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To cite this article: Craig Johnston & Simon Bradford (2019): Alternative spaces of failure. Disabled 'bad boys' in alternative further education provision, *Disability & Society*, DOI: [10.1080/09687599.2019.1601070](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1601070)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2019.1601070>



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Published online: 29 Apr 2019.



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Alternative spaces of failure. Disabled 'bad boys' in alternative further education provision

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ABSTRACT

This article draws from an ethnographic study of a group of school-aged disabled white working-class and self-proclaimed 'bad boys' in one Alternative Provision (AP) in an English further education college. These young disabled students' disabilities contribute to the formation of their revalorised – yet stigmatised – identities. Stigma also facilitates the governance of their educational careers. The article considers how this group understands its precarious existence in and beyond AP and how these young men resist the conditions of their devaluation. Despite multiple, stigmatising experiences, the article shows how they appropriate space and (social) capital, often in tension with other students and college staff. The article suggests that there are questions about AP as an appropriate means to confer value upon young disabled students.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 May 2018
Accepted 26 March 2019

KEYWORDS

Disability; alternative provision; stigma; social capital; young people; identity

Points of interest

- White, disabled, working-class male students are increasingly placed into Alternative Provisions intended for young people who would otherwise not receive suitable education for various reasons. The experiences of such students have received limited research attention.
- This article is based on research conducted with young people who attend a provision located within an English further education college. The research found that these young people experience a lack of support, low trust and disregard from peers and some professionals at a crucial time in their educational careers.

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- It is important to understand disability in relation to other social differences – social class and gender, for example – as the combined impact of these in educational settings may undermine future career prospects and life chances.
- The article emphasises the importance of education practices that develop reciprocity, trust and cooperation in improving the often oppressive circumstances young disabled people face in post-school settings.

Introduction and context

This article draws on a study researching the experiences of a group of school-aged (14–16 years) disabled students in so-called ‘Alternative Provision’ (AP)¹ in England. AP, a recent policy innovation, is a substitute for mainstream schooling located outside ‘regular schools’ (Slee 2011), often in further education (FE) colleges. The exclusion and alternative schooling of disabled students is currently a policy focus in England (Department for Education 2018) and elsewhere (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2016; Tomlinson 2013). The recent UNESCO (2018) report into disability and education raised concerns that young people with disabilities are almost always worse off than their non-disabled peers when it comes to access to, exclusion from and completion of mainstream school. However, the use of school exclusions of disabled students is uncommon among European countries in comparison to the United Kingdom (Office Of The Children’s Commissioner 2012; Stamou et al. 2014). In England, the number of permanent exclusions of disabled students is also considerably higher than elsewhere in the United Kingdom (Evans 2010; Power and Taylor 2018). Research suggests that students enrolled in alternative forms of schooling achieve poorer life outcomes with higher rates of prolonged unemployment, homelessness and criminal activity (Pirrie et al. 2011) than those from mainstream schools. Despite commitment by successive governments in the United Kingdom to provide a more ‘inclusive education’ system, evidence suggests that disabled students, especially those facing multiple disadvantages deriving from class, race and gender positioning, continue to face disproportionate levels of school exclusion (House of Commons Education Committee UK Parliament 2018; Gazeley et al. 2015).

White, working-class male students with disabilities are over-represented in APs in England (Gill, Quilter-Pinner, and Swift 2017). However, their voices and experiences are largely absent in current disability and youth studies literature, in which the relationship between disability and the markers of class, race, gender and age is largely ignored (Kraftl 2013; Mills, Renshaw, and Zipin 2013; Mills and McGregor 2014; McGregor et al. 2015; McCluskey,

Riddell, and Weedon 2015; Malcolm 2015; Thomson and Pennacchia 2016). How young disabled people fare or are marginalised in APs has received limited attention in the literature, further contributing to their marginalisation. The decision to focus this research on young disabled men was made on the basis of their emerging but still limited presence in the literature (Robertson and Smith 2014), yet their significance as an education policy focus.

This article is based on data collected as part of an ethnographic study of the AP arrangements in one FE college (Haven) in southern England. The article seeks to further understand young people's experiences in AP and their responses to it. The young people referred to in this article had diverse corporeal, cognitive and emotional characteristics, and were labelled by Haven as having a physical or learning disability, or both, across six disability classifications. Thus, disability as a form of social difference is classified in symbolic systems of representation that mark out boundaries. Some of the young people had acquired secondary labels, identifying emotional and behavioural difficulties, bipolar disorder or extreme mood disorder. These defined them as other to the college's main student body, although it was clear that it was the impairment inherent in relationships and practices at Haven which was significant. Discourses of disability emerging from 'medical' and 'social' models, including developmental psychology, rely on normative assumptions that rigidly separate idealised and assumed ability and its other: dis-ability (Burman 2008). As disability discourse has informed policy, institutions and practitioners have deployed narratives of 'normal development' against which disability has become understood. The practices and structures that impair some young people have often remained invisible. Practitioner ideologies have, historically, construed young disabled people in problematic, dependent or deficit terms (Rogers 2012). Disability, therefore, is discursively and relationally produced, yet has material consequences in lived experience (McLaughlin, Coleman-Fountain, and Clavering 2016).

English education policy over the last three decades has been characterised as 'customer-oriented', having institutional diversity and setting a strong association between education and the labour market. Recent trends have, arguably, marginalised many young people. Growing numbers of permanent exclusions from mainstream schools in England have led to a range of negative outcomes for the young people concerned. For example, Daniels et al. 2003 (quoted in Ogg and Kail 2010) found that over 50% of permanently excluded students were neither in education, employment nor training (so-called NEET) two years after their exclusion. Fifteen years on, the Institute for Public Policy (Gill, Quilter-Pinner, and Swift 2017) estimate that 1 in every 200 students in England is educated in AP, disabled students accounting for 7 in 10 of all permanent exclusions, which have increased by 40% since 2013, and for 6 in 10 of all interim exclusions (Department for Education

2017a). In addition to funds that the government offers APs for each excluded student, the provision of pupil premium funding² in English schools in 2011, which was inspired by funding models utilised in the Netherlands and the United States, both since scrapped or modified (Forster 2009), attaches differing amounts of funds to a student depending on their background (Freedman and Horner 2008). However, this funding emerged alongside extensive budget cuts to Local Authorities, the development of academies and the closure of expensive Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), and is often not used as a separate funding stream (Carpenter et al. 2013). Interest subsequently led to APs being provided by commissioning charities and FE colleges to offer full-time APs with work-based vocational qualifications and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) as desired outcomes (Martin and White 2014). APs' attractiveness in the architecture of expertise concerned with classifying and managing young disabled students, especially compared with PRUs, is that they privilege human (student/teacher) relationships and dialogic learning. They evade standardised teaching and learning by offering vocational, recreational and almost semi-therapeutic elements of curriculum. These may be seen as more attractive to young disabled students in the attempt to re-route their educational trajectories through reshaping self and identity (Kraftl 2013).

Despite shifts in English FE policy over the last 20 years (reflecting broader education policy changes but marked by funding cuts, changes to teaching contracts and numerous reform proposals emanating from various stakeholders; Keep 2015), the goal of enrolling school-aged students in FE in order to acquire the right skills, rituals and/or desirable capital pertinent to success in the labour market has remained constant (Department for Education 2018). The Wolf Report activated '... the legal right of colleges to enrol students under 16' (Wolf 2011, 11), thus expanding³ the number of school age students on full-time work-related provisions. The Department for Education (2017b) policy on AP extends this. Despite recognition of the poor outcomes of those emerging from APs, the recent UK government paper 'Creating Opportunity For All' reaffirms the vital role of APs in successfully enhancing students' '... soft work-related behaviours and skills' (Department for Education 2018, 21).

Representations of good practice in APs make implicit reference to 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2010). That is to say, APs evoke a neoliberal logic whose goal embraces the aesthetics and semiotics of capital, consumption and the development of a useful and correct self as a social ideal. This is an enterprising, rational, covetous subject (Skeggs 2004) whose development is contingent upon individualised work-related vocational programmes for its realisation. The Government Green Paper 'Support and Aspiration' (Department for Education 2011) focuses on the chronic failure of young

white, working-class males and disabled students to achieve this goal and signals the rigorous care and attention necessary in order for these young people to successfully enter the labour market. The form of care common in many APs of 'behaviourist hugs and behaviour points' (Thomson and Pennachia 2016, 622), and notions of aspiration (Best 2017) which underpin this Department for Education document, are manifested in a pervasive AP rhetoric. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) exemplify knowledge acquisition and the soft skills of emotional labour that signify desirable attributes of contemporary workers and consumers (Farrugia 2018). The rhetoric of ILPs (and their implementation within alternative schooling) is based upon an understanding that students' needs can be effectively met by skilful and caring teaching staff (Power and Taylor 2018).

This broad policy landscape is problematic for white, working-class disabled male AP students. According to Pavey (2006, 221), the use of work-related skills to describe the aims and outcomes in AP programmes is flawed, failing to add to a student's capacity because '... it does not distinguish between ability levels and subsequent attainment; they are seen as the same'. The skills discourse also assumes that students have '... the means to exert ... control over (their) bodies' (Shilling 2003, 2), and a focus on individual aspiration and self-alteration as the dominant ideal fails to consider stigma effects (negative attitudes and stereotyping) faced by young disabled students, who may find it difficult to internalise new habits of conduct (Allan et al. 2009) and establish positive relationships with others. Arguably, these relationships are central to creating settings which promote learning and provide links to further sources of support. However, as disability discourse constructs young disabled people as other, there is considerable scope for the stigmatising of these young people in APs located in FE. We consider how the concepts of social capital and stigma might begin to illuminate how young disabled people's experiences are framed in APs.

Excluding young people in AP

The concept of social capital is contested. In much of the literature it refers to interpersonal networks that form bonds of trust, reciprocity, solidarity and support (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995). Bourdieu's rather more critical formulation emerges from an analysis of society comprising contested social space in which actors seek to advance their positions or sustain their privilege by deploying or trading extant resources ('capitals') in various ways, in so doing contributing to the reproduction of social relationships. Social capital is one resource in achieving and maintaining social position and power, and is '... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources ... linked to possession of a durable network of ... institutionalised relationships of mutual

acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1986, 249). In FE, a highly competitive field, social capital is potentially formed in students' varying participation in relationships and social groups through which they establish and maintain social identities as part of the broad process of growing up.

Stigma disrupts the rhythm and flow of social capital, potentially denying access to and participation in the networks to which Bourdieu refers. Stigma discredits individuals, reducing them '... from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one' (Goffman 1963, 3), leading to persistent disadvantage and a pervasive social exclusion. Goffman's attention was focused on the inter-subjective nature of stigma in the context of social norms, its construction, internalisation and consequences, and the social practices that police stigmatised identities through establishing boundaries. However, stigma must also be understood as evoking a social process establishing difference and boundary, rather than signifying a particular corporeal or psychological property of individuals. Stigma identifies, classifies and separates the discredited from the normal, and in institutional life (a college or a school, for example) it facilitates techniques of government by marking out those requiring expert intervention (Dean 2007, 82). The management of young disabled people's FE careers through expert practices is one example of this. Expert professionals manage such young people through the range of educational plans and interventions that constitute AP and which are contingent on identifying and extending forms of stigma. The concept of stigma, therefore, has potential in explaining how young disabled people's marginality is reproduced by illuminating how they are excluded from access to usable social capital resources

Social capital theory has not gone unchallenged. Coleman and Putman's normative, gender-blind and ethno-centric optimism (Morrow 1999) about the potential or actual support available in shared networks, which may bind disparate elements of students' transitions from school to FE, can be affiliated with the rhetoric found in policies that relax some of the educational requirements for students entering FE. These policies aim to promote learning by highlighting the benefits of college as a place where students can network and gain access to valuable social resources in what Bourdieu (1986, 250) calls 'the unceasing effort of sociability'. If, as integrative theorists suggest, the development of social capital(s) relies upon promoting trust and reciprocity in networks, many young disabled people may be disadvantaged within FE. Acquiring forms of social capital by displaying competence in relation to normative behaviours has consequences as young disabled students' perceived inability to adhere to group norms – to fit in – may encourage discrimination towards them (de Visser, Smith, and McDonnell 2009).

Recent studies investigating stigma in education (O'Byrne and Muldoon 2017; Gulczyńska 2018) highlight the centrality of norms, obligations and forms of exchange in fixing boundaries to social networks which may be

closed and inaccessible to some young people. Although not explicitly, Goffman (1963) linked stigma to social capital through a focus on roles, identities, rituals and relations (Noam 2008) that define individuals against a social ideal within 'a general economy of social practices' (Bourdieu 1986, 242). FE is a particular field shaped by differences that emphasise students' perceived ability to add to those valued work-related identities, attributes and consumerist priorities set in FE and wider youth culture. Resisting these priorities may be manifest in struggles of access, closure and advantage gained from forms of social capital within social groups and networks, but not necessarily as overt antipathies. Young disabled students are, of course, multiply positioned (Shields 2008; Ivanka 2017). The exterior materiality of their positioning (through dominant discourses within FE) is constituted, reconfigured and lived through representations of disability, essentially as other (Garland-Thomson 2011). Their intersectional locations (their class, race and gender, for example) are 'not ... discrete identities like beads on a string but, rather, they are relationally defined and emergent' (Spelman 1988 as quoted in Shields 2008, 303). This emergence is powerfully shaped by the relational resources either available or inaccessible to young disabled people and the impact on them of stigma, both of which reproduce inequalities within FE.

Research background and methodology

The data are drawn from an ethnographic study of working-class⁴ disabled young men in AP in a southern English FE college. Haven college is located in an inner-city area with one of the highest levels of disadvantage and child poverty in the United Kingdom. It is known nationally, and characterises itself as a successful leader in the AP marketplace for students who represent challenges to mainstream education provision. The research was part of a year-long ethnographic study that explored social capital in young disabled people's social networks in college. The study, which gained Research Ethics Committee approval, explored their experiences and responses to their presence. Access to all AP settings at the college was granted by managers.

Acknowledging the discursive nature of disability and its consequences as a social process, we were interested to know whether activities constituting AP had the potential to include or marginalise participants. Thus, the study sought to explore young people's experiences of attending AP from their own perspectives. How did they understand their AP careers at Haven and how did they manage day-to-day life in AP? Recognising young people's participation in Haven's AP practices, how was their sense of agency, their capacity to have influence in the activities and practices occurring around them (Olli, Vehkakoski, and Salanterä 2012, 794), expressed in their talk about AP

experiences? These questions have important implications for the sociology of youth, as well as for AP policy in FE, and the article contributes to knowledge in these areas.

Data were collected in 10-day blocks at the beginning, middle and end of the college's academic calendar. These included unstructured observations and analysis of classroom-based activities, materials and key documents, such as ILPs. As well as spending time in AP settings, participating in classes, hearing from various informants and observing day-to-day college life, the researcher completed a series of semi-structured one-to-one interviews and small focus groups which included 30 participants from two year groups (Year 10 and Year 11). The article draws from these. Subsequent site visits occurred halfway through the year and near the end of the year. In this time frame, students had an opportunity to navigate a range of learning events which may offer opportunities to produce, access and use social capital. Haven's Access provision (its AP) is a full-time vocational programme undertaken by students who have been excluded from school. Although the data are context specific, they may be of value in developing exemplars necessary in the process of generalisation to other settings (Flyvbjerg 2001, 74). However, we acknowledge that our research participants are exclusively male (Tolonen 2005) and accept the limitations this imposes on any claims that can be made.

Participants brought complex histories and backgrounds, although sharing objective positions in relation to other aspects of social difference. However, the intersections of age, class, race and gender of the self-proclaimed 'bad boys' revealed a complexity of experience that served as a foundation to identify and explore social capital as part of the fabric of their relational lives. Importantly, social capital should not be seen as 'stuff' that can be measured or calculated. Rather, and following Bourdieu, it is best understood as a metaphor for actors' resource deployment in the struggle for social position. Our view of the bad boys' social capital and stigma is therefore relational, context specific and energetic; played out within the daily life of the college. The boys became an important focus of the study for two reasons. The early data suggested that existing as a bad boy entailed being subtly yet literally placed outside of mainstream FE life and the social capital that existed within it as a consequence of how they are identified and positioned in college. More generally, they designate a wider group of young people who typically reject school (MacLeod 2009), who are over-represented in APs in England, and who are an important policy focus and, yet, who are also under-researched.

Data collection and analysis foregrounded young people's own accounts of their experiences and relationships, and the significance they attributed to their potentially stigmatised identities in positioning them in college.

Interview and focus group data were transcribed and analysed thematically through close textual reading. Bourdieu's observation that social orders are deposited in 'durable dispositions such as mental structures' (1993, 18) informed the analysis. We take these structures to be real in the sense that they both constrain and enable agency, in turn contributing to their reproduction. The depiction of such structures ('the social') develops through the talk of individuals that is captured in interview data such as those from which we draw. As narratives, their talk reveals much about how the bad boys make sense of their lives in AP although clearly they cannot be understood as complete and analysis should be alert to what is either unsaid or absent (Holdsworth and Morgan 2005, 35). Coding of data was broadly organised through a theoretical interest in social capital and stigma, and analysis at each stage of data collection reconstructed themes, resulting in changes to codes. As new codes were offered up, narratives of social capital and stigma were identified. Clear themes emerged from the coding and analysis. We consider three of these.

Life in Access: making known

A high level of teacher-based relationship-building (forms of care, attention and direct support) was evident from observations of the all-female Access staff at work at Haven. This was individualised and heavily focused on achieving compliance with ILPs and completing set tasks such as budget planning and creating a job-seeking profile. The ILP document aims to expand the provision of resources students are expected to receive and served as a catalyst for supplemental one-to-one support through structured time in the classroom or in the library. This was used as portfolio-based evidence of progress towards self-management or a strong work ethic, for example. For the boys, there seemed to be a simple binary choice of 'resist or conform' to what is expected of a young disabled (male) student: deficient, dependent and deferential to staff. Of course, some students entered Access with well-practised tactics for resisting close relationships with staff, in effect rejecting staff social capital. The bad boys deployed what they describe as 'banter', coarse or quick wit directed towards others in the classroom, particularly those who conform to a disabled identity but often used to resist engaging with access staff and establishing relationships with them. The bad boys said they preferred 'avin a laff', 'chillin' and 'skiving', wearing hoodie tops and trackie bottoms, as well as pushing each other off classroom chairs and into doors, rather than engaging with set classwork. Subversive acts distanced the bad boys from other students and staff. Observation suggested that this occurred in the early part of the academic year, setting a pattern of distance and separation between the bad boys and

other students who appeared more willing to invest in Haven's aspirational discourse. Access staff seemed to find it difficult to handle banter, and when it was deployed it was quickly sanctioned, undermining chances of the bad boys developing positive relationships with staff, who they described as 'stuck up' and 'boring'. These performances, shaped by a familiar hegemonic masculinity, also signify a resistance to the culture of success and perhaps a chaotic rejection of the neoliberal discourse of aspiration and self-alteration that marks Haven's ethos. The bad boys' pursuits appeared framed by loyalty and solidarity, rather than individual aspiration (Stahl 2015), which inspire a 'moral panic ... about the underachievement of boys' in English schools (Weiner, Arnot, and David 1997, 620; Stahl 2016). Like white, working-class lads before them, the bad boys internalise these gendered identities and aspirations to paid labour they envisaged lies ahead after AP. As an example, Kevin said, 'girls do beauty stuff an' most of 'em [fellow Access students] got no fuckin' chance [of work] ... there's jobs for 'ard lads like me ... [in places] yeh' 'ave to do [heavy] liftin' an' that' (Year 10 interview).

Quinn (2010) points out that the bonds constituting aspirational forms of social capital need not be 'real' to be applicable. Kevin's localised and internalised notions of close association and collective self-protection (Skeggs 2011) meant he imagines a future within a largely vanished manufacturing-based economy. The bad boys are, however, unlike young men in the 1970s, who may have left school with a valued and valuable working-class identity. The collapse of the youth labour market, inequitable conditions created by precarity of paid work (Bates, Goodley, and Runswick-Cole 2017) and cuts to support services (Goodley et al. 2014, 2016) have all affected young disabled people disproportionately at relational (Sayce 2011) and economic levels (Butler 2009). There was little evidence that the bad boys were receptive to the dominant values of contemporary work-related performances, outside of improbable and precarious (and, again, imagined) careers that Darren, for example, described as 'lads (online) who make loads gaming'. These imaginative practices may be important in shaping these young men's lives and perhaps rendering them, at least temporarily, more hopeful. However, we should also consider the bad boys' performances in a wider context and how these attract stigma whose formation shapes the relations of inter-subjective and material space as well as creating the apparent necessity for the surveillance and management of these young men's educational lives.

Mainstream students 'out there' and their impact

Several students outside of the AP are recognised by the bad boys as having an impact on their agency and identities. These experiences combine to give the bad boys an understanding of who they are, who they can become and,

as part of that process, in which spaces their presence is either accepted or rejected. Four bad boys referred to experiencing actual physical harassment by students outside of Access: being pushed, punched and bullied. The common perception among these students was of Haven being a hostile place. They related being told by other students 'to go back to school', attributing these instances to aspects of their size, appearance, association and younger age. They were acutely aware that they are understood in terms of their discredited bodies and character (Goffman 1963, 14). However, the impact of these characteristics changes through shifting social relations of friendship, and peer group adherence, as young people become older. Stigma is itself a contingent, fluctuating and fluid entity expressed in the context of social practices.

Some of the bad boys gave examples of where a once recognisable face from their previous schools or local neighbourhoods distanced themselves at Haven. This can be seen in one Year 10 interview with Darren, who, like the majority of the bad boys, was identified in his ILP with 'learning as a primary cause for concern', but with the addition of some fine motor skill concerns, around writing and cooking, but passes as 'normal' if assessed on bodily appearance. Darren describes how enrolling in an AP acted as a stigmatising marker of both age and disability, which provoked verbal abuse from a 'mate' he had previously spoken to at school:

I fink lads [from school] see me as a freak, like when I was walkin' wiff friends [from class] past some lads from school, they start larfin' an callin' me retard an' that, it's cos' they 'fink Access is for the stupid kids, init!' (Interview)

In one Year 10 focus group, the bad boys talk animatedly about how they internalise this:

Darren: I hung wiff [a former mate] him in school ... We'd say Hi an' that, cos' my mum knew his mum. He's weird to me in 'ere, like I'd say hello an' he'd say nufink.

[Several of the bad boys mumbled 'yeah'].

Elliott: Yeah ... yeah like some lads from our school they won't say 'nufink [raising his voice] I 'hink it's well wrong cos', just cos' we're in like college an' that now.

These extracts suggest the bad boys are aware, and fearful, of the possibility or actuality of peers' negative views. Implied in these experiences is the sense suggested by Goffman (1963, 11) of a '... ritually polluted [person] ... to be avoided, especially in public places'. Within the college's diverse student body, being stigmatised in this way is perhaps surprising. However, stigma breaks earlier established relations creating estrangements, rejections and deficits in trust, inevitably shaping feelings of acceptance and belonging. It diminishes potential social capital. Stigma arises through association and

AP becomes stigmatised by its association with young disabled students, creating an iterative process of further stigmatisation.

In this climate, one way of avoiding exclusion is to conceal stigmatising entities. 'Passing' is the practice of hiding aspects of a spoiled identity to present as 'normal', a form of intense reflexive self-regulation (Goffman 1963, 92). This became a daily preoccupation for the bad boys who try but fail to embody desirable competencies. Although difficult to pass as 'normal' in Haven, the bad boys had a strong desire, as Elliot puts it, 'to escape the bubble' of Access. This referred to achieving independence from Access's stigmatising regimes and participating in ordinary student life. However, opportunities to gain independence were tempered by Haven's practices of organising 'appropriate' activities for AP students (Benzon 2010; Burns, Watson, and Paterson 2013), part of the governmentalisation of these young people's lives. For Access staff, risk or uncertainty was something to avoid and was understood neither as contributing to personal development nor as potentially liberating. Leisure time at Haven raised concerns about risk and safety. Institutional stigma arose in the framing, structure, and delivery of various activities in which the interests of the bad boys were set against potential safety concerns and staff emphasis on adult support and personalised learning. Indeed, the bad boys' active participation in mainstream college activities was only evident by its absence. College policy inhibits such participation. Most of the activities on offer have limited viability, in part, as they were aimed towards the standards and routines of those implicitly regarded as the 'able' majority. For example, overnight trips, which were advertised to all FE students, were off limits to the bad boys. As Gaz in Year 10 stated, '[an AP manager] told us "no" [you are unable to attend], 'cos we's too young'. The bad boys and staff seemed to understand leisure differently. The bad boys held social reasons for their involvement in leisure activities that challenge the obstacles they experience at the college. For the AP staff, these activities are viewed in relation to future job readiness, becoming a form of labour in itself (Rojek 2010). Personal relationships, construed as social capital, were a resource to be encouraged in developing these young men's potential in relation to the labour market. The bad boys' ILPs invariably identified the maintenance of personal relationships and friendships as learning targets. Leisure activities were important in this especially as sports participation had been instrumental in how the bad boys' understood their experiences at school:

Sam: we played [of football] at my old school in the [football] team an' that.

Researcher: I see you have pictures here of you playing football, where's that?

Sam: In the cage [a small concrete area adjacent to the AP] ... it's alright, but it's not the same ...

Researcher: What do you mean it's not the same?

Kevin: ... [Playing] games in the playin' field wiff best, yeah, ye'd stick it to the olda' lads, init.

Tom: I miss that ... it's just us [Access] lads playin', init.

Their observations suggest that relationships with other young people at school were made possible through football but this had changed at Haven. An athletic identity embodying the cultural values of masculinity is situated near the peak of a personal identity hierarchy for the bad boys and its absence at Haven is disappointing for them. As masculinising experiences, sports may be a significant bridge that supports developing self-confidence, resilience and bodily continence (Smith 2007, 2013). However, AP staff, perhaps for genuinely considered motives, constantly attempted to limit the experiential foundations from which the bad boys' social and cultural competences could be enhanced. These competences (forms of talk, ways of presenting self and achieving emotional control) are increasingly the prerequisites for successful participation in a changing economy, exemplifying assets of 'successification' (Bradford and Hey 2007). Cultural assets like these transcend a preoccupation with disability and may establish common ground and solidarity with other young people, perhaps even disarming existing stigma practices (Fisher et al. 1988, 280). However, the stigma of age and association (and its institutionalisation in college practices) creates spaces of struggle where the bad boys collaborate in resistance, challenging stigmatising social representations. They create and draw on their own networks of social capital in the attempt to rewrite the debilitating scripts imposed by staff and student practices of differentiation and discrimination.

White bodies and a marginalised masculinity: 'a room of our own'

The protective solidarity of the bad boys' reciprocal mate-ship was partially formed in a search for counter-experiences, varying from shouting and swearing at others to petty crime. Without a clear masculine sense of self, these acts are moments of shelter within a 'restored self' (Charmaz 1994, 287). For example, Haven's hair and beauty department sign, which Kevin admits to defacing with the words 'Ladies only', is, he states, 'for girls an' gays, not lads like me!' Kevin places boundary markers between himself and what he sees as 'girly' spaces. In one focus group, Kevin described the support generated by the bad boys aiding the demarcation of 'a room of our own'. As they labour against stigmatised experiences, this room has a strong and protective social function, and symbolises how support is negotiated and achieved within the boys' own network. The room resonated with 'social noise', reflecting the bad boys' agency and challenging perceived barriers of

confinement and their subjugated and stigmatised identities. It can be understood as the elaboration of social capital; resources supporting them in managing the stigma practices affecting them.

When they 'got 'assle' in Haven, the bad boys tended to counter this through acts of collective or individual resistance in either verbal or physical forms. For example, they tried to verbally abuse the older students who abused them. One of the Year 11 focus group discussions illustrates this:

Sam: they're [young males] always like, coming up to ya', hasslin' ya!

Kevin: yeah, they fink they can gives us shite an' get away wiff it.

Researcher: So, Tom why do you think that is?

Tom: I 'fink it is cos' we are still in school an' that they look down on you, an' 'fink that that they can push ya' about ... fuck that, I just give it back to em' lot.

Kevin: yeah ... yeah ... but we ain't gonna just take that shite, init.

Jimmy: yeah, ya gotta deal wiff it, yeh know.

The strategy employed by the bad boys to redeem a level of social power and respect poses threats to hegemonic forms of masculinity in the college. Their spaces of struggle undermine prior assumptions they have about being in possession of a tough male body. For instance, the bad boys fail to establish any apparent form of respect among older male students in the Hub, a busy space where students' socialise by playing pool, listening to music or relaxing. The conflict that arose can be drawn from the boys' otherness in relation to an aspirational 'cool lad' identity, stressing the continuing importance of social and material positioning in the FE field as produced through race, class, gender and representation 'on the ground' (Weis 2008). This identity is a hybrid version of the subject of value at the college, a successful student who can embody capabilities that Castells (2000, 18) terms 'self-programmable labour'. He (always he) is multi-skilled and multiply positioned as street-cultured with attitude, a consumer, according to Gaz, 'wi' sick clothes' who appears heterosexually active and attractive and seems to know where he is going after FE. The bad boys frequently attribute such coolness to older African-Caribbean students. A discourse of white envy of black style and masculinity (Beynon 2002) sometimes occurs in their conversations about what represents 'cool' at Haven. Coolness is an aspect of Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital, a further resource that interweaves with social capital in establishing power and position. Acquiring and deploying such capital is a challenge for young people as coolness relies on normative assumptions about corporeal and cognitive capacity.

Gaz gives an example in an interview of an African Caribbean student in Year 11 named Steven, who is able to 'chill' and blend with older males in

popular social spaces. This is possible, he said, '... cos of [Steven's] black way of doin' 'fings'. Despite some of the bad boys' imitation of this class-mate's style, a form of passing, Gaz resists 'actin' black', something he sees as false and in conflict with a white (non-disabled) self. Successful passing requires authenticity, always contingent on recognition. A combination of Gaz's own indignation and sense of bodily exclusion at Haven results in a complex narrative justification of his stance:

I'm not bein' racist, but it bugs me when my mates act all black, callin' each ova' nigga. There's a lot of that 'ere [in Haven] init, 'cos girls 'fink it's cool. Suppose actin' black is the way it is, but boys would bang their fuckin' knee against a wall to get a limp an' be chillin wiff' em [black young people].

Gaz's mates' efforts to re-fashion themselves (e.g. with a limp) as a means of asserting their toughness and pass as normal signals an attempted (and imagined) positioning as powerful in the hierarchy of masculinities in FE. In contrast to the African Caribbean young men, the college's large Asian population does not arouse the same form of envy, yet the shared ethnic identity of male Pakistani students apparently offers an acknowledged form of security. In an interview, Tom cites his view that 'Paki' lads stickin' togetha'' is a reaction to Haven's racialised cultural hierarchy:

The Pakis stick togetha', cos they talk the same. But, I 'fink they know it's betta' stickin' wiff their own kind in 'ere [Haven] too, it's safer, init.

The threats of violence towards the boys' often smaller, sometimes physically impaired white bodies in ethnically separated spaces renders their awkward social positioning comprehensible. It therefore remains an unsettling fact that the bad boys are '... not real men (in FE colleges): they don't have access to physical strength or social status in the conventional way' (Shakespeare 1999, 60). While there is a sense that these matters are taken for granted by those born with an overt physical difference, the boundary between able-bodied and disabled identities is not always clearly demarcated for the bad boys. They position themselves, and are positioned by other (male) students, on the borderland of a hierarchically constructed duality of ability/disability. They are neither disabled nor able-bodied, but occupy liminal and untenable spaces (Trinh 1991) in which they experience impairment. Sam, for example, is dubious about his disability and distances himself from those he described as 'propa' disabled:

Researcher: Would you say you have a disability?

Sam: eh ... [long pause] ... What do you mean?

Researcher: Do you think your disabled 'cos, as you said, you can't read good?

Sam: No, I'm not like Harry [physically disabled] an' 'em who's propa' disabled.

While research has focused on the harm disability as stigma causes young disabled people (Law et al. 2007; Vignes et al. 2009), it is important to problematise other social statuses that fracture the potential of new identities and undermine these young people's sense of agency in FE (Tomlinson 2016). Such explorations must therefore acknowledge the embodied, historical and institutionalised elements of stigma that are intricately interrelated. It is also important to remember that the bad boys' rejection of schooling is, partially, a well-rehearsed (classed and gendered) performance of self-elimination from middle-class normative aspirations (Reay 2017). However, the situation is far more complex for young people identified as disabled in FE. We suggest that the stigmatising neoliberal processes, regimes of care and the consumerist, aesthetic culture in Haven impact in shaping (and marking) the bad boys as other. Their sense of social powerlessness and educational worthlessness forces them to bear not only psychic but a range of social, material and physical costs of being in Haven. Thus, these young people's participation in FE's political, social and material contexts is a matter of social positioning, of social structures and (capital) resources, in which staff and students' interests incessantly compete and conflict in ways that limit the idea of success. As stigmata develop from and are maintained through the social relations in which governmentality is realised, attempts to challenge stigma in Haven are likely to be very difficult.

Concluding discussion

This article explored how a group of young men, defined by Haven college in terms of disability, understood and managed their everyday experiences in FE. We wanted to know how Haven's AP practices might include these young men, making AP a supportive phase of their education careers. The data suggest that the bad boys invest in social capital generated within their own group, yet are also invested with representations that are at odds with discourses of aspiration and popular youth culture at Haven. Their problematic engagement in FE culture suggests that they desire to be accepted as neither having a disability nor aspirational, and labouring to manage themselves as such entails inconceivable changes, as Kevin put it, for '[strong, bad] lads like me'. The bad boys' demeanour and antagonistic tough style indicates the failure of over 20 years of education policies directed at white, working-class young men identified as disabled. The article suggests how the relationships in which these identities are constituted deny access to social capital that has the potential to form new relationships and opportunities, sometimes referred to as 'bridging' or 'linking' capital (Allan et al. 2009, 116). Although the capital invoked by the bad boys offered important peer support and identity development, it rarely involved caring adults (outside of

disciplinary practices) or other 'mainstream' students who might offer friendship, practical advice or support extending the boys' existing horizons.

Perceived and real access to valuable social capital has been continually linked to positive school-related outcomes (Holland 2009; Pang et al. 2018). Wright et al. for example, show that daily involvement in extended schools with family and religious organisations has been vital in offering black and ethnic minority students a 'turnaround narrative' (2016, 22), against the backdrop of stigma (Howarth 2006) that defines this group within the United Kingdom (Rhodes and Brown 2018). Wright's work complements recent studies which provide growing evidence that it is the knowledge, support and sense of mutual obligation contained in these networks that help to build aspiration, cultural resistance and increased achievements (Reynolds 2006, 2013; Rollock et al. 2011; Rübner Jørgensen 2017). Such networks can become 'supportive collectivities where negative experiences can be shared and processed' (Rastas 2005, 158 as quoted in Howarth 2006), offering opportunities where young people can develop strategies to overcome stigma. Close relations, discussions and collective activities can provide capital resources that rebuild stigmatised identities (Wright et al. 2016). However, the position and positioning of the bad boys is dependent on the interpretations of others at Haven. These rely on actors' imagined social capital. From the staff and other students' perspectives, the capital or the 'banter', 'skiving' or collective risk-based acts appear empty of the resources and dispositions which reflect the characteristics of an idealised student and the social experiences, competence and attributes which constitute popular forms of male youthfulness and contemporary work-related identities.

There are several factors that undermine the development of imagined social capital in the mind of another social actor, notably the status of 'other' in the context of social bonds. In terms of social capital, we suggest, this otherness makes the mutual bonds the bad boys establish less accessible to others with whom they are not bonded. Stahl's (2015) research similarly indicates how new benchmarks and pressure on school-related resources distort and affirm familiar pessimisms about working-class males (Bernstein 1977; Skeggs 2016), latterly represented as 'chavs' (Ward 2016; Jones 2012). The bad boys' embodied cultural performances mean that they are 'disqualified from full social acceptance' (Goffman 1963, 9) which entails the enactment of hyper-heterosexuality. Their performances of masculinity (Frosh, Pheonix, and Partman 2002) appear antagonistic to middle-class civilised conversations and values (Hey 1997), nuanced forms of masculinity in present-day (educational) communities (Ward 2016) as well as the hyper-masculinities of youth culture. Arguably, there are few occasions for young disabled males to perform or choose different masculinities in FE (Shuttleworth et al 2012). Various 'hybridised' masculinities exist in both youth culture and labour

market, '... nothing less than the emergence of a more fluid, bricolage masculinity, the result of "channel hopping" across versions of the masculine' (Beynon 2002, 6). The central elements of masculinity, class, age and disability may be challenging to recognise, but the power to choose, to hop channels, underlies young men's identities in FE. In order to exercise choice, a bad boy needs access to and be free of stigmata to display valued capital assets. Such choice is, in the bad boys' view, largely denied to them in AP.

Some disability theorists have argued that '... disability tends to be figured in cultural representations as an absolute state of otherness that is opposed to a standard, normative body' (Snyder, Brueggemann, and Thomson 2002, 2). This absolute is false. Difference interlocks to characterise some students as variously lacking corporeally, culturally or cognitively. Whilst it is difficult to identify exclusive 'disability affects' from our data, disability discourse retains significant institutional and inter-subjective power in these young people's lives. It becomes entwined with, and entwines, other aspects of social difference promoting exclusion. Race, gender, class and age underline the dehumanising nature of normative discourses and practices in FE that stigmatise and which render the stigmatised, the bad boys, amenable to governmental practices as well as excluding them from acquiring social capital. Normative and dominant notions of success celebrated in popular culture and implicitly affirmed in current education policy valorise social difference, including disability, setting boundaries to achievement that the bad boys find difficult to negotiate. Haven's culture (reflecting wider society and economy) locates success and the eradication of failure at its heart. Indeed, success represents everything that is not abnormal and that which young disabled students may not wish to symbolise as part of their identity. Clearly, the bad boys cannot draw on some aspects of FE's aspirational and youthful discourses to construct their identities. A cool, 'ard, sexy bad boy is a contradiction in terms and the bad boys' extant component differences interconnect to stigmatise them variously as inadequate bodies and non-functional minds (Horschelmann and Colls 2010). Access to valuable forms of social capital, especially those prized relationships that are necessary to (potentially) reinvent identity (Moriña 2017), seem unlikely to arise for them. In the absence of relationships that extend or develop young people's social and cultural competence, there is a risk of retreat into closed peer networks.

It is apparent that the bad boys, and students like them, are faced with unique struggles in becoming valuable subjects in FE. This has real implications for FE policy and practice. In contemporary education spaces, such as Haven, the bad boys' specialness, although interlinking with other forms of difference, tends to dominate other characteristics, attracting stigma practices such as bullying, physical harm, exclusion and, perhaps worse, social invisibility (Baker et al. 2018). Importantly, stigma is experienced by young

people identified as disabled as a real world problem, collectively fashioned, resting in forms of social difference and notions of success, which organise the social relations and practices of FE and beyond. The challenge for FE is how its provisions for young people like the bad boys might be organised to avoid further stigma and exclusion. Challenging stigma in policy, institutional and inter-subjective forms must be seen as a collective task that moves beyond policy-makers and others 'thinking about the world' to become located in the 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 39). However, serious questions arise concerning which young people FE is for. The increasing commodification of education in the United Kingdom and elsewhere is problematic for young people like the bad boys. FE, unlike schools and PRUs, has absorbed consumerist discourse to attract 'paying' adult customers. The bad boys' presence in Haven disrupts this aesthetic, inviting judgements about their (disabled) bodies and performances in comparison with the idealised embodiments promoted through education and popular culture (Hughes 2002, Hughes et al. 2005; Bradford 2012; Goodley 2016). As FE struggles to come to terms with budget cuts, and with experienced staff leaving the sector (Smith et al. 2013), how students like the bad boys might flourish is a concern. It is vital to continue to examine the consequences and lived realities of difference at a time when entry to APs is promoted as a positive step in students' social and educational lives. Our analysis suggests that the bad boys experienced real hardship in sustaining their identities in AP, yet there was ample evidence of their agency in resisting stigmatising practices. How effective this might be in enabling their achievement in FE is a moot point needing further research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1. AP is 'education arranged by Local Authorities or schools for pupils who, due to exclusion, or other reasons, would not ... receive suitable education; education arranged by schools for pupils on a fixed period exclusion; and pupils being directed by schools to off-site provision to improve their behaviour' (Department for Education 2013, 3).
2. The pupil premium is supplementary funding for publicly funded schools in England and is intended to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers (Department for Education 2014).
3. One per cent of all 2014 Year 11 students finished school enrolled on an AP in England, 10% of whom have a special educational need (Department for Education 2017a). The most recent figure for FE is from 2008, when an estimated 135,000 students enrolled on an alternative FE provision at that time, 75% of whom had a Special Educational Need (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008).

4. The term, 'working-class' refers to those pupils entitled to free school meals. All 10 students whose data are presented here were eligible for free school meals before entering FE. Free school meals data were readily available and have been frequently used as proxy indicators of class by many researchers.

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