'It was more a fear of the school thinking that I'd be a troublemaker'– Inappropriate use of internal exclusion through labelling by association with siblings

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Abstract

Within neoliberal education systems, elements of marketisation are endemic and this brings with it the invasive pressures of performativity. Against this backdrop, discipline in schools is in many instances being more closely monitored and tightly controlled, with the implementation of strict and in some cases 'zero-tolerance' behaviour management policies. Can such an emphasis on compliance and control feed into greater educational inequality and marginalisation and if so through what means? This paper elucidates one possible mechanism through which the enforcement of strict behaviour management policies may fuel marginalisation - namely through inappropriate use of internal exclusions, via an example of courtesy stigma that I term 'labelling by association with siblings.' This emerges as part of a wider ethnographic study into marginalised students in secondary school. The student participants have each spent time outside the mainstream classroom setting, working instead in an on-site withdrawal unit. Through poignant first-hand telling of his experiences, one marginalised student exemplifies and illustrates such labelling by association with his siblings and its consequences. He is adamant that this indelible association with his brother marked him out and stigmatised him, with very real and profound consequences for his educational trajectory or 'moral career', as well as for his permissible learner identities. Close monitoring of internal

exclusions, or reforms promoting a more nuanced approach to behaviour management - preferably in conjunction with a reversal of neoliberal in-roads into education- are needed, to mitigate the barrier to educational equality which internal exclusion though labelling by association with siblings presents.

Keywords: *educational inequality, courtesy stigma, labelling, learner identity, exclusion*

Introduction

This paper focuses on an instance of marginalisation through internal exclusion; this will be referred to as ‘labelling by association with siblings.’ I argue that the current predilection for strict behaviour management policies in schools fuels, rather than diminishes, instances of exclusion - in all its forms - and that leaves the way open for misuse of such processes, including through labelling by association with siblings.

In order to make the case that this labelling is not simply noteworthy but also enlightening, in terms of understanding inequalities in the present education system, I will start with a wide lens and narrow in. I begin by making the case that exclusion - in all its forms - is a social justice issue, then I consider some recent exclusions data of various kinds, starting with some permanent and fixed-term exclusion statistics and an Ofsted report. I then touch on other forms of exclusion from the classroom, such as instances of internal exclusion, managed moves, or off-rolling. Lastly, before moving to the empirical data on labelling, I examine some salient literature surrounding labelling and stigma, how labelling can impact on-going identity formation and possibilities for resisting such labelling. I draw from an ethnography into the lived-experiences of marginalised students in a secondary school, who have all been internally

excluded, before narrowing in further still, to consider the experience of one such student - Alfie- whose story gives flesh to sterile statistics and experience to exclusion. He exemplifies and illustrates labelling by association with his siblings and its consequences. Having heard Alfie's account, I argue that this is pertinent, in terms of addressing educational inequalities in current neoliberal education systems. I offer suggestions as to how this may be mitigated in practice.

Exclusion Is A Social Justice Issue

Exclusion from school remains a persistent feature, deeply embedded within many education systems, including the neoliberal education systems in the UK and the USA (Department for Education 2020; Welsh and Little 2018). As an illustration, in the UK '*while permanent exclusion is a rare event – 0.1% of the 8 million children in schools in England were permanently excluded in 2016/17 – this still means an average of 40 every day. A further average of 2,000 pupils are excluded for a fixed period each day'* (Timpson 2019, p5). Furthermore, this is far from a declining concern, since '*rates of both fixed period and permanent exclusion have risen since 2013/14*' (Timpson 2019, p6). The latest government statistics indicate that the rate of permanent exclusions remains steady at this 0.1% figure, with rates across different types of schools also remaining steady. The rate of permanent exclusion in secondary schools is 0.2%, ten times that of primary schools, which are at 0.02% (Department for Education 2020). Despite exclusions being seen by many to play a necessary role within wider systems of behaviour management, I argue that there are two profound reasons why the role of exclusion - in all its forms - in fact urgently needs scrutinising: exclusion is applied unfairly; and exclusion can have drastic, life-long effects on individuals. Indeed exclusion is thus a social justice issue, with sustained and disproportionate representation for certain marginalised and vulnerable groups

of students, whether by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender or learning needs (Department for Education 2020; Losen 2014). In terms of the recognition of the unfair application of exclusions, researchers in the USA note that this is not only the case for permanent exclusions, but also that the high risk of fixed-term exclusions *‘is not borne equally by all students’* (Losen and Gillespie 2012, p6). In the UK the government commissioned review of school exclusions acknowledges that unequal exclusion rates have been entrenched within the process for some time:

> ‘There are longstanding trends that show exclusion rates vary between pupils with different characteristics. Children with some types of SEN, boys, those who have been supported by social care or are disadvantaged are all consistently more likely to be excluded from school than those without these characteristics. Exclusion rates also vary by ethnicity.’ (Timpson 2019, p9)

Life-Long Effects from Exclusion:

Firstly exclusion can dramatically impact the individual who is excluded. Students who have been subject to exclusion are subsequently less likely to engage and succeed within the system. Indeed, in the UK analysis of those sitting their GSCE examinations in 2015/16 reveals that ‘*just 7% of children who were permanently excluded and 18% of children who received multiple fixed period exclusions went on to achieve good passes in English and maths GCSEs, qualifications that are essential to succeeding in adult life*’ (Timpson 2019, p7/8).Furthermore, there are likely to be wider longer-term effects across the life course, with increased prospects of school drop-out, followed by a greater likelihood of being NEET(not in education, employment or training) and even of subsequent criminality. Specifically then, in the UK, more than a third of students who sit their GCSE examinations in Alternative Provision, that is outside the mainstream school system, go on to be NEET (Education Datalab

2018; Timpson 2019). Research in the USA echoes concerns surrounding long-term impact from exclusion, emphasising that it is not only permanent exclusion from schools, which takes a toll on the individual. Indeed Losen and Gillespie (2012) note that it is fixed-term exclusions which matter most since they are '*among the leading indicators of whether a child will drop out of school'* (p6), and they go on to highlight that fixed-term exclusions increases a student's risk of future imprisonment. Indeed, an increase in the use of strict behaviour management policies in schools generally, is seen as one factor underpinning the so-called school-to-prison pipeline (Mallett 2016).

More marketisation, stricter schools:

Research indicates that increased marketization and choice in the education system contributes to educational inequalities (Green, Preston and Janmaat 2006). These issues have been raised in relation to the increase in variety of types of school, such as the academisation process in the UK (Wilson 2011), as well as specifically in relation to greater competition fuelling greater use of exclusion (Blyth and Milner 2002). Certainly, as marketisation makes increasing in-roads in the education system, the focus of education is detached from concerns of equality, leaving the way open for inequality - and instances of marginalisation and exclusion - to increase:

> 'The values and incentives of market policies being pursued and celebrated by the states of almost all western societies give legitimation and impetus to certain actions and commitments – enterprise, competition, excellence – and inhibit and de-legitimise others – social justice, equity, tolerance. The need to give consideration to the fate of others has been lessened in all this' (Ball 2003a, p26).

With this shift in focus, there has been a parallel shift in behaviour management policies (Blyth and Milner 2002; Ball, Hoskins, Maguire and Braun 2011), with

a move away from a restorative justice and inclusive practice bent, towards an emphasis on greater control and enforcement of stricter policies (Department for Education 2016; Bennett 2017; Welsh and Little 2018; Wenham 2019c).Use of strict behaviour management policies and perhaps even a zero-tolerance approach, encourages the greater use of exclusion, starting within the school, with removal from the classroom (Mallett 2016). When students who fail to follow the rules are no longer permitted to remain in the mainstream classroom, they miss out on learning alongside their peers, a tangible inequality of experience. This can take various forms from the light touch, short-term, less impactful, to the most severe. The least extreme format would be some version of internal exclusion, where students remain on-site and perhaps are only removed from the classroom for particular lessons or a defined, short period of time, from a few lessons to a matter of days at the most. Schools more and more frequently build such internal exclusions into their behaviour management policies, as a step prior to fixed-term exclusion, or the more drastic permanent exclusion.

The focus here is on the use of internal exclusion provision -for which figures and trends are difficult or near impossible to collect - and specifically on the identification of students for such exclusion. Since internal school data is less readily available, it is worth briefly stepping back, to examine not only who it is that is subject to other forms of exclusion but also how they are identified. What are the reasons given for their exclusion?

Falling foul of behaviour management policies - who is excluded and why?

Internal school level data on on-site exclusions is not collated - and possibly not consistently recorded - so in seeking information, we must turn to what is available, that is data pertaining to fixed-term and permanent exclusions from schools. This will shed light on the characteristics of students over-represented

in external exclusions, which may then arguably be expected to echo those subject to internal, on-site exclusions, since this is frequently used as a stepping-stone to the more severe punishments of external exclusions.

The most recent government data includes a table also found in previous reports, recording exclusions by the deprivation level of a school. These tables indicate a sustained and clear trend that as the deprivation level of the school falls so does the proportion of the school population receiving exclusions (Department for Education 2019/2020, Table 10). This would undeniably imply that there is a possible link between deprivation and exclusion albeit at the school level.

This latest set of data also considers exclusions by individual pupil characteristics, noting higher exclusion rates among free school meal (FSM) eligible pupils. This rate is remaining steady, with FSM eligible pupils being around four times more likely to receive a permanent or fixed period exclusion than those who are not eligible (Department for Education 2019/2020, Table 9).

Furthermore, pupils identified as having special educational needs are also more likely - when compared to those identified as not having such needs - to receive fixed-term and permanent exclusions (Department for Education 2019/2020, Table 9). It is also interesting to observe that exclusion peaks at age 14 (Department for Education 2019/2020, Table 9).

It seems then that it is the more deprived students and those with special educational needs that are disproportionately subjected to exclusions and that secondary schools in particular make use of exclusion. What is it that is leading to these exclusions and can this shed any light on why such students are overrepresented?

In an insightful study, Daniels (2011) followed 193 students over two years, from their permanent exclusion from secondary school. He acknowledged that while the reasons listed for actual permanent exclusion were more often than not related to assault on staff or students, there was frequently an extended period of disruptive behaviour prior to this:

> ‘the most common reason for exclusion (both permanent and fixed period) was persistent disruptive behaviour. It would seem reasonable to suggest that… whatever it is that drives permanent exclusion is a fairly durable feature of English schooling’ (Daniels 2011, p40).

The latest available government statistics for permanent and fixed-term exclusions also show a similar picture endures (Department for Education 2019/2020, Table 4).

Who then are these children who exhibit persistent disruptive behaviour? Presumably they must predominantly be the more deprived, SEN students who are overrepresented in exclusion figures in the end - but why? SEN students, whose needs are unmet and are thus unable to access the work, may indeed struggle in the classroom and perhaps play up. If such a situation endures then presumably more sustained disruption could result. And what of the more deprived students? It seems unlikely that students exhibiting persistent disruptive behaviour will generally be the children of the middle classes whose parents are likely be more adept at intervening at an earlier stage to pre-empt such drastic outcomes, and should it come to exclusion, would doubtless be better able to make a convincing case at Appeal (Ball 2003b). While any student can become entangled in a one-off disruptive incident, it is this idea of *persistent* disruptive behaviour that is more likely to remain unchecked when families are less present, less involved, less able to support their child’s

education and crucially less able to play the system. Hence, the children from households with lower levels of appropriate socio-cultural capital, the perpetually disadvantaged lower socio-economic strata, are then those most likely to be over-represented amongst excluded pupils.

When official exclusion policies are sidestepped, distorted and abused

Is there any evidence that schools, of any sort, are acting outside the established frameworks for excluding students from school? This is addressed by several recent reports. One such report for The Children's Commissioner specifically considershow it is that children *disappear* from England's schools', noting that the increase in numbers of home-schooled children, disguises and conceals the range of experiences which this transfer to home-schooling encompasses (Children's Commissioner 2019). With pressures to maintain standing in league tables, examination attainment may be prioritised by schools, which then leads the school management to consider ways to remove less high-attaining students from their data. This may be through local arrangements between schools, such as managed-moves, or increasingly, this may be through so-called 'off-rolling'. Here the school may encourage or indeed pressurise some parents into removing their child from the school roll. In this manner official exclusion data remains low, while attainment data receives a boost (Children's Commissioner 2019).

Another salient report explores the issue of 'off-rolling' on behalf of Ofsted, the schools inspectorate (YouGov. 2019). This report defines 'off-rolling' as *'a pupil being taken off the school roll in order to try and manipulate reported exam results/league tables'* (YouGov. 2019, p7) and notes that over two-thirds of the teachers they surveyed are sufficiently familiar with this unofficial use of exclusion, to be able to correctly identify the process as defined above and

furthermore *‘a quarter have seen it happen in their schools’*(YouGov. 2019, p7).

Other recent research also finds similar concerns present; in contemplating the *‘group of pupils who leave state education at some point between Year 7 and Year 11’* (Education Datalab 2018), researchers note:

> ‘this is a vulnerable group of pupils. Compared to those who complete secondary education in a mainstream school, pupils in this group are more likely to have been eligible for free school meals, have special educational needs, and have had lower attainment at primary school’ (Education Datalab 2018).

They go on to suggest that some of these students have: *‘been off-rolled - encouraged off the roll of a mainstream school in an informal exclusion in which the school’s best interests have trumped the pupil’s’* (Education Datalab 2018).

In a climate of ever-increasing competition, schools may seek, where they are able, to recruit the more compliant, middle-class, higher achieving pupil who is more likely to aid them in their quest for a higher league table ranking, over and above a poorer student with lower baseline data, producing what Ball calls an *‘economy of student worth’* (Ball 2010, p163). Concomitantly, data above indicates that official and unofficial exclusions are being used to ‘off-load’ students who are seen as not contributing to or posing a threat to performance outcomes. It is the low attaining, SEN and FSM child who is most likely tobe the subject of such ‘off-loading’(Education Datalab 2018).

Labelling, identity-formation and resistance

In seeking to be informed by literature on labelling theory (Becker 2008), it is teacher stereotypes and associated labelling that are central in a school setting. Teacher prejudice features within much research into issues of educational inequalities, and attainment gaps, in terms of individual categorisation by race, class or gender (Gillborn 2008; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Slavin 1990). Within this work, teacher bias, labelling or stereotyping is considered as one contributing factor, in terms of pupils adopting certain attitudes in school and as a result, in these students subsequent marginalisation. In terms of the constraints of labelling and feeling confined by teacher opinion:

> 'Students can also feel that their image and habits are held in place by their teachers – who have files and memories in which their behaviours, and, indeed, their characters, are indelibly recorded' (Galton, Gray and Ruddock 2003, p86).

Such perceived constraints will be applicable here, yet in honing in on one individual's story, ideas of greater relevance come from two research areas. Firstly the notion of stigma and in particular of courtesy stigma (Goffman1963; Link and Phelan 2001) and secondly research that emphasises the impact of teacher labelling on an individual students on-going identity formation, as well as research with a clear role for individual agency in resistance (Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010).

In his foundational book - *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* - Goffman defines stigma as an *'attribute that is deeply discrediting'* (Goffman 1963, p3). Through being subject to such stigmatisation, an individual is set apart from the norm, seen as different in an undesirable way, as diminished, lessened, spoiled or '*tainted'* (Goffman 1963, p3). For Goffman, there are three different kinds of stigma - individual physical abnormalities, personal character

flaws and those connected more with group prejudice, say ethnicity, nationality, or religious affiliation. Across these three categories, individuals are stigmatised for attributes that they possess. Since the emphasis here is on being labelled by association with siblings, research that is most apposite would focus on labelling by affiliation with others.

Of particular pertinence here then, is the concept of '*courtesy stigma'*, (Goffman1963, p30) that is a stigma of affiliation that applies to people who associate with stigmatised individuals, as opposed to being directly stigmatised themselves. In his initial illustrations of where such courtesy stigma occurs, Goffman (1963) highlighted an element of choice on the part of those then subject to courtesy stigma. This conscious choice could be seen as morally flawed then, for example in the case of a cleaner choosing to work for a prostitute. For the families of stigmatised individuals, the element of choice surrounding the association is absent - they are related. Research into courtesy stigma and family members, includes a pertinent body of work examining parents who are subject to courtesy stigma as a consequence of traits possessed by their children. For instance, parents of children with disabilities may experience courtesy stigma (Green 2003). Research highlights different parental responses to courtesy stigma. Different adaptations noted include attempts to pass as normal in some settings- either where the affiliation is not emphasised, or where the child's stigma can be masked - or choosing to limit social participation and interact less frequently with peers where possible (Birenbaum 1970; Green 2003). For these parents, such adaptations illustrate that, whilst there may be no choice in the affiliation with their child, there remains some minimal element of choice in the response. This choice of response can be used to mitigate the impact of courtesy stigma.

When courtesy stigma results from affiliation with a family member with bad behaviour, options to soften the blow are limited further. A review of research into stigma surrounding attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), found family members of individuals with ADHD suffering from courtesy stigma (Mueller, Fuermaier, Koerts and Tucha 2012). Parents whose child had a new diagnosis of ADHD were particularly concerned with not being able to escape labelling, with their child being seen as badly behaved and causing problems (Dos Reis, Barksdale, Sherman, Maloney and Charach 2010). Moreover, in exploring the stigma experienced by parents of children with high functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome, Gray (2002) found that parents of violent or aggressive children are more likely to be stigmatised that parents of compliant, passive children.

In a school environment, there are also issues of power at play, which may restrict possibilities to avoid courtesy stigma, or to soften any impact. Where power dynamics are crucial, the conceptualisation of stigma following on from Goffman and put forward by Link and Phelan (2001) is instructive. *'In our definition, stigma exists when elements of labeling, stereotyping, separating, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows these processes to unfold.'* (Link & Phelan 2001, p382). Their emphasis on the backdrop of power relations, which permits the stigma process to take place, is valuable when considering a student at school. Indeed, their fleshing out of these stages of the stigma process, within a situation of power imbalance, explicitly culminates in discrimination. The more powerful stigmatising individuals use stereotypes to discriminate against the weaker, labelled individual, to deny them access to particular parts of wider society, indeed to exclude them. Furthermore, Link and Phelan go on to elaborate that through this conceptualisation of stigma, there is a move away from focusing too narrowly on micro-level processes and interactions, to propose that stigma is a social

factor impacting opportunity and long-term life chances. These ideas then inform how courtesy stigma experienced in a school setting can have far reaching consequences.

Where options to dodge courtesy stigma, or to lessen the blow, are dramatically constrained, what remains is individual agency and the possibility of acts of resistance.

Youdell’s body of post-structuralist ethnographic work focussing on identity formation in education, and a version of labelling theory, is rooted in the work of Foucault and Butler and has issues of agency and resistance to the fore. This concerns the idea of a constitutive subject, who is perpetually not only being defined through discourse but also being formed and reformed through it (Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010). Labelling as part of the discourse, thus impacts on-going identity formation. Youdell examines identities that are constituted within schools, explicitly considering: ‘*the parameters of good and bad students and acceptable and unacceptable learners’* (Youdell 2006, p101). Furthermore, she is concerned with how *‘discursive networks that frame schooling’* render some student identities meaningful and intelligible, whilst others are considered less so. At the extreme, there is then: *‘The possibility that some subjectivities may be so incompatible with school discourses of students and learners that they may be rendered impossible’* (Youdell 2006, p101). She suggests, following Butler, that ‘*it is this threat that leads the subject to accept a constitution as the Other – this other is still intelligible and, therefore, human’* (Youdell 2006, p100).

The Study: Listening to students from an on-site withdrawal unit

In complement to the official statistical data offered above this paper seeks to address *'the absence of children and youth voices in the examination of neoliberal schooling'* (Sonu, Gorlewsk & Vallee 2016, p9), drawing on data from an ethnographic study that positions student voices front and centre (Wenham 2019a). This ethnography aims to shed light on in-school marginalisation, by listening to accounts of the lived-experiences of students who have each, at some point in their secondary schooling, spent time outside the mainstream classroom setting, working instead in an on-site withdrawal unit, mostly following a period of persistent low-level disruption.

Such marginalised students are some of the most difficult for researchers to reach, but I argue, their stories and accounts can enable a much fuller and more nuanced understanding of day-to-day educational inequalities in practice.

The ethnographic research is principally drawn from semi-structured interviews, with participant observation, and some small group teaching by the researcher within the unit (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Kvale 2008). Grounded theory techniques employed to scrutinise the data include elements of free-writing, coding, memoing and diagramming. In particular, use is made of deeply embedded low-level diagramming, where from the outset supporting data extracts are explicitly tied to each connection in the emerging diagramming, to aid with rigour (Wenham 2019b). Resulting processes emerging from this analysis of the data are then identified (Charmaz 2006; Strauss 1987).Whist what is reported here is focussed largely on the experiences of one student, it is important to emphasise that the validity of the research is routed in the rigour of the analytic process (Charmaz 2006; Strauss 1987) and the soundness of this larger ethnography where, as is typical, the researcher came to know the field in-depth, over a period of more than six years, establishing trusting relationships

with staff and students, substantiating student interview data through this wider understanding of the individuals and their experiences within this setting (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

In what follows, I focus on a single astringent code identified in the process of analysis -the inappropriate use of internal exclusion through labelling by association with siblings.

Examining the data

When the student participants in the ethnographic study were invited to talk about their experiences of school, labelling by association with siblings emerges in relation to transition from primary to secondary school - specifically then in terms of following an older sibling into secondary school.

One student - Alfie - is adamant in his account of being internally excluded that ‘labelling by association with siblings’ was instrumental in his immediate, persistent and severe marginalisation. This emergent process is situated at the nexus of three potential sources of marginalisation - one relating to the over-zealous and inappropriate implementation of strict behaviour management policies, another concerning long-term impacts from a difficult transition (Anderson, Jacobs, Schraumm, and Splittgerber2000; Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008; Wenham 2016; West, Sweeting and Young 2010) and the third pertaining to the impacts of courtesy stigma and labelling *per se* (Goffman 1963).

Alfie’s Story

Let us focus on Alfie. He has a story rife with labelling by association with his older siblings and his brother in particular, as he followed them from school to school. This has had a profound effect on his educational trajectory in many ways. Indeed, his story illustrates the multifaceted, tangled and intricate nature

of this trajectory; the complex 'package' of his experience and reaction that makes up what may be better termed his *'moral career'* (Goffman 1959).

Alfie has a sister who is several years older and a brother in the academic year above him. When they were young and all still in primary school, the three siblings went to the same schools. Alfie makes explicit one way in which siblings all being at the same school makes things easier.

> ALFIE: So we all like went together, like purely coz mum would have to get us to school. She can't physically get us to two different schools.

This is a common sense justification for wanting to keep siblings together at the same school, for the practicality and ease of transportation, whether this is older siblings escorting the younger ones to and from school safely or parents on a school run. For Alfie's mum, this would make taking her children to and from school easier.

Alfie's brother had been excluded from two primary schools and each time he was *'kicked out'* this meant all three of them starting afresh at a different school. Thus for Alfie these issues frame not just his transition from primary to secondary but additionally his transfer between different primary schools and different secondary schools.

> ALFIE: When I was in Year 3 we got moved to another school coz he basically got kicked out of primary school… First day of my second primary school my brother knocked a kid out so we immediately went to a third one… In the third one he seemed to settle down and we all seemed to like get on with it.

As early as Year 3 then, Alfie's education is tangibly impacted by the actions of his older brother. Alfie was taken out of one school and moved to another –

twice - as a direct consequence, not of his own behaviour, but of that of his brother. In recounting his changeable time in various primary schools, Alfie speaks of practicalities and facts. There is little embellishment in terms of feelings, possible impacts or expectations. Despite it being evident from the exclusions that his brother must have entered each subsequent primary school with some reputation and baggage, even if only among a select few members of staff, there has been no mention thus far of Alfie or his sister being tarnished by this, of any labelling by association or assumptions about them being just like their brother. Perhaps this did not occur; perhaps if it did Alfie himself was sheltered from it or perhaps any memories of such things have since faded. In fact there is no mention of how these moves affected Alfie at all. Later this does begin to emerge as a subject when he talks about his journey into and through secondary school.

By the time that Alfie was due to transition into secondary school himself, his older brother had been excluded from one secondary school and in addition, his sister had also ‘*had an altercation with a teacher’* since starting at the closest secondary school to their home, Ashtonville, and subsequently moved to Our Saviours, a religious school much further away. Since his mother still preferred to keep her children together where possible, Alfie did not follow the majority of his peers to Ashtonville, but rather followed his sister to Our Saviours.

> ALFIE: But we got through to Year 6 and then my sister was at Our Saviours school but she’d previously been to Ashtonville school; my brother was, I think he was in-between schools when I started school because he’d been kicked out of one and was waiting for a place in another. And then I went straight to Our Saviours coz my mum didn’t want me going to Ashtonville.

Alfie believes that he would have gone on to his nearest secondary school ‘*two minutes round the corner from us’*, as was the common practice from his

primary school, had his sister not already had negative experiences there. So it was as a direct consequence of following his sister that he ended up transitioning without peers; Alfie knew people already at the secondary school then but only through his sister so they were students who were quite a bit older than he was.

> ALFIE: Well when I went to the school no one from my primary school went there. I didn't know anyone, so immediately I started hanging around with my sister's friends and she was 4 years older than me. So all of them were a lot older than me and they were into drinking and all that sort of thing and in Year 7 that's bad, it's a huge scary thing. So I kind of grew up a lot quicker than I had to coz I weren't willing to try like interacting with people.

Here the effects of following his sister emerge then. Alfie's reluctance to interact with new people in his year meant that he socialised with his sister's friends. The emotional impact of spending time with older students and being exposed to their antics is palpable when he summaries – *'it's a huge scary thing'*.

After no more than a term at Our Saviours, Alfie was so unhappy that his mother agreed that he could transfer to the local school where most of his primary school peers now went. The fundamental reason for his unhappiness, he conveys as not fitting in with the religious nature of the school. He does not blame the fact that he followed his sister for his unhappiness, despite mentioning his unusual social group. He also goes on to mention in passing that the other students in his year were not the sort of people he would socialise with but this too he links with religion. He is clear that he is at odds with being at a faith school and this is the reason for his desperate desire to move. On moving school however, rather than leaving any association with older siblings behind him, in fact, Alfie then found himself at the same secondary school as

his brother, instead of his sister. This would have profound consequences on his educational experiences. Alfie is convinced that the reason that his mother finally gave in to his repeated requests to move school was because he would be joining his brother.

> ALFIE: She ended up moving me to Ashtonville coz my brother had just got into there.

Starting at Ashtonville was very different to his first secondary school, as this time he not only had many people in his year group whom he already knew but also many others from the locality.

> ALFIE: I remember starting at Ashtonville I knew near enough everyone in the school… from primary school and several years above I knew all of them as well so I was very well known before I went into the school.

There seemed then to be potential here for a positive start at the new school, he had friends in his year group already and so felt comfortable with his peers (Pratt and George 2005).

Labelling by association with siblings

As Alfie progresses into his second secondary school, almost immediately the impact for him, of his older brother’s behaviour and reputation, begins to emerge.

> ALFIE: Within the first week I was put into the isolation unit… coz they thought that I was going to be disruptive, not because I had been disruptive. Because they thought I would.

Alfie elaborates on the usual purpose of this isolation unit.

> ALFIE: If you'd done something bad enough, you'd get isolation for a day and you'd be in one room for the whole day. They'd have little sections.

Alfie is adamant that his being put into isolation was far from a justified punishment, that he had not done anything wrong but that there was an assumption that he might. When seen in the light of subsequent events, it is extremely probable that this was the first sign that Alfie was experiencing courtesy stigma, specifically he was being labelled by association with his siblings (Becker 2008; Goffman 1963). From the off, it was made clear to him, in various ways, that he was expected to be a bad seed just like his brother. It is worth pursuing this thread of Alfie's story further up the secondary school trajectory, where he sees what follows as stemming from his being pigeonholed on arrival at the school, which in turn is inherently linked to following his siblings. Moreover, year on year, his identity in the school remained inextricably linked with that of his brother. He was irrevocably labelled by this association (Goffman 1963).

For what remained of Year 7 and through Year 8, Alfie continued through school in an unremarkable fashion, now and then getting into some minor trouble but essentially attending class and maintaining a low profile. Despite this, Alfie is insistent that there was a sustained, unswerving, already entrenched concern from staff - teacher stereotyping if you will - that he may cause trouble and was one to watch (Gillborn 2008; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; Goffman 1963; Mac an Ghaill 1988).

> ALFIE: I weren't a huge troublemaker when I was younger but it was more a fear of the school thinking that I'd be a troublemaker.

Alfie felt very strongly that all his experiences at Ashtonville were coloured by being connected with his brother, that he could not escape this negative labelling through association (Goffman 1963).

> ALFIE: It was a known fact at Ashtonville that I was treated differently purely because of who I am and who I am related to… if I hadn’t done anything and something had been done, my name would be brought up.

This extract epitomises courtesy stigma. Alfie was not only indelibly labelled through affiliation with his brother; he was treated differently as a direct result of this affiliation with a stigmatised individual. Furthermore this came about solely as a consequence of this affiliation, and not through traits of his own (Goffman 1963).

Things came to a head dramatically when Alfie reached Year 9, at which point his older brother was excluded after a series of incidents, including significant acts of vandalism and starting of fires.

> ALFIE: That’s when he got shipped off and that’s when they upped the anti on me coz they thought I was going to do something that bad as well… Within a week I had several meetings with the Head Teacher basically saying, “don’t even think about trying to follow your brother” basically and it was kind of like, why are you pinning me out like that?
> LWE: You weren’t thinking about following your brother at all?
> ALFIE: No, I was like what an idiot. What’s he doing he’s got himself kicked out of school, what’s he doing? And they were like “you’re gonna do the same”. I was like don’t tell me I’m gonna do the same. If you keep telling me it, then I’ll go out and do it sort of thing.

Arguably, such meetings with the Head Teacher could be seen as preventative measures, without any enduring labelling thereafter, to try to determine whether

or not Alfie had any intentions of following in his brother's footsteps. In Alfie's recollection however it does sound as if there was a definitive expectation that he would try to do this; that he would indeed be just like his brother. Arguably Alfie's account of himself is a resistance to labelling then, where he deliberately acts in defiance of these expectations. It is nonetheless interesting that Alfie recalls an awareness that if he were to be persistently labelled in this way, he would feel an urge to live up to such expectations. This last sentence is then an account of labelling leading towards self-identification with the assigned label (Becker 2008, Goffman1963). Thus, whether Alfie remains successful in his active resistance of labelling or succumbs to its enduring nature, this labelling by association with his brother will impact his on-going identity formation (Goffman1963; Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010).

What happened next in Alfie's educational career is remarkable (or perhaps ordinary but hidden). He was put into the isolation unit for a prolonged period. This, he recalls, as once again being a consequence of concerns about *what he may do*, as opposed to concerns about anything he *had actually done* – a further incidence of labelling by association with his brother, of courtesy stigma then (Goffman 1963).

> ALFIE: I spent the whole of Year 9 in there. From start to end. They wouldn't let me out of the room… I was in there the whole year coz they constantly thought that if I was allowed into class that I would cause problems.

It was very unusual to be withdrawn from lessons completely for such an extended period and even more so when in Alfie's case he had done nothing to bring this about. Clearly he was not happy and as he goes on to assert, neither was his mother.

> ALFIE: My mum argued all the time to try and get me out of there, but also she knew that while I was in there, there weren't gonna be a chance of any trouble happening.

This second remark is interesting, hinting that Alfie's mother was also buying into this labelling by association on some level, as per labelling theory (Becker 2008). Eventually, in Year 10, Alfie was allowed to return to some lessons. Alfie reflects on his educational trajectory and in particular his time in the isolation unit and unquestionably locates his difficulties at school as a result of following his siblings and being labelled by association with them.

> ALFIE: I look back at it and think if I could do that all again I would do so many things different and like when I was moving from Our Saviours to another school, I would have said to her "look put me anywhere but where somewhere they've been and just make sure I haven't been where my brother and sister have been" and I'd be able to get a fresh start… That was a huge problem for my whole life that I was associated with my brother and sister.

Alfie at least feels that some lessons have been learnt for his younger sister. She was not sent to a school where the two oldest siblings had been, precisely to avoid labelling by association.

> ALFIE: Everyone knew I was my sister's brother and my brother's brother and that used to cause problems and that's the main reason why Fern is at this school… Coz if she went to Ashtonville, it'd be a case of "oh here's another Batchelor, they're going to be a little shit. They're going to do this…"

Here Alfie makes it clear that he feels that his younger sister would also experience labelling by association, if it were known who her older siblings were. With the unshakable reputation of his older brother as spoiled, tarnished, a bad seed, a poorly behaved student, Alfie insists the affiliation would be identified immediately if they were in the same school. Thus he sees no

possibility of escape from this courtesy stigma, within a school setting. The only evasion he can foresee is to attend a different school, where both the stigma of his brother and thus the courtesy stigma through association, can remain undisclosed and stay secret.

Labelling by association with siblings - Discussion:

Alfie's story demonstrates that labelling by association with badly behaved siblings, for a student in a school context, leaves little to no room for choosing to mitigate courtesy stigma. I argue that the reason for this is two-fold.

Firstly courtesy stigma through association with an individual stigmatised for bad-behaviour, removes the possibility for covering, obscuring, or downplaying such an apparent, overt behaviour. Here there are echoes of research into parents of children who exhibit bad behaviour, whether the children have ADHD (DosReis et al. 2010; Mueller et al. 2012) or Asperger's syndrome (Gray2002). The similarity is palpable; when a relation is stigmatised for bad behaviour, be they a child or a sibling, there is no room for denial or obfuscation of this overt behaviour. Indeed here with Alfie's brother notorious for having set fires, for acts of vandalism and for violence, Alfie finds himself in a similar position to the parent of a child with particularly violent behaviour, where research already indicates courtesy stigma is more intense (Gray 2002).

Secondly the power relations in school leave little possibility to choose to muddy or disguise the affiliation. Here the backdrop of power relations, pervasive in a hierarchical school system, and indeed in most teacher-student and adult-child relationships, is key (Link and Phelan 2001). For Link and Phelan it is this power situation, which allows the processes of stigmatisation to evolve. Alfie is powerless to hide or deny that he is his brother's brother, if the

powers-that-be, namely the Head Teacher and other staff, know and share this information across the school.

Options for mitigating courtesy stigma are virtually non-existent.

Moreover, as Link and Phelan (2001) argue, stigma can impact opportunity in very real ways, with consequences for long-term life chances. Certainly, Alfie’s story illustrates the mechanisms of labelling by association with siblings and how these can impact an individual’s educational experiences, leading to dramatic marginalisation. This emergent process is seen to come about firstly by following siblings to secondary school. It is then that labelling by association with these siblings occurs. Finally it is the improper implementation of strict behaviour management policies, specifically the inappropriate use of internal exclusion, which allows this labelling, this stigmatisation process, to have such drastic consequences. The courtesy stigma and the distorting of the official processes for exclusion, feed into each other, blur and compound in such a manner as to result in drastic marginalisation here. Expulsion from the main student body and assignment to the unit, is an explicit example of separation, denial of access, of exclusion then, which - as Link and Phelan (2001) argue - stigmatisation can lead to.

Much of the research into transitions from primary to secondary school shows that knowing others in the secondary school, in particular older students, who are already established there, can play a positive role in lessening anxiety (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008; Pratt and George 2005; Wenham 2019a). Thus it may often seem very positive indeed to follow in the footsteps of older siblings. Alfie’s account paints a contrasting picture. He continuously returned to the idea that he was ‘seen’ by his school and senior teachers as ‘like’ his siblings and likely to behaviour like his siblings – labelled by association with

his brother in particular. This labelling, this courtesy stigma then led the school to take pre-emptive measures which to some extent served to confirm perceptions and expectations. The measures, forms of internal exclusion, came to represent him as a problem student. His resistance to the labels attributed to him served as confirmation of this problem status. In his account he is unequivocal that he feels his association with his brother labelled, stigmatised and categorised him, with very real consequences for his own educational experiences as well as for his permissible learner identities. He was boxed in, through being physically confined to the unit and additionally his identity, his permissible learner identity at school, was similarly constrained; he was a bad kid's younger brother. He could not be seen as anything else, there was no space for him to be a successful learner or a compliant student (Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010).

Alfie certainly sees the labelling in association with his brother as '*indelibly recorded*' (Galton, Gray and Ruddock 2003, p86), since he recounts being repeatedly excluded from mainstream classes and kept apart from the bulk of his peers, regardless of how well he behaved. He is further stereotyped and marginalised – explicitly by being removed from class at the very least – as a result. Whilst elements of labelling and marginalisation, feature in Alfie's story, there is much more to his account that speaks to resistance. Here Alfie, while largely unable to avoid the weight of institutional processes to which he is subject, is articulate and active in unsettling, rejecting and resisting these attributions whenever he can.

Alfie contests and resists the labelling by association with his brother repeatedly, yet in his shifting or unstable and uncertain identities he may indeed accept such labelling as other fleetingly, so as to remain intelligible at school, in the confines of the isolation unit. In other words, if perpetual resistance to his

labeling keeps him at odds with the official school discourse to such an extent that he is indeed *'rendered impossible'* (Youdell 2006, p101), he may feel he has no choice but to temporarily embrace the troublemaker label assigned to him, his brother and arguably his family (Youdell 2006).

Alfie's story sheds some light on issues of marginalisation, illustrating how this may occur through labeling by association with siblings, as well as demonstrating that marginalisation has a history, often a history marked by significant moments or events. It is also, in complex ways, situated in social relations – families, friendships and teachers. This history and the social relations are complexly and often very specifically inter-related.

Wider Implications for Neoliberal Schooling - a more nuanced approach to behaviour management:

Alfie's story offers a fresh and disturbing insight into the drastic nature of transition effects for some more vulnerable students. It illustrates - clearly and unambiguously - how courtesy stigma or labelling by association can be instrumental in the marginalisation of such vulnerable students. Furthermore, it details an important instance of misuse of behaviour management policy, where internal exclusion is not only misapplied but also unmonitored and uncorrected over a prolonged period.

Difficult transitions are known to occur and indeed some students are considered liable to be at greater risk of experiencing such issues as well as suffering a more unremitting, longer-lasting legacy (Anderson et al. 2000; Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008; Wenham 2016; West, Sweeting and Young 2010). The idea that labelling and stigmatisation impinges on on-going learner identities and may restrict permissible learner identities is likewise already present in research literature (Youdell 2006; Youdell 2010). Labelling and

stigmatisation by association with communities, and families more specifically, has long been acknowledged (Goffman 1963). Evidence of distorting and abusing the implementation of already strict behaviour management policies is also documented (Education Datalab 2018; YouGov. 2019). On their own each of these aspects may contribute to greater marginalisation and educational inequalities and here Alfie's retelling of his experiences fleshes out a gruelling example of how it is that this may occur.

Why is it that such labelling by association with siblings, in conjunction with over-zealous behaviour management practices, may be a pertinent concern not only within current English secondary schools, but also more widely in neoliberal schooling?

I argued at the outset that within neoliberal schooling where performativity pressures abound, the greater propensity for application of strict behaviour management policies lays the groundwork for greater bending, eschewing and indeed out-right abuse of these policies. Managed-moves and off-rolling were cited as evidence of this. Now the warping of internal exclusion mechanisms can be added to this list, as Alfie's story demonstrates. It is the market positioning, the chasing of higher league-table rankings and Ofsted gradings, which fuels a predilection for ever-greater classroom discipline and control. This is turn makes over-eager, rushed application of behaviour management sanctions more probable and instances of blatant misuse also likely to rise. Given that every instance of such abuse may lead to drastic, even irrevocable consequences, perhaps similar to Alfie's pathway, even if numbers remain small, I would argue each case is inexcusable. In the light of existing evidence on the prevalence of the side-stepping of processes and the disregard given to official behaviour management procedure (Education Datalab 2018; YouGov.

2019), there is no reason to believe that any misapplication of internal exclusion is rare.

In order to tackle educational marginalisation and inequalities such as that experienced by Alfie, several avenues can be pursued. Confronting issues of teacher stereotyping, labelling and labelling by association with siblings is one route. This is crucial, yet like all prejudice is thick with inertia and slow to change. A more tangible, immediate first step could be ensuring fair and appropriate application of existing behaviour management policies. If each instance of internal exclusion were to be regularly reviewed, at least any misapplication could be identified and rectified. Furthermore if the initial allocation to internal exclusion were to be closely monitored and overseen, inappropriate use may be minimised or eliminated.

Going a step further would likely consider a return to a more nuanced approach to behaviour management; perhaps with a restorative justice slant, or with a greater emphasis on the social and affect (Wenham 2019a). It is worth emphasising that such a move would be more likely to succeed if it went hand-in-hand with a reversal of other neoliberal in-roads into schooling. After all as argued at the outset, the shift towards greater strictness, more compliance and control, towards an emphasis on greater enforcement of stricter behaviour management policies, arose in lock step with greater marketization of the overarching system. To attempt to unpick or reverse behaviour management policies alone, would not remove the context that gave rise to it in the first place. A more wholesale diminishing of marketization of the education system is worthy of thoughtful consideration.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. Pseudonym for the secondary school where the study takes place.

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