



Reframing the Self in an International Learning Context: Experiences of International Students with a Disability

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In teaching and dialoguing with international students with a disability we often had to struggle with questions such as: What is the nature of student experience? And how are we supporting international students with a disability to articulate transformative perspectives of the self? This paper, which is based on a qualitative case study of two international students with a disability at McKenzie University (a pseudonym) Melbourne, Australia, is written to provide insider accounts and provoke understanding into how Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital and field can be expanded to account for the conscious transformations that the students made in recalibrating themselves in their new fields. The paper calls for nuanced reading of how transformation of the self constitutes ongoing reframing of the habitus as a way of detaching oneself from dominant prescriptions of disability within one's field. We ask our readers to consider how this detachment brings into being new formation of the self and symbolic capital to the students. Finally, we bring a reflective reading to the data as a critical moment of practice and to reclaim our understandings of disability not as inability, but as complicated socio-political construct that needs to be contested. It is within these contested spaces that we can gain the strength to give marginalized selves the voices they need to move beyond margins of tertiary education.

Keywords: inclusion, higher education, international students, Bourdieu

In teaching and dialoguing with international students with a disability we often had to struggle with questions such as: What is the nature of student experience? And how are we helping international students with a disability articulate transformative perspectives of the self? This research has two purposes. First, is to provide insider accounts and provoke understanding into how Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital and field can be expanded to account for the conscious transformations that two international students with a disability made in recalibrating themselves in their new fields. Second, is to identify how the resources and strategies in the university at the center of this study

support or hinder the academic performance of international students with disability.

Globalization, the importance of institutionalized cultural capital and English as the lingua franca have resulted in a large number of students travelling abroad to study with Australia as a popular destination. International students have been a significant feature of this move to tertiary education institutions in Australia, particularly over the last ten years. For the purposes of this paper we use the definition of "international students" from Arkoudis and Tran (2007) as referring to "students who are pursuing a degree at an Australian institution but are not citizens or permanent residents of Australia"

(Arkoudis & Tran 2007, p. 158). Australia is one of the top three destinations along with the United States and the United Kingdom to draw international students (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Liamputtong, 2011). The fact that Australian universities are becoming ever more reliant on the income generated by international students, means that it is important that universities start to listen to these students and leverage what can be learnt from their experiences to inform the fostering of a positive academic journey in Australia (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Liamputtong, 2011; Robertson, 2011). The fact remains however that the expansion of student populations from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds is the continuing challenge for universities in Australia (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007).

Cultural differences and/or linguistic challenges mean that international students find it hard to navigate a number of areas: academic codes, relationships with lecturers, teaching and learning styles, adjusting to a new life away from family and friends, which are often compounded by stress from financial pressures (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008; Liamputtong, 2011; Pan, Wong, Chan, & Joubert, 2007).

Similarly, the presence of a disability can further complicate the process for local students adjusting to university in terms of accessing and understanding relevant policy, support systems, access to resources and adjusting to a more independent lifestyle (Donato, 2008; Dutta, Kundu, & Schiro-Geist, 2009; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Students can become segregated, isolated and limited in terms of full participation and engagement with their educational and social environments, and isolated by policy which situates students in deficit, perpetuating 'able-est' beliefs (Fay & Wolff, 2009; Hehir, 2002). Unfortunately these experiences can then cascade into internalized ableism where students believe these limitations are the result of their own failings and as a result become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Fay & Wolff, 2009; Hehir, 2002).

One of the key policies for students with a disability at McKenzie University is to provide an inclusive and flexible environment for students and staff by identifying and removing any remaining systemic barriers to equitable access and participation. There is no specific policy at McKenzie University which governs international students with a disability per se; the relevant policy pertaining to international students with a disability, in theory, is contained within the university's Equity and Diversity policy. In practice however, the disability liaison unit of the university does not receive extra funding for service provision to international students with a disability, even though international students pay fees in excess of local students for studying at McKenzie University.

As researchers we were interested in this intersection of 'layers' – how a student who is labeled not

only 'international student' but also 'student with a disability' navigates new territory, geographically, culturally and politically (under university policy), in their new academic and social setting of a foreign country. Looking at these experiences informed by disability as a social construct rather than an individualized 'problem' helps us examine these layers and make sense of the workings of power and empowerment, the politics of difference and inclusion (Albrecht, 2003; Ware, 2009) and seeks to show respect for people with a disability as individuals rather than a collective group with the same needs. The pervading discourse regarding international students has often been one of deficit, and problematizes groups of students based on ethnic background for example; "Asian" students are often problematized as being typically passive learners (see Biggs, 1997; Littlewood, 1999, in Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Robertson, 2011).

Gleaning insight into an individual's experience through close consideration of insider perspectives is pivotal in moving away from perceptions which situate students as a homogenous group and assume that their experiences are the same under the disability "label." These insider perspectives are a way for researchers, policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders to appreciate and learn from the realities of other people (Jones, 2013).

The belief that "all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate" (Harvey, 1989, in Mills & Gale, 2007, p. 439) is central to a critical theoretical stance as articulated by Bourdieu, and is used in this research to underpin how the students interviewed have resisted the 'disability' label. A Bourdieuan approach to research underpinned by critical theory and the tenets of social justice means

Starting thought from the lives of those people upon whose exploitation the legitimacy of the dominant system depends can bring into focus questions and issues that were not visible, 'important', or legitimate within the dominant institutions, their conceptual frameworks, cultures, and practices. (Harding, 1998, in Mills & Gale, 2007, p. 439).

Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, capital and field, and symbolic violence, have been applied in this paper in order to explore the experiences of two international students with a disability, Mary and Anna, the results of which were somewhat unanticipated. In Bourdieuan theorization, field explains individual positioning and relations between both individuals and institutions and is framed by certain rules (Clark, Zukas, & Lent, 2011). Capital is that which is valued in the field, and may be symbolic, social, economic, or cultural (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Habitus are the embodied social structures encompassing agency, habits

and reflexivity, structured by histories and present circumstances (Clark et al., 2011; Webb et al., 2002). Practices and actions are the manifestations of the habitus (Manton, 2008, p. 51, in Clark et al., 2011). These elements are interdependent; for example, an individual's position in the field will have an influence on the kind of capital recognized in that field. This also serves to shape the habitus of the person. Symbolic violence is "the violence which is exercised upon individuals in a symbolic, rather than a physical way. It may take the form of people being denied resources, treated as inferior or being limited in terms of realistic aspirations" (Webb et al., 2002, p. xvi).

The analysis of the data employs Bourdieu's conceptual tools as a framework through which to view the experiences of Mary and Anna. Mary is a 20 year old student from China who has a visual impairment. She has full mobility without the use of a cane or a guide dog, but wears thick glasses and needs to hold written material very close to her face to read it. Anna is a 21 year old student from Hong Kong who has depression and anxiety. Mary's and Anna's experiences in Australia as international students showed how they use their habitus, and capital in navigating new academic codes and adjusting to life in a different culture (field) while also working with new systems of support to transform the self. There are times when Mary and Anna experienced symbolic violence in the form of discrimination or disadvantage, but are unable to speak out about this.

Looking at the experiences of these students serves to complement Bourdieu's habitus by seeking to acknowledge "individual reflexivity and the capacity to behave in ways that are not necessarily accommodative to the dominant social relations or discourses within which they are located" (Bennett, 2010, p. 101).

Couldry (2005) argues that Bourdieu's habitus limits an agent's "possibilities for action, by constraining the resources he or she has to act in the situations he or she encounters" (Couldry, 2005, p. 357). However, as the analysis shows, the experiences of Mary and Anna illustrate how these students have consciously worked at reconstructing their habituses in the new fields, and how this happens in alignment with their newly acquired cultural capital as a student studying in Australia.

Research Questions

The following two questions informed the methodology of this research:

1. How are the strategies and resources in the research university supporting or hindering the students with disability's academic development and achievement? That is, what are the facilitators and what are the barriers as conceptualized as part of this study?
2. As practitioners, how can Bourdieu's theories of capital, habitus and field help us understand these experiences?

Methodology

We situate this research in a Bourdieuan perspective of field, capital and habitus. Bourdieu defines the habitus as "internalized embodied social structures" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18). As habitus is composed of values, beliefs and norms the research approach must recognise voice and agency as important tools for exploring lived experiences. For example, prior to entering into Australia, the international students in this research have acquired existing internalized values, beliefs, dispositions from their long socialization with a place in their respective home countries. As they enter into Australia, they enter into a new field; what Bourdieu terms as a network of objective relations between positions (Bourdieu, 1988). Because objective relations have rules and norms which determine the nature of interactions of the agents or occupants, a new form of socialization begins leading to a hybridization of habitus. Bourdieu sees capital manifesting in economic, cultural, social and symbolic ways (Bourdieu, 1998). In economic terms capital refers to wealth defined in monetary terms; cultural capital involves a person's or institution's possession of recognized knowledge; social capital is constituted by social ties; and symbolic capital refers to one's status, honor or prestige (Bourdieu, 1998). These assets influence everyday relations the international students with disability have with predominantly Australian White educators. By utilizing this theoretical methodological approach we avoided entangling ourselves in purely quantitative approaches to collecting data which often are problematic when the aim of the research is understanding authentic voices of individuals with disability because they create and maintain positioning of "the other".

Quantitative approaches can answer some research questions but largely, the researcher becomes invariably positioned 'outside' and 'at a distance', and looking for an 'objective' reality. This is in comparison with a qualitative case study which attempts to enable researchers a deeper insight and understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. By carrying out this research within qualitative parameters we have gained the possibility of analyzing underpinning power relations or wider social contexts, and how these relate to power; (Webb et al., 2002) an important part of research with students, particularly those with a disability. It is significant that a number of contemporary studies which focus on the experiences of students with a disability use interviews as a way of collecting rich and meaningful data, and qualitative approaches to analysis in exploring the various dimensions of these experiences. For instance, Beauchamp-Pryor's (2012) study considered how students with a disability participate and are represented in educational policy-making at university in the UK. Bessant (2012) explores the experiences of students with a disability at university negotiating alternative

assessment arrangements with staff members in Australia. Redpath et al. (2013) focus on the barriers to higher education experienced by post-secondary students in Northern Ireland. All of these studies utilize interviews and different qualitative analysis techniques to explore the richness inherent in their findings. In a similar way, framing this research within Bourdieu's conceptual perspectives using a qualitative approach also offers us the possibilities of understanding how the insider perspectives of students with disability are crucial in making sense of how they feel about themselves in regards to the impacts of policies, support and services on them in their education (Bland, 2011).

An important part of qualitative approaches is considering how the researcher cannot be separated from the research – the researcher's values are an inherent part of all the stages of the research process and cannot be detached from the subject under investigation (Ayiro, 2012; Bryman, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through a process of reflexivity we asked ourselves questions about our perceptions and beliefs before engaging in the research. As both authors are lecturers, one of the lecturers also being a student at the time of these interviews, we had some preconceived notions regarding the experiences of the students we were interviewing. Based on literature and anecdotal evidence of local students' experiences we expected the results of this study to reflect negative outcomes. However, this was not the case, and the data analysis shows an overall sense of satisfaction, which we had not predicted.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research was undertaken at McKenzie University (pseudonym) in Melbourne. The interview protocol for this study was informed by a conceptual framework which situates policy, practice, and pedagogy as intrinsic to fostering inclusivity in higher education. Using the conceptual framework, we created questions for the students which focused on what is currently working or not working for them, and how they viewed their experience as a student with a disability from a country outside of Australia. Because of the added layer of complexity provided by cultural diversity within both participant cohorts, questions also focused on gaining insights into the interviewees' perceptions of socio-cultural norms as reflected in their respective countries, as well as perceptions of other countries.

Recruitment of interested students was purposeful (students who had registered with the Disability Liaison Unit of the University) and was done through email invitation. The email was sent to a manager at the Disability Liaison Unit (DLU) at McKenzie University which outlined the background to the research and provided email contact details of one of the researchers for students to write to if they wished to participate. Alternative means of communication were also suggested if the students did not find email to be an

appropriate medium with the DLU's assistance. The DLU manager sent the information to any international students who had registered with the unit as requiring support. Although we sought more students to participate in this research, only two students signed consent forms indicating their willingness to participate. Face-to-face, individual interviews were held on the university campus and lasted for around one hour for each participant. Questions were sent to the participants before the interviews took place and covered areas such as educational background, the level of academic support in the home country and in Australia, perceptions of any cultural differences in support, and the attitude of people with additional needs in home country and Australia.

In order to maximize the voice of the student and clarify further information, the interview transcripts were sent to the students. The students were asked to extend ideas, rework comments, or delete any areas they wished to have omitted from the data, giving the participants' ownership of the information. As these students speak English as their second language, their speech does contain grammatical errors. However, these were not corrected in the transcripts in an effort to maintain the true voices of the participants (Bland, 2011). Theoretical categories of habitus, capital, field and symbolic violence were used to thematically organize information from the transcripts. In order to preserve the stories as much as possible, the analysis was done "manually" and not by using a software program such as Nvivo.

Results and Discussion

Culture: Habitus and Symbolic Capital

The students' views on and experiences of service provision in the university at the center of this study demonstrate that the nature of the dispositions, values, etc. of a country determine the way that people with disabilities are treated and supported. The results from the interviews with Mary and Anna reflect the different degrees of symbolic capital that are afforded to students with disabilities in different countries. Within the Asian context for example, authors suggest that the concept of inclusive education is one that is relatively new (Forlin, 2007; Gilson & Dymond, 2011) and that values embedded in Confucian philosophy in Hong Kong and Chinese cultures are also a likely contributor to the willingness to thoroughly embrace inclusion (Forlin, 2007). Disability has long been considered under a medical rather than a social model in Hong Kong, which has created a society where people with a disability have been isolated and ostracized (Forlin, 2007; Gilson & Dymond, 2011). Similarly, the implementation of initiatives for inclusive practices in China has generally been slow, and relates to a culture which tends to shy away from "difference" (Shang, Fisher, & Xie, 2011). The way that Mary and Anna spoke about their additional needs reflected their internalized problematic, using language such as "my problem" to talk about their

disabilities. Mary mentioned “how in China I don't want other people to know my eye problem” because of the shame that it had caused her growing up, and the possible implications of not being able to attend university or get a job:

When I was in China, if you have some problem...people... will look down at you and if I will go to find a job, it's very difficult. They don't think you can do it... They think you have disability so you're actually not a normal person.

At the start of the interview Anna talked of how she had “escaped” from her country because

I have problem, that's why I'm here today and I don't want to stay in Hong Kong...My country, I'm not thinking about those physically disabled, but someone like me, mentally disabled, my country they don't recognize people as mentally disabled. They just think that we're crazy and you should be locked up in a mental hospital.

Both of these quotes reflect the highly competitive field in China for symbolic capital; a battlefield of sorts (Webb et al., 2002), in that the competition for capital is fierce between the agents, and those who need help such as Mary and Anna are denied recognition by being looked down upon or locked up. As a result, both Anna and Mary spoke about feeling like someone from a kind of sub-class in their own countries. For this reason it is perhaps not surprising that both Mary and Anna locate “the problem” as within themselves, and consequent feelings of low self-worth in trying to deal with a lack of support at school and university in China and Hong Kong. Tse, Cheung, Kan, Ng, and Yau (2012) argue that the distinctiveness and saliency of one's social status depends heavily on how society perceives the group to which the individual belongs. For Mary and Anna, their classification as disabled individuals puts them in a distinctive group, which for cultural reasons is considered as being sick in need of treatment. Similarly, using the DLU for support in Australia may also have negative consequences on their identity if membership is associated with being unwell.

Familial habitus. Both Mary and Anna's families played a significant role in the degree to which they each felt supported and empowered to pursue their education in Australia. This familial or family habitus (Atkinson, 2011) in relation to education is seen as the internalized and ingrained perspectives a family has, which constitute largely unarticulated assumptions about the likely academic trajectory for the child, the extent to which further study at university, for example is “as an impossible, a possible or an entirely natural future” (Reay, 1998b; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, in Atkinson, 2011, p. 334).

The significant role Mary's family, particularly her father, played in encouraging her academically and

socially is unequivocal and inextricably linked to the habitus of her family:

I can talk to everyone about my eye problems now. I don't feel very confused or very stressed about my eye problems. When I tell you, yes, it's the truth. I can't fix it and my father always told me that if you can't control it, just let it go. It happened so that's a fact... When I graduated from middle school I think a lot about my life at that time and my father asked me if I want to go to a normal life or just disability life... If I go slow I just can learn by myself and my father said your brain don't have problems so you're a very brilliant girl and just have some problems with your eyes, that's my problem.

It is likely from this comment that Mary's family assumed that university study would be an option for her, and encouraged her to pursue this. Perhaps also part of what prompted Mary to pursue overseas study may have been the desire to remove herself from the field of her home country and ‘prove’ her education as “an entirely natural future” as Atkinson's (2011) quote above suggests.

However, unlike Mary, Anna was unfortunate in not having the support of her family. Anna's familial habitus is one where there is a struggle against her family:

Even my parents think that I'm crazy. They hate the idea that I'm asking for help and I need help from a counselor or I need help from the DLU and the special consideration, they hate this idea. They hate the idea that I'm taking medication... They think that I'm not working hard enough. They think that mental illness is like a block. If you jump over it, if you try hard enough to jump over it, you can jump over it. They think it's like a fever, but it's not that easy. It's something in your mind that you can't figure out and you need help.

In looking at these statements from Anna, it appears that in her case, familial habitus is a discord between the beliefs of her family and her experiences of growing up with anxiety and depression. Anna lacks capital within not only her social and educational fields, but also within her family field because the social/cultural group to which she belongs is defined and linked to illness (Tse et al., 2012).

Capital and field. As previously alluded to, Mary's perceptions of the pervading socio-cultural fields in China meant in general she was not afforded cultural capital in wider society (Shek & Merrick, 2012; Tse et al., 2012), potentially impacting on her acceptance into university and future ability to secure a job. She told a story about having a pre-university medical examination, and implied that her acceptance or rejection into the university hinged on the results of this test. She was fortunate on the day in that at the test

I just said [to the person doing the eye test] I can't see clearly, if you can just make me pass and at that time they just don't want to make some problems, [so they said] yes, you can pass, just make a little [adjustment to the results] - maybe I can just see 5.1 maybe and so it's borderline, it's 5.4, they just make it 5.4.

Mary talked about how she had been through school with no support, and how she developed her own strategies for learning on her own, such as sitting at the very front of the class to copy from the blackboard or rely on friends to help with her study, all the while not wanting to let on about the extent of her vision. Mary talked about the support she had received in Australia:

I want to talk [about] one of my good tutors. He's very kind. Last trimester I asked him a lot of questions. When we did assignments, not only me, I just feel confused because I'm the person who always wants to do something in front of others because I have some problem and I think I will do it a little slow so maybe they need four hours, maybe I need eight hours so I just do it first and I came to his office maybe four or five times a week to ask something about assignments and he's very kind and he just tells me and he is very humorous and he helps me to do the things and he told me maybe this is wrong and you should do this, those kind of things and the learning adviser as I mentioned before, K, she is very good. She helps me a lot for the bigger printing and to apply for DLU and some other things.

Arguably, finding support at McKenzie University also contributed to Mary feeling a greater sense of freedom in Australia in being able to talk about her needs openly. Although Mary talked about herself as being "the problem" or "I'm the person always having problems", she was empowered and comfortable in herself to ask for assistance at McKenzie University. This implies that her symbolic capital and resultant attitudes have shifted since coming to Australia; she has more agency in this new field in being able to disclose her needs. Bourdieuan capital "is not set in stone or universally accepted, either within or across fields" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 22). As a result, Mary enjoys good relationships – she has friends here in Australia and talked about positive interactions with support staff. This accumulation of capital also resulted in her parents feeling happy that her daughter is supported in Australia.

Anna also found a new sense of capital in the field at university in Australia. What we see in Anna's case is her shift in acculturated capital away from the field of her own country and family which constructs her identity as being in deficit, to one where she can openly seek help, and indeed is one of many students who seek help.

The western countries have more knowledge about mental illness and in fact my counselor keeps telling me something like a lot of people in Australia need counseling services and a lot of them, especially students in my age, because I used to tell them I'm 21 and 21 should be the age that you feel happy, you play with your friends and you go out and have fun and at least not stay in a room talking to counselors and she said a lot of students in Australia, at least in [this university], they ask for counseling, so I guess that sort of makes me feel better.

The fact that Anna even sought counseling is important as it is inconsistent with the literature which suggests that international students do not take advantage of counseling services offered by universities due to concerns over trust, loss of face, embarrassment, shame or fear of stigmatization by peers and family (Sawir et al., 2008). Indeed, "many international students would rather suffer with psychological difficulties than speak to a professional counselor due to stigmas associated with mental illness and personal competency" (Sandhu, 1994, in Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004, p. 135). In Anna's case, she was able to talk about the comparisons between her counselor in Hong Kong and in Australia, and in doing so it was interesting that she had concluded western countries have more knowledge about mental illness. Her conclusions may be based on identifying some of the differences in approaches to therapy, in that counselors influenced by western psychotherapeutic approaches perceived mental illness as arising from interactions between the person and the environment. (Mallinckrodt, Shigeoka, & Suzuki, 2005, in Chen & Mak, 2008, p. 443)

Symbolic violence in the field. Despite having positive experiences of support there were also times when Mary and Anna felt at a disadvantage or unsatisfied. For example, Mary was frustrated that prior knowledge from China was not recognized in Australia. She told us how she had studied in China for three years before coming to Australia and that she had expected this prior study would have been recognized by McKenzie University in terms of advanced standing for some units. However, this was not the case. Because of this lack of recognition by the university, she felt it was a waste of her time having done this prior study.

In China it's three years at uni[versity] and now it's three years [here] and I nearly finish half and I came here. What I did before is just rubbish. I can't fix it and when I came here I can't apply for credit.

She was obviously frustrated and upset by this lack of recognition, and waste of time and effort in having completed the study in China, is particularly emphasized in her use of the word "rubbish". In this case we can see how the alignment of cultural capital of the student with that of the target institution results in the maximization of

learning potential, but that this is hindered when not the case (Stewart, 2010). For Bourdieu, Mary's experience in not having her capital recognized is an example of how the education system "work[s] to 'consecrate' social distinctions by cultivating certain ways of acting that have the effect of reproducing social inequality" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 128).

Anna's experience of symbolic violence was evident in the way she talked about her disappointment regarding contact with local students: "there's no school bullying, they're just trying to ignore you like you don't exist because they don't know how to communicate with Chinese." This was compounded by how she felt about the financial commitment her family was making for her to study in Australia. "What's wrong with Chinese? They pay 40 grand to study here and so you [local students] can enjoy your educational benefits." This is Anna's experience of symbolic violence in that it is almost the norm that local students 'ignore' international students. According to Dunne (2009) local students at university often report that intercultural contact is "less rewarding than intracultural contact" (Dunne, 2009, p. 233). Local students tended to pursue intercultural contact "only when it was deem[ed] to be 'worth the effort'" (Dunne, 2009, p. 233).

Symbolic violence for Mary and Anna was also related to the challenges of communicating in a different language and the reactions of those around them. Part of Mary's frustration for example was how she felt unable to fully express the extent of her vision, and how much help she actually needed in class.

I just told them [the lecturer] my eyes are not good or something, but they can't understand how bad it is. I can't explain very clearly how bad it is. I just can tell them it's bad... I actually can't see it [the lecture slides], but how can I say just make it bigger? If they make it bigger, I can't see it, too.

This difficulty in communicating may also relate to Mary's habitus – in her own country she had lived for so many years in trying to hide her loss of vision that now when it is safe to fully explain it to others, she simply does not have the words to do so. This is not uncommon for many students with a disability; the ability to communicate needs is one of the main determinants for success for students (Donato, 2008), which is of even greater significance when the student speaks English as their second language. Furthermore, "students' ability to communicate their needs does not necessarily lead to a positive experience" (Donato, 2008, p. 61) as was the case with Anna:

When I first came to this university and when I first trying to see a doctor and having new medication which is very difficult, because psychological pills are not a cold or something and I may have difficulties in class which the

teacher himself thought it was a way that I tried to get higher marks, so I told him I was sick and he said it's a way that you try to get higher marks and he said my English couldn't be good because I'm Chinese. I got high distinction from the foundation here and he said that's because I'm Chinese and my English won't be good so that's not very nice...[so I was discriminated against] from being ill and from being Chinese...I didn't know that I could deal with that [situation with the lecturer] so I did nothing and he just gave me a cross, that's every paper I handed in, a big one.

Fear of speaking out is something that many students with a disability face (Donato, 2008; Goode, 2007; Hopkins, 2011). The psycho-emotional dimension of disability, that is any situations where a person with a disability feels put down, "undermined", "devalued", or "worthless" and afraid to speak out (Reeve, 2002, p. 1) is one of the most brutal examples of Bourdieuan symbolic violence. Mary continued to struggle in class despite not being able to read the slides after asking for help. Anna was unaware that she was able to do anything about her lecturer accusing her of feigning illness for higher marks. These are clear examples of how Mary and Anna as agents are being "treated as inferior, denied resources...but they do not perceive it that way; rather, their situation seems to them to be the natural order of things" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 25). Clearly these situations could have been very different had the lecturer taken the time to sit and talk to Mary and Anna openly about what exactly their needs were, and what other support systems and strategies might have helped their learning.

Reconstructing the habitus. Even though she continually talked about "my problem", in many ways Mary has "fought back" and constructed herself as an agent with capital in two fields. Firstly, based on encouragement by her father, and the seemingly grim alternative of "the disability life" which is fraught with discrimination, lack of opportunity and society's belief "that you are not a good person" (if you have a disability), Mary clearly made a conscious decision in China to become educated and live a life where she could become empowered through education. She then traveled to Australia to upskill and acquire further cultural, symbolic and linguistic capital in an English-speaking university, something which is valued in various fields (further education, employment) in China (Waters, 2006).

Secondly, within the Australian university field she has worked with a sense of determination in constructing herself as a student who speaks English in her home life, achieves high marks and has made friends who she can rely on for help. She established good connections with lecturers and got herself a job. In this way she repositioned herself within the fields of her own country as well as her university in Australia. Mary's

formation of the habitus is conscious, an extension of Bourdieu's solely unconscious endeavor (Farnell, 2000, in Sayer, 2010, p. 91). Mary's habitus is working against the accepted cultural grain that is, she is fighting against how society constructed her identity in China as without symbolic capital; a sense of her being seen as "handicapped" and not a good person. Moreover, despite the negative attitudes in her home country, Mary has still developed an attitude of viewing people for what they are rather than harboring deficit views about others, saying that people with a disability should

have the same rights, I think. They need to study. Maybe they will do things better than the normal person and maybe I can't see it clearly, but my ears is very good. I can hear a lot of things.

As previously alluded to, Anna's observations of Western countries having more knowledge about mental illness and her statement that "I feel more comfortable staying in Australia than Hong Kong because I'm more western" show that she prefers to position herself in terms of Australian students. Anna had also managed to leverage support from her counselor to act as a quasi-advocate on her behalf in terms of notifying staff of her needs, saying "I'm no longer contacting my teachers. I ask my counselors to do that." Once again this is evidence of a conscious recalibrating of the habitus and pushing against the socio-cultural habitus of family and community in Hong Kong.

In the context of this study, Bourdieu's theories can be extended towards the potential for people to push against the previous limitations of the dominant habituses and construct themselves as powerful and empowered. This new conceptualization of Bourdieu's habitus hence can take into account "the way in which the constraining and enabling effects of social contexts on individuals are mediated by their own deliberations" (Sayer, 2010, p. 89), something which Sayer argued that Bourdieu's construction of the habitus "largely ignored" (p. 89).

Conclusion

Collecting data via interviews to glean insights into the student experience and analysis through Bourdieu allows insight into the uniqueness of the individual experience, challenging our notions of "international student" and "student with a disability". Bourdieu's tools of habitus, capital and field allow real insight into the lived experiences of these students, and these methodological approaches are aimed at uncovering the rich and complex individual experiences of a diverse range of students.

In response to our research questions driving this study, our main finding was in relation to how existing socio-cultural norms in home countries resulted in students feeling unsupported in China and Hong Kong, as also explored by Shek and Merrick (2012). The juxtaposition of the students' comments regarding their perceived level of support in Australia against their own

notions of disability driven by culture (for example, Anna's words about how "they lock you up" in Hong Kong if you have a mental illness) clearly results in what we see as a positive reflection of their experiences as a student in Australia. Their experiences further support the theory that in any specific social or cultural group to which one belongs, the value of one's identity depends to a great extent on health status and self-perceived wellbeing in comparison to other groupings (Tse et al., 2012). Anna and Mary came to Australia with minimal expectations of how their particular needs would be met due to their home country experiences and the lack of symbolic capital in their own countries. For example, being classified into a disability group, which was not valued in their home countries, incurred negative impact on their identity.

In terms of moving forward, Anna and Mary did also give some examples of where they felt unsatisfied with how their needs had been met at McKenzie University. Both Mary and Anna were unaware of the existence of policies governing the experiences of students with a disability and McKenzie University, and therefore unaware of their rights under such policies. As practitioners and policy makers it is important to think about the true accessibility of these policies and who is included under these policies – international students with a disability are not technically covered under the current university policy. Making all students aware of their rights under university policy, and such policies being written in clear and easily understandable ways for students who may speak English as a second language, are positive ways of looking towards comprehensive provision for students such as Anna and Mary.

This research is positioned in a way so as to contribute to the discourse which looks at the identity and agency of international students (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Kettle, 2005; Kell & Vogl, 2008; Robertson, 2011) and students with a disability (Goode, 2007; Hopkins, 2011). As researchers we wished to uncover how students work as agents of their own change in their conscious positioning away from deficit labels. Looking at the experiences of these students serves to complement Bourdieu's habitus by seeking to acknowledge how individuals change their positioning in relation to what might have been their assumed originating and influencing socio-cultural discourses. Recognizing that students have individual experiences which are valid and worth listening to is critical in terms of developing inclusive practice and policy, improving access and accountability and celebrating what is working. It is apparent that little has been explored within the cohort of students from a variety of cultural backgrounds and how their experiences in their own countries mirror or are different to experiences in their new countries.

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