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Title:

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Date:

2018-07-04

Citation:

Järvinen, M. & Ravn, S. (2018). Playing the game or played by the game? Young drug users' educational trajectories. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39 (5), pp.669-682. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1401917>.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/294906>

Playing the game or played by the game? Young drug users' educational trajectories

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This is the accepted version of the article, ie the final version before layout and typesetting. Some minor changes may have occurred in the proof stages.

The full reference is: Järvinen, M. & Ravn, S. (2018): "Playing the game or played by the game? Young drug users' educational trajectories". British Journal of Sociology of Education, vol. 39(5), pp. 669-682.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1401917>

Abstract

This paper analyses the relationship between cannabis use and educational trajectories among 42 young drug users, recruited at addiction treatment centres in Denmark. Quantitative research shows regular cannabis use to be associated with poor school performance and drop-outs. However, these studies do not pay much attention to differences between educational tracks or to the links between the educational field and other fields. Drawing on a Bourdieusian framework we analyse the interviewees' involvement in four different fields: the academic field, the field of vocational schools, the labour market field and the artistic field. We contribute to the literature on post-16 educational trajectories by showing how successful 'investments' in education depend not only on available resources (capitals), but also on the ability to navigate in an increasingly complex educational system. Furthermore, we show how regular cannabis plays into the 'illusio' of different fields, challenging the interviewees' playing of educational games.

Keywords: youth; educational trajectories; drugs; Bourdieu; qualitative methods

Introduction

This paper analyses the post-16 educational trajectories of a particularly vulnerable group of young people: youths with a problematic drug use. Drawing on a Bourdieusian analytical framework we investigate the relationship between cannabis use and involvement in education with the aim of identifying different social and educational trajectories among young people with cannabis problems. The paper shows that successful ‘investments’ in education depend not only on individual resources and motivation but also on a) the youths’ position in the social space that society is made up of, b) their ability to navigate in an increasingly complex educational system and c) the different ways cannabis plays into the main fields the youths are involved in. Empirically, the paper is based on qualitative interviews with 42 young drug users in drug treatment in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Research on post-16 trajectories has consistently shown how young people’s educational choices are ‘socially embedded’ and highly influenced by the resources available to them, in particular resources relating to social background (see e.g. Snee and Devine 2014; Heath et al. 2010; Bathmaker et al. 2013; Reay 2004). Large parts of this research draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to show how resources, or capitals, as well as embodied experiences in the sense of one’s habitus provide students from privileged backgrounds with an advantage in the educational system. In this paper we use these insights to investigate how students who differ in terms of social background but all have a problematic cannabis use fare in the post-16 educational system.

Previous research on cannabis use and educational engagement is predominantly quantitative and in large part based on US data. This research has consistently shown

how regular cannabis use is associated with school drop-out (Bray et al. 2000; McCaffrey et al. 2010; Elffers 2012; see also Townsend et al. 2007 for a review), poorer outcomes (Jeynes 2002; Stiby et al. 2015) and fewer years of schooling (Chatteriji 2006). A recent study based on British data confirms the association between substance use and educational disengagement (Symonds et al. 2016). This association persists when controlling for a number of factors such as gender, social background and ethnicity (Rees 2014), though the actual direction of the association is difficult to determine. What these studies share is a rather uniform approach to education, not paying much attention to differences between educational tracks (for instance between academic and vocational tracks) or to the relationship between the educational field and other fields. Furthermore, educational engagement often appears as a matter of individual motivation or lack of motivation, without much focus on the social conditions that promote or curb this motivation. However, in the interviews that form the empirical basis of this paper it became apparent that the relationship between the interviewees' cannabis use and their educational trajectories was not entirely captured by this understanding. For many interviewees, cannabis use was indeed associated with a gradually decreasing involvement in educational activities (Järvinen & Ravn 2017) but this development differed across educational sectors and dependent on the interviewees' social background and broader life situation. Also, some interviewees struggled to maintain their involvement in the educational system *despite* their extensive cannabis use, while others had found ways of integrating their cannabis use in engagements outside of the educational system.

Qualitative research on cannabis or other drug use and educational involvement is generally sparse. Much qualitative drug research focuses on substance use as a youth

leisure activity (Parker et al. 1998; Parker 2005), and does not investigate whether and how this affects other dimensions of young people's lives. One of the few studies investigating how cannabis and other drug use is associated with particular identities *in* school settings is Fletcher and colleagues' study of a London-based upper secondary school. The authors build on Paul Willis' (1977) classic study but suggest that today drug use has replaced working class affiliation as the point of identification in counter-school cultures, and further that drug use can provide a sense of belonging among students who otherwise feel marginalised in school (Fletcher et al. 2009). Looking more broadly at young people's transitions from education to the labour market, British researchers have documented how drug use is often part of a larger amalgam of disadvantage in specific neighbourhoods that works to challenge young people's educational engagement (MacDonald and Marsh 2005; Webster et al. 2004).

In this paper we contribute to the sparse existing, qualitative research on educational engagement among young substance users. We do this by taking a closer look at how young drug users are engaged in and beyond the educational field and how their cannabis use plays into this engagement. To conceptualise this we take inspiration from Bourdieu's theoretical framework. More specifically, instead of speaking about 'motivation', we will draw on Bourdieu's metaphor of investments, proposing that individuals engage in different 'games' in accordance with their social dispositions and dependent on the fit between their habitus and the stakes at play in a specific field. With the Bourdieusian approach we can conceptualise how the interviewees are differently equipped with regard to making investments, and also how successful investments depend on a certain relationship between the present and the interviewees' imagined futures.

Theoretical framework

Although Bourdieu's concepts are closely related to each other and hence form a whole 'package', in this paper we draw in particular on the concepts of field and *illusio*.

According to Bourdieu, society, or the 'social space', consists of separate and relatively autonomous fields, each with their own logics and values. A field is defined as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 97). Loïc Wacquant employs two metaphors to describe the concept of the field: firstly, it can be compared to a magnetic field, meaning that all individuals in the field are affected by and have to relate to the forces or gravity of the field. And secondly, all fields are 'battle fields' in the sense that they are characterized by hierarchies between people positioned more or less centrally in the field, struggling to either maintain or obtain central and rewarding positions (Wacquant 1992, 17). Such positions depend on the amount and composition of capital that individuals possess. Different forms of capital, be that economic, cultural or social, have different value across different fields and hence a central position in one field does not necessarily translate into an equivalent position in another field (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 98f). This is central for the analysis that follows, in which our focus is not so much on the power struggles between individuals within a given field, but more on the relation between different fields and how our interviewees try to navigate in and between them.

Central for understanding how a social field operates are the concepts of *doxa* and *illusio*. While *doxa* is often defined as the rules or presuppositions, formal or common-sense, of the field, *illusio* is the belief or investment in the field. Bourdieu often compares the field to a game: for a game to appear meaningful, one has to believe in the

‘the name of the game’, to acknowledge what is at stake and fully invest oneself in this (Bourdieu 1990; 2000). Importantly, though, individuals are not equally well equipped for partaking in distinct fields. On the contrary, some individuals have a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1990, 66) that others do not, as a result of their experience with the game, and conditioned by their (and their parents’) social position. Hence, an individual’s habitus, that is, the “historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action“ (Wacquant 1992, 16), is key to his or her ability to navigate the field in question.

In the analysis below we conceptualise the young interviewees’ educational engagement as a matter of investment in *different* fields. First and foremost this involves the educational field with its internal relations between academic and vocational positions. In order to capture the diversity of the educational field, we distinguish between on the one hand interviewees’ involvement in high-schools and universities and, on the other, interviewees’ experiences with vocational schools, apprenticeships etc. We also include the labour market field and the artistic field in the analysis as these ‘compete’ with the educational field with regard to the youths’ present and future investments. Each field operates with a specific logic: while the academic field values and quantifies intellectual achievements and the vocational field and parts of the labour market field focus on practical skills, the artistic field depends on creativity and artistic skills. All four fields, however, demand other forms of investment as well, in order for the participants to be successful players. As we will show in the analysis, regular cannabis users face challenges across these fields but the character of the challenges varies from one field to another.

While the prime focus of our analysis is the interviewees' educational experiences and their investments in different fields so far, this for the most part also implies an orientation towards the future; when investing in a particular field one also sees that investment as holding future promises. According to Bourdieu, this orientation to the future cannot be understood in isolation from the past; from the embodied history that the habitus provides us with. These "dispositions towards the future" are then confronted with "the chances objectively offered to [the individual] by the social world" (Bourdieu 1990, 64) to provide a sense of "what is and is not 'for us'" (ibid.). In other words, the combination of the interviewees' trajectories and the chances they encounter is what forms their imagined futures.

Methods and data

The analysis draws on 42 qualitative interviews with young people enrolled in drug treatment in Copenhagen, Denmark. The interviewees were recruited from three small treatment centres that offer outpatient treatment (Centre A: 14 interviewees, Centre B: 22 interviewees and Centre C: six interviewees). The recruitment was conducted with the aid of staff at the treatment centres who briefly introduced the study to potential participants. Interested participants provided their phone number and were contacted by the researchers to set up an interview. 38 interviewees were recruited in this way.

Another four participants were recruited at group therapy sessions attended by one of the interviewers for observation purposes. The majority of the interviews took place in a meeting room at the treatment centres or at the researchers' work-place. The interviews lasted 45-85 minutes, the majority around one hour. They followed a semi-structured interview guide that centred around four broad themes: initial drug use experiences and subsequent 'drug career', present drug use and everyday life, the process of seeking

treatment, and experiences with the treatment system. Also, interviewees were asked to describe their life situation and background (family background, education and labour market experiences). The present paper focuses on the relationship between this information and the interviewees' descriptions of their drug use careers. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and fully anonymised in terms of names, places and other identifiable markers.

The sample consists of 27 men and 15 women aged between 17 and 30 years, the majority (27 people) being between 18 and 23 years old. They differ substantially with regard to their social background and the resources available to them. In line with our overall Bourdieusian framework we speak about these resources as capitals, and focus on cultural capital (operationalised as parents' education) as this is the most significant for the present analysis, and also the dimension on which we have the most systematic data. The interviewees can be classified into three groups according to their parents' level of cultural capital. Seven interviewees came from families where at least one parent was university-trained (5 years, MA level), 13 from families where at least one parent had a middle-range education (e.g. social worker, technician, nurse) and 16 from families where the parents were unskilled workers or had a short vocational education. Information about parents' education was missing in six interviews. Around two out of three participants were on social benefits at the time of the interview and took part in various activation programmes as part of this. The remainder were enrolled in education or held regular jobs, though not necessarily full-time and often casual.

Almost all interviewees had tried a broad range of drugs, stimulants as well as hallucinogens, and all (had) smoked cannabis regularly and often daily. The

overwhelming majority reported that while they had been able to cut down or even quit their use of other illegal drugs, their cannabis use was what was causing them problems and was often the reason for seeking treatment in the first place.

Below we first analyse how investments in the two educational subfields take form and whether and how regular cannabis use is compatible with studying. In total, ten interviewees had experience with the academic field (high-schools and universities) and 28 with the field of vocational schools. We then move on to look beyond the educational field and analyse the two other fields that our interviewees invested in: four out of five had some experience with the labour market field while ten were engaged in some form of artistic practice. As the numbers indicate, many participants had experiences from more than one field.

Given the age range of our sample, the educational fields are relatively dominant in the interviews. In Denmark, as in most Western countries, further education beyond compulsory school is seen as key to future opportunities in the labour market (Biggart and Furlong 1996; Furlong 2013; Snee and Devine 2014). Education at all levels is free of charge, and students receive monthly financial aid, “SU” (state education grant). For unemployed “young people under the age of 30” (Ministry of Employment 2013, p. 2), taking part in or preparing for education is now compulsory to be eligible for social benefits¹. In accordance with the scope of this policy, and as youth transitions to adulthood today are generally described as prolonged or extended (Furlong & Cartmel 1997; Roberts 2003), we refer to our sample of 17-30-year-olds as ‘young people’.

Based on the participants' own descriptions, the following sections analyse their engagement in four different fields, starting with the academic field.

Investing in the academic field

A number of our interviewees had been enrolled in and often also completed high-school and some went on into further education. Many of the (former) high-school students talked about themselves as “good pupils” who despite their escalating cannabis use had managed reasonably well at high-school, at least for a year or two. They typically described themselves as “naturally gifted” or “lazy but talented”, meaning that they would come to school tired and unprepared but nevertheless succeed and maintain a good relationship with their teachers.

One aspect that makes this field stand out compared to other fields is parents' involvement. Parents, especially those with longer educations, were described as taking an active part in their children's high-school activities and in trying to keep them from dropping out from school. One example is Julian (21), the son of an economist and a lawyer, who developed an intense cannabis use during his second high-school year, and said he was about to give up school several times. However, his parents promised to pay for a year's traveling abroad if he finished successfully, which he did. Upon returning to Copenhagen, Julian started in engineering school, an environment where cannabis use was uncommon and where he felt different from the other students: “My fellow students knew I was half-stoned most of the time but... yeah, I think they were irritated, I rarely showed up but I got good marks [laughs], so I wasn't popular”. On this background, and because “engineering wasn't me after all”, Julian dropped out after eight months. At the time of the interview, he (like several other interviewees from privileged backgrounds)

had moved back to live with his parents, who had their son enrolled in addiction treatment. Julian had diminished his cannabis use considerably but still had problems controlling it. He had not yet decided if he wanted to return to school.

Another interviewee with experience of higher education was Janine (23), whose parents were a social worker and a tradesman. Although doing well during the first two years of her studies, Janine (like Julian) felt “alien” among her fellow students, who did not use cannabis: “I always sit alone at the backmost row in class. I don’t have many friends at university. At the Orientation week [at university start] for instance, the others boozed... but I smoked pot and locked myself into the bathroom and went early to bed”. Janine said she preferred the company of her drug-using friends outside of the university, because “with my friends, I can be honest about who I am. They don’t put me into boxes or judge me”. Janine’s life seemed strictly divided between on the one hand her studies and her family (“my mum keeps telling me how important it is that I get my degree”), and on the other hand her “smoking friends” outside of university.

Janine’s studies clearly placed restrictions on her cannabis smoking. She defined herself as “dependent on cannabis”, but she also adapted her smoking to her studies, for instance by taking longer breaks when preparing for exams:

My studies mean a lot to me but I feel smoking holds me back. When I took a month’s break in May, I was like ‘wow, who’s this girl, where has she been all the time, all that energy and self-confidence’. I became aware of the things I miss out on when I smoke [...] I never smoke at the university, right, but when I smoke I can feel it for three days. I can’t concentrate, I am not good at listening, I can’t read in a focused manner and I am

not good at putting sentences together [...] I need to stop because I want to become an academic, travel around the world, have an exciting job.

Summing up, interviewees in the academic field described resources (intellectual resources as well as support from parents) that helped them invest and remain in the field for a while, despite escalating cannabis problems. Investing in the academic field while simultaneously smoking cannabis regularly was problematic, especially in the longer run. The challenges were, first, that regular cannabis smoking affected their school performance (memory, concentration, endurance) in negative ways, and second, that they felt increasingly “alien” and “isolated” from the non-smoking majority of students. The “dispositions towards the future” (Bourdieu 1990) that the academic field presupposes do not include intense cannabis smoking, and regular cannabis use is not accommodated or accepted in this field. For some interviewees, such as Julian, this conflict/opposition made them drop out; for others, such as Janine, it rather functioned as an incentive to scale down or stop smoking in order not to undermine their ongoing educational investments.

Investing in the vocational field

Two thirds of the interviewees had experiences with the field of vocational schools. Strikingly, very few had finished a vocational programme, but instead started and dropped out of a number of different programmes. Participants’ experiences in the vocational field varied from involvement in a single programme to enrolment in (and dropping out from) six-seven different programmes. In the following quote Tina (20), whose parents were skilled workers, described her educational trajectory:

After compulsory school, well, what did I do? I started a jeweller programme, but did not... I completed the basic course and then stopped. Then I just bummed around and then I started at a production school², then after a year with more bumming around I enrolled in a programme for agricultural assistants but did not complete it because you need a driver's license. Which I did not have. So lately I have been bumming around some more and getting a driver's license, and now I am looking for an internship [necessary to complete the programme].

Not only Tina's switching from one school to another, but also between different, unrelated programmes was typical of a number of interviewees involved in this field. Programme enrolments were scattered and seemingly random, indicating participants' difficulties in piecing together a coherent educational profile. Long-term educational goals tended to be diffuse or altogether missing, and in some cases participants imagined futures (estate agent, restaurant owner, travel guide, to mention a few examples) that had nothing to do with the programmes they attended.

In contrast to the accounts about investment in the academic field, parents were seldom mentioned in the descriptions of vocational school experiences. Instead, the social system was often involved. 'Bumming around', as Tina termed the periods of time in between various educational programmes, was often underpinned by social benefits meaning that the interviewees were also part of mandatory activation programmes. Mads (28), the son of two primary school teachers, described the past 10 years like this:

I have been partying a lot, it was almost my full time job [laughs]. So I have a number of unfinished educational programmes behind me. For a couple of years the social services enrolled me at various folk high-schools [six months residential programmes], hoping to

solve my problems by sending me far away. So I had a few stays there [...] then some daytime programmes, production school and so on. Unemployed for a few years. And then I started a HF single subject programme before starting on this carpenter thing.

In Mads' case the social services had actively been involved in enrolling him in most programmes, none of which provided actual qualifications. In other interviews, it was less clear whether specific educational choices were made as part of activation programmes or by the interviewees themselves, making the question of who is doing the 'investing' difficult to answer.

While in the above section we showed how cannabis did not 'fit' into the academic field, very few interviewees in the vocational field mentioned stigma associated with cannabis use as a motivation for not smoking before or during school. As Leo (21) said, "people [at school] would know it but nobody would say anything", and Jesper (29) told how at the garage where he was an intern, his older colleagues would occasionally take cocaine or amphetamines themselves and would "wonder why I was so distracted" but not ask into it. The greater tolerance of cannabis use in vocational schools may be interpreted as having had two different effects on the interviewees. On the one hand, they did not report experiences of marginalisation, as did the high-school students in our sample, which meant that some of them remained at school despite their cannabis use. On the other hand, several participants told that the widespread use of cannabis at (some) vocational schools contributed to an intensification of their own use which in turn impeded their studies. The result was often that they were unable to finish the programme and dropped out – and after some months on social benefits entered a new training programme which they again had difficulties finishing.

To summarize, the most distinct characteristic of the interviewees' experiences with the vocational field was the haphazardness and seeming lack of planning in their school trajectories. The drug-tolerant atmosphere in parts of this field affected them in different ways but most participants shared one thing: a lack of engagement in and devotion to the school programmes they were enrolled in. Bourdieu described *illusio* as "the fact of attributing importance to a social game, the fact that what happens matters to those who are in the game" (Bourdieu 1998, 77). The contrast to *illusio* is in Bourdieu's terminology 'indifference' or not seeing why and what one is playing, not feeling that playing is worth the effort. When looking at the interviewees' depictions of their vocational school experiences, it is indifference and lack of interest that come to mind: a condition of not knowing the purpose of investing in different school programmes and not relating the programmes to one's future prospects. We return to the question of field interest and field indifference in the final discussion.

Investing in the labour market

The labour market field has its own gravitational forces. The *illusio* here can be seen as the belief that hard work will pay off, either in terms of higher salaries or a better position in the field. The internal power relations are between skilled and unskilled labour and between casual and permanent contracts. The majority of our interviewees had experiences from the labour market field but few had (held) permanent jobs. In some cases it was unclear whether interviewees were referring to 'real' jobs, or to trainee positions (related to the educational field) or activation schemes (through the social system). They generally inhabited fairly marginal positions: given their young age, few of them had (yet) obtained the qualifications to enter into skilled jobs and most were in casual contracts.

Some interviewees took pride in working instead of going to school. For instance Christian (20) who dropped out from high-school and found himself a job at a café, said: “I was like ‘I’m only 17, right, but I can hold a fulltime job like the other grown-ups, and if you have a fulltime job, you can live your life and earn money and be comfortable, smoking cannabis every day’”. Christian was able to keep the job for about two years but lost it when he started to smoke cannabis in the morning (again) after a long period of primarily smoking after working hours. He was still committed to his former work-place – an “alternative” environment with older colleagues he admired – and planned to return there when he had “sorted out” his problems. However, being a child of parents with long and middle-range educations, Christian also thought he should return to high-school “sooner or later”.

Other interviewees talking about their experiences with the labour market field were less engaged and primarily seemed to work in order to supply their cannabis use. Magne (25) (no information about family background) said: “I have been conscientious in that sense, a loyal employee, but mostly because I needed money for smoking. So I guess you can say that I worked out of loyalty to pot rather than loyalty to work”. Magne saw his cannabis use as having had negative consequences in terms of his education – he dropped out from school twice – but not in relation to his work: “As regards the jobs I have had, it [cannabis] hasn’t meant much, I always provided for myself”. At the time of the interview, Magne had not smoked cannabis for a year (during which he had married and become a father). He was back in the educational field, studying to become a nursing aide.

Whereas Christian and Magne above were alternating between the labour market field and the educational fields, other interviewees had given up (or in a few cases completed) their education and were now only engaged in the labour market field. Some interviewees in this category were able to keep their jobs for longer periods, others alternated between short-term jobs and periods of unemployment. To the extent that sanctions (sackings, warnings) were mentioned in the interviews, they seldom concerned cannabis use per se but rather the visibility of and/or consequences of use. Tariq (25), coming from an immigrant family of unskilled workers, related:

I worked as a kitchen assistant and I often went out in the backyard to smoke a joint. But then one day my boss could smell the smoke pouring in through the window where the guests were sitting and she shouted ‘what are you thinking of, Tariq, turn off that funny grass’. And later we sat down with a beer and she said ‘as long as you don’t do it at work’ [...] I tried for a while but the others smoked as well, and it wasn’t that important, I guess.

In general, the interviewees’ experiences with the labour market field were less marked by feelings of defeat than were their experiences with the educational fields. As Magne and others stated above, cannabis use may be easier to combine with some types of work than with studies. Also, having an income from work, as compared to study grants or social security benefits, gave participants a larger economic scope, including more money to buy cannabis. However, few participants regarded their present engagement in the labour market as holding promises for the future. What unites the interviewees’ experiences from the labour market field was how the job itself was rarely described as holding any prospects for development or advancements. Bearing in mind that we are looking at positions on the fringe of the labour market (unskilled and casual jobs), this

is perhaps not surprising. It also questions, however, the long-term prospects of the interviewees in the field: in many cases, their involvements in various jobs seemed to be a way of 'killing time' while waiting for something indefinable to happen – “in the long run, I will do something completely different than being a cleaner, that's for sure, I just don't know what”, as August (22) put it.

Investing in the artistic field

The fourth field turning up in the interviews was the artistic field (music, writing, film, painting, sculpturing) in which at least ten participants were engaged. In general, this field was depicted as the most including/accepting of cannabis use(rs) and several interviewees declared that using cannabis was a “natural part” of the artistic field. They were also of the opinion that cannabis smoking, at least at lower levels of use, promoted their artistic performance. Furthermore, participants described a conflict between the doxa of the educational fields and that of the artistic field – as they comprehended it. While some did (attempt to) pursue their artistic interests within the educational field as part of arts and crafts programmes, others dissociated themselves from, and sometimes scorned, the logic that it is important for young people to get an education. Instead they focused on their need to exercise their art of choice and imagined that one day in the not so far future their talents would be recognized – talents that education played no part in developing.

As Mark (24), the son of a hairdresser (single mother) said, “I wanted to play music. To be honest, the only thing I feel like doing, the only thing I whole-heartedly want, is to make music”. Mark had not finished any of the educational programmes he had started and “actually preferred” to be unemployed. For the past three years he had spent his

time making music on his computer and his “greatest dream was to have my hits played on the radio”. He regarded cannabis as having a positive effect on his musical performance: “For me, smoking isn’t bad. I am just a music-maker. And a lot of my music, I couldn’t have made if it hadn’t been for cannabis”. Mark had been requested to attend addiction treatment by the social services “in case I didn’t want to lose my welfare benefits, so here I am”. His social worker had advised him to return to school the following year instead of “loafing about” at home, a plan that Mark had reluctantly agreed to, although he also intended to “stick to [his] decision to become a famous musician”.

While for Mark cannabis was clearly described as facilitating his artistic performance, other interviewees had more mixed views on this. For instance, Emma (22), whose father was an artist, described similar positive, initial experiences with smoking cannabis when being creative in classes as part of an arts and crafts educational programme, saying for instance: “If I was to get started on a new painting or something and couldn’t get a grasp of it, I just went out in the schoolyard smoking a joint, and when I came back I worked slower but better”. However, when Emma’s smoking escalated, she felt the effects of cannabis became more and more negative:

I love being creative, but it gradually disappeared, right. I used to work with ceramics, shaping all kinds of pottery. When I started to smoke for real, it all faded [...] As for now, if I smoke now and then, I get all kinds of funny ideas that I can use in my work [...] But if I smoke every day, I can’t keep it, it all fizzles out [...] If I get a good idea, I can’t even be bothered to write it down or draw a picture. I honestly can’t.

For Emma and several other interviewees, cannabis use was a balancing act. In larger doses – which most participants used, which was why they sought treatment – cannabis was described as causing passivity, fatigue and difficulties with finishing things. In moderate doses cannabis was experienced as creativity-promoting, making the users “relaxed and braver”, “able to go into depths with things” or “open for new and unexpected angles” (quotes from interviews). For this reason most participants with artistic ambitions wanted to cut down, not quit their smoking. Also, interviewees in this group, and especially musicians, referred to artists who had smoked cannabis for decades “with no harm done”, “real artists” who “have been smoking for 20 years and lead fantastic lives” (Christian, 20).

According to Bourdieu, success in a field does not depend on talent alone. Novices need to work hard to learn the rules for competition, the mechanisms for gathering the right forms of field capital, the strategies for differentiating themselves from rivals and for building alliances with people centrally positioned in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 101). Fields operate by defining and defending eligibility rules, legitimizing some participants but not others to enter and proceed in the field “by their possessing a definite configuration of properties” (ibid., 107). Artistic success for our interviewees, or the fame they dreamed of, depends on their ability to do *all* these things. Judging from the information provided in the interviews, some participants had been active ‘field investors’ in the sense Bourdieu depicted, trying to build relationships with other, more central players in the field, engaging themselves in writing projects, performing at events and so on, especially before their cannabis use escalated. The majority, however, practiced their arts alone – often in increasing isolation as their cannabis use escalated – nevertheless hoping that one day somebody would discover their talents.

With a few exceptions (for instance Emma, quoted above), there was no mentioning of parents supporting their children's investments in the artistic field. Rather, parents – representing a broad spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds – advised their children to seek other, more “realistic” and “secure” educational paths or find themselves a job. As for the social services, which all the youths with artistic ambitions were or had been in contact with, the pattern was similar. Social workers tried to steer the participants into vocational programmes, most of which had nothing to do with arts and crafts, recommending that they regard their artistic interests/practices as a hobby.

Discussion

This paper investigated the post-16 trajectories of a particularly vulnerable group of young people: youths with a problematic cannabis use. We analysed the relationship between cannabis use and investment in four fields: the academic field, the vocational field, the labour market field and the artistic field, showing how regular cannabis use represents different challenges in different fields. Academic studies (at high-schools/universities) in particular were described as difficult to combine with regular cannabis use, a fact that made some interviewees restrict their drug use while others felt marginalized and dropped out. The artistic field and the vocational field were depicted as the most accepting/tolerant of drug use. The labour market field varied, dependent on type of jobs, working hours and tasks but sanctions for cannabis use were rare. In some cases, participants were able to maintain their employment for relatively long periods despite their cannabis problems.

It is well-known from previous research that young people's educational trajectories are related to their possession of appropriate forms of capital, structured according to their parents' societal position (for instance Snee and Devine 2014; Heath et al. 2010; Bathmaker et al. 2013; Reay 2004). Our study contributed to this research by showing how differences in parents' cultural capital influence the educational investments of young people with cannabis problems. A general pattern in the sample was that interviewees whose parents had longer educational backgrounds were able to remain in school (and partly also at work-places) for longer periods than youths from families with less cultural capital. Vocational schools in particular – which tended to be dominated by students whose parents had a short or middle-range education – were characterised by scattered and disrupted student trajectories. Also in the artistic field interviewees from the least privileged backgrounds seemed most vulnerable. As described above, they practiced their art in isolation, waiting for someone to discover their talents, without much concern for (or support from others in) developing their general field competences.

For Bourdieu, fields can be compared to a game, although unlike most games a field is not necessarily the product of a deliberate act of creation and it follows rules – different for different fields – that are seldom explicit and codified (Bourdieu 1992, 98). In Wacquant's words “each field prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles” (Wacquant 1992, 17). Field differences notwithstanding, Bourdieu also pointed out that there are ‘playing cards’ which are valid in most fields, master cards (for instance intelligence, eloquence, family resources) that players almost always benefit from. In a similar vein, one may claim that there are negative playing cards – cards that function as impediment or obstructions in agents' playing of a game,

regardless of the field. For our interviewees, who had all been enrolled at treatment centres because of their drug *problems*, regular cannabis smoking may be regarded as such a negative playing card in the fields they were engaged in. However, as described above, participants were not equally affected by this negative playing card. Rather, higher levels of parental cultural capital seemed to work as a ‘buffer’, limiting the negative consequences of participants’ cannabis use.

Successful investment in a field is closely tied to interest or *illusio*, a condition of being caught up by the game and feeling that playing the game is worth the effort (Bourdieu 1998: 76). An indifferent person is someone who cannot see why he or she should play the game and does not recognize the stakes at play – “such a person is someone who does not have the principles of vision and division necessary to make distinctions, finds everything the same, is neither moved nor affected” (Bourdieu 1998, 77). In Bourdieu’s analyses of fields, participants’ investments in a field go together with a specific orientation towards the future: the expectation that investment holds future promises: “One invests not where the profit is but where it will be” (*ibid.*, 79). In other words, a feel for the game is “a sense of the forth-coming” and a sense of “what is to be done in order to bring things about” (Bourdieu 2000, 77). In our interviews, there were expressions of interest/*illusio* in both the academic and the artistic field – yet participants’ escalating drug use made it difficult for them to succeed in both these fields. The field of vocational schools seemed least successful in creating and maintaining *illusio* among its participants. Participants drifted from one program to the next without expressing any long-term plans or commitments. In some cases, vocational school enrolments were experienced as part of a “sending me far away” strategy (as one interviewee put it above) rather than a well-considered educational choice. In other

cases, enrolments were initiated by the youths themselves who later, due to increased cannabis use or for other reasons, lost interest and dropped out.

Bourdieu described the modern school system as characterised by increasing complexity and, related to this, a delayed and opaque ‘expulsion’ of students from families low in economic and cultural capital. ‘The new school delinquency’ was Bourdieu’s term for students who were unable to play the educational game (Bourdieu 1998, 28). We saw the same pattern in our sample, although framed within a contemporary Danish context: cannabis users from less privileged backgrounds passed through a long series of (mostly) vocational programmes – which they entered and exited in what seemed like an aimless pattern. What is most paradoxical in this is that representatives of the social system (be they school counsellors, social workers or psychologists) were involved in many of these educational trajectories. Hence, even in the cases (or maybe especially in the cases) where the social system took over the game, participants’ school trajectories seemed arbitrary, disorganized and seldom part of a long-term plan, at least not a plan the interviewees were able to describe.

In conclusion, this paper showed how a sample of young cannabis users navigated in four different fields and how their parents’ possession of cultural capital influenced their educational trajectories. We used Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘illusio’ and (its opposite) ‘indifference’ to understand why the interviewees, and especially interviewees from less privileged backgrounds, often failed in their field investments. We pointed to the lack of a forward-oriented ‘feel for the game’ – and a lack of ability to combine investments in different fields – as constituting the largest obstacle in cannabis users’ educational trajectories. Finally, we identified severe challenges in the social services’ role as ‘co-

investors' in the interviewees' trajectories. Participants' descriptions of these co-investments pointed to a lack of long-term planning and collaboration between welfare and educational agencies, as well as wide-spread cannabis use at some of the schools they were enrolled in. By all accounts, ad-hoc placements of regular cannabis users in (especially) vocational school programmes – without consideration for how these programmes match the youths' general field competences and interests (present as well as future-oriented) – may contribute to, rather than solve, problems of social marginalization.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Rockwool Foundation in Denmark for funding parts of this study as well as the two anonymous reviewers whose comments helped improve the paper.

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¹ From January 1st 2014 new legislation was introduced in Denmark targeting unemployed people under the age of 30. Those without any qualifying education are now directed to enrol in education to be eligible for benefits. If not 'education ready', one has to participate in activation and training programmes (Ministry of Employment 2013).

² A 'production school' is a school programme aimed at students who are not seen as ready to start upper secondary education after compulsory schooling. The programme evolves around practical work in a workshop and youths can be enrolled for up to a year to get ready for formal education.