

## Learning the rules of the 'student game': transforming the 'student habitus' through [im]mobility

### Abstract

In recent years a growing body of literature has emerged concerning the mobilities of students, specifically relating to the interactions between local and non-local students which can accentuate unequal access to education; social interactions and learner outcomes. Central to much of this literature is a sense that being mobile in institutional choice is the most appropriate and expected approach to successful University life. Conversely, local students, disadvantaged by their age, history, external commitments and immobility, are thought to be unlikely to share the same 'student experiences' as their traditional counterparts, leading to feelings of alienation within the student community. This paper will seek to problematise this binary by examining the experiences of a group of local and non-local students studying at the University of Portsmouth using Bourdieu's reading of habitus and capital. This is useful as it provides a more critical insight into how students' [dis]advantaged learner identities are [re]produced through their everyday sociability. Moreover, these findings extend previous discussions of first year transitions by questioning the influence of accommodation upon the formation of identities and the initial experiences of 'being', or 'becoming' students. This paper also seeks to extend previous theoretical tendencies which privilege identity formation through mobility rather than stasis.

### Keywords

University students; Student mobility; **Cultural capital**; Habitus; Student Geographies

## Introduction

Assessing student mobility has become fundamental in understanding the geographies of students (Sage et al., 2013; Smith, 2009; Smith and Sage, 2014) with a growing corpus of literature focused upon students' propensities for mobility (Duke-Williams, 2009; Holdsworth, 2009b) and immobility (Christie, 2007; Holdsworth, 2006; Holton, 2014) and subsequent influences upon social interactions and future employment trajectories. This is important as increasingly diffuse approaches to higher education (HE) have encouraged students from a variety of different backgrounds to go to University (Holton and Riley, 2013) who must consider their mobility as part of such decisions (Mangan et al., 2010). According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2014), of the 1,385,670 UK full-time undergraduate students enrolled in HE in 2012/13, 54 per cent were residing in student accommodation (halls or shared housing) while 36 per cent were living with parents or in their own homes (ten per cent were other or unknown), suggesting a third of undergraduate students had sought alternative living arrangements to those offered by Universities. Importantly, these figures support **studies which** challenge assumptions that students ought to be mobile in their institutional choices **(Holdsworth, 2009b)**.

This paper builds upon previous discussions of student geographies by critically **examining** how students' term-time living arrangements might influence their transition into HE and extends previous enquiries which question the notion that all students follow a linear transition through University (**Leese**, 2010; Mangan et al., 2010; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005; Reay et al., 2010). In expanding this body of work, this paper will question whether a student's status as 'local' or 'non-local' may

influence the formation of a student habitus during the first year of study. By discussing these participants' experiences, this paper will problematise Holdsworth's (2009a) simple binary by discussing the participants according to their term-time accommodation. A smooth transition during this first period of the degree pathway is thought to be crucial for students, whether they choose to leave home or not, and plays an important role in discussions of student retention and support networks (Christie et al., 2008). While these accounts focus upon the role of Universities, tutors and families in maintaining these support networks, this paper will highlight the importance of discussing how students *themselves* use their evolving student identities as leverage to establish meaningful networks which might buffer against potential problems.

Crucially, the student habitus is not developed uniformly and this paper will emphasise this heterogeneity using interviews conducted with students from the University of Portsmouth about their first year experiences. By employing Bourdieu's readings of habitus and capital, this paper will explore the complexities faced by local and non-local students as they attempt to establish and maintain their student identities during this transitional period. This will be achieved by examining: (1) the influence of social activities in the development and maintenance of the student habitus and (2) how those living away from student accommodation might manage their seemingly disadvantaged identities.

### **Student [Im]mobilities**

We rely on mobilities for all aspects of our daily lives, from our everyday routines to the provision of the services, information, capital and goods (Adey, 2010; Urry 2007), hence it is the interactions of time-space relations between people which give

mobility to seemingly static spaces (Jensen, 2009). For example, Peters et al. (2009) explore the **mobilities of our everyday activities** to suggest that the patterns created by our routines have temporal as well as spatial effects. They utilise the example of the journey to school as a way of explaining how processes require meticulous co-ordination, both between network members and their temporalities and more importantly, how these processes become tightly interconnected. Moreover, Jensen (2009) argues for the complex relationships between flow and fixity to be recognised, as urban spaces are often understood as “environments which make mobility” (page 154). Recognising the elastic nature of space is useful to this research as it helps explain how different states of movement, from the ordinary to the extraordinary, influence interactions and identities.

Relating this to HE, links have been made between mobility and the student experience (Holdsworth, 2009b; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) with Holdsworth (2009a) stating that, “being a student is emblematic for not being from around here” (Holdsworth, 2009a, page 227). Fundamental to this literature are notions of belonging in which students must negotiate how they ‘fit’ during a period of transition. Hinton (2011) points to the influence of ‘homeland’ in shaping mobility decisions for her young Welsh respondents, suggesting that her interviewees sought to retain: “the ontological security of a Welsh ‘home’ during the transition to the unknown and unfamiliar world of HE” (page 32). While this highlights the threat that identities may be destabilised through mobility, Savage et al. (2005) suggests that belonging is socially constructed, meaning a lack of belonging can be overcome as a person’s social position changes. **Nevertheless, some students may adopt strategies of ‘starting over’ prior to commencing University, through severing bonds with their original peer group in order to forge new connections at University (Brooks, 2002).**

Such pragmatism evokes a degree of liminality where the process of “waiting for the future to arrive” (Brooks, 2002, page 462) indicates that non-local students may have fewer attachments to their non-student pasts, preferring instead to form communities of like-minded people. This supports Holdsworth’s (2006) claim that mobility can, in part, help shape a student’s habitus. However, in doing so it is important to determine to what extent this is taken up by non-local students. Moreover, Forsey (2014) argues that more contemporary tensions between the “ideas and ideals of mobility, modernity and education” (page 2) are highly influential over the propensity for student mobility in this period of ‘mobile second mobility’, and in the context of neoliberalisation, has been dramatically reconfigured.

In contrast to the physical trajectories of students’ mobilities, it is a student’s immobility which comes into question when regarding those who choose to remain ‘local’ during their studies. Crucially however, within the literature immobility is viewed, not necessarily as a state of being, but rather as a mooring (Urry, 2003) or place of storage (Adey, 2010). Importantly, Adey (2006) argues that “there is never any absolute immobility, but only mobilities which we mistake for immobility” (page 83). This means that processes, people or places can be in a state of relative immobility whereby a person’s (or object’s) lack of mobility is judged in relation to another’s mobility. Therefore, as Adey (2006) argues: “it is the *differences in mobility which creates relative immobility*” (page 84 emphasis added). This has important consequences for human interactions as mobilities may be unevenly influenced by power, increasing mobility for some groups and embedding immobility for others. (Hannam et al., 2006)

When relating this to the mobility of students, the symbolic attraction of the family home and the inability (or unwillingness) to 'fit in' amongst a student community are prominent themes (Crozier et al., 2008; Reay et al., 2010). Hence, it has been assumed within much of this literature that the immobility of local students sits in direct contrast to more popular discourses of transitions through mobility mentioned elsewhere (Hinton, 2011). Christie (2007) argued that retaining strong local networks of family and friends can be equally as important in deciding to live at home during studies as financial (Callender and Jackson, 2008) and/or parental (Pugsley, 1998) influences. In recognising these alternative strategies, Christie demonstrated how her participants adopted multiple identities which enabled them to move freely between home and University. Holdsworth (2006) queried whether those who elect to stay at home might 'miss out' on the University experience thus challenging their ability to 'fit in' among their non-local peers. Holdsworth argued that there are no right or wrong ways of going to University and, in some ways, staying at home can assist in the accumulation of the capital necessary to 'get on' after graduation. Importantly, these studies stress that local students are far from passive in their involvement in student-centric social activities, suggesting a sense of agency in establishing how they find their place within the student community which is often factored in during the application process (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005).

Moreover, the literature implies that 'home-based' students may employ particular 'stay-at-home' strategies which minimise the risks associated with going to University which provide anchorage during studies by enabling strong material and symbolic connections their established neighbourhoods and communities. This relates to Savage et al.'s, (2005) notions of local identities becoming intertwined with the place itself, and how these associations can be flexible depending on the adaptive position

of the individual. Likewise, Dixon and Durrheim (2000) stress the fundamental importance of recognising location and belonging in the development and maintenance of place-identity, suggesting that:

“Through practices of environmental usage [...] we are able to create and sustain a coherent sense of self and to reveal ourselves to others” (page 29).

Hence, for local students, remaining in the city is vital in making sense of, what can be an otherwise complicated and confusing period of adjustment. What is less clear however is how such diversity may affect the ‘student experience’.

As this paper will demonstrate, students are not a homogenous group and often have diverse and complex social, cultural and economic reasons for mobility decisions. Remaining local to maintain connections with an established social sphere is very different to living at home to care for a family member or retain a job. Equally, whilst living in halls of residence or rented term-time accommodation may be considered an ephemeral part of the life-stage for many students, this may also be experienced differently, by different students at different stages of the degree. Moreover, this research provides an opportunity to highlight how term-time mobility contributes to students’ interpretations of, and relationships with, their University location, and how this may shape their understandings of how to ‘fit in’ among their peers.

### **Habitus and Capital**

Researchers have long turned to the theories of Bourdieu (1977; 1984) to investigate students’ complex social mobilities, drawing upon notions of habitus and capital to

give clarity and understanding to students' adaptive experiences with their term-time locations. Bourdieu (2005) broadly defines habitus as:

"[...] a set of acquired characteristics which are the product of social conditioning [...] totally or partially common to people of similar social conditioning" (page 45).

Habitus' popularity within HE research stems from its flexibility, particularly as it can be influenced by either experience or education, meaning people behave in accordance with their position (capital) and personal background (habitus). Crucially, habitus is concerned with a propensity towards certain dispositions rather than a compulsion, being "embedded within everyday actions, much of which is sub-conscious" (Thomas, 2002, page 430) making it embodied rather than cognitively understood (Dovey, 2005). Hence, its dynamism is useful within this study because it exposes how past experiences influence the characteristics of an individual's dispositions, meaning practices will be carried out in accordance to these dispositions during periods of mobility.

Fundamentally, discussing students through the lens of habitus highlights the way in which different types of familial and institutional capital can intersect and shape the experiences and trajectories of students. Literature pertaining to student mobility discusses the role familial and institutional habitus might play in [dis]advantaged transitions through HE. Reay (2004) argues that individuals are both *in* and *of* their familial habitus where, in its crudest sense, information of the mechanisms of University is transferred from parent to child (Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005).

**Habitus and capital cannot, of course, be accepted uncritically.** Reay (2004) posits that: "habitus is primarily a method for analysing the dominance of dominant groups



in society and the domination of subordinate groups” (page 436), meaning power must be recognised when attempting to differentiate between those who are socially advantaged or disadvantaged. Therefore, habitus alone cannot explain why certain students may have a successful transition through University and vice versa without recognising the diverse power relations which exist within the student cohort.

Holdsworth (2006) suggests that Bourdieu’s notions of habitus being fixed and generational may not necessarily sit well with the view that students factor “choice, risk and reflexivity” (page 499) into their decisions. In this sense, Bourdieu’s theories may be accused of being overly deterministic in their focus upon the influence of pre-learned dispositions upon future social endeavours (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2007). However, Reay (2004) and Fuchs (2003) argue that Bourdieu explicitly set out to transcend dualisms such as structure-agency or objective-subjective. Likewise, in countering these notions of determinism, Pimlott-Wilson (2011) argues that, rather than being destined to follow in their parents’ footsteps, dispositions can often be employed by children out of ‘common sense’, with certain actions being the most obvious or practical things to do. Hence, in a historical and ontological sense, while habitus may be shaped by objective structures, these structures have previously been influenced by *subjective* structures, highlighting how habitus undergoes regular adaptation (Crossley, 2001). Moreover, exploring these transformations in the context of mobility will provide an alternative way of examining the transitional experiences of undergraduate students.

## **Methods**

The research for this paper comes from a larger project concerned with how undergraduate students establish a sense of place within their term-time location. A

mixed method approach was employed to collecting the data, incorporating web-based questionnaires and walking interviews to recognise both the broader trends and micro-geographies of mobility, movement and experiences among the student population of Portsmouth<sup>1</sup>. This paper builds upon an analysis of the qualitative walking interviews. Invites were emailed to students that had previously contributed to the survey and had nominated themselves as potential interview candidates outlining in detail the aims and objectives of the project as well as what would be required of them if they chose to participate. A quota sampling technique was implemented to ensure that students from each of the residential categories were represented as evenly as possible.

In all, 31 walking interviews were conducted between January and May 2012 with full time University of Portsmouth undergraduate students. Each excursion lasted 1-1.5 hours and the participants were asked to choose two to three predetermined locations within their term-time location which they visited regularly. While this may appear to presume that students will only form habitus in their term-time locations, the city as a bounded space is a valid space within which to discuss students' experiences and interactions. Importantly, the walking interviews enhanced the experience by affording greater opportunities to relate experiences to other locations. The routes were kept fluid between locations in order to encourage participants to, as much as possible, take control of their journeys around the city to ensure it was about *their* experiences (Holton and Riley, 2014). This technique encouraged more

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<sup>1</sup> The UK's only island city, Portsmouth has a population of 197,614 with a population density of, on average 5000 people per km<sup>2</sup>, making it the UK's most densely populated city by area outside of London (Portsmouth City Council (PCC), 2012). Portsmouth has a large youth population with 33.6 percent under 25, three per cent higher than the national average (PCC, 2012), reflecting Portsmouth's large student population. In 2012-13 The University of Portsmouth had 22,709 students constituting eleven percent of the city's population, comprising: 18,878 (83 percent) full time and 3,831 (17 percent) part time students, with 18,889 (83 percent) undergraduates and 3,217 (17 percent) postgraduates (University of Portsmouth, 2012).

visual interpretations of student spaces through direct experience as well as opening up the potential for unexpected interactions with spaces. Walking interviews were useful here as they allowed the participants to pause to 'sense' place and grasp the essence of place through imagination. As they excavate knowledge and capture encounters 'in the moment' they help develop richer understand of identities, emotions and social relations which shape the nature of responses (Riley, 2010). The place-based nature also encouraged the participants to be more reflexive, providing more critical interpretations of their term-time environment which may be obscured by conventional face-to-face meetings (Elwood and Martin, 2000). The interviewees were given control of the voice recorder to allow them freedom to direct the journey. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed using the CAQDAS (computer aided qualitative data analysis software) package Atlas.ti. Pertinent aspects of the walking interviews were documented in a research diary, which has been referred to as part of the analysis for this paper. The demographic breakdown of the interview participants are detailed in Table 1 and demonstrate a leaning towards the participants being under 21 (68 per cent), female (65 per cent), white (90 per cent) and British (90 per cent). Whilst this does not constitute an evenly represented dataset, the distribution here does reflect the findings of similar studies (Holdsworth, 2006; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005) and can be compared to the overall composition of the University of Portsmouth.

Within this study it was important to focus specifically on the participants' first year living arrangements to make sense of the transitional period into University. Two thirds of the students were living, or had lived, in student accommodation and the remaining third lived either with parents or in their own homes. It may, of course, be considered problematic relying on students' reflexive experiences of place. However,

these retrospective accounts were pertinent as the second and third year students' reflective explanations of their past accommodation were produced through hindsight, rather than simply discussing experiences which they had not necessarily had the time or maturity to consider in great detail. This meant that their past encounters held just as much resonance over their present experiences of living as a student.

[place Table 1 here]

### **Negotiating a Student Habitus**

A common theme among the responses was that student-centric social spaces are one of the primary locations with which to develop a student habitus through the forging of friendship groups and experimentation with social activities (Chatterton, 1999). This was particularly evident in the locations chosen to visit on their walking interviews, with University spaces (e.g. the Library or the Students' Union) or places popular with large student groups (e.g. Guildhall Walk and Gunwharf Quays) being twice as popular than with non-local students. Such spaces provide the social capital with which students can develop and transform their habitus and cement their status among their peers. As Holt (2008) suggests:

“Individuals who have access to particular social networks will be able to mobilise [their] social capital, transforming it into different types of capital [thus] maintaining their advantages within particular ‘fields’ of activity” (p. 231).

The accounts of these participants add nuance by emphasising the importance of accommodation in these experiences particularly as the participants all displayed contrasting housing configurations that make from year to year (Table 2). This emphasises how [im]mobility cannot be prefigured for students as they may make

various choices throughout the degree pathway which may influence their experiences of 'being' students. Hence, accommodation spaces may act as 'fields' through which certain dispositions are learned and mobilised elsewhere. These assist participants in understanding the rules associated with such spaces through the habitual experiences of them (Chatterton, 1999):

“[Living in halls] seemed more like the straightforward option. It seemed like it would be good experience to get the whole halls of residence experience. I knew I would end up living in private rented accommodation in the second and third year anyway so I may as well take the opportunity while I could” (David<sup>2</sup>).

[place Table 2 here]

As David's comment suggests, halls of residence provided a platform for him to begin to learn how to 'become' a student. However, while Holt's (2008) earlier suggestions emphasises how the acquisition and mobilisation of capital may strengthen a student's habitus there may be among students as to what types of dispositions are likely to enhance their ability to get on at University. David's comment suggests he expected the close proximity of halls to campus and nightlife to afford him the opportunity to immerse himself in the student experience. Therefore, rightly or wrongly, David's comment highlights how students may be acutely aware of the characteristics they important to their term-time experience and will shape their habitus according to these expectations. Lisa and Millie's responses below further emphasise how these expectations might complicate notions of the student habitus being fixed or universal:

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<sup>2</sup> All names have been anonymised.

“I think at the beginning I felt very uncomfortable. It was quite difficult, I hadn't done it before. [...] Everyone is going out and being a Fresher and I think there is a lot of pressure to get drunk and make bacon sandwiches at three in the morning drunk and stuff” (Lisa).

“I've experienced more of life than they have. One probably terrible example is we went on a night out and none of them had ever done a Tequila shot before because they'd only just turned eighteen which I found very strange so I educated them. If it helps them it helps me, so to speak” (Millie).

While Chatterton (1999) suggests that students from more traditional backgrounds may be aware of the rituals and dispositions associated with University social activities, the comments above suggest that the background of the individual is influential in how dispositions are operationalised once students commence University. As Reay (2004) suggests, habitus is a multi-layered concept based upon interactions between the past and the present. Habitus is not static but “permeable and responsive” (page 434) meaning it can be layered through [in]congruous experiences, such as Lisa's apprehensions or Millie's knowledge of drinking cultures. This demonstrates how University does not constitute ground-zero for the student habitus, but is instead messily formed through an amalgamation of dispositions and preconceptions which lead up to the start of the degree. Nevertheless, for some of the students, their mobility through migration generated certain social, economic and cultural risks (Thieme, 2008). What can be drawn from this is that by bringing together past and new experiences to transform the habitus the participants were able to subvert these risks by adapting to the unfamiliar fields they were placed in.

This provided them the opportunities to 'fit in' quickly, and in a way which hopefully aligned with their expectations, during the relatively short first few months of term.

Notions of 'fitting in' become nuanced when incorporating the experiences of those first year students who were living in rented housing. While the interviewees perceived exclusive student-centric activities as being essential in the development of their student identities, all of the participants (including the ten living in rented housing) felt this was not the most conducive way to integrate with the student community:

"I definitely felt like I missed out on the whole halls experience, meeting new people, having loads of people on your floor. There was just the five of us and that was kind of it at the start so I definitely feel I missed out there" (Claire).

"I think because halls is so big. [...] Like when I go to my friend's house I'll speak to those people in that block and other people in other blocks. Like compared to living in my house, the girls, they have their friends so when I socialise with them I feel really sort of out of place so definitely, I feel disadvantaged" (Adele).

These comments problematise the suggestion that student accommodation provides 'normal' access to student-centric capital which may ease the transition through the initial stages of University. In this instance the proximity of the halls of residences to the Fresher social spaces provided opportunities for a more immersive experience which was not readily available to those living in housing which might be up to 2.5km away from the campus. The students living in rented housing, such as Claire and Adele, lacked the social connections which their contemporaries in halls had access

to and which were often greatly accelerated due to the high concentrations of members within these groups.

What became clear was that this alternative living arrangement appeared to destabilise the mobility of these participants, **many of which had moved long distances to attend University**. While most mobile students exhibit confidence in transitioning into their term-time location (Holdsworth, 2006), these students living in rented houses expressed different mobilities as they struggled to reconcile the social dysfunctions which came from the unfamiliar spaces they were residing in and the physical distance from their peers. For the participants, these predominantly second and third year **residential** spaces did not necessarily present the most suitable 'time' in which to experience activities which are directed at a different audience. Adele, for example, chose the halls where her friends lived as a destination on her walking interview, and discussing her experiences in this location made it clear, through her improved eye contact and body language, that the halls environment was somewhere she felt relaxed. As Bourdieu (1977) suggests, those who are moving in fields which they are unaccustomed to can struggle with interpreting the capital they are presented with. Moreover, while cultural differences may be present in student accommodation, the first years within this study living in rented housing were not necessarily living with other first year students. Hence the incongruent capital they were exposed to in their homes **provided them different term-time mobilities to their peers in halls**, occasionally forcing them to make ad-hoc arrangements (e.g. staying over at friends, arranging transport for more formally planned nights out etc.) in order to settle this. **Drawing these experiences together emphasises how such relative mobility might influence the transformation of the student habitus for seemingly 'non-local' students in quite complex ways. While the participants were experiencing**



University in relation to their peers (Jensen, 2009), they were also reconciling these experiences in relation to the mobilities they were expecting to have when commencing University.

### **Nuancing and/or inhibiting the local student habitus**

These notions of exclusive geographies can be developed further when considering the experiences of non-local students. While certain student-centric spaces may be appropriate for operationalising more conventional student dispositions (Chatterton, 1999), conversely non-local students may struggle to develop their student habitus away from the immersion of campus. What is important to identify here is that local does not necessarily equate with immobile. Only two of the participants living with parents reported living in Portsmouth itself, while the other six commuted up to twelve miles, suggesting that these students were employing different forms of mobility which were relative to the mobilities of the non-local students. Borrowing from Forsey (2014), the local students were experimenting with their student lifestyles both on and off campus, meaning they were attempting to learn to be 'somewhere' whilst at University. All of the local participants spoke of desiring exposure to some sort of 'student experience' in their first year. Whatever the experience, the students recognised the benefits of gaining new experiences in 'being' or 'becoming' University students. Nevertheless, unpacking how these students experienced these practices revealed certain variability. In particular, those living with parents spoke of how their living circumstances gave them the agency to move between their student and non-student friendship groups, essentially selecting the most appropriate elements with which to establish their own nuanced student habitus:

“I’ve made some brilliant friends. In the first year I probably had to work ten times harder than everybody else to make friends because I didn’t have those immediate housemates or hall friends but now I’ve got friends from first year who are friends for life now. I’ve probably got less Uni [sic] friends but then I don’t think that matters too much because I joined a society” (Dawn).

“Because I go to church and most of my church friends go to Uni [sic] it hasn’t been difficult at all and my cousins they are almost my age so I can hang out with their friends as well. It’s no big deal. [...] We get to do quite a lot of things together in church and as students so it’s made things a lot easier. [...] I can choose my friends a bit more wisely rather than being with people and doing things that I really don’t want to do” (Cleo).

Dawn and Cleo’s responses extend claims that home-based students are unlikely to take up University societies or understand the potential benefits they might hold (Crozier et al., 2008), or that students living with parents might lack the commitment to regularly keep up with societies (Holdsworth, 2006). As these comments suggest, there is a certain enthusiasm for being involved in societies and an understanding of the benefit they can bring to their future careers. These participants also expressed an awareness of the importance of establishing a strong student peer group while at University and often had a substantial network of student friends living in more traditional term-time accommodation. However, as Carl suggests below, these connections may be more carefully considered and motivated by a desire to ‘get on’ at University rather than having the fully immersive experience practised by their more typical peers:

“I wanted to take advantage of the opportunities that were offered at Uni [sic], not necessarily all the drinking and clubbing and stuff [...] but different activities that the University offers. It’s just sort of me and I find that interesting” (Carl).

Crucially though while the local participants recognised the importance of these experiences, the complexity of being a student in the home environment meant they did not necessarily embrace them as fully as their non-local counterparts. For example, during the walking interviews the local students were far more prepared to talk holistically about their position in Portsmouth as a place rather than framing their experiences of it solely in the context of their student selves. **This meant that the transformation of habitus appeared much more complex for the participants who were living with parents than any of the other residential circumstances as they were often negotiating these multiple (and sometimes contrasting) dispositions simultaneously.**

**As is often suggested in the literature, local students attempt to mitigate any social and spatial incongruities between home and University spheres by enacting separate lives away from the mainstream student community (Holdsworth, 2006). Holdsworth (2009a) and Abrahams and Ingram (2013) suggest that local students may be keen to temper their classed identities whilst among their non-student peers as a method of fitting in. The experiences of the interviewees here offer an alternative slant to this notion of disadvantage by suggesting they were not simply keen to *retain* their non-student identities, but to *protect* them** from their more typical peer group. Carl, Maya and Nina all commented that they would think twice before introducing their University friends into their home-based social group and used this physical distance

as a barrier with which to shield their home lives. They reported keeping friendship groups separate, either due to bad past experiences or through a recognition that particular aspects of their non-student **selves** may be construed as different to that of their more traditional peers, making it rare for them to invite student friends to socialise in their home towns. Although it was not mentioned directly in the interviews, Carl, Greg and Helen all alluded to how age may factor in this distancing from the more traditional cohort, particularly as these younger students living with their parents spoke of feeling uncomfortable at the thought of acquaintances met at University gaining access to their non-student social spheres. These participants cited the ephemeral nature of these friendships as a driving factor, suggesting these interactions would be deemed inappropriate, particularly in the family home, and were maintained out of respect of parents and siblings:

“I’m sure they’re nice people and if I were to bring them back to my house they’d be very respectful of it I’d imagine, but I do feel more of a co-sharer of the house now, not just a child in it so I don’t feel it would be really appropriate to bring University people back to that because I feel that maybe wouldn’t be right for my parents. They probably wouldn’t be comfortable with that so I wouldn’t do it” (Carl).

**For all of the participants living at home, commencing a degree coincided with a change in social position within the household.** As Carl points out, he **felt** more responsible for the goings on within the family home. Carl’s account extends Christie’s (2007) suggestions that students living with their parents often retreat into the sanctity of their non-student peer group in order to maintain connections with their more familiar identity. While Christie’s participants felt more able to choose

which group of friends (student or non-student) to socialise with, the agency Carl and others exert demonstrates how some of the participants felt it necessary to go a stage further and actively exclude their student friends from their non-student social lives.

Crucially, the experiences outlined here may also be seen to subvert the exclusive geographies discussed earlier in this paper (see Chatterton, 1999), with the non-local participants employing similar techniques of self-segregation demonstrated by the local interviewees. Common among these respondents were feelings of the appropriateness of frequenting particular term-time locations:

“Early on in the interview Maya became quite defensive over the city and how it’s used (or in many ways not used) by other students. One particular example of this was a friend who took her parents to Old Portsmouth but had not shown them the bombed out church” (Research Diary).

“Palmerston Road and Canoe Lake were reflections of Greg’s non-student identity and were in stark contrast to the other sites we passed through which he contrasted with the student spaces and that students were unlikely to wish to visit” (Research Diary).

Viewing these tactics through Chatterton’s (1999) lens of exclusive geographies suggests that these local students were not necessarily always being held on the periphery of the student community. Rather, they appeared to be mirroring the non-local students’ exclusionary behaviours by denying them the opportunities to share in their non-student experiences through the adoption of multiple, and distinctly separate, activities.

This can be explained through Helen's account of how her University peer group had few expectations of her to get involved in student-centric activities because she lived at home:

"I think it's easier when you live at home because if you don't want to do certain things then people don't expect you to. I think they view me not quite as a 'student' student but as a, kind of 'ah, no, I'm at home, I don't really want to go out late', things like that. If I had moved out I would definitely be feeling a lot more pressured to do what everyone else was doing, whereas I've got the excuse that I've got the rest of my life to be doing as well" (Helen).

Helen's excuses for not socialising with her friends offer an example of how aspects of the habitus can become [un]intentionally embodied for students living with their parents through certain constraints as they attempt to perform their student identities. Holt (2008) suggests that an individual's identity is inherently bound within the socio-spatial contexts in which they live their lives (in the case of these students, being subjectified as immobile by remaining in the family home). As Holt suggests: "An individual's previous social encounters are embodied and influence their future social performances" (page 238). Hence identity is not fixed but constantly viewed in relation to the norms of others, meaning "norms of identity performance are central to the processes by which a person is subjectified" (page 238). Here, Helen's assumed position as 'immobile' may have become incorporated into her sense of self and if perpetuated may influence her social position in other social situations. As Holt suggests, it is the reciprocal nature of such relationships, in this case Helen's self-segregation from her peer group and their acceptance of this self-segregation, which allows these norms to be conveyed.

In contrast, for those interview participants who were living in their own homes the student habitus appeared to be formed distinctly from their non-student lives. It rarely, if ever, moved out of the confines of the campus, was mostly restricted to weekdays and appeared to be grounded more in pedagogic rather than social dispositions:

“I work in here [The Hub café]. If I’ve only got a short period of time I might have a cup of tea and maybe something to eat and read. I mean, even though it’s noisy sometimes, no-one talks to me so I can just get on and do something. I usually try and use all my spare time in the working week working on my studies so that I don’t have to overflow into the weekend” (Sarah).

Sarah’s comments were indicative of the distinctions made during the walking interviews between the learning environments on campus and the unanimously non-student social spaces of the city. As the following extracts from the research diary demonstrate, these, often older, participants behaved differently in certain locations, coming across as relaxed in places in which they could remove themselves from their student peers:

“Sarah visibly relaxed at Canoe Lake. She stopped looking at me and instead looked across the water. This is a space where she regularly comes with her children and meets friends. She will spend prolonged periods in this location and carefully detailed each of the activities she would do. This did not occur in any of the other locations we went to” (Research Diary).

“Upon arriving at Gunwharf Quays, Jane announced that she’d “never come here, it’s too studenty [sic]”. It turned out she chose to come here to point out

the places where she socialised with her non-student friends in Gosport, which was across the harbour from where we were located and she stared across as she recounted her social activities there” (Research Diary).

These observations imply that, in many ways, mature students may exhibit little or no interest in acquiring the cultural capital associated with University life, instead preferring to settle for the capital they feel requisite for them to successfully learn their chosen subject. In this sense, this was likely to be because the capital they were dealing with was too contrasting to be compatible with their non-student habitus.

Nevertheless, it would be crude to imply that all the mature participants followed this pathway, and some of the student living in their own homes did desire some degree of engagement with the traditional cohort, yet their responses suggested this could provide its own set of problems, particularly if the students happened to read the signs wrongly from their more traditional peers:

“I wouldn’t say they [society] were hugely welcoming, I think they tried. I found it difficult personally to integrate into a new group. It’s something I find difficult to do anyway so it was hard to join in. Plus having a child at home, other than this one girl who also had a child at home, nobody else had kids so it was really hard to grasp that I had to go home and that I had these outside commitments that weren’t Uni [sic] based” (Eve).

“As a mature student it is hard to fit in with younger students. No-one really speaks to me so I have to make a real effort” (Alex).



While neither student reported any instances of receiving unkindness from their peers, their accounts are tinged with a realisation that the capital they were attempting to utilise was incongruent with that of the younger student cohort. For example, Eve's position in particular as a wife and mother living away from the centre of the student community meant that she was **stereotyped by her peers as being** unable to transform her capital into anything which might benefit her integration within the group.

These accounts reiterate that living in student accommodation adjacent to the campus **continues to be a formidable driver in being included within the 'traditional student experience'**. For those living with their parents, and to a greater extent those older students in their own homes, their limited ability to access the right types of capital diminishes their opportunities to fit in with the rest of the cohort. Holdsworth (2006) suggests that this creates a 'disrupted' habitus (Lawler, 1999), where the dispositions of local students are not easily recognised by either the more traditional student cohort or their non-student friends. However, when exploring this in the context of the older participants' [im]mobilities this could be thought of as being closer to an *inhibited* habitus where they might be **actively** prevented from utilising the capital they have legitimately acquired. Their **perceived** peripheral student/non-student selves may be socially and geographically restricting their ability to make and maintain meaningful interactions within either of their student/non-student spheres. This is particularly the case for behaviours which may be viewed as uncharacteristic and/or detrimental to the lifestyle they hold outside of University.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated how the complex and contrasting ways in which local and non-local students make sense of the capital they acquired during the initial stages of their degrees, might be transformed into the type of habitus which might smooth their initial mobilities through University. Importantly, the action of mobility here appears to alter some of the power dynamics discussed within the mobilities literature, presenting opportunities for these young adults to mobilise their capital in ways which may smooth their transitions into University life. However, while the interviewees acknowledged the transformative potential of University, there was a great deal of heterogeneity in the ways in which the students interpreted, and to a certain extent succeeded in transforming, their capital. Some were keen to express their cultural capital in the many student-centric social spaces in the city, using this as a tool in order to expand their friendship groups, while others sought to acquire the necessary capital to simply get by.

Crucially, this paper has identified the reciprocal role of mobility and habitus in shaping these students' experiences, outlining some of the potential pitfalls which may exist and the tactics many of the participants used to overcome them. For example, those living in more typical student accommodation in the correct environment to acquire the types of cultural capital needed to develop a student habitus. Yet for those students living in non-student accommodation, the student habitus was formed and managed in a slightly subtler, more nuanced way. For many of the participants, their [im]mobilities were not necessarily based simply upon pragmatic financial decisions or emotional ties (Christie, 2007) but upon a desire to create *different* mobilities which allowed them to move more freely between their student and non-student lives. Hence, the students living with their parents were capable of creating the same exclusive geographies as their peers in halls, forming

highly nuanced student habitus' which legitimised these exclusions thus extending previous theoretical tendencies which privilege identity formation through mobility rather than stasis. Crucially, while distinctions existed between how local and non-local students' term-time accommodation influenced their interpretations of the city, more nuanced differences also existed *within* these accommodation types. The analysis revealed that these differences could either impede or enhance students' ability to access capital to establish their position within the student community during such a vital period and highlights how accommodation choice can be an important driver towards [un]successful mobilities through the rest of the degree pathway.

This analysis has also revealed an important consideration for future discussions of the student habitus by suggesting that compatibility issues exist in the development of the student habitus which might prevent, or discourage, some individuals from having the same student experience as that of their peers. Whilst there were clear differences between the ages of the students living in typical or non-typical accommodation, particularly between those living with parents or in their own homes, there were also obvious distinctions between the types of students who wished to be involved in the student community and those who did not. Students may not necessarily be inclined to socialise in the environment closest to them, as was the case for many of the first year students living in rented houses, meaning such disparities can make certain student groups feel excluded from the more mainstream student activities by their relative [im]mobilities and may contribute to a general dissatisfaction with their student experience. This suggests that for those in transition, *successful* mobility may be dependent, not only on relationships with others but also the ease at which *expected* mobilities may be operationalised (e.g.

living in the 'right' location etc.) and how this may impact upon interactions with other spaces and people during term-time.

Nevertheless, while it may be impossible for some students to have the same student experience (e.g. through family commitments, distance between home and University etc.), that is not to say that they may not wish to share some of the same experiences as their more traditional peers. This paper has identified the different, and occasionally unexpected, social and academic motivations of students.

Crucially, this extends discussions of first year experiences by suggesting that students (in the context of this study primarily students in their own homes) may not necessarily shirk student-centric activities due to their preferences. In addition other social, cultural or institutional processes may contribute to *preventing* these students from being included in the more 'typical' student experience, which in turn may inhibit the acquisition and subsequent re-distribution of student-centric capital. In other words, failed attempts at 'fitting in' among student peers may force such students back into their non-student social group.

**Finally**, this research contributes to discussions of habitus and capital by exploring the rapid transformative potential of habitus through both geographical and social mobilities. The diverse ways in which the participants established, imagined and managed their student habitus during the initial stages of their degrees was crucial in cementing their position among their peers. Importantly, the research demonstrates how this could be achieved quickly by most of the students as they transformed their habitus according to the different capital they were presented with. Consequently the habitus did not provide a constant for the students but instead was subject to various (and conflicting) mobility factors which conflated or suppressed its influence. Hence,

problematizing this transitional period is useful in that it moves beyond the fixed, generational and deterministic characteristics of habitus by highlighting its potential for subjectivity. While habitus may be accused of constantly looking backwards in reference to pre-learned dispositions, this paper demonstrates how these participants adapted and transformed their habitus *in spite* of their previous social endeavours, allowing them to align themselves in positions they felt most suited to.

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