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**WHO AM I? – AN ANALYSIS OF THE IDENTITY (RE-) FORMATION OF A GROUP OF ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL WHITE WORKING CLASS MALES AT TWO ELITE UNIVERSITIES**

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**Background**

Student identity, formation and diversity of identity have become a focus of attention within the discipline of sociology of education and informs the notion of a socially just education system. This paper will focus on how seven academically successful young white males from a working-class background, who are currently attending elite universities, have adapted their identities to ‘fit in’ (Reay, 2010) to the ‘institutional habitus’ of the elite university while retaining their ‘home’ identities.

**Focus of Enquiry**

In this paper I explore how seven white men from working-class backgrounds have adapted their identities and refashioned themselves in the wake of their experiences at university (Bourdieu, 1990) while retaining their links with their home backgrounds.

**Research methods**

The paper draws on an ongoing qualitative data research project on the factors behind the academic success of fourteen young men from a working class background. The study is an in-depth, longitudinal piece of research and it involves interviewing these fourteen young men three times during their undergraduate study. The data for this paper has been drawn from the first two interviews.

**Analytical/theoretical framework**

This paper will focus on the factors behind the successful adaptation by the participants in my study to life at an elite university, reworking their identities and conforming to the ‘institutional habitus’ of the university. They have successfully managed this shift in habitus and identity. I draw on Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and capital as these concepts have provided a theoretical framework for understanding the choices and adaptations these academically successful working class men, have made to both habitus and identity.

**Research findings and/or contribution to knowledge**

My focus in this paper is with the adaptation and interactions between habitus and identity being attempted some academically successful young men from a working-class background. This work has suggested that rather than any unitary ‘real me’, or core self, identity is:

> ...the continuous process of affirming who one is and who one wants to become .... It does not refer to some fixed characteristic of a person but rather to something that has to be established time and again … a single label does not cover it. One person can ... develop skills to switch identities ...’ (Voestermans and Verheggen, 2013, p. 190).