁴¹⁷ *Leeds Times*, 29 March 1845.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ He continued, when a man questioned the spiritual or physical world ‘it was the exercise of reason that had made these difficulties, and it was by that and that alone that they could be solved.’ *Leeds Mercury* 5 February 1894.

for intellectual independence suggests that despite similarities with dominant culture, mutual societies wished to see themselves as autonomous, working-class associations.

As with their cultural analysis, the relative autonomy of the mutual improvement societies facilitated an analysis of current affairs which prioritised the working-class experience. Across a range of societies in different areas exists a social critique and appreciation of the struggles of working people. Bradford noted life was a 'battle' for those with 'no influence and less of that other potential, money.' For them, it was so much harder to 'keep our heads above water,' or to 'make headway.'⁴²⁰ When support for political parties were expressed at the societies, this was accompanied by support for working-class independence and equality. For example, the library list from a Bradford Society includes liberal histories and biographies alongside *Rights of Man*.⁴²¹ A Sutton members' support for the Liberal Party seems to have been based on commitment to social reform. In December 1879 he compared 'the condition of the nation with that of the years between 1870 and 1874,' concluding that the election of a Liberal majority was 'the only course open to England in order to stop the aggressive conduct of the present government and secure attention to home affairs.'⁴²² Similar commitment to policies that would erase inequalities is expressed in discussions such as 'popular remedies for low wages,' 'the cost of royalty,' and 'Liberalism and Labour.'⁴²³ Similarly, at Keighley, topics included 'What will be conducive for health, wealth, and living,' 'the future prospect of the working class,' 'the wages question,' and 'sick benefit societies.'⁴²⁴

Similar political views were held at Little Horton Society in 1894. An account of the speech of Liberal leader Lord Rosebury was followed by angry rejections of 'distasteful' class privileges and national education upon which the speaker 'heaped sarcasm.'⁴²⁵ In the years that followed, papers reflected the society's liberal politics whilst also hinting at more

⁴²⁰ Bradford Friends Mutual Improvement Magazine, Jan. 1871.

⁴²¹ Bowling Old Lane, Records of the Mutual Improvement Society.

⁴²² Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 19 December 1879.

⁴²³ Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 21 October 1874, 2 January 1879, 1 November, 1895.

⁴²⁴ Keighley Mutual Improvement Society Adult School Minute Book, 1882-97.

⁴²⁵ Little Horton Wesleyan Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 12 March 1894.

radical tendencies; in the debate for 'Should the House of Lords as present constituted be abolished,' one member noted that 'his chief objection to the House of Lords was that they were not a representative body.' A few months later majority of members voted for the motion that the franchise should be extended to women. The Society's interest in politics is reflected in a paper on socialism from 1895 when 'quotes from several eminent socialists,' and an 'explanation of why it would not work or be of benefit,' were given.⁴²⁶ From these varied activities and opinions the main conclusion that can be drawn was that societies selected topics that genuinely interested them. Both Mr Holtby's lecture on his 'yachting cruise to Norway' with the Polytechnic Institution, and the regular reports on current affairs suggest that members wanted to gain a greater understanding of the world they lived in. However, ever present was an interest in members' social class and its place in the world. This is often revealed in comments made as part of discussions that do not appear to be political. A discussion of 'modern fiction,' for example, led to the happy conclusion that 'the authors of the present days were taking up more and more of the questions of the poorer classes, attaining their heroes and heroines from this source rather than from the upper classes and the aristocracy.'⁴²⁷

Whilst explicit commitment to political ideology, and particularly to radicalism, was rare, it is evident that mutual societies used discussion of a range of topics to assert their commitment to an egalitarian and democratic society. It is telling that, in an essay on the benefits of mutual improvement societies, a topic that most societies revisited at least once a year, a writer who insisted that he had no wish 'in the least to participate in party politics,' clearly did not feel that this should prevent him from arguing that, 'We cannot afford to leave our natural welfare in the hands of hot house politicians whose votes can be bought and sold as ordinary articles of merchandise to the highest bidder.' He, as other members surely did throughout the century, saw the need for politicians to be drawn from amongst working class learners like themselves; 'thinking men, men of principle, men of sound judgement, men who are capable of reasoning out the conclusions to which they have

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 1 February 1895.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 25 October, 1895.

come.’ The value of mutual societies to this member was clear in his conviction that ‘where are you to find these [men] if not in connection with our mutual improvement societies?’⁴²⁸

An application of Bourdieu to the mutual improvement societies is valuable because his theoretical framework allows for an analysis of the relationship between dominant and subordinate culture. Bourdieu argues cultural capital only has arbitrary value and that, in the wider social field, that value is determined by the middle class that possess it in the largest quantities.⁴²⁹ Acquiring legitimate culture or style of speech therefore reflects an unconscious acceptance of middle-class arbitrary values, confirming Bourdieu’s view that subordinate social fields and classes can never have absolute cultural autonomy. However, to Bourdieu, the oppositional nature of dominant culture means that subordinate culture is defined as ‘other’ and therefore must have distinctive features. Bourdieu’s conception of subordinate culture allows us to identify times in the mutual societies when behaviour was recognisably, often self-consciously, that of a subordinate group. It is here, in learners’ recognition of themselves as a dominated class, that their autonomy becomes clear. In valuing morality over knowledge and in rejecting pretentious speech, learners subordinated form to function and therefore embraced the vulgar. Furthermore, in emphasising the difficulties they faced as learners and the universal natural abilities of man they rejected dominant society’s reliance on the idea that the dominant are naturally more gifted. This suggests that learning in an exclusively working-class field allowed working people to celebrate rather than reject some of the defining features of a subordinate culture.

Finally, Bourdieu provides us with a framework which considers the impact of cultural acquisitions on the habitus and therefore on behaviour. He argues ‘the manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it.’⁴³⁰ The homogenous analysis used in mutual improvement societies, in self-help literature, and by working-class writers suggests that the working-class experience of cultural acquisition and the nature of the capital acquired provided learners with a cultural code that shaped their perception of the world and themselves. Moreover, as with the bourgeois cultural code, the cultural code of

⁴²⁸ Brook, pp. 17-8.

⁴²⁹ Crossley, ‘Social Class’ in Michael Grenfell ed. *Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, p. 88.

⁴³⁰ Bourdieu, 1994, pp. 2-3.

autodidacts could be used in social positioning, as a marker of superiority within the working class. Analysis of the mutual improvement societies as a separate and partially autonomous cultural field allows us to recognise working-class learners as being involved in a complex form of competition. They acquired legitimate culture and rejected irrational pursuits to distinguish themselves as a superior fraction of the working-class but they also interpreted culture as a justification of the rights of all men to access cultural, social and political benefits. In doing so, they clearly saw themselves as competing for a higher position for the whole of their social class to gain access to the advantages monopolised by the dominant classes.

Female adult learners: a subordinate group in a dominant class

In *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu argues a crucial reason for the reproduction of gender inequalities is the division between the sexes appears to be 'in the order of things, as people sometimes say to refer to what is normal, natural, to the point of being inevitable.'⁴³¹ In nineteenth-century Britain, middle-class ideas about women's 'place' were reproduced in working-class communities more effectively than middle-class ideas about working-man's role in industry and society. Working-class men and women restricted the female habitus' conception of what was possible or desirable in adult education. In dominant culture, the value of female education was conceived only in reference to male priorities. Male leisure time was protected at the expense women's. Female education was not conceived as valuable to family or social class, as men's was. Time women spent on learning was therefore seen as wasted and women were prevented or discouraged from joining educational associations. The difficulties experienced by those attempting to learn alone meant underlying concerns that learning was wrong or destined to fail were likely to be accepted by the habitus. Therefore, the thriving 'autodidact culture,' according to Rose, was an 'overwhelmingly male territory,' until the late nineteenth century.⁴³²

Prioritisation of domestic work over female education and the exclusion of women from mechanics' institutes and mutual improvement societies resulted from ideas about the 'woman's place,' that were strikingly similar in middle- and working-class culture. During the

⁴³¹ Bourdieu, 'Prelude', *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

⁴³² Rose, p. 18.

nineteenth century, dominant ideas about women's place were reflected in the gendered education provided by the Board of Education. Meg Gomersall argues domestic economy classes for girls and provision of grants for schools that taught cooking and laundry were 'specifically designed to foster gender differentiation,' in Victorian society.⁴³³ Domestic learning reflects the bourgeois concept of the 'angel in the home,' which, in the educational field, was translated in to prioritisation of learning that made women better wives and mothers. For middle-class girls, this meant bourgeois parents wanted their daughters to acquire 'accomplishments and what is showy and superficially attractive... as regards to their relation to the other sex.' More 'solid attainments,' were actually seen as 'disadvantageous.'⁴³⁴ Working-class ideas of womanhood were strongly influenced by bourgeois ideals. For working-class girls, a disposition to avoid education was taught primarily by their mothers. The suffragette Hannah Mitchell was taught a model of working-class womanhood that focussed on family life, domestic work, 'good looks,' and 'self-abnegation.'⁴³⁵ Therefore, when middle-class supporters wrote the rule book, as at mechanics' institutes, and when working men did so, as at mutual societies, women were excluded.⁴³⁶

However, after 1840, when literary culture along with female members entered mechanics' institutes, or 1880, when women were more likely to be welcomed at mutual societies, female membership tended to remain low. Whilst men were taught that self-expression and scientific, historical, and literary knowledge had high value, women were taught that their education was valuable only in its potential to contribute to male happiness.⁴³⁷ In 1895 George Bainton suggested wealthier women read the subjects 'in which her husband is most interested,' whilst 'the hard-working wife, struggling with poverty,' should read to

⁴³³ Meg Gomersall, *Working Class Girls in Nineteenth Century England*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 114, 122.

⁴³⁴ Taunton Commissioners quoted in Jacobs, p. 251.

⁴³⁵ Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: the Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel*. Ed. Geoffrey Mitchell. (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), pp. 54, 88.

⁴³⁶ Minute books show that Bradford Friends, Clayton, Sutton Baptist, Hunslet, Leeds, and Northowram societies were all exclusively male. *Leeds Mercury* reveals that Tadcaster and Headingley Mutual Improvement Societies were also for male members only, 2 November 1850, 27 January 1857.

⁴³⁷ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) p. 99.

keep 'abreast with [her husband].'⁴³⁸ Gomersall argues for working-class women cultural capital that held value and on which her 'self-respect' relied was 'the appearance of her persona and home, the quality of her needlework, the tastiness of her cooking and the thrifty economy with which she managed her budget.'⁴³⁹ This view was not tempered by radicalism; Mays argues political movements after 1830 were 'increasingly wedded to a familiarly gender bifurcated worldview centring on the ideal of male breadwinner and political agent, on the one hand, and the "noble," self-sacrificing wife, mother, and "help-mate," on the other.'⁴⁴⁰ In male improvement culture 'noble' was used to denote prioritisation of learning, for women, nobility was sacrificing their own interests to facilitate the domestic needs of their families. Elizabeth Wordsworth encouraged girls to deny themselves the pleasure of reading when doing so would allow them to care for others as, 'these are the kind of little self-denials that really touch us.'⁴⁴¹ For male learners, learning meant gaining respect and social influence and these benefits were a major motivating factor. Depriving female learners of this reward meant women were less likely to respond even to societies, like Beeston, who encouraged female members to join. In 1851 Beeston that they were keen to welcome female members but failed to attract any.⁴⁴²

Very few men and women at the time recognised the damaging effect of dominant values on women's attitude to learning. A writer in the *Westminster Review* argued 'to tell a girl that her virtue is given her to improve her husband's children and her intelligence to show her *how* to do it, is to pace her at once in an inferior grade, to prevent her from attaining to any high degree of virtue or intelligence.'⁴⁴³ Whereas experience taught men that learning would lead to their classification as 'the best of their class,' the female habitus continued to experience confirmation that education would have a minimal or negative impact on their social status. Therefore, in 1849 there were 13,717 members of institutes and societies connected with the Yorkshire Union, of these 1,052 were women.⁴⁴⁴ The proportion of

⁴³⁸ George Bainton, *The Wife As a Lover and Friend*, (1895), pp. 99, 106 quoted in Flint, p. 99.

⁴³⁹ Gomersall, p. 89.

⁴⁴⁰ Mays, p. 352.

⁴⁴¹ Elizabeth Wordsworth quoted in Flint, p. 235.

⁴⁴² ARYUMI, 1851, p. 30.

⁴⁴³ Review of 'Woman's Mission', *Westminster Review*, 1840, vol. 34, p. 257 in Kathryn Gleade, *Radical Writing On Women, 1800-1850* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p. 64

⁴⁴⁴ ARYUMI, 1849, p. 6

female adults was even lower; in 1852, of the female members, only forty-six percent were over the age of eighteen, for men, the corresponding figure was seventy-four percent.⁴⁴⁵ Attitudes in the societies also encouraged women to comprehend the limits of their educational possibilities. James Hole, the Yorkshire Union Secretary, saw the chief role of the institutes in the education of women as ensuring a woman was 'cultivated so as to be a companion to her husband.'⁴⁴⁶

Attitudes like Hole's meant cultural capital valuable to male learners was never viewed as more than a pleasing addition to a wife and always had the potential to be perceived as unnecessary and self-indulgent. Mary Smith, a shoemaker's daughter, felt condemned for her 'love of books, because 'my poor mother looked upon reading, even when I was a little child, as a species of idleness.'⁴⁴⁷ This had a lasting effect on Smith's habitus and in adulthood she 'never said anything to anybody about my love of books.'⁴⁴⁸ Mays argues, 'reading, study and *self*-improvement constitute direct resistance' to the model of working-class womanhood. The view that the woman's primary role was domestic and supportive meant that whereas men were encouraged to read to avoid the self-indulgence and addiction that could be found in the public house, women 'could all too easily envision reading not as an antidote..., but as itself one of those habits- an indulgence one needed to 'give up'.⁴⁴⁹

Men benefited from experience of radical movements which revealed new possibilities and expectations. Political role models demonstrated the potential for improved social status and the value of learning in the competition for political capital. Women's experience of radical movements was not so transformative. Alice Clark argues the Chartists supported the view that female education was important primarily in facilitating the education of future Chartists.⁴⁵⁰ The National Association's commitment to 'the social and political rights

⁴⁴⁵ ARYUMI, 1852, p. 8.

⁴⁴⁶ Hole, p. 36.

⁴⁴⁷ Smith, quoted in Mays, p. 354.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 355.

⁴⁴⁹ Mays, p. 358. Smith believes she needs to 'give up' reading, her view is that she needs to 'break' and 'be on... guard against', 'a passion' for it. Smith pp. 142-3.

⁴⁵⁰ However, she insists that this was different from the middle class 'separate spheres position,' and was instead a 'militant domesticity,' that envisioned the eventual transcendence of traditional

of women,' was based on their view that 'men's happiness depends upon the minds and dispositions of women.' Women's learning was useful only for the 'comfort, cheerfulness, and affection their intelligence can spread in the humble home.'⁴⁵¹ Radical movements therefore confirmed rather than challenged the assumptions that dominant society forced upon the female habitus. The Owenite Mary Leman Grimstone (b. 1796), found that individuals in Owenism attempted 'to ascertain how much a woman may be allowed to know, without trespassing on the mental preservers of men, and how little, consistently with securing for him every possible advantage.' That female education lacked social value or autonomy is evident in her complaint that 'Her education is never considered otherwise than with reference to him; though his education is never considered with reference to her.'⁴⁵²

Political movements failed to provide women with examples of individuals who had converted their learning into social or political success and Rose recognises 'female autodidacts were held back,' in part 'by the scarcity of other female autodidacts as models.'⁴⁵³ The writer Marianne Farningham (b. 1834) found herself growing 'bitter' when periodicals she read were full of 'men who had been poor boys, and risen to be rich and great,' but that in vain, 'every month [she] hoped to find the story of some poor ignorant *girl*.' Farningham's perception of possibilities would have benefited from a story of a woman who 'beginning life as handicapped as I, had yet been able by her own efforts and the blessing of God upon them to live a life of usefulness, if not greatness.'⁴⁵⁴ The few influential women in political movements were not enough to change ideas about the outcomes women should expect from education. Lovett, the great advocate for education's radical potential, thought wives and children could easily become 'the most formidable obstacles to a man's patriotic exertions,' if men did not teach them 'their rights and duties.'⁴⁵⁵ Similarly

domestic roles. Anna Clark, 'The Rhetoric of Chartist domesticity: gender language and class in the 1830s and 1840s', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (January 1992), p. 77.

⁴⁵¹ 'The Female Members of our Association', *National Association Gazette* (8 January 1842), no. 2, p. 11, in Gleadle, p. 171.

⁴⁵² Mary Leman Grimstone, 'Acephala', *monthly repository*, 1834 vol. 8, pp. 771-773, 777 in Gleadle, p. 65.

⁴⁵³ Rose, p. 20

⁴⁵⁴ "Marriane Farningham" *A Working Woman's Life: An Autobiography*, (London: James Clarke, 1907), p. 44 quoted in Mays, p. 353.

⁴⁵⁵ Lovett p. 442 quoted in Mays, p. 352.

conservative attitudes were expressed by male learners at Sutton who asked 'is woman indispensable for the comfort and well-being of man?'⁴⁵⁶ Therefore, whilst many men valued cultural capital because of its potential to contribute to political competition, women were taught that their possession of the same cultural capital would have no impact beyond the home.

Dominant society's resistance to valuing male and female cultural capital equally meant women were forced to prioritise domestic and 'moral' knowledge to make them better wives and mothers. Encouraging men to see 'useful knowledge' as that which related to their work had proved demotivating and uninteresting, and probably had a similar effect on women. However, whereas men had been able to create their own societies to challenge educational boundaries, women were not able to do so. Huddersfield Women's Institute's Committee, which consisted of female teachers and benefactors of both genders, explained their intentions were 'to teach sewing, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history and other branches of a sound and moral, and secular education.'⁴⁵⁷ Negative attitudes towards female learning are revealed in their insistence that the institute would not create 'blue stockings, or prodigies of learning,' nor would they teach 'drawing, French, with other so-called accomplishments, to qualify them for the drawing-room.' This was undesirable as the 262 members who joined in 1847 had 'little to expect beyond the duties and pleasures of the kitchen and cottage'.⁴⁵⁸ Working-class women were actively prevented from aiming for anything other than a home which was 'happier and more attractive to their husbands and a training ground for their children.'⁴⁵⁹ In mutual societies women were limited differently, though there were not usually separate classes for women, there is no evidence that women wrote or delivered essays on political topics, though they occasionally participated in political debate.

⁴⁵⁶ Sutton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 8 March 1883.

⁴⁵⁷ Huddersfield Women's Institute Annual Report quoted in Gerrard and Weedon, p. 238.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, and ARYUMI, 1847, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁹ Gerrard and Weedon, p. 238, Other institutes that provided classes for women had similar separate, elementary and domestic education. For example, at Holmfirth, the female Writing and Arithmetic Classes consisted of 24 pupils, with an average attendance of 18, further classes were in Reading, Sewing and Dictation Class. ARYUMI, 1847, p. 13.

Ideas about the limited value of cultural capital when possessed by women meant the time women could dedicate to education was curtailed by more than their work. Mays argues self-improvement 'differentiated and occasionally isolated,' male learners from other members of the working class, but they were 'encouraged to see themselves as, in the process, working on behalf of those very people in a way that working-class girls and women simply were not.'⁴⁶⁰ Women and girls who wanted to learn were dissuaded by convictions that their learning was not valuable to their family or social class. Thus, as a girl Mitchell found herself 'filled... with bitterness to the brim,' by 'the fact that the boys could read if they wished,' when she 'was forced to darn my brothers' stockings.'⁴⁶¹ Though she experienced some brief freedom as a young adult in socialist circles in Derby, when Mitchell married a socialist, she found 'my greatest enemy has been the cooking stove – a sort of tyrant who has kept me in subjection,' because 'a lot of the Socialist talk about freedom was only talk and these Socialist young men expected Sunday dinners and huge teas... exactly like their reactionary fellows.'⁴⁶² Hole, though supporting female education, argued that an ignorant woman was still 'less evil than a literary slattern.'⁴⁶³ Therefore, female habitus was taught to associate learning with risk or guilt, making membership of educational associations less attractive.

When women did join mutual societies, they were less able than men to define the logic of the field. Female members were almost all single, suggesting that they tended to be young and only had a few years to augment their position before their marriage. At the Armitage Bridge Society, the female membership did not usually vote on issues affecting the management of the institution, though in 1894 special allowances were made for women to be able to attend and vote at the meeting regarding the Shrove Tuesday entertainment.⁴⁶⁴ Women's exclusion from influencing the logic of the societies shows that they were kept in positions of limited influence and this surely contributed to ensuring female members were

⁴⁶⁰ Mays, p. 359.

⁴⁶¹ Mitchell, p. 43.

⁴⁶² Mitchell, pp. 240, 96.

⁴⁶³ Hole, p. 36.

⁴⁶⁴ There were no female members of the main committee though there were three men and three women on the singing class committee. Armitage Bridge Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1894.

relatively silent. At Armitage Bridge, the first example of a woman delivering an essay came in 1897 when Miss Riddel 'read an excellent paper on working men who have become famous.'⁴⁶⁵ The choice of this topic by the first female speaker reflects the dominance of male perspectives in the society. Though Riddel's essay received praise, no further female speakers appear.

The unlikelihood of gaining influence within the mutual societies removed another factor which motivated male learners. Women were kept in subordinate positions because the field of mutuality continued to value women primarily for their domestic role, seeing their learning as secondary to male learning. In minute books women are most often mentioned in connection with entertainments given for the benefit of male members. At Hunslet in 1847, the female singers and caterers listened but heard nothing to inspire them in Edward Baines' speech which praised the 'young man, who aspired to be a scholar and to raise himself in life, to be an honour to himself and useful to society.'⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, at Tadcaster, the young women who attended the tea as guests of male members heard the society's wish to impress on the minds of the 'young men of the town... the desirableness of self-cultivation.'⁴⁶⁷ At Yeadon when, in 1849, the fourth annual soiree involved a tea for 500 male and female members with friends, the women were thanked only for their 'refined taste and good management,' which had produced trays of food 'far superior to any seen in Yeadon before.' The first class for women at the society was proposed in 1861 when it was suggested 'that domestic duties should form part of the instruction.'⁴⁶⁸ In Keighley, a female improvement class offered domestic learning to '*young women connected with our factories* – an interesting class, whose education hitherto has been much neglected.' Classes were in reading, writing and arithmetic, grammar, sewing and dressmaking, average attendance was 110.⁴⁶⁹ A Young Women's Institute connected with Halifax Working Men's College was founded in 1856 but, whereas men were awarded prizes in their algebra,

⁴⁶⁵ Armitage Bridge Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 11 October 1897.

⁴⁶⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 25 September 1847.

⁴⁶⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 2 November 1850.

⁴⁶⁸ *Bradford Observer*, 14 November 1849. Thirty years later the Yeadon society still had only thirty-four female members but 278 male members. *Leeds Mercury*, 6 November 1877, *Leeds Mercury*, 6 November 1861.

⁴⁶⁹ ARYUMI, 1849, p. 63.

geometry, history and chemistry, women were awarded only for 'proficiency in homely dressmaking and millinery, and are taught the art of simple cookery.'⁴⁷⁰ Not only were women limited to domestic and moral education, unreasonable double standards were placed on them when the Men's College secretary suggested, 'Perhaps more of the dissoluteness and recklessness of living among the husbands in the working class is produced by want of good management in their wives than by any other cause.'⁴⁷¹ Even when women joined educational associations, they were encouraged to limit their expectations of the cultural capital that they should or could acquire.

However, a small minority of women did become active members of mutual societies. In 1850 there were forty female members at Holbeck and New Wortley Zion School.⁴⁷² At Holbeck Mutual Society, 'application was made by several females to be allowed to attend in the evenings, saying they needed instruction as much as the young men, and were anxious to get it, and pay for it too.' Following this application fifty women joined to attend the elementary class.⁴⁷³ Women paid one pence a week, they were exempt from the six pence entrance fee and they also got writing materials provided free of charge.⁴⁷⁴ At Gommersall mutual society, there were 100 members in 1850 and the female members played a prominent part, delivering three of the fourteen lectures and answering half of the thirty-four questions posed in society meetings.⁴⁷⁵ In the last-quarter of the nineteenth century, female membership became more common, Sutton Society was founded for men in 1868, though a young women's society existed by 1880 when the members were invited to an event at the men's society.⁴⁷⁶ In the same year, female members had enough funds to engage Marianne Farningham to speak to them.⁴⁷⁷ At Little Horton Society in Bradford, two of the vice presidents were women and only one was a man, the committee included five men and five women.⁴⁷⁸ Women were equally significant at Northgate Society, in 1900

⁴⁷⁰ 'History of the Halifax Working Men's College' *Working Men's College Magazine*, 1 October, 1859, p. 159.

⁴⁷¹ 'History of the Halifax Working Men's College' p. 160.

⁴⁷² ARYUMI, 1850, p. 74.

⁴⁷³ ARYUMI, 1850, p. 37.

⁴⁷⁴ ARYUMI, 1853, p. 71.

⁴⁷⁵ ARYUMI, 1850, p. 33.

⁴⁷⁶ Sutton Baptist Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 16 June 1880.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Little Horton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book.

there were sixty-two male members and twenty-eight female, by 1903 a fall in male membership meant that half of the members were women.⁴⁷⁹

The campaign for women's suffrage is likely to have had an indirect part to play in the growing dominance of women in these societies. In the mid-century, the language of radicalism had excluded women, by the late century it was increasingly likely to value them and place greater significance on their learning. At the Leeds Society in 1848, a 'free, unfettered, and universal franchise,' meant only 'extension of the elective franchise to all the male adult population of the empire.'⁴⁸⁰ However, in the late-nineteenth century, the mutual societies regularly endorsed women's suffrage even when there were no female members.⁴⁸¹ At Little Horton a debate on female suffrage produced an interesting discussion which 'was well taken up by the ladies.' The secretary noted 'most of the members present were in favour of taxing bachelors and giving women the franchise.'⁴⁸² Similarly, at Northgate, political discussion regularly recommended male and female adult suffrage.⁴⁸³ Evidence that women were becoming increasingly eloquent in the late century was probably inspired partly by this support for their political representation. At Northgate women were confident members, two women led a reading group in the society and women regularly read their essays.⁴⁸⁴ When criticised by another member 'for favouring Longfellow at the expense of Burns' in her essay, a Miss Shackleton 'stood her ground and in response read Longfellow's poem on "Burns".'⁴⁸⁵ The significance of women and their ability to define the logic of the field is reflected in their positions on the committee and in their representation of the society at the Halifax Conference of Mutual Improvement Societies.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷⁹ There were twenty-four women and twenty-five men. Northgate Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 12 January 1903.

⁴⁸⁰ *Leeds Times*, 13 May 1848.

⁴⁸¹ Rose notes that the Gallatown Men's Mutual Improvement Society saw twenty-six members support a resolution for women's suffrage, only fifteen voted against. Rose, p. 73.

⁴⁸² Little Horton Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 7 December 1894.

⁴⁸³ Northgate Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 17 November 1902.

⁴⁸⁴ From the Minute Book, essays included 'Sir Walter Scott' (Miss Millward, 29 October 1900) and 'Meldssohn' (Miss Wadsworth, with a relation, Mr Wadsworth, 22 January 1900).

⁴⁸⁵ Northgate Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 18 February 1901.

⁴⁸⁶ Two women and one man attended, Northgate Mutual Improvement Society Minute Book, 1 November 1897.

At the end of the century the growing significance of women in the field of adult education is reflected in the role accorded to them in the Workers Educational Association (f. 1903). The proportion of female students in the WEA rose steadily from thirteen percent in 1912 to thirty-two percent in 1922.⁴⁸⁷ The successful Leeds branch of the WEA ran tutorial classes, each being 'a body of eighteen to thirty-two men and women, who meet together for two hours each week during three successive winters, to study a seriously non-vocational subject of mutual interest, under the guidance of a qualified tutor appointed by the University Joint Committee.'⁴⁸⁸ Labour MP and WEA tutor Arthur Greenwood saw the WEA as 'a fellowship of men and women, united in a passionate desire for an educated democracy.'⁴⁸⁹ Lavena Saltonstall, the Suffragette from Hebden Bridge, benefited from the education she received in the WEA and in 1910 attended the summer school at Oxford University. Her favourite tutor was the son of Lord Monkhouse, 'I never thought a lord's son could be so sensible or charming,' but she lost none of her political convictions, she was horrified by the conditions that the Oxford servants lived in, 'one is reminded very forcibly of the pictures one sees in Dickens' books.'⁴⁹⁰

However, men were still far more likely to attend the demanding tutorial classes. The reality was that women still had little time to dedicate to learning and female work continued to facilitate male leisure.⁴⁹¹ At the turn of the century, the average work day for women in paid employment was two hours longer than that of unionised male workers. Domestic work became more time consuming as daughters spent more hours at school. Dominant attitudes continued to confirm that, as women had been forced to accept as children, learning was a male occupation. In the twentieth century, Saltonstall found herself experiencing similar frustrations as Hannah Mitchell, 'I am supposed to make myself generally *useless* by ignoring things that matter.' Saltonstall found that her working-class community continued to value only that capital that was domestic or which contributed to motherhood or

⁴⁸⁷ Jonathan Rose, "The Workers In The Workers' Educational Association, 1903–1950", *Albion*, 21.4 (1989), 591-608, p. 599.

⁴⁸⁸ Harrison, p. 269.

⁴⁸⁹ *Yorkshire Bulletin*, 1929, p. 2 quoted in Harrison, pp. 271-2.

⁴⁹⁰ Lavena Saltonstall, *Halifax Evening Courier*, 19th July 1910, quoted in Rose, 1989, p. 597.

⁴⁹¹ Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: gender, class and ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 67.

'courting'. Any other activities were considered, 'unwomanly and eccentric,' and 'Should any girl show a tendency to politics, or to ideas of her own, she is looked upon by the majority of women as a person who neglects doorsteps and home matters, and is therefore not fit to associate with their respectable daughters and sisters.'⁴⁹² Therefore, whilst cultural capital possessed by females had become more valuable by 1900, this did not mean that women experienced anything close to the social benefits enjoyed by male learners.

Conclusion

Bourdieu's theoretical tools allow for a deeper understanding of working-class acquisition of capital which conceives capital as economic, cultural and political. Whereas adult learning has been variously explained as escapism, political activism or respectability, understanding learning as a competitive strategy produced by the habitus' interaction with field leads to a more complex understanding of working-class behaviour. Bourdieu's duality is invaluable because he can explain why, in a field closely resembling the wider social field, learning was incompatible with working-class habitus. However, in a field with a working-class logic, the learners' strategies were effective. Considering the historical basis of the habitus suggests working-class political competition in the second-quarter of the century made competition for cultural capital seem possible and beneficial, even for non-agitators. Moreover, it complicates the view of working-class education in the years after 1850. Whereas traditionally historians have seen working-class education after 1850 as pursuit of individualistic aims, more recently historians have argued education became crucial to radicals who recognised that tactics needed to appeal to and allow for cooperation with the middle class. Bourdieu's use of field to explain competition allows for an analysis in which individualistic and collective aims are not dichotomous. In the mutual improvement societies, individuals aimed for a higher social position in relation to other members of their class. Moreover, there is evidence that in mutual societies individuals inculcated a moral and cultural code which classified non-learners as inferior. Yet, pursuit of cultural capital valued by dominant society was understood, at least by male learners, as a process that equipped the whole social class with the tools to compete for a higher relative position in the social field. The cultural code that was employed by learners in working-class fields can be better understood through Bourdieu's concept of a subordinate culture or a 'culture of

⁴⁹² Lavena Saltonstall, 'The letters of a tailorress,' *Highway* 3rd January-February 1911, quoted in Rose, 1989, p. 600.

necessity'. Through portraying rational potential as universal and by valuing moral self-control over knowledge or skill, working-class learners created a vulgarised form of cultural classification that implicitly challenged the logic of the bourgeois social field.

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