

**TROUBLE WITH THE BOYS: EQUITY
CONCERNS ABOUT WORKING CLASS BOYS'
BEHAVIOUR IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

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Abstract

Evidence has consistently highlighted equity concerns for the educational experiences and outcomes of working-class boys in England. This paper explores one facet of this complex issue: the disparity in the behaviour and approaches to learning exhibited by working-class boys relative to their peers.

A review of existing literature synthesizes scholarship from the fields of education, sociology and psychology, to critically analyse theoretical perspectives about the behaviour and approaches to learning exhibited by working-class boys during secondary education. Subsequently, an action-research project details the development and implementation of ameliorative strategies for a group of four boys at a challenging inner-city comprehensive through collaborations with research participants and professional colleagues.

The research suggests the need for practitioners to utilise more personalized approaches of behaviour management, grounded in understandings about individual students, empowering students to exercise agency and improve in-school behaviour. Furthermore, the findings highlight potential areas for future scholarship centred on integrating existing literature with sociological action-theories.

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1. Introduction

Concerns about working-class boys' educational experiences, behaviour and attainment, in the English education system, are longstanding (Jackson & Marsden, 1966; Willis, 1977). Indeed, highly active areas of research have sought to examine the relationship between social-class (Jenks, 1972; Bourdieu, 1977; Brynner & Joshi, 2002; Ball, 2003; Reay, 2006; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; Lupton et al., 2009; Ball, 2010; Gillborn, 2010) gender (Willis, 1977; Francis, 1999; Lindsay & Muijs, 2006; Ingram, 2009) and education. However, as Evans (2008, p.176) notes, despite decades of scholarship since the sociological research of Douglas (1964), Willis (1977) and Corrigan (1979), the links between social-class, gender and educational attainment remain as strong as ever.

Contemporary research demonstrates that large variations in students' educational attainment, at sixteen years of age, still exist in relation to social-class and gender (DfE, 2014a; Strand 2014), a phenomenon which Strand (2014, p. 165) argues, requires equity researchers to 'develop more nuanced accounts of educational success and failure' focused on social-class, gender and their intersection. This paper explores just one aspect of this, and provides a critical examination of the attitudes to learning and

behaviour exhibited by working-class boys during secondary education.

1.1 National Context

National statistics have consistently demonstrated that boys and students eligible for free school meals (FSM), are four times more likely than their peers to be excluded from mainstream education (DfE, 2011; DfE, 2012; DfE 2013a; DfE 2014b). Data reveals the most cited reason for permanent exclusion is persistent disruptive behaviour (DfE, 2014b).

Being excluded from school can have dramatic effects on the future educational trajectory of students and can continue to affect their life chances beyond the school gates. Evidence suggests that students ‘who display problematic behaviour in [...] adolescence [...] are more likely to have few, or no, educational qualifications’ (DfE, 2013b). Furthermore, research into the post-school trajectories of pupils in the North of England has found that 15% of those who leave school with few or no qualifications, and who are not in long term education, employment or training (NEET), are dead within a decade of leaving the education system (Swain & Vaughan, 2009) owing to an increased likelihood of mortality arising from ‘drugs and alcohol abuse, violent crime, ill health and suicide’ (Conrad, 2009).

Such evidence reveals an alarming level of educational determinism, which disproportionally affects boys from low socio-economic status households. This, allied with observations that reveal higher levels of hyperactivity, lower levels of self-regulation and pro-social behaviour for boys or students in receipt of free-school meals (FSM) (Sammons et al., 2008), demonstrates a clear rationale for understanding why these phenomena occur, and for researchers to explore and develop ameliorative actions that could redress the current levels of educational inequity.

1.2 Local Context

School X is a challenging inner-city comprehensive, serving a community with levels of social deprivation in the top quintile nationally (DfE, 2014c), where 34% of the 1,100 students on roll are currently in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) compared to the national average of 14.6% (DFE, 2014d). Over a period of fourteen years, the school has drastically transformed the academic attainment of its students; from 9% 5A*- C in 2000 (DFE, 2000) to 60% in 2014 (DfE, 2014c).

However, despite improvements in students' outcomes, data from RAISEOnline (DfE, 2014c) highlights strong attainment gaps between different groups of students. In 2014, the percentage of boys attaining 5 A*-C in GCSEs was 20% lower than girls and the

percentage of disadvantaged students securing 5 A*-C was 25% lower than non-disadvantaged students (DfE, 2014c, p.29). These findings show clear similarities to the equity concerns highlighted by Strand (2014). The attainment gaps at School X raise questions concerning which aspects of educational experiences and processes lead to the disparity in student outcomes.

A major priority at School X is the need to understand why these achievement gaps persist, and to implement ameliorative strategies. The in-school discourse concerning the academic underperformance of working-class boys, has for some time been framed within a culture of deficit, with the pathologization of this social group, centred on the dual polemics of poor classroom behaviour and approaches to learning. Although the school has abandoned a previous model, which used setting by behaviour to segregate those students who were ‘poorly behaved’, ‘didn’t want to learn’ and ‘didn’t value education’, a deficit model still exists, and emphasises the existence of barriers presented by disadvantaged students’ lack of cultural or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

An analysis of internal school data supports the observations of staff, that the behaviour of working-class boys is worse than that of any social group in the school. Table 1 below demonstrates how internally-logged behaviour incidents vary according to gender and FSM status during the first term of 2014 (School X, 2014). Table 2

demonstrates how the number of seclusions, managed-moves and exclusions vary along the same grounds.

	Male	Female
FSM	45%	23%
Non-FSM	21%	11%

Table 1. The Distribution of School Behaviour Incidents Along Grounds of Gender and FSM Status.

	Male	Female
FSM	47%	21%
Non-FSM	22%	10%

Table 2. The Distribution of Seclusions, Managed Moves and Exclusions Along Grounds of Gender and FSM Status.

This analysis of data yields striking results and demonstrates that those students who are male and in receipt of FSM, are significantly more likely to incur sanctions for their behaviour and approaches to learning than their peers. Even accounting for concerns about the extent to which a student's FSM status can be used as a proxy for social-class, (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Hobbes & Vignoles, 2009), this evidence provides some support for the observations of staff and may suggest that a contributing factor for

the working-class boys' attainment gap, can be ascribed to their classroom behaviour and approaches to learning.

1.3 Research Aims

It is evident from an initial analysis of data that equity concerns exist for the educational attainment of working-class boys at School X. Internal data demonstrates more frequent and pronounced levels of poor behaviour from this social group. The longitudinal effects of this variation could, over time, account for the disparity in attainment of this social group at the end of Year 11. In response to this, this paper explores the behaviour and approaches to learning exhibited by working-class boys within my professional context.

Given the limitations imposed on the research, owing to my status as a part-time student and a full-time teacher, it is important to outline the scope of my project at the outset. The research focused on in-school factors and was confined to the micro-level within Bronfenbrenner's (1989) hierarchy of analysis. I am mindful that this focus was at the expense of developing an understanding

of factors at the macro or meso level, and restricted my ability to consider ‘the influence of the wider economic and social context on schooling.’ (Reay, 2006, p. 289). However, I justify my decision to overlook the influence of meso and macro level factors by evidence from the school-effectiveness movement, which shows that classroom-level effects on students’ attainment are greater than school-effects and background characteristics such as gender and socio-economic status (Muijs, 2006; Sammons, 2007). It is therefore advantageous to consider how equity gaps emerge and are mediated at the classroom-level, because events here have the most potential to exercise transformability and leverage more equitable outcomes for students.

The following research questions guided my reading of the literature:

- What explanatory factors does existing literature provide for the behaviour and approaches to learning of working-class boys?
- How do the causal explanations proposed in existing literature relate to my professional context?
- To what extent can specific interventions, focused on behaviour and approaches to learning, facilitate greater

levels of educational equity for working-class boys at
School X?

1.4 Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of existing literature drawn from the fields of education, sociology and psychology and explores a range of explanatory factors for the behaviour, and approaches to learning, exhibited by working-class boys during secondary education.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed overview of the design and methodological approach employed in the research. In addition to demonstrating the suitability of the methodology for addressing the research questions, a clear rationale for each of the methods employed is made. Additionally, this chapter gives careful and detailed consideration to ethical issues and outlines how the methodology adheres to the BERA (2001) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

Chapter 4 presents the findings through the medium of vignettes which chart the cycles of action-research for each participant.

Chapter 5 contains the discussion and analysis. A thematic structure is used to consider how the evidence gathered, elucidates answers to each research question.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings and evaluates the extent to which the research questions have been answered. Subsequently, I consider the implications of the findings for future research and evaluate the methodology to suggest potential improvements. Finally, I conclude by considering the implications for my research in relation to practise within, and beyond, my professional context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews a wide range of literature, developing a theoretical understanding for why working-class boys' behaviour is reported to be more problematic than that exhibited by other groups of students.

The review begins by considering a range of theoretical perspectives for students' behaviour and approaches to learning. This will serve to generate a set of sensitizing concepts that can be used to frame and critically examine subsequent literature and findings within the thesis. Later, the chapter explores literature from the fields of education and sociology focused on gender, class

and their intersection, to elucidate explanatory factors for why equity gaps exist for working-class boys. The review concludes by synthesizing literature focused on socio-cultural and psychological aspects of learning, suggesting approaches that may enhance levels of equity experienced by working-class boys in relation to their behaviour and approaches to learning.

2.2 Theories of Behaviour & Approaches to Learning

As researchers and teachers, we should be conscious of the role that folk-psychologies, those ‘every-day intuitive theories about how other minds work’ (Bruner, 1999, p. 5), may play in underpinning educational practice. Indeed, the possession of such epistemological frames may be a causal factor for the current levels of inequity for working-class boys’ behaviour in schools. School-effectiveness research illustrates that effect-sizes at the classroom-level are greater than demographic variables such as gender and socioeconomic status (Muijs, 2006; Sammons, 2007). Some studies have shown that teacher-effects ‘explain almost 75% of the classroom variance’ in students’ attainment on standardised tests (Muijs & Reynolds, 2001, p. 15). It is evident therefore, that the possession of folk-psychologies, and the application of associated folk-pedagogies, has the potential to greatly influence educational practices and thereby affect students’ educational experiences and

outcomes.

In response to this, the initial section of the review considers a range of perspectives that explain human behaviour and approaches to learning. Drawing on the synoptic research of Powel and Tod (2004, p.16) and adapting their conceptual framework, this section will examine *difference*, *reactive* and *interactive* theories of behaviour.

2.2.1 Difference Theories: Developmental & Biological Explanations for Student Behaviour

The theories considered here have been classified as *difference theories*, in recognition of their predominant focus on differences between individuals. For Ball (2013, p. 52), theories of this type have often been associated with a degree of ‘pathologization realized within a set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic and normative practices’ whereby educationalists have sought to find ‘explanation for children’s failures, disengagement, distraction, anger and defiance in their genetic and medical profiles’ (Slee, 2011, p. 151).

This section provides only an outline of ideas within this area of scholarship to contextualize ideas within later discussions. This is justified by the observation that difference theories, as employed within the field of education, have failed to acknowledge developments in the biological sciences which emphasize the relationship between environmental and genetic factors (Keverne & Curley, 2008, p. 409).

Additionally, theories within this perspective are ill-equipped to explain the widespread problem of poor behaviour and underachievement along social-class gradients without engaging in a form of pathologization which ‘has its roots largely in the eugenicist discourses of the early twentieth-century’ (Ball, 2013, p.93).

2.2.1.1 Pubertal Development

Within the paradigm of difference theories, pubertal development is an example of a biological influence that may explain why boys exhibit poor behaviour during secondary education. Research has demonstrated that during boys’ adolescence there are observable increases in the rates of anti-social and delinquent behaviour (Williams & Dunlop (1999, p. 158). Drawing on Moffitt’s (1993) research into this area, Williams & Dunlop (1999, p. 158) attribute this change to ‘pubertal

development' that leads to 'biological maturity much earlier than Western society permits [...] social maturity'; engagement with poor behaviour is then used by individuals as an attempt to 'bridge this maturity gap'. In other studies, the increase in poor behaviour during puberty is ascribed to individuals seeking to gain status within social groups (Silbereisen and Kracke, 1993).

Although this theory can account for an increase in poor behaviour during pubertal development, it fails to explain differences in adolescents' behaviour along gender and social class gradients. However, this perspective may provide a useful lens of analysis to consider the interaction between boys' pubertal development and the role which self-esteem, peer-groups, social-status and gender-identity play in mediating boys' behaviour and approaches to learning during secondary education.

2.2.1.2 Biological & Medical Difference

The presence of a medical condition, which affects an individual's ability to engage fully with schooling, is another example of difference theory. Data from the Department of Education (2014b) reveals that students who are diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN) account for 70% of all permanent exclusions. As Jull (2008, p. 13) notes, the classification of 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' as a SEN, presents immense difficulties for practitioners to consider 'how best to respond to

students whose particular special educational need seems to justify punitive disciplinary action, including exclusion'. It is also possible to consider inherent differences between biological sexes from this perspective. Indeed, Jackson (1996, p.103) finds evidence of teachers ascribing boys' poor behaviour to biological determinism: 'boys will be boys' and behave the way they do because of their genetics.

As with pubertal development, a limiting factor of these perspectives is that they overlook the role that external stimuli play in determining individuals' behaviour, particularly the role of environmental factors (Powel and Tod, 2004).

2.2.2 Reactive Theories: Behaviourism & Achievement

Motivation

This section considers reactive theories, which frame human behaviour solely in terms of an individual's responses to environmental stimuli. It begins by examining the classical behaviourist perspective, before utilizing achievement motivation to understand students' behaviour and approaches to learning.

2.2.2.1 Behaviourism

As Galloway et al. (2004, p.92) note, ‘the central tenet of behaviourism is that all motivation arises from basic drives, instincts or emotions in ways that are predictable’. Its application to education can be characterized by the use of ‘positive reinforcement to teach students mastery’ (Jewell & Feiler, p.70). An illustrative example of this, provided by Powell and Tod (2004, p.16), is that a student may begin to engage more frequently in off-task behaviour, because doing so results in receiving more attention from the teacher; the solution from the behaviourist perspective would be to attach greater reward to on-task rather than off-task behaviour.

While behaviourism can provide some insight into how individuals’ motives and drives dictate their behaviour, it has limitations as a theoretical model. As Galloway et al (2004, p.92) note, because behaviourism rests on the assumption that human behaviour is predictable, it cannot be applied to the analysis of situations where individuals’ behaviour fails to follow predictable patterns. In this respect, behaviourism has limited utility in understanding contexts where exogenous stimuli lead to changes in individuals’ day-to-day behaviour in school. Furthermore, because of its focus on reactions to the environment, behaviourism is at odds with perspectives that characterize individuals as autonomous agents, who shape their environmental conditions and relationships with others. Fundamentally, a major weakness of this perspective is

its inability to develop understandings about the ways in which interactions between students and teachers shape behaviours and attitudes (Galloway et al, 2004, p.92).

2.2.2.2 Achievement Motivation

Another example of a reactive theory is Atkinson's (1957;1964) achievement motivation. From this perspective, an individual's behaviour is driven by a desire to achieve or experience success. When applied to the classroom environment, achievement motivation would suggest that variations in levels of engagement with an activity could be explained by how confident an individual feels about the likelihood of completing a task successfully.

Achievement motivation can also be conceptualized as a desire to avoid the experiences of failure (Atkinson, 1957, p. 360). From this perspective, task-avoidance acts as a defence mechanism and ensures an individual does not experience failure as a result of continued engagement. When unified with desires to maximize success, this adds an additional dimension to achievement motivation as a conceptual frame, whereby an individual's behaviour results from a dyadic optimization process in which they strive to maximize success and minimize failure (Morton, 2014).

A central issue in achievement motivation is the question of who defines success and how it is defined (Galloway et al., 2004). This level of subjectivity restricts the generalizability of achievement motivation to situations in which variability in behaviour is studied alongside demographic gradients. The model also fails to conceptualize the role that teacher-student interactions play in determining a students' engagement with a task. Therefore, the theory is unable to integrate with those that suggest that teachers' praise affects students' motivation to learn (Schunk, 1996; Dweck & Mueller, 1998) or which illustrate that the levels of success derived from a task can vary over time (Galloway et al., 2004). Responding to this, I examine the constructivist perspective and consider the role played by the interaction between different social-actors.

2.2.3 Interactive Theories

Constructivist theories are concerned with how the social-world mediates learning and individuals make sense of the world by constructing models about how it works (James, 2008). This perspective differs from those previously considered in this chapter because of its concern with the socio-cultural world of the classroom; those 'social conditions of [...] learning' and 'the

relationships between pupils and their teachers and between pupils themselves' (Arnot et al., 2004, p. 3).

The theories contained within this section have been classified as *interactive theories* because of the emphasis they place on the interactions between individuals as social-actors. Indeed, the constructivist perspective, is grounded in Piaget's models of learning and knowledge construction (Callahan, 2007), and shares many similarities with sociological action-theories: a field of study that considers human behaviours to be agentic choices made 'in light of how people define the situations they find themselves in' (Jones, 2003, p. 102).

This section considers key sociological concepts that explore how individuals' behaviour can be explained through interactions with others, and examines the role played by attribution theory and mindset.

2.2.3.1 Sociological Concepts: Symbolic Interactionism, Labelling & The Presentation of Self

Constructivism as a conceptual framework shares common ground with sociological action-theories. This section provides an overview of three such sociological perspectives which may be important to the exploration of the relationship between social class, gender and their intersection, and working-class boys'

behaviours and approaches to learning, particularly in relation to how these are mediated in the classroom.

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective from which social life can be reduced to 'the interaction of humans via the use of symbols' (Jones, 2003, p.102). In this way, we can view an individual's action or behaviour as a result of their interpretation of another action or behaviour (Jones, 2003, p. 103). Within this framework, what is important is not what an individual does, but how another interprets what they do. This perspective is valuable to educators, because a range of evidence demonstrates the important role played by assessment practices (Butler, 1988; Reay & Wiliam, 1999), teacher expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Ryan et al., 1994; Rist, 2000; Ferguson, 2003) and students' expectations (Feldman & Prohaska, 1979), in mediating learning and affecting educational outcomes. Symbolic interactionism can therefore provide an important critical lens for analysing how teachers and students utilize symbols in their interactions and how this influences students' behaviour and approaches to learning.

The existence of self-fulfilling prophecies in education (Jussim & Harber, 2005) could also be considered to stem from another action-theory perspective: labelling. This area of sociology is concerned with how labels can be attached to individuals to impose identities (Jones, 2003 p. 105). For example, if a teacher wrongly accuses a student of a misdemeanour, the student may argue and

protest their innocence. The teacher may interpret this as a further act of defiance, resulting in further sanctions and strengthening the attachment of a defiant label.

This example is typical of those given by labelling-theorists to emphasize concerns about how institutional and individual power can be exercised through the attachment of labels. Labelling-theory is deeply concerned with issues of social justice and how dominant groups in society define and label deviancy in other groups. For Jones (2003, p. 110), labels are often ‘attached to the most helpless and least powerful members of society, those who are least capable of fighting back and resisting the process’. In this respect, the attachment of labels to individuals can be regarded, from a Foucauldian perspective, as the exercising of the microphysics of power-relations between different social groups (Ball, 2013, p.31).

Labelling-theories offer an important analytical tool to understand what role the interaction between the male peer-group, constructs of masculinity, social class identities and self-esteem play in determining working-class boys’ behaviour and approaches to learning in school. From this perspective, a working-class boy who finds himself in a social context which attaches negative labels to working hard in lessons, may be inclined to shy away from hard work to avoid the attachment of negative labels from his peers.

Another concept relevant to this enquiry, is Goffman’s (1959) notion of the ‘presentation of self’. Goffman’s (1959, p. 9) theory is

grounded in theatrical performance with an important emphasis on dramaturgical principles. Fulcher & Scott (2007, p. 128) note that from this perspective, ‘people are like actors on the stage and [...] employ props and scenery in their interactions in order to try and convince others that they really are what they claim to be’ and in doing so have ‘a considerable amount of discretion as to how exactly’ they ‘present themselves’. This theory may be important in understanding how the social-world of the classroom acts as a site, where different forms of masculinity and class-identities determine the behaviour and approaches to learning exhibited by working-class boys. From this perspective, it would be possible to interpret a boy’s defiant behaviour as a social performance, used to gain prestige in relation to collectively valorised forms of masculinity or class within a social group.

2.2.3.2 Attribution Theory and Mindset

Research suggests that an individual’s academic self-concept is an important factor which influences their behaviour and approaches to learning. This section considers ideas from the perspective of Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory and Dweck’s (2006) conceptualization of mindset.

Central to Weiner's (1986) model of attribution theory is the interpretation of individuals as sense-makers. In this theory, individual's motives are driven by perceptions about the causation of events. This contrasts with *difference* and *reactive* theories of behaviour, because the focus of study is not what stimuli caused a particular action, but how an individual's interpretation of those stimuli lead to their action. This shifts the locus of analysis onto 'the ways in which people make decisions about the causes of events' (Galloway et al., 2004, p. 96). For example, a student who has been repeatedly sanctioned by a teacher may attribute any future sanction to a belief that the particular member of staff is deliberately singling them out. Attribution theory tells us that the student's perception about their relationship with the teacher will be vital in determining the student's response to being sanctioned in future situations.

From this perspective, the social-world of the classroom, and the relationships between students and teachers, may play a vital role in influencing behaviour. Furthermore, issues such as an individual's prior experiences, and autobiographical construction of self, are important in mediating approaches to learning.

When applied to a classroom level analysis, attribution theory is concerned with how individuals' attribute causes to events, and how these attributions influence future behaviour. This places emphasis on the role academic-self concept plays in determining

students' learning behaviour, and how this is influenced by classroom practices.

As Dweck & Yeager (2012, p. 304) note, a student's disposition to learn can be influenced by academic self-esteem; and ways of 'looking smart and, perhaps even more important, not looking dumb'. In many respects, this can be regarded as a reconceptualization of the optimization process, displayed in achievement motivation with the focus shifted from endogenous drives for success, towards exogenous affirmations of value.

This approach to learning and motivation is termed the 'entity theory' within Dweck's (1986) conceptual framework. From this perspective, an individual regards their levels of intelligence as being fixed and their behaviour is orientated towards optimizing positive judgments about self-worth. However, Dweck (1986) demonstrates the existence of an alternate conceptualization, an 'incremental theory' in which the amount of intelligence possessed by an individual is malleable. Individuals who share this worldview are not inclined towards this optimization process but are instead predisposed to strive for self-improvement and enhanced competence.

Contemporary research demonstrates that classroom-level factors can influence student's alignment with either conceptualization of mindset. Dweck & Yeager (2012) illustrate that the way praise is used in the classroom is important in determining students' dispositions to learn. Students who are praised for their intelligence were more likely to align to a fixed mindset; students who were praised for effort were more likely to align to an incremental mindset. It is possible here, to observe similarities with behaviourism, particularly in relation to how the repetition of specific forms of praise can socially condition an individual. From a sociological perspective, we can observe a likeness with labelling theory, whereby the different labels attached to individuals affect their behaviour and approaches to learning.

2.3 Masculinity in Education

The role that gender plays in students' education remains an important area of study in the fields of sociology and education (Connolly & Neill, 2001; Titus, 2004; Mac an Ghail & Haywood, 2011; Stahl & Dale, 2013). This section examines the role that masculinity plays in relation to the educational experiences, behaviours and approaches to learning of male students. It explores gender as a socio-cultural phenomenon and considers the role that

hegemonic forms of masculinity and 'lad cultures' play in the classroom.

2.3.1 The Social Construction of Gender & Hegemonic Masculinity

Gender is a theoretical concept distinct from an individual's biological sex. Instead, it is concerned with the different social roles played by men and women in society and the process through which individuals learn behaviours and develop identities aligned to masculinities and femininities through a process of socialization (Marsh et al., 2000, p. 338). In addition to individuals possessing their own gender identities, society is also regarded as having a gender order that is composed of hierarchical forms of gender identities (Fulcher & Scott, 2007, p. 163).

There is no clear consensus about the process of causation for the gender-roles of individuals. From a classical behaviourist perspective, gender is constructed through a system of reward and punishment (Fulcher & Scott, 2007, p.159). In this respect, conformity to normative gender roles is ensured, through the pathologization of deviancy. From the social constructivist perspective, gender is constructed through individuals' interaction and sense-making of the world and their place within it. Although these theoretical explanations provide different accounts for the

process through which gender identities are constructed, they acknowledge that construction takes place in the social world.

For Connell (1987, p. 120) 'compact organizations like schools [...] have particularly clear gender regimes'. A key analytical concept that has been used extensively to understand the gender regime within schools is hegemonic masculinity (Jackson, 2006; Barnes, 2012); a 'form of masculinity that is culturally exalted at any one time' (Jackson & Dempster, 2009, p.342). In much of contemporary social theory and educational research, hegemonic masculinity is a metonym for a heterosexual masculine culture that values 'toughness, physical strength, authority and aggression' (Fulcher & Scott, 2007 p. 163). In response to this, I now examine literature which considers the role of hegemonic 'lad' culture (Willis, 1977) in education.

2.3.2 'Lad' Cultures in Education

Titus (2004, p. 153) notes that a range of literature (Connell, 1996; Kenway, 1995; Mac an Ghaill, 1994) suggests that hegemonic masculinity is reinforced, as a normative concept, during schooling through the curriculum and pedagogy. For Keddie (2003, p. 291) the role of the male peer-group also plays a vital role 'in shaping and regulating [...] boys' understanding of masculinities'

where boys' 'desire for self-legitimation and belonging' is 'pivotal in the constructions of [...] identity.'

These theories, together with conceptualisations of 'laddish behaviour that is seen to value disruption, hedonistic activities and disrespect for school personnel' (Francis, 1999), have dominated much of the discourse concerning the schooling of working-class boys (Tucker, 2010). For Arnot (2004 p.36), some discourse represents an over-generalization of Willis' (1977) study into the educational experiences of working-class boys. Rather than framing Willis' observations concerning the development of 'a counter-school culture based around the importance of having a laff' (Griffin, 2005, p. 292) in a class cultural context, some perspectives represent the presence of 'laddish' behaviour as a 'characteristic of masculinity itself, irrespective of social class' (Arnot, 2004, p. 36).

Despite these concerns, there is clear evidence within the field of education and sociology that 'lad' cultures, framed within hegemonic forms of masculinity, are observable within the school and the classroom. Indeed, Keddie's (2003, p. 291) research demonstrates the establishment of a hierarchy of peer-masculinities within school 'established through the dispersion of socio-political power; produced and maintained within a dynamic of competition and differentiation and policed through the perpetuation of gender dualisms.' This shows similarities with the research of Jackson (2002;2003), which explores the role that normative

conceptualisations of masculinity play, as students navigate through schooling.

For Jackson (2003), one conceptualization that may explain the prevalence of 'laddishness' is a fear of the feminine. Jackson (2003, p.584) asserts that many boys perceive succeeding academically at school as feminine. Therefore, boys in these contexts are inclined to avoid engagement with work to prevent the attachment of a feminine label. From this perspective, we can observe one explanation for why boys might choose to disengage in their schooling. Titus (2004, p.152) notes that some perspectives transcend arguments about the fear of the feminine, and instead conceptualise the presence of hegemonic masculinities as a response to 'a hostile school climate'. As Mac an Ghaill (1996, p.387) notes, masculinities are 'developed in specific institutional contexts in relation to and against other masculinities and femininities'. This may suggest that the function of male and female role-models could be an important factor that influences the behaviour of students.

An alternate conceptualisation for the approaches to learning and behaviour of boys is provided by Martino (1994) who asserts that the problem is founded on normative models of masculinity that fail to value self-expression or emotional support. This shows similarities with Keddie (2003, p.290) who comments on the social reproduction of 'limited and restrictive understandings of

masculinity' through schooling. In some respects, this is a reframing of Moffitt's (1993) maturity gap, whereby students demonstrate laddish behaviours as a mask to conceal their inability to confront their emotional vulnerability. From Jackson's (2002; 2003) perspective, we can conceptualise a fear of failure as one such emotional deficit. For Jackson (2003), laddish behaviour stems from boy's fear of failure; rather than engaging with a difficult task and encountering failure, it is possible to rationalise task-avoidance instead.

This example demonstrates overlap with the ideas explored in the first section of the review. When presented with a challenging task, an individual driven by an 'entity theory' view of intelligence, who is naturally predisposed to optimize success, is now inclined to disengage. However, refusal to engage on account of difficulty would most likely result in the attachment of a label of being 'dumb' or 'stupid', particularly in a hegemonic environment which values competition and has a clear peer-hierarchy. Therefore, an individual as a social-actor, rationalises the decision to present himself as something other than 'dumb' and instead seeks to maintain their place within their peer-group by demonstrating 'laddish' behaviour.

As this example illustrates, hegemonic masculinity and a culture of 'laddishness' can provide one perspective to examine boys' behaviours and approaches to learning. However, Archer and

Yamashita (2003) note that this perspective is limited by the inability of researchers to locate a single hegemonic masculinity. Despite this, as a theoretical perspective, hegemonic masculinity is able to provide a number of sensitizing concepts that can be utilized to critically examine my research question.

2.4 Working-Class Boys' Behaviour and Approaches to Learning

Social class has long been recognized as a key factor in determining the education experiences and attainment of students (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977; Reay, 2001; Reay, 2002; Kane, 2006; Ingram, 2009). Despite a long history of research and a range of policy measures within the last two decades designed to engender more equitable outcomes for working class students, Strand's (2014) recent research would appear to suggest that little has changed since Connell's (1993, p.6) observation that 'statistically speaking the best advice we can give to a poor child, keen to get ahead through education, is to choose richer parents'.

This section considers the role social class plays in relation to students' education. It begins by examining socially critical literature to explore the paradox of working-class success in education. Subsequently, it considers how value-system alignments

can provide one perspective for understanding the behaviour and approaches to learning of working-class boys.

2.4.1 Working Class Success: A Strange Paradox

From the perspective of socially critical theorists, a central problem is that the school acts as a site that reproduces and replicates existing social-class inequalities (Freire, 1970; Illich, 1973; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) From this vantage point, the school can be regarded as a 'tactical locus for the management of urban populations' (Ball, 2013, p.58). Drawing on the work of Foucault and considering how power is exercised within schools, Ball (2013, p. 41) notes that the expansion of universal education in urban areas can be seen as an attempt to improve the morality of those who had previously been strangers to education. Indeed, as Titus (2004, p.146) notes, the moral panic concerning boys' behaviour 'lies in viewing controversies about gender and schooling as power struggles of moral regulations' which seek to 'either enhance or constrain social practice'. From this socially critical perspective, the discourses and social practices employed in regulating behaviour in schools today can be traced back to the social institutions of Victorian England, which sought to control the growing urban

population: namely, those in the workhouse, industrial school, and reformatory.

It is possible to regard this striving for urban improvement as being grounded in the pathologization of the working class, where discourse centres on the deficits of working-class families and family life (Steedman, 1986; Reay, 2001). For Mac an Gaill (1996, p. 169) this culture of pathology is a cause of inherent contradiction in urban education whereby 'schooling reproduces wider social relations in preparing young people for the marketplace, while at the same time providing an ideological justification for large-scale working-class failures'. For Ball (2013, p.77) this process has sustained the notion of the defective child grounded in 'a social hereditary of poor parenting, lack of aspirations and a failure to make the home a site of development'.

As Reay (2001, p. 334) observes, the culture of working-class pathologization results in the emergence of a strange paradox for the notion of working-class success that 'is not about the valorisation of working-classness but its erasure'. This shows similarities with Ingram (2009) who frames educational success for the working-classes as a form of escapism which itself further devalues working-class culture.

The deficit of positive images for working-class educational success could be one factor that contributes to the continued underperformance of this group academically (Reay, 2001): a

phenomenon that could arise in a number of ways. Firstly, the internalized framing of the lack of working-class success has been shown to limit the aspirations of working-class students (Reay, 2000), a phenomenon which has been shown to more profoundly affect boys than girls (Connolly & Neill, 2001). Secondly, research has shown the difficulty some students experience in trying to reconcile the value system of the school, with that of their peers and family (Reay, 2002). This conflict in value systems, particularly in reference to working-class boys' education, has been theorised as a stimulus for the development of an anti-school and anti-authoritarian counter-culture (Willis, 1977; Marsh et al., 1978; Hargreaves, 1982; Stahl & Dale, 2013).

The development of such a counter-culture can be regarded as a self-defensive mechanism, in which students assert what little power they have within the context of their school (Stahl & Dale, 2013). However, it is also possible to conceptualise these behaviours as presentations of self, that attempt to mask feelings of inferiority and marginalization (Galloway et al, 2004). In this respect, an important consideration for the behaviour of working-class boys is the extent to which their school environment provides valorisation in relation to their social class and gender.

2.5 - Summary

This chapter has explored a range of theoretical perspectives which consider different explanatory factors for the behaviour and approaches to learning exhibited by working-class boys during schooling. Throughout the chapter, a number of recurring themes suggest important areas of focus for the remainder of this research project.

Specifically, labelling is an important concept that can assist researchers in understanding how and why working-class boys select their behaviour and approaches to learning. In addition to self-labelling in relation to academic self-concept and self-worth, a number of different labels can be attached by staff and students within the school-setting which can determine an individual's behaviour.

The attachment of labels by others and the need for validation within a male peer-group, could suggest that an important way to understand working-class boys' behaviour is through the use of Goffman's (1959) notion of presentation of self. From this perspective, behaviours can be interpreted as acts of self-presentation, whereby working-class boys attempt to navigate a number of self-contradictory expectations such as 'looking and feeling smart' but 'not appearing feminine' within a culture of 'laddish' hegemony.

The alignment of value systems within the school can also play a role in relation to boys' behaviour and approaches to

learning. This does not mean schools need to valorise hegemonic masculinity or working-class culture: they should, however, seek to avoid engagement in forms of cultural and social pathologization.

In light of these observations, a central feature of my research-design will explore the extent to which the concepts of labelling, self-presentation and value-alignment play in relation to the behaviours and approaches to learning exhibited by working-class boys within my professional context. This will be achieved in direct reference to the following research questions:

- How do the causal explanations in existing literature for working-class boys' behaviour, relate to the experience of students in my professional context?
- To what extent can specific interventions, focused on behaviour and approaches to learning, facilitate greater levels of educational equity for working-class boys at School X?

3.0 Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the methodology used to explore the research questions. I commence by explaining the process of research design, providing justification for the methodological approach in relation to the aims and scope of my research. Subsequently, I describe how participants were selected in collaboration with colleagues, and provide a clear rationale for the research methods used and outline ethical considerations about their operation.

3.1 Methodological Overview

Research design is fundamental to any scholar's attempt to explore research questions through empirical investigation. As McNeill (1992, p. vi) notes 'good social science, like all science, is based on good evidence'. It is therefore the aim of any investigator to utilise an approach that is capable of generating both valid and reliable data.

Within the social sciences, the researcher's task is often made more difficult by an inability to apply 'hypothetic-deductive scientific approaches' because 'the firm theoretical base that is called for is just not there' (Robson, 1993, p.20). Indeed, this is the case for this research project and I justify my rejection of such an approach on the following grounds. Firstly, the wide array of different and often conflicting theoretical frames explored in the literature review, demonstrates the absence of a singular perspective in which to ground a hypothesis. To focus on one theory would have grounded my research in a particular perspective without methodological justification. Secondly, to explore a single theory would have been at the expense of understanding alternatives: this would have reduced my ability to critically examine the interplay between different theoretical perspectives, and hindered developing an understanding about how the behaviour and experiences of working-class boys in my educational context, relate to those portrayed in existing literature.

It is against this backdrop, underpinned by a motivation to strive for greater levels of educational equity through ameliorative intervention, that I outline how an action-research methodology was utilised to address my research questions.

3.1.1 Action-Research Methodology

Action-research refers to an approach that has been employed in the social sciences since the first half of the twentieth century (Peters & Robinson, 1984; Hammersley, 2004). In general, action-research can be conceptualised as a cyclical process through which specific hypotheses or interventions are designed, implemented, evaluated and improved (Denscombe, 2003; Hammersley, 2004).

This approach was utilised because it enhanced my ability to address the research questions and afforded the following benefits.

Firstly, action-research is a methodological approach that is driven by a need to 'solve practical real-world problems' in which 'practitioners are crucial [...] in the research process' (Denscombe, p. 74). This feature of action-research made it extremely well-matched to the aims of my third research question. Secondly, as Heikkinen et al. (2007, p. 5) note, action-research acknowledges the 'principal historical continuity' and recognises how 'past [...] events [...] have acted to shape the present'. This allowed me to begin the research by developing an awareness of the participants' behavioural history and school experience. In addition to providing vital research evidence to address my second research question, and explore how participants' experiences related to causal explanations in literature, this information was utilised as a starting point for the development of specific interventions for participants. Furthermore, action-research provided another clear advantage

over other methodological approaches and placed emphasis on working in partnership with other stakeholders to carry out research (Wisker, 2008, p.229). This ensured the methodology was well-matched to working in partnership with other professionals across the school, drawing upon their knowledge and expertise to support my research. Finally, central to action-research is the repetition of research cycles as part of an iterative process of improvement. This provided the advantage of being able to carry out two cycles of research: one to gather information about participants and implement participant-led interventions; the other to draw on the expertise of other professionals and develop further interventions for the research participants.

It is to these two cycles that I now direct my attention, outlining how each cycle sought to address the research questions.

3.1.2 Action-Research Cycle One: Socio-Historic Background & Participant-Led Intervention

Cycle one was conducted over a two-week period and had two research foci. Firstly, to generate sufficient qualitative data to address the second research question and examine the relationship between students' experiences and causal explanations for working-class boys' behaviour found in existing literature. Secondly, to allow participants to exercise their agency and suggest self-led

interventions to improve their in-school behaviour: an activity related to the third research question.

In many respects, the initial cycle was a deliberate attempt to deviate from the standard model of action-research. The sheer breadth of potential explanations for students' behaviour considered in the literature review, meant that it would be unfeasible to begin with a typical model consisting of design, implementation, evaluation and improvement. Instead, it was necessary to generate an understanding about the socio-historical context of the research participants, reducing the focus of interventions to those issues that were relevant to the educational experiences of students within my professional context. Furthermore, I was aware that a major criticism of action-research centres on its inability to generate knowledge about theory, owing to its inherent focus on developing and refining practice (Wallace, 1986; Hammersley, 2004). I wanted to respond to this criticism by grounding the development of practice in those theories which were most closely relevant to the experiences of my research participants. This approach allowed me to generate knowledge about how the theories considered in the literature review were experienced within my professional context, and to develop student-led interventions to enhance behaviour and approaches to learning.

3.1.3 Action-Research Cycle Two: Professional Collaboration and Tailored Interventions

The second cycle took place over a four-week period, and focused on the development of ameliorative strategies to enhance the levels of educational equity experienced by research participants. I began by collaborating with colleagues responsible for behaviour and pastoral care, examining the impact of the student-led interventions in the initial cycle, identifying areas for improvement, and suggesting interventions that could be of benefit to the students. I then interviewed individual participants and evaluated the initial cycle of intervention. During these interviews, I talked to participants about potential interventions highlighted through my collaborations with colleagues. Given the agentic nature of my research, participants were encouraged to suggest their own strategies to improve their behaviour and approaches to learning. Each interview concluded with agreed interventions to be implemented.

The cycle was evaluated using quantitative data which was gathered through an examination of the students' behaviour-logs in their planners and the whole-school behaviour tracking system.

3.2 The Selection of Research Participants

A cohort of four research participants was selected through the use of an internal data-management system and collaborations with colleagues. Initially, I filtered the data to identify those students who met the following criteria:

- Male
- Placed on a behavioural report within the past half-term
- Currently in receipt of free-school meals (FSM)

The initial two criteria for selection ensured the sample would be composed of boys who had a recent history of poor behaviour within the school.

The third criterion, however, presented methodological difficulties. Defining an individual's social-class presents a number of challenges. Within the field of sociology there are a range of definitions for social-class from the classical theories of Marx and Weber to contemporary conceptualisations by the likes of Giddens (1973) and Bourdieu (1984). Furthermore, a range of different methodological approaches could have been employed to attempt to capture the social-class of research participants. I rejected the use of self-reporting or peer-reporting on the following grounds. Firstly, I regarded both methods as inappropriate given the age of the research participants and the sensitivity of my research. Secondly, I lacked confidence in the ability of either method to generate valid and reliable research data.

Instead, I sought to define an individuals' social-class through the use of an objective criterion: namely using a students' FSM status as a proxy for their social class. This was justified by the observation that although a students' FSM status is not an ideal proxy for family income, 'children eligible for FSM are much more likely than other children to be in the lowest income families' (Hobbes & Vignoles, 2009, p. 685). A limiting factor when using this approach, is the ability of the objective criterion to produce a reliable sample from the population. Therefore, I acknowledge that a weakness of this approach is that it excluded a number of working-class students from the initial sample because they were not in receipt of FSM. Despite this, I believe that the approach was justifiable on the following grounds. Although there exist working-class students who are not in receipt of FSMs, an individual's FSM status as an indicator for family income can be applied as a sufficient, but not necessary, condition of being working-class. Therefore, I remained confident that the sample generated would comprise working-class boys with poor behaviour: it would simply not contain all the working-class boys with a history of poor behaviour in the school population.

From this sample, discussions were used to identify the potential research participants. Given the focus on in-school behaviour and approaches to learning, students were deleted from the resulting data-set if they received educational provision

elsewhere. Furthermore, I collaborated with pastoral staff and engaged in discussions to eliminate those students from the sample who had ongoing exogenous factors which contributed to their in-school behaviour, or who were soon to commence alternative provision or undertake a managed-move to another school. From the remaining sample, four research participants were selected through the use of a simple random sampling method conducted with a random number generator.

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data was gathered throughout the project to assess the impact of specific interventions on students' behaviour and approaches to learning. This data was gathered from two secondary sources in the following ways.

I recorded how many room-removes, lessons spent in isolation and detentions the students received, using the whole-school data management system. Although this gave me accurate and detailed information about how frequently in-school sanctions were applied to participants over time, it did not present a full

picture. This method would only detect behavioural incidents that were flagged up as being serious at a whole-school level. Therefore, to gain a more nuanced account of students' behaviour, I tracked the comments that were recorded in students' planners, which captured low-level disruptive behaviour not recorded on the whole-school system. These approaches enabled me to triangulate data to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions by considering how participants' behaviour varied during the project.

3.3.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative research data was gathered during both cycles of the action-research through the use of individual interviews. There were two foci to the collection of this data. Firstly, to understand how the experiences and behaviours of the research participants related to those outlined in existing literature. Secondly, to understand from the students' perspectives how their behaviour and approaches to learning were affected as a result of specific interventions.

Individual interviews were utilised due to concerns that peer-groups, and peer-hierarchies, could compromise the reliability of

data generated through focus-groups or group interviews (Basch, 1987). By using individual interviews, I hoped to eliminate this form of bias from the data-collection method. Moreover, I recognised that by rejecting group interview techniques, I reduced the opportunity to 'elicit a range of views' and explore conflicting perspectives (Gilbert, 2001, p.129). This was, however, a compromise that I was prepared to make because the generation of reliable data was more important than my ability to explore conflicting perspectives 'live' in a group- setting. Instead, it would be sufficient to explore conflicting views and experiences through an analysis of the research findings.

The individual interviews were semi-structured and approximately sixty percent of the questions were pre-prepared. The questioning focused on issues highlighted by the literature review, such as students' behaviour within school, motivation to learn and peer-groups. The remaining questions were composed in response to answers from students and were used to examine, in greater depth, how students' perspectives or behaviours related to those found in literature. This approach allowed me to 'place more emphasis on a point of interest' than would be afforded by structured interviewing techniques (Denscombe, 2003, p.167). Additionally, the pre-prepared questions ensured a level of consistency that would have been difficult to achieve with unstructured interviews.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

I began by considering ethical issues related to the research participants' confidentiality. Participants were assured that pseudonyms would be used throughout the process to protect their anonymity. They were informed that the content of the interviews would remain confidential, and would not be shared with staff, other students or parents, except in those circumstances where child safeguarding or legal conflicts of interest were highlighted.

I also considered the ethics of data-storage. During the project, a significant amount of sensitive data was collected about the students' behavioural history. Additionally, digital-audio recordings were used to capture data from the interviews, supporting my ability to ensure accuracy when analysing students' responses. In compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998), all research data was stored on a password-protected laptop with an encrypted hard drive. Participants were informed that all data relating to the research would be destroyed at the termination of the project.

During the research design, I considered how the presence of power-differentials between myself and participants could lead to bias in the collection of research data through interviews (Cain, 2011). I was aware that I was unlikely, as a teacher-researcher, to

remove the presence of power-differentials. However, throughout my research design, I attempted to minimise their potential to shape the findings. It was of paramount importance to ensure that participants avoided 'merely telling what they believe the interviewer wants to hear' (Kvale, 2006) and to this end I took the following steps:

- Reminded participants at the start of each interview that the content of our conversation would remain confidential.
- Explicitly told the participants that I wanted them to be honest and that they should not tell me what they thought I wanted to hear.
- Reduced power-differentials in the physical space by being seated at the same level as the participants.

Despite these steps, power-differentials may still have shaped the research findings. However, I believe I implemented adequate measures to ensure a sufficient level of reliability in the research data generated.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the findings of the research project and is presented in the form of individual vignettes for each participant. This approach was selected for the following reasons. Firstly, by focusing on the individual, the findings avoid resorting to generalizations. This will enable me to explore nuanced differences

during the analysis and discussion section, in the subsequent chapter. Secondly, this form of presentation allows me to synthesise qualitative and quantitative data for each participant, providing a clear narrative about the effects of specific interventions on each individual: an approach which mirrors the agentic nature of this research.

Throughout this chapter, pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of the participants.

4.2 Jordan

At the beginning of the project, Jordan's behaviour consisted of low-level disruptions in a minority of specific subjects:

In some lessons I'm alright and pretty well behaved. In other lessons like art, dance and music I just mess around a little bit. I get a bit too excited and it depends where I'm sitting as well, because if I'm sitting next to my friends I want to mess around with them.

Jordan's sanctions occurred due to his inability to know what was acceptable in lessons:

Sometimes the teachers don't agree on what I do and [...] I go a bit too over the top, but, its just when I don't know when to stop and where the line is.

In our initial interview, Jordan cited the following situations where he had been sanctioned or reprimanded in school:

Talking when the teacher's talking, when somebody gives an answer what I don't agree on or something. So I just talk to my

friends and say I don't agree, but then I'm talking over the teacher so they give me a verbal warning. And in dance when the teacher tells us to stop, I carry on a bit more. I just get into it a bit too much so I just carry on.

Place and positioning in the classroom, relative to his peer-group, also appeared to play a role in Jordan's behaviour:

When I'm sat next to my friends I normally talk to them [...] and don't get on with my work. Then, when I'm sat next to somebody who [...] I don't know them as well, I just get on with my work because I don't have somebody to talk to and get distracted by.

Jordan acknowledged that in some situations he escalated situations by ignoring the instructions of staff:

When I'm with a teacher and they give me a verbal warning [...] but they don't normally give me a verbal [...] I take it and then carry on with my work. But if it's a teacher who always gives me a verbal, I carry on coz I don't agree what they've said. I think that coz I've just set a bad example in the first day with them they keep an eye on me throughout the lesson.

I asked Jordan whether he was motivated by a 'lad-culture' in which he 'enjoyed showing off in front of his friends':

I've seen people do it, but I don't really do it. It's just how I behave around them, just talking really.

However, Jordan recognized the existence of a culture that sought to feminize hard work in the school:

I think because people think that girls do most of the work, if some boys do it, their friends might think that they're a bit girlish. Most of the girls just get on with their work and don't have many conversations and boys normally talk about football and rugby or what they've done at the weekend.

For Jordan, sport played a large part in his school life, peer-group and his own identity:

I think because I play for one team and some of my friends play for another we have to tell each other about the score. In rugby, they've got to tell them what happened and how they won it or how they lost it. I'm sporty and don't feel any pressure from friends because my friends are sporty as well. If you are a sporty person and your friends are too, they'll be more of a friend to you than somebody who likes English. They'll be more of a friend to you because that's what they do and they'll like it, so you'll talk about it.

For Jordan's peer-group, sport was an important factor for membership:

They'll have to be a bit sporty. They'll not need to be but we'd like them to be a bit funny as well because we like entertainment and stuff. They're the two main reasons to fit into our friendship group. They'd like doing sports like football or rugby and doing races. When you go out, they'd want to play football. They'd make a couple of jokes but won't make too many that they'll get verbals. They'll make the class not as dull, coz if there is a bit of funniness in the class people will be a bit more upbeat.

Jordan set out the following intervention for the first cycle of action-research:

I think if I got moved away from my friends then my behaviour would be better. It'll also depend on the work because if its hard I'll get distracted. I'll have conversations with friends about how do it, then we'd get distracted and talk about something else instead. I'll need to stop that happening.

The following table collates quantitative data gathered from Jordan's planner and the whole-school behavioural log to show the impact of the first cycle of action-research:

Average Sanctions (per week)	Before 1 st Intervention	After 1 st Intervention
Comments in Planner	7	2

School Detentions	1	0
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After his improvement as a result of the initial intervention, my collaborations with pastoral staff emphasised the importance of praising Jordan's improvement and allowing him to develop his own strategies to further enhance his behaviour. In our interview, Jordan was extremely positive and proud of his achievement:

I think I've improved because we've had a talk. Now, if I find that I'm getting distracted, I focus on my work. The only time I have silliness now is if something silly went on in the corridor and we carry it on in lesson. I've tried to do the opposite of what people who misbehave do. If somebody tries to talk to me, I'll just turn my back or try and pretend that I'm not listening or can't hear them. I don't talk as much now to people who try to talk to me.

Where negative comments had been recorded in his planner since the last meeting, Jordan explored the reasons why he had received sanctions:

In English, I was sat behind one of my friends. He kept talking to me and I got distracted. In History, I was being silly throughout the lesson. In Art, the teacher does a demonstration of what you are supposed to do. I was standing behind one of my friends so I was talking to him. Later, I couldn't do the thing with a needle and thread, so I went over to my friend and asked him to help, but the teacher thought we were just talking.

I should have stood away from my friends in Art and I should have asked the person next to me for help, then I'd not have got the comments. In English, once I had a verbal warning I should have asked to move seats away from my friends. In History, we were doing partners and I shouldn't have picked my friend, I should have picked somebody I was friends with but who I didn't mess around with.

I asked Jordan to explain what had changed since we had last

met and what he thought he should do to improve further:

I always used to answer back [...] when I got a verbal but now I've just taken the verbal and tried to calm down a bit, so I don't get a written comment.

Nothing has changed in my friendship group. They've known that I want to get on with my work more now, they know why I'm trying to ignore them sometimes. I'm not getting any comments in Drama and Dance and my friends know I'm trying to get on a bit more.

I asked Jordan how the changes had altered his experiences of schooling and whether they were worth it:

The lessons aren't as fun, because I'm not trying to talk to my friends and it's not as funny [...] coz my friends some of them are really funny. When I ignore them the lessons aren't as funny because I'm not listening to them. I think I'm learning more because in Spanish I used to get just over half marks and now I'm getting nearly full marks. I think it is worth it. If I get better grades, I get a better education so that I can get a better job. I can still be friends with the people who I'm friends with.

At the end of my interview with Jordan, we agreed that his focus should be on sustaining the improvements he had made to his behaviour and that he should continue using the strategies he had put in place, ensuring each comment was an opportunity to reflect on how he could have made better choices. The following table shows the impact of the second cycle of intervention on Jordan's behaviour:

Average Sanctions (per week)	After 1 st Intervention	After 2 nd Intervention
Comments in Planner	2	1.5
School Detentions	0	0

4.3 Kirk

At the beginning of the first cycle, Kirk talked about how his behaviour had started to change since being off a whole-school behavioural report:

Since I've come off report, I've done a bit better and have started to get less comments. I still can get a bit silly in lessons and try to be the class clown.

I asked Kirk what motivated this behaviour:

I like attention and trying to make people laugh. It doesn't always work out in my favour because I get comments, but I still make people laugh.

I asked Kirk about his friendship group and what was important to belong to the group:

There are quite a few funny people and naughty people in my friendship group. Although, I've tried to stop hanging around with some of the boys and get some friends who behave better. To fit into a naughty group, you have to do stupid things that you get dared to do. When I started school, I did stuff to make friends because I didn't know many people. I just got pulled into it. I'm not going to blame them; I did the stupid things myself.

I asked Kirk whether he felt any pressure to misbehave from his peer-group:

There is pressure on boys to misbehave. I mean, if I was a goody two shoes I'd get the mick taken out of me. So I get laughs out of people. It makes me popular.

I was interested to explore whether Kirk thought that girls experienced the same pressure:

I think that girls are better behaved, but, they do behave badly, but they don't get caught coz they're not as loud. Girls are sly and keep

it on the down-low.

I asked Kirk to explain to me how his behaviour varied in different lessons, what caused this, and how it could be improved:

I always behave in Maths because I have a good teacher and they help me. I misbehave a lot in English because there are lots of loud people in my class. I'm really badly behaved in French because I don't like the subject or my teacher. I was so bad in Science that I got moved to the front of the class. ICT is my worst lesson because my teacher doesn't help, then I get aggravated and carry on being disruptive.

If a lesson is hard and I don't understand it, lots of my teachers say 'you should have been listening'. I then start talking because I don't understand how to do it, then I get in trouble. I think for my behaviour to get better, I need more help with my work. I need to speak to my teachers where I am struggling and let them know. But, I also need to stop being distracted. That's hard because I'll say it, and then after two weeks I'll be distracted again: it's hard to keep up.

At the end of this initial cycle, it was agreed that Kirk would speak to teachers to let them know that he would like extra help in lessons. He would also implement his own strategies to avoid being distracted in lesson, such as focusing more on his work than distractions from his peers. The following table shows the impact of the initial cycle of intervention on Kirk's behaviour:

Average Sanctions (per week)	Before Intervention	After 1 st Intervention
Comments in Planner	4	7
School Detentions	1	2

I was concerned that Kirk's behaviour had deteriorated since the implementation of the first cycle of action-research. My conversation with Kirk's Director of Learning revealed that his behaviour had a tendency to deteriorate when he was not on school report. It was therefore decided that being placed on a behavioural report would be our suggested intervention for the second cycle of research.

I began the second cycle by asking Kirk what had happened to his behaviour since our previous meeting:

I've had some bad weeks since coming off report. I've got a lot more comments again.

I asked Kirk to explain why he thought this had happened:

When I'm on report I try and do my best every lesson so that I don't go into inclusion. After I come off report, I don't think much about getting a verbal or a comment. When you're not on report, you're not getting looked at with behaviour as much. If you get three comments in a day, you'd not get as many sanctions. It doesn't really matter as much when you're not on report.

I asked Kirk whether he found it more difficult to regulate his own behaviour without staff purposely keeping a close eye on him:

Yes, coz my head of year has helped me since year seven. Knowing that she is coming in lesson makes me want to get better and helps me control myself. I'll try not to mess around and backchat.

When I'm not watched, it feels like I'm free to mess around. It's like if you can get away with it you do. I mean, when I was in year seven I did some really bad stuff. When a teacher wasn't looking I stuck my fingers up at them. Then when I got grassed in I left and shouted 'for f's sake'.

I don't know why I'm badly behaved. I just know it helps when the teacher looks after me.

Following this, Kirk reflected on his behaviour and suggested his intervention for the second cycle of action-research:

I'm going to ask Ms. Jackson (Head of Year) to put me on a card thing for each lesson. That way every lesson my planner gets looked at. I'm going to need to stay on the behaviour card for a bit.

One of my worst things in lesson is answering back and making it worse for myself. I kind of get annoyed a bit easily. So I'm going to try and keep my mouth shut if I get a verbal, I'm just not very good at doing it.

The following table shows the impact of the second cycle of intervention on Kirk's in-class behaviour:

Average Sanctions (per week)	After 1 st Intervention	After 2 nd Intervention
Comments in Planner	7	2
School Detentions	2	0

4.4 Jamie

At the start of the first cycle, I asked Jamie to describe his behaviour in school. His account was both frank and honest, a feature which I ascribe to the the fact that I have taught Jamie since Year seven and have a good working relationship with him:

It's not good. Most of the time people take mick out of me because of my weight and stuff like that. Then I bottle everything up and I'll be alright and then I'll just have a massive outburst and then I'll not be good for a long period of time.

Exploring this further, I asked how long this had been a feature of his behaviour:

It's ever since [...] Primary [...] because I broke my leg and couldn't move for six weeks [...] I was eating out of boredom.

I was intrigued to explore what specific behaviours Jamie was displaying in lessons which led to sanctions:

Most of my comments are for talking because I'll be talking about random stuff, nothing to do with lesson [...] what went on last night or stuff. Some of them are for swearing when I get annoyed and a couple for refused planner and that's about it. Oh, and I've had a couple of work comments.

I was interested to examine the discrepancy between Jamie's attribution of his weight as a cause of his behaviour, with general low-level disruptions in lessons and defiance towards the instructions of staff:

When I get mick taken out of me, I'll speak to my mates about it and tell them stuff. When I get work comments, I'm thinking more about the bad things about me than the good and being distracted. When it comes to my planner, I don't see the point in giving it over, I don't know why.

I was interested to know whether Jamie thought his behaviour varied between different subjects:

It doesn't depend on which lesson it is, it'd depend on what teacher it is. When I'm upstairs in Geography, I feel like she's always picking on me because I have bad behaviour and I'm in her form.

It's different in some lessons. Some teachers are nice and try and reason with me. Some other teachers just shout and I don't know why, but when I get told off I laugh, so I get told off even more.

In English, I know I'm in a bad set and I want to do better so I behave. So Miss Hudson, she's always nice with me. She'll help me and she sat me next to this kid who needs help because she knows I'll help him and she's always asking questions and she always lets me and Ben help other people because we come from a higher set and it was because of our behaviour why we got moved down.

I was interested to explore whether Jamie's peer-group played any

role in his classroom behaviour:

I think friends affect my behaviour. Like before, when I was hanging around with my mate Simon [...] coz he was good and was a good influence on me I was behaving and not getting no comments or owt like that. When I started hanging round with all my mates again, the ones that aren't my mates, they're just there, I started getting back in trouble again. I just don't listen because I'm with them half the time. I think its because I'm just showing off, trying to be the class clown, laughing all the time and making inappropriate jokes.

I asked Jamie whether he liked the role of class clown and what it meant to him to be in that position:

If I'm the class clown, I don't get anyone say anything about my weight because they like me [...] I can actually fit in with them.

I was interested to know what Jamie and his friends thought about the feminization of hard-work:

I'm not sure. Yesterday, Simon, coz he's really well behaved, he stood in [...] a feminine posture and everyone took mick out of him. Then I thought it wasn't right nice so I don't know. It would be good to be able to get the work done and stuff like that but it wouldn't be because sometimes you might get taken mick out of you, coz they'll call you nerd and stuff like that.

Next, I wanted to explore how the level of challenge in a lesson affected Jamie's behaviour:

If its really difficult, I'll start talking which will affect things. If its really easy, I'll get on with it and finish, then I'll ask for more work. But if it's difficult then I won't get on with it and I'll keep asking people for help and they'll start talking [...] because they're a couple of questions in front, so I'll start talking with them and I'll get told off because I'm far behind everyone else.

I asked Jamie what steps he thought he'd need to make to improve his behaviour in the first cycle:

I think by working harder I can get better in all my subjects. In lessons, I like to have a drink near me coz I'm warm and I've been running around, so I like to have a drink near me and when I ask the teacher they say no. I wouldn't like to sit near my mates because I'd get distracted and wouldn't listen, so I need to move away from them and then I need to ask teachers [...] to go back for help again because last time when I was coming back to do revision, I did really well and got good grades at the end of year. So I think I just need to work harder and ignore the ones around me and just concentrate on my education.

It was agreed that Jamie would keep a bottle of water on his desk in lessons. Jamie asked his teachers to move his seat in lessons and if he could come back after school for extra tuition. The following cycle shows the impact of the first cycle of research on the number of sanctions Jamie received:

Average Sanctions (per week)	Before Intervention	After 1 st Intervention
Comments in Planner	8	3
School Detentions	2	1

Impressed with Jamie's improvement, I spoke with his pastoral leader and we agreed that he should try to maintain his current level of behaviour with the same interventions. I was made aware that Jamie would be going on holiday during term-time, I therefore conducted a shorter interview with Jamie before his holiday and agreed to meet with him after his return

to refocus the interventions. I met with Jamie in the second week after he returned to school and asked him how things had gone before his holiday and how things were since he had returned:

Since our last meeting, I've been doing bad, not doing what I've been told, walking out of lessons. I was good before the holiday but since I've come back I've been kicked out of lesson each day and had twelve comments last week.

I was interested to explore why Jamie's behaviour had deteriorated since coming back off holiday:

Over the past few weeks my grand-dad has been in hospital. I've been a bit scared so I've not been behaving. At the moment, I feel like I don't really care about anything, I just do whatever I want. In rugby, I'll walk off and leave. In school, if I get told off for something I don't agree with, I'll just walk off. I've got into a habit where if somebody tells me to do something I don't agree with, I'll just refuse to do it because I don't think that's right.

I asked Jamie in which lessons his behaviour was worse since returning:

It's mainly cover teachers that I don't behave for because I think that I can mess about for them.

I asked Jamie to expand on this:

Why? Because they're not my normal teacher. We just mess about because they aren't right bothered because they're not our proper teachers, so its like why should we be bothered about it. Proper teachers care about what we get and how much work we do and stuff like that. Whereas cover support teachers just sit there and [...] don't discipline us as much.

I was interested to understand how lessons in which little discipline was used, accounted for the majority of Jamie's comments:

In cover lessons, they'll not say anything to me, so I'll just keep doing it and doing it. So I'll talk and they'll give me a comment for it and then I'll talk again and they'll give me another comment for it and then I'll just answer them back and they'll room-remove me.

I asked Jamie what he needed to do to improve for the rest of the cycle:

I don't know. I will be better next year when I've had a fresh start over summer.

I asked Jamie what support he was getting in school to deal with those issues that were causing him stress outside of school:

Nothing, coz no one knows now. I just bottle everything up and try to deal with it myself instead of talking to people.

I asked Jamie why he bottled things up:

Before, I've never been able to talk to anyone. Nobody listens really. I haven't been used to talking to anyone about owt.

I asked Jamie how he would feel about having support from a member of the schools' care support and guidance team:

I don't want my friends finding out. A friend got help and people called him a wuss and stuff like that. People might just take the mick out of me.

I concluded the session by explaining to Jamie that he could meet weekly, on a confidential basis, with a member of the school pastoral team, to gain support for his stress management. This was established as the only intervention for the second half of the second cycle of action-research. The table below shows the impact of the entire second cycle on Jamie's behaviour:

Average Sanctions (per week)	After 1 st Intervention	After 2 nd Intervention
Comments in Planner	3	4
School Detentions	1	1

4.5 Ryan

I began the first cycle of action-research by asking Ryan to describe his behaviour around school and explain the sanctions he receives:

Well I normally keep out of isolation, but sometimes I'm up in there. I get comments for talking in lessons, but I don't usually get that many. I get some for arguing with staff. I go in isolation for smoking. If you get caught you get four units.

I was aware that Ryan had recently spend a large amount of time in isolation, so I asked him what specifically had caused this:

Well I got put in for smoking in school, and coz I was seen outside of school. Also, I got in a fight with another student and then assaulted a member of staff.

I asked Ryan to explain to me the circumstances around his fighting and assault on a member of staff:

I don't know what I was doing...I just ended up being racist to Ismail. He was winding me up and I didn't know what to say, so I called him a racist name. After that, they chased me inside. Then five minutes later I went back out. Then Mr Smith started following me, he gripped me and I was grabbing on to the pole so that he couldn't drag me or owt. Then Mr Benjamin came over and grabbed me and then I ended up hitting Mr Smith.

I asked Ryan why he hit Mr Smith:

I dunno, he just said I assaulted him and then I can't remember.

I was interested to understand the role of Ryan's peer-group in his schooling:

The group I hang around with we've been mates since Primary. We just hang out and talk. If we have problems outside of school, or if owt's happened then we'll talk to someone about it.

I asked Ryan whether he or his friends worked hard in school:

Most of my mates don't like concentrating.

I asked Ryan whether he would be friends with a hard-working boy:

I'd be less likely to be friends with a boy who worked hard. I think it's girlish for boys to work hard. They get called names like nerd and geek and stuff like that.

I asked Ryan whether it's important to be seen as tough in his friendship group and whether fighting is part of the group culture:

It's important to be hard. Mostly we all just fight. I don't know why we do. I wish I didn't, because it hurts knuckles and all that. Then obviously when you're older and you need your hands to work you can't.

Intrigued about Ryan not knowing why he fights. I asked him what usually causes him to fight:

I get into fights about people talking about mi mam and all that. They call her a [prostitute] and a fat cow and all that...they do it to wind me up...It makes me feel angry...I hit them.

I asked Ryan if he thought they deliberately tried to wind him up:

Yeah, they do it deliberately.

I followed this by asking if Ryan knew of any other way to deal with it:

I could tell someone but...I don't know why I don't.

I asked Ryan whether he experienced peer-pressure:

Yeah, that's why I smoke. My mate started smoking and I felt left out and so I started smoking. If my mates do something then I do, instead of getting called names like chicken and all that.

I asked Ryan how being called names made him feel:

When I get called names it makes me feel depressed. I don't get called names often because I do the stuff my mates do. If I didn't do what they did, I'd get called names.

I decided to move my line of questioning on and asked Ryan how the difficulty of a lesson affected his behaviour:

If it's proper hard, it stresses you out and you just end up kicking off with someone because you don't get it.

I asked Ryan whether he had any strategies for coping with difficult work:

No. I just find the work hard and then I start kicking off.

Finally, I asked Ryan what steps he thought he needed to take to improve his behaviour:

I don't know how to improve my behaviour. It needs to be improved because of my temper and reacting.

We concluded the meeting by agreeing on a range of interventions for Ryan. Firstly, I would e-mail his teachers to let them know that he would like more support in lessons. Secondly, I liaised with a member of the pastoral team to set up anger and stress management sessions with Ryan. Finally, Ryan agreed to drop-in daily with a member of support staff, to have a five-minute conversation about how his day was going in school. The following table shows the data for the first cycle of action-research:

Average Sanctions (per week)	Before Intervention	After 1 st Intervention
Comments in Planner	9	4
School Detentions	3	1

I began the second cycle of action-research by asking Ryan to describe how his behaviour had changed over the first cycle:

I've got less comments. I'm not kicking off as much around school.

I asked Ryan what was different now and what prevented him from kicking off:

I get more help in lessons now and spend more time in the Learning Support Unit (LSU).

I asked Ryan to explain how the learning support unit was different to normal lessons:

You only have five people in there so you get more help when you need it and that. You also don't get distracted because you're all doing different stuff.

I was concerned about the equity juxtaposition between the provision of extra support for Ryan with his removal from mainstream lessons in the majority of his subjects. I asked Ryan whether he thought there were any disadvantages to working in the LSU:

None really. I prefer it to normal lessons. You get all the help you need and if you're having a stress or something they let you calm down and chill out.

I asked Ryan whether he was learning more or less now that

he was in the LSU:

I dunno. It's different for different subjects. In [Maths, English & Science] I get booklets of set work, so I'm doing the same as everyone else in normal lessons. In other subjects I get nothing sent, so I do extra Maths or English with Miss.

I was interested to find out how Ryan's drop-in sessions with a member of support staff were going:

I've not really done it everyday. I just go and see Miss if I'm having a bad day and have a chat.

I wanted to know if Ryan was finding this occasional contact beneficial:

It's alright coz if I'm having a bad day Miss just listens. It helps me stop kicking off.

I concluded the meeting by discussing the potential interventions for the second cycle of action-research. In my liaisons with Ryan's pastoral leader we discussed that a potential way forward would be to continue providing the same pastoral support, and begin reintegrating Ryan into mainstream lessons at a pace suitable to him. We were both in agreement that to simply put Ryan back into mainstream lessons could result in a return to his previous misbehaviour. I put this suggestion to Ryan and we agreed that for the second cycle he would go back to mainstream lessons for Maths, English and Science with immediate effect. Following this, he would liaise with his Head of Year to arrange a timetable for going back to mainstream lessons in other subjects.

The following table shows data for the second cycle of Ryan's

intervention:

Average Sanctions (per week)	After 1 st Intervention	After 2 nd Intervention
Comments in Planner	4	2.5
School Detentions	1	0.5

5 Analysis

I present my analysis in two sections, relating to each of my research questions. I begin by considering the relationship between

the causal explanations for working-class boys' behaviour presented in literature, and the experiences of students in my professional context. Subsequently, I examine the extent to which the specific interventions put in place for the research participants facilitated enhanced levels of educational equity.

5.1 Critical Examination of the Research Findings and their Relationship to Existing Literature

To facilitate the examination of the relationship between the experiences of boys in my professional context and the causal explanation for working-class boys' behaviour, I utilise a systematic approach which considers each of the theoretical perspectives presented in the literature review in turn.

5.1.1 Difference Theories

In the literature review I considered two *difference theories*, pubertal development and medical difference, that may help to explain the occurrence of boys' poor behaviour during secondary education.

The findings demonstrated some evidence to support the existence of the hypothesised 'maturity gap' (Williams & Dunlop,

1999, p. 158) specifically in relation to emotional maturity.

Instances of this can be observed in:

- Ryan's inability to manage his temper when other students deliberately provoked him.
- The challenges Jamie faced in dealing with low self-esteem concerning his weight and in expressing his emotions and anxiety for his ill grand-father.

In both instances, violence and poor behaviour were used as coping mechanisms: strategies that appear to indicate the gulf between the boys' biological and emotional maturity (Moffitt, 1993; Williams & Dunlop 1999). However, the presence of this 'maturity gap' was not seen in all of the research participants, which therefore raises questions about the generalizability of its application to studies of boys' behaviour.

Furthermore, where a maturity gap was observed, it was always part of a much larger and more complex set of events, such as Ryan and Jamie's subjection to long-term bullying. This suggests that because of the inexorable relationship with other causal factors, the proposed maturity gap may be better understood from a perspective of interactive theories as opposed to biological determinism. Indeed, although the research findings illustrated that

students sometimes used poor behaviour to gain social-status within their groups (Silbereisen & Kracke, 1993), this had as much to do with students' self-esteem, hobbies and interests. For example, in my discussions with Kirk (p. 58), he explained that his poor behaviour was a strategy used to gain friends when he started school. It seems implausible to ascribe this behaviour solely to pubertal development. Rather, I suggest that theories of pubertal development, which seek to explain poor behaviour and delinquency in boys, cannot be considered in isolation of the wider social context. This indicates a need for researchers to integrate the theory of pubertal deviancy with research that recognises the importance of wider sociological and psychological issues, and the role of individuals as agents in their own behaviour.

During my research, I found little evidence to support, or refute, theories concerned with the presence of a medical condition or SEN and their role in determining the behaviour of students. However, it is important to note that all participants recognised that they displayed certain poor behaviours in times of stress or frustration with their academic work. This suggests that a central component to improving students' levels of educational equity is ensuring that sufficient support systems are in place to assist students in their management of stressful situations. During the intervention cycles, all students developed strategies to control and mediate their behaviour. Drawing on Jull (2008, p.13), this raises

important questions about how practitioners can transition from using the term ‘emotional and behavioural difficulties’, as mere labelling of a deficit, and instead use this to drive the identification of a specific need and inform tailored intervention. Indeed, it appears that this could be one important mechanism ‘to respond to students whose particular SEN seems to justify punitive disciplinary action, including exclusion’ (Jull, 2008, p.13) and instead create higher levels of educational equity for students.

5.1.2 Reactive Theories

In the literature review, I considered how the reactive theories of behaviourism and achievement motivation could explain the prevalence of poor behaviour in working-class boys.

Galloway et al. (2004, p.92), note ‘the central tenet of behaviourism is that all motivation arises from basic drives, instincts or emotions in ways that are predictable’. I identified the following behaviours in the findings which align with this theoretical perspective:

- Jordan describes a behavioural trait in which he defies the instructions of staff if they regularly give him sanctions (p.52)
- Kirk identifies that he only behaves if he is monitored by staff (p. 58).

- Jamie talks about a developed habit of defiance if he disagrees with instructions (p.63)
- Ryan finds difficulty in controlling his aggression when people insult his mother (p.66)

All these behaviours could be regarded as examples of learned and predictable responses to given stimuli and thus conform to the behaviourist perspective. However, over the course of the project, some students were able to demonstrate an ability to adapt and change their typical behaviours in given situations. For example, Jordan began to avoid confrontations with staff and Ryan began to avoid confrontation when stressed. I think this highlights two important points. Firstly, behaviourism remains an important theoretical perspective for understanding students' learnt behaviours and the levels of automaticity with which their behaviours respond to given stimuli: something which can inform researchers about how embedded a behaviour is. Secondly, understanding students' learnt behaviours could prove instrumental in developing interventions that improve it. During this study, engagement with the meta-cognitive process of reflecting on classroom behaviours proved to be a useful strategy that informed the development of new approaches to classroom situations which disequibrated students' learnt responses.

Galloway et al (2004, p.92) assert that a weakness of behaviourism is its inability to understand how interactions between social-actors shape behaviours. However, I would suggest that this could also be a strength: behaviourism provides a lens of analysis to understand how ingrained and automatic students' responses are to specific stimuli, information which is invaluable to practitioners' attempts to develop interventions that enhance the quality of interactions between student and teacher.

The research findings appear to show similarities with the negative conceptualisation of achievement motivation outlined by Atkinson (1957;1964), in which students' behaviours are driven by avoiding the experience of failure. For example:

- Jordan talked about task avoidance within his peer-group when faced with challenging work (p.53)
- Kirk implied that he gets more distracted when presented with challenging work (p.57)
- Jamie described how his response to hard work is to start talking to friends which often leads to distraction (p.61)
- Ryan discussed his tendency to 'kick-off' after becoming 'stressed out' when presented with 'proper hard' work (p.67).

These behaviours appear to arise from a desire to avoid failure, getting 'distracted', 'chatting' and 'kicking-off' act as defence mechanisms that suppress students' continued exposure to feelings of failure, or challenge, that might be experienced through perseverance with demanding activities.

It is important to note however, there is little evidence to support the positive conceptualisation of achievement motivation in which behaviours arise out of a desire to experience success. The only example of a behaviour similar to positive achievement motivation was demonstrated by Jordan's change of behaviour and increased focus on work in lesson. However, Jordan's reasons for changing his behaviour could also be conceptualised as delayed gratification focused on his future employment prospects instead of increased satisfaction from his academic work (p.55).

A contributing factor for the absence of positive conceptualisations of achievement motivation may be the presence of a peer-group culture, recognised by all participants, that pathologised hardworking and successful boys. This shows similarity with Galloway et al. (2004), who note that an important feature of achievement motivation is a concern with who defines success and how it is defined. For each boy in this study, being successful in school depended on a wide range of factors beyond academic success in the classroom.

Like behaviourism, achievement motivation is strongly dependant upon the interactions of different social-actors. However, it is not without utility. In this project, its application highlighted the existence of a counter-culture within the school that failed to valorise academic success for boys. Furthermore, it also allowed me to observe some of the attributes that the boys valued in their schooling, such as being ‘funny’ or ‘sporty’. This is important because it may allow leaders and practitioners to identify the discrepancy between the values they hold for the students and the values the students hold for themselves. An awareness of this lacuna may be central to the attempts of school leaders to implement policies and strategies that generate more equitable experiences and outcomes for their students.

5.1.3 Interactive Theories

Central to interactive theories is the recognition of individuals as agentic social-actors and sense-makers who construct models about how the world works (Jones, 2003; James, 2008). In this section, I consider three concepts from the field of sociology and two psychological perspectives.

The findings clearly demonstrate that symbolic interactionism is an important theoretical concept for understanding the behaviour of students during schooling. Central to the utility of this concept is

its emphasis on understanding a student's behaviour as a result of their interpretation of others' actions (Jones, 2003, p. 103). As a researcher, this allowed me to understand how and why students' behaviour arose from given situations and how they interpreted the social world of the classroom.

Throughout the project, symbolic interactionism was always related to the sociological perspectives of labelling and the presentation of self. Therefore, I consider how these theories interacted with each other and provide specific examples to support my observations.

I believe that identity, its self-construction and mediation, is a unifying feature that allowed me to observe the interaction between the three sociological concepts considered in the literature review. During the project, all of the boys were aware of different labels that could be attached to individuals in the school setting and what these labels represented. For example:

- Jordan talked about the value gained from being labelled as 'sporty' or 'funny'. He also highlighted that hardworking boys were labelled as girlish (p. 53)
- Kirk talked about the labels of 'naughty' and 'funny' as pre-requisites for membership within the 'naughty' group (p. 56).

He also talks about the pressure not to be labelled a 'goody two shoes' (p. 56).

- Jamie talked about the problems he faced for being labelled overweight (p. 59) and how that being a 'class clown' compensated for this (p.61).
- Ryan talked about 'girlish' hard-working boys labelled as 'nerds' or 'geeks' (p.66). He also talked about conforming to peer-pressure to avoid the attachment of the label 'chicken' (p.67).

The above examples also suggest that each boy understands the labels within a hierarchical framework of value: having the preference for the attachment of one label over another. The existence of such a value driven labelling system may explain the interaction with the sociological concepts of symbolic interactionism and presentation of self.

Given that the boys had an awareness about the different labels that may be attached to them, it is possible to interpret their behaviours from the perspective of Goffman's (1959) notion of 'presentation of self'. Their behaviour could be regarded as attempts to 'convince others that they really are what they claim to be' (Fulcher & Scott, 2007, p. 128) through which they exercise 'a

considerable amount of discretion as to how exactly to present themselves'. I suggest that symbolic interaction is central to the mediation of self-presentation and I provide the following examples to support this:

- Initially Jordan explained how some teachers 'kept an eye on' and judged him on his previous poor behaviour: this led Jordan to show defiance towards those staff (p. 52). He also suggested that his behaviour was at odds with a peer-group that valued not getting verbals (p. 53). During the second interview, Jordan explained that he had changed his behaviour and stopped answering back (p.55) and started ignoring his friends to stop being distracted (p. 55). He said that his peer-group relations had not changed and that his friends understood why he sometimes ignored them (p.55). This whole process can be understood as an attempt by Jordan to change his behaviour to project a new image to both his staff and peers.
- Kirk recognized that he 'did stuff to make friends' and engaged in poor behaviour to facilitate his ability 'to belong' to a naughty group. Here Kirk's behaviour can be regarded as traversing the dichotomy between the labels

of 'not knowing many people' and the need to belong (p.56). Kirk also described the pressure he felt to be seen as 'popular' and not as a 'goody two shoes'. Here, Kirk indicates how he uses his behaviour to carefully stage-manage the perceptions other people have of him and the labels they attach.

- Jamie described a similar process of stage management and explained how he presented himself as a 'class clown', to reduce the likelihood of being labelled as 'overweight' and being bullied (p. 61).
- Ryan's engagement in smoking and fighting can be regarded as a presentation of self that sought to minimize the attachment of the derogatory label 'chicken' (p.67) and instead maximize the attachment of the valued label 'hard' (p.66) in his peer-group.

Although these examples demonstrate the importance of all three sociological concepts in understanding the behaviour of boys in this study, the findings highlighted deviance from some of the theoretical framings considered in the literature review. In particular, my initial reading of labelling centred on dominant

groups using labels to exercise power over others and concerns about labels being ‘attached to the most helpless and least powerful members of society [...] who are least capable of fighting back’ (Jones, 2003, p.110). Although this may be useful for considering how teachers attach labels to their students, it overlooks the role played by the attachment of peer-labels. This suggests that an important area of future research would be an examination of how peer-labelling operates as a mediator for the micro physics of power relations between individual students during their schooling (Ball, 2013, p.31).

I now consider research evidence in relation to Weiner’s (1986) model of attribution theory. Although, the findings supported the theoretical model for how students’ behaviours were motivated by their perceived cause for events, this always overlapped with the sociological concepts considered earlier and focused on the autobiographical construction of self. The correspondence between these perspectives centred on the similarity between:

- Attribution theory’s concern with how ‘people make decisions about the causes of events’ and how ‘those decisions [...] affect a person’s reaction’ (Galloway et al., 2004, p. 96)

- Symbolic interactionism's focus on human interaction through the use of symbols (Jones, 2003).
- The need to present oneself and 'convince others' in addition to readings of the performances of others (Fulcher & Scott, 2007, p. 128).
- How labels attached to individuals influence their perceptions and behaviours.

Indeed, there was such an overlap between these theories that I suggest an important area of future scholarship would be to examine how these theories could be integrated into a single model: this would facilitate the researchers' ability to localize specific behaviours and work with students to enhance their levels of equity.

Additionally, academic self-concept appeared to play an important part in determining the behaviours of students; however, not in the ways outlined in literature. Dweck & Yeager (2012, p. 304) consider behaviours motivated by the needs of students to look 'smart and, perhaps even more important, not [...] dumb'. However, within the context of my research, students weren't motivated to look smart because this was emasculating. In many respects, the need to avoid the attachment of labels such as 'girlish', 'goody two shoes', 'geek' or 'nerd' played such a

significant role in determining the behaviour of these boys that there was little relevance of either an 'entity theory' or 'incremental theory' of mindset (Dweck ,1986) to my research. This reveals that although a notion of academic-self concept was important in determining students' behaviours, this is not always closely related to individual experiences of self-worth academically. Instead, students' behaviours were orientated to optimize positive judgements from their peers.

5.1.4 Theories of Masculinity

It was evident throughout the research that gender-identity played an important role in determining the behaviour of boys. In many respects, this was consistent with the observation of Connell that (1987, p. 120) 'compact organizations like schools [...] have particularly clear gender regimes' and centred on the role of the male peer-group as a regulatory force in which the boys' 'desire for self-legitimation and belonging' was 'pivotal in the constructions of [...] identity' (Keddie, 2003, p. 291).

However, the findings were not always consistent with a singular form of hegemonic masculinity (Jackson, 2006; Barnes, 2012) that valued 'toughness, physical strength, authority and aggression' (Fulcher & Scott, 2007 p. 163). In general, the findings supported the observation that it is often difficult for researchers to

be able to locate a single form of hegemonic masculinity (Archer and Yamashita, 2003). The following findings illustrate this position:

- Although the boys were disruptive in lesson and sometimes showed defiance towards staff, I found little evidence of a universal culture which valued 'disruption, hedonistic activities and disrespect for school personnel' (Francis, 1999).
- Although there was some evidence of a culture that valued the importance of 'having a laff', it would not be accurate to describe this as a 'counter-school' culture (Griffin, 2005, p. 292). For Jordan, having a laugh was important to make his lessons 'not as dull' and 'a bit more upbeat' but having a laugh at the expense of getting sanctions from staff was not valued by his peer-group (p. 53). For Kirk, being funny was important to avoid getting the 'mick taken out' of him and for him to feel popular (p. 56). For Jamie, having a laugh was a strategy that reduced his likelihood of being bullied because of his weight issues (p.61). In each case, 'having a laff' resulted from a different set of factors for the boys and was not simply a feature of a culture which valued disruption.

The findings clearly show that a fear of being labelled feminine existed for this group of boys. This shows similarities with Jackson's (2003, p.584) observation that many boys perceive succeeding

academically at school as feminine. Despite this, no evidence was found to support the theories that these boys feared the feminine (Jackson, 2003). Indeed, there exists the following evidence to the contrary:

- Kirk talked with respect about his female Head of Year who had helped him since he started school (p.58)
- Jamie talked about the strong relationship with Miss Hudson, his English teacher. (p.61)
- Ryan described how going to see a female member of staff helped him if he was having a bad day (p. 69)

I suggest that the absence of these features, in addition to the boys' failure to conform entirely to the hegemonic norm, supports the thesis that masculinities are 'developed in specific institutional contexts' (Mac an Ghaill, 1996, p.387).

The research findings also appeared to support Martino's (1994) position and indicate that some normative models of masculinity fail to value self-expression or emotional support. This was most strongly visible in relation to:

- Jamie's tendency to 'bottle up' his emotions which led to 'massive outbursts' (p. 64)

- Ryan's engagement in fighting when other students said unpleasant things about his mother (p. 66).

Again, this indicates some overlap with theories concerned with the self-regulation and management of emotions, conceptualisations of masculinity, the presentation of self and Moffit's (1993) maturity gap. Indeed, an investigation to explore the extent to which these theories are mutually exclusive, would prove an insightful piece of scholarship for researchers and practitioners focused on enhancing the behaviour and educational equity of their students.

5.1.5 Theories of Class

I was surprised to find little evidence to indicate a strong role played by social-class. On reflection, I believe that this could be attributed to the research design. By focusing on a homogenous class-group, I was unable to explore the nuances between the experiences of the working-class research participants and other boys within the school.

The research evidence failed to suggest the existence of a pathological culture focused on students' deficits which acted to reproduce wider social inequalities as detailed in the literature (Steedman, 1986; Mac an Gaill, 1996; Reay, 2001).

However, it was possible to find evidence to support Reay's (2001) observation about the paradox of working-class success. This was observed to operate through a peer-group culture which feminized and pathologized the hard-working boy. Indeed, only Jordan felt comfortable in being able to work harder in lessons, without being marginalized from his social group.

It is important to note however, that it is difficult to attribute this culture, merely to social class. Rather, I would suggest that it is inexorably bound with notions of masculinity and peer-negotiated value systems. In many respects, this indicates that a fruitful area of study would synthesise literature focused on counter-productive school cultures (Willis, 1977; Marsh et al., 1978; Hargreaves, 1982; Stahl & Dale, 2013) with scholarship that considers the development of value systems in school peer-groups. This could be essential in understanding the difficulty some students experience in trying to reconcile the value system of the school, with that of their peers and family (Reay, 2002).

Finally, it should be noted that there was no evidence to suggest that students developed a counter-culture to assert what little power they had within the context of their school (Stahl & Dale, 2013). Instead, I would suggest that the students' behaviours were primarily driven by their desire to optimize feelings of self-worth, derived from labels attached from their peer-groups and to mask feelings of inferiority (Galloway et al, 2004).

5.2 Evaluation of Intervention Impact

Over both action-research cycles, all students evidenced improvements in their behaviour, although some students had spikes of incidences of poor behaviour during the cycles. Quantitative data about all students' behaviour over the course of action-research is shown in the following table:

Name	Weekly Average Comments (Before)	Weekly Average Detentions (Before)	Weekly Average Comments (Cycle 1)	Weekly Average Detentions (Cycle 1)	Weekly Average Comments (Cycle 2)	Weekly Average Detentions (Cycle 2)
Jordan	7	1	2	0	1.5	0
Kirk	4	1	7	2	2	0
Jamie	8	2	3	1	4	1
Ryan	9	3	4	1	2.5	0.5
Average	7	1.75	4	1	2.5	0.375

Table 3 – Quantitative Behavioural Data During Action-Research Cycles

This demonstrates a significant decrease in behavioural incidents after the cycles of action-research for all students. On average, the number of negative comments that students received in their planner decreased by over sixty percent and the average number of detentions per week decreased by almost eight percent.

I attribute the success of this to the hard-work of students and their clear desire to improve their behaviour, as evident throughout

the project. I was surprised at the level of impact my interviews with students and collaborations with staff made on the students, particularly on their increased responsibility and autonomy over their behaviours. This is evidenced by:

- Jordan's increased self-reflections and suggestions about how he could have acted differently and his self-implemented strategy to avoid confrontations and distractions (p. 54).
- Kirk's decision to ask his Head of Year to place him on a behavioural report because he recognised he would improve if more closely monitored (p.59)
- Jamie's engagement with pastoral support to help him with stress management, despite initial reluctance to this (p.64)
- Ryan's use of the Learning Support Unit to support his learning and his negotiated return to full-time lessons (p. 69)

Furthermore, central to the success of the research was the process of collaboration with other staff. In addition to supporting the selection of research participants for the study, the collaborations supported the research in the following ways:

- They confirmed my belief that Jordan should be given total autonomy over the implementation of strategies in the second cycle.

- They ensured that Kirk had a behavioural report, because of a desire to do so, despite his ineligibility on the usual school criteria.
- They facilitated the provision of weekly intervention for Jamie to help support his emotional and behavioural well-being.
- They supported Ryan's learning through a more personalised delivery of the curriculum in the LSU and established a relationship between Ryan and another member of staff to provide additional informal pastoral support.

6.0 Conclusions

This chapter is presented in four sections. The first summarises the answers to my research questions. The second considers the implication of my findings for researchers. The third evaluates the research project and suggests, with hindsight, potential improvements. The final section outlines general

concluding remarks about the research project in relation to practise within, and beyond, my professional context.

6.1 Summary of Findings

The literature review responded to my initial research question and elucidated a range of explanatory factors for working-class boys' behaviour from a number of different theoretical perspectives. In particular, it suggested the importance of concepts such as labelling, self-presentation and value-alignment in determining behaviour and approaches to learning.

The second research question considered how the causal explanations considered in the literature review related to the experiences of working-class boys in my professional context. My findings failed to support a number of theories considered in the literature review. Firstly, I could find no evidence that positive conceptualisation of achievement motivation or behavioural and emotional SEN, determined participant's behaviour. Secondly, the boys in this study deviated from the conventional models of hegemonic masculinity presented in literature (Jackson, 2006; Barnes, 2012), specifically in relation to their failure to highlight the existence of a counter-school culture (Willis, 1977; Stahl & Dale, 2013) or a culture that 'fears the feminine' (Jackson, 2003).

The findings demonstrated that although evidence supported elements of a number of theories explored in the literature, such as attribution theory (Weiner, 1986), the pubertal maturity gap (Williams & Dunlop, 1999), behaviourism and negative achievement motivation (Atkinson, 1957), these could also be interpreted from the perspective of the sociological concepts of labelling, symbolic interactionism and the presentation of self. Furthermore, it was possible to interpret elements of theories pertaining to the role played by social-class and gender in education using these sociological action-theories. This revealed synthesis between existing scholarship and suggested a number of potential areas of future scholarship (outlined in section 6.2) that could assist researchers, practitioners and policymakers in enhancing the levels of educational equity experienced by working-class boys during secondary education.

The final research question examined the extent to which specific interventions could be used to enhance the levels of educational equity experienced by working-class boys in my professional context. The findings clearly demonstrate that by using personalised interventions it was possible to improve the behaviour and approaches to learning of a small group of working-class boys. On average, the strategies implemented by students led to an average weekly reduction of sixty percent in the number of behavioural comments received and an eighty percent reduction in

the average number of weekly detentions. Throughout the research, the improvements made by students were not linear and at times students' behaviour did regress or deteriorate. However, by providing continued pastoral support to students and empowering them with strategies to enhance their own behaviour, all participants were able to evidence improvements during the project.

6.2 Research Implications

I now consider the key implications of my findings for researchers. The analysis of research data suggested the need for researchers to explore overlaps between different theoretical perspectives, and examine the extent to which these can be integrated to present a more consistent theory of students' behaviour. In particular, it highlighted the following specific research questions which are of interest to researchers, and practitioner-researchers:

- To what extent can existing research concerned with pubertal deviancy be integrated with interactive theories of human behaviour? What implications does this have for how schools manage adolescent behaviour?
- How do peer-groups develop mutually agreed value systems? What are the implications for theories about counter-productive school cultures grounded in gender and social-class discourses?
- To what extent is student's behaviour driven by issues of identity, its self-construction and mediation? Does this vary along the grounds of social-class or gender?

- How does peer-labelling mediate the micro-physics of power-relations between individuals? What implications does this have for the construction of hegemonic norms of class, gender and ethnicity?
- To what extent can attribution theory and concepts of mindset be integrated with theories of symbolic interactionism, labelling and the presentation of self?
- What role do hegemonic conceptualizations of class and gender play in the construction of peer-negotiated value systems?

I believe that an exploration of these questions could play a pivotal role in developing further understanding concerning how behavioural equity gaps are mediated during schooling, informing the implementation of ameliorative practices by school-leaders and teachers. I therefore intend to engage other practitioners and leaders with some of these research questions to strive for more equitable working practices for working-class boys within my educational context.

6.3 Evaluation of Research

During this project, my ability to assess the impact of the second cycle of action-research was limited to the use of quantitative data. Although this clearly demonstrated improvements in the participants' behaviour over the cycle, it did not allow me to understand how their behaviour had changed. This could have been

achieved by conducting further interviews at the end of project. Initially, I ruled out the use of such interviews because of concerns they would generate too much qualitative data, and I would therefore have to reduce the scope of my investigation given the word limit of an MSc dissertation. However, in retrospect, a potential compromise would have been to select just three research participants and to conduct interviews at the end of the second cycle.

Collaborations with colleagues were extremely useful throughout the project and helped to inform and support the students' interventions. However, I suggest that the involvement of other professionals could have been enhanced, by asking the colleagues involved in the delivery of interventions, to keep a research diary of their work with participants. Initially, I was reluctant to involve disciplinary support staff because of concerns with how this would have shaped my findings. However, in retrospect this may have provided another rich source of qualitative data.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

The findings demonstrate important implications for practitioners, both within and beyond my professional context. Firstly, they highlight the importance of implanting systems that empower students to improve their own behaviour. Before my

research, the participants had been subjected to a system of behaviour management, framed within a narrow behaviourist perspective. Despite this, the students' behaviour was still consistently poor and little was done within the school context, other than to apply rewards for improvement and sanctions for deterioration of standards. This research demonstrated that by trying to understand the challenges student's face and why their behaviours occur, it is possible to work in partnership to create interventions that enhance behaviour.

Secondly, I believe that an integral factor to the success of this research has been its dependence on a personalised approach. This therefore raises questions about the role that conceptualisations of the average student play in school policy-making. The findings demonstrated that each participant faced different problems during schooling and although they showed similar behaviours, these often stemmed from different causes. Furthermore, these students were all very different and didn't merely conform to social-class or gender hegemonic norms. Therefore, I question the appropriateness of school policies built on models of the average student. Indeed, drawing on recent research by Rose et al. (2013), such models might apply to everybody but don't work for everybody. I suggest that if schools wish to strive for educational equity they should move towards forms of behaviour management and pastoral support that are nuanced to the needs of individual students.

Finally, when allied with the observations of Biesta (2010), this raises questions about the extent to which behaviour systems can be generalized and replicated from one school context to another: rather, I would assert that for schools to achieve equity for their students, they need to embrace working practices whereby professionals collaborate and work in partnership with students, to develop systems and processes that meet individual needs. As Mapp (2014) notes, there is an ever increasing need for educators to work ‘in solidarity with others’ and see ‘students [...] as co-producers and co-creators of reform, rather than mere consumers of policy’. This research has demonstrated, that by using such an approach, it is possible to learn in partnership with students and colleagues to develop more equitable processes that enhance students’ experiences of education.

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