EXPERIENCES OF WORKING-CLASS ASPIRATION, SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CLASS TRANSITION:

Sociological and Existential Impacts of
Class on the Embodied Self.

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Copyright statement

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Abstract

This thesis examines working-class aspirants' experiences of class mobility and attempts at class transition in 'becoming' middle-class. Focusing on the interiority of aspirant endeavour it examines the psychical, emotional, ontological and existential features of this striving for a 'better classed life' and the class-related anxieties that can ensue. The discussion draws on the work of key contributors to discourses on class, self and upward mobility. Central to this is the work of Bourdieu and his use of the embodied *habitus*. I contextualise this framing concept and other conceptual tools such as *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence* in relation to the 'aspirant self'. Critiques by Bourdieu's adherents and critics are used to build an argument for the significance of the emotional and psychical challenges in the reflexivity of aspirational endeavour. The study undertaken by Sennett and Cobb of the 'hidden injuries of class' is used with related research on the loss of a 'familiar' or authentic selfhood. The discussion also examines the *ontological insecurity* that can arise as a result of shifting class identities during and beyond mobility and class transition. I also draw on relevant personal experience, presented in the form of vignettes, in order to further explore and convey the nature of working-class aspiration on an embodied self.

The thesis makes a novel contribution to existing debates on the interiority and psychical issues of social mobility and class. By critiquing selected examples, I suggest that there is a basis for an existential sociology approach to class transition which places *ontological insecurity* and existential anxiety alongside the structural-determinist barriers of class as key components and inhibitors affecting class transition. The thesis therefore argues that working-class aspirants often experience psychical barriers in making this transition into middle-class life; that they carry injurious *residues* of their classed origins within their mobility trajectories, and that these often impose social and cultural constraints on a successful transition into the middle-class. In these ways the thesis makes a further contribution to the existing literature on the nuanced nature of aspiration and working-class mobility by extending the theme of *hysteresis* and conflicted interiority that can be experienced by working-class mobiles.

Contents

Introduction.

I see myself as being from the working-class while now living a middle-class lifestyle.[1] However, to say this, in this way, is immediately problematic and forms the rationale and motive for undertaking this work. The experience of entering and being in this 'other world' of the middle-class still seems foreign, incomplete and uncomfortable to me, since I carry the *residues* and legacy of my working-class self and the psychical scars and injuries of this class transition. Recollections of experiencing the transition into this other class and how, as a result, a different sense of being can evolve, form the basis of this thesis.

In my case, and seemingly quite by accident, in my late teens, I and some of my Liverpool working-class friends unwittingly experienced a kind of 'class revelation'. We met and became friends with a group from the middle-class from the affluent area across the River Mersey, with whom we bonded and spent most of our leisure time. Despite growing up in a city where class divisions seemed to be acutely transparent; where working-class culture was (and still is) brazenly pride-inducing, our class differences did not seem an issue at first. It was the leisure pursuit we all embraced that was the catalyst for our friendship and this pushed any sense of 'class difference' out of view. This is perhaps an indicator of how imprecise, nuanced and mutable social class can be in terms of experiencing its divisions and differences, particularly when considering it in the context of social aspiration and mobility.[2]

Yet gradually, as our friendships developed, this sense of connectedness with another class evoked deep feelings of inadequacy and ineptitude in me. In specific encounters with my 'posh' friends I became conscious of

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[1] I provide a definition of social class and the use of the terms 'working-class' and 'middle-class' later in this Introduction.

[2] I consider 'social aspiration' to be an instrument of individual self-enrichment (see Jones 2011, p. 10) and a desire for the realisation of ambitions, ideals or accomplishments. I use the term in conjunction with 'social mobility', which I define as bringing improvements to the social status and wellbeing of individuals or groups. I develop these definitions further in this Introduction and in Chapter 1.

nuanced differences between us. Differences of lifestyle, demeanour and character. These friends weren't overtly snobbish, and they did not behave in an arrogant way. Indeed, they were kind, friendly people, but they were undoubtedly different from us in particularly subtle ways.[3] We all got along really well in this mutually stimulating environment until gradually some of them went off to university, or pursued careers in other places. However, I recall that I was often irritated and envious of their self-assurance and 'ways of being'. For they had all received a good education and this clearly gave them key advantages which, at the time, I was unable to fully understand or appreciate. They seemed to be better armed for a more fulfilling life and they seemed to take this for granted.

But there was one significant outcome that emerged from these social encounters. These middle-class friends had shown me how I might prepare myself for a different kind of life. It was the mid 1960s and I was in my late teens. I had left school and was working in the motor trade as an apprentice mechanic. I recall that it was through these new social encounters I began to compare myself with these new friends. Also, and without actually realising how or why it might be the case, I began to feel that my job was somehow less attractive than I had previously thought and that it lacked future prospects. Moreover, this increasing disenchantment became tempered with a growing awareness of other possibilities and a more positive desire for a change of life course. It became clear that my new middle-class friends had motivated me to reflect on my situation and to consider pursuing educational qualifications that I had previously convinced myself were beyond my capabilities.

But was I being drawn into an illusion here? One that suggested that 'the grass was greener' in other types of occupation and lifestyle? Indeed, why was I feeling ambivalent about my class origins and often unable to feel proud and self-assured about being working-class and working in the

[3] I explore these nuanced class differences throughout the thesis within the context of social aspiration and consider examples of mobility in the trajectories of working-class aspirants.

motor trade? After all, fully skilled motor engineers were known to earn a good living. Perhaps it was to do with feeling insecure and that I was perhaps unsuited to the garage workplace culture. Or, perhaps I had previously convinced myself that I was not capable of doing anything 'brainier', or 'refined', or of higher status, or more 'worthy'? Or, perhaps I had seen the promise of another style of life that my middle-class friends seemed to possess? Perhaps I was envious of their life prospects and the social and cultural advantages that they seemed to embody?

I later left the garage trade and tried other jobs, before eventually, in the early 1970s, when in my mid-20s, applying for a course at a further education college. Once this was underway, I gradually learned new academic skills and *internalised* what might be considered a 'more refined' set of values that enabled me to develop new ways of thinking, being and of seeing the world around me.[4]

I consider this shift in values and ways of being to be pivotal both in this autobiographical account and in writing this thesis. However, I do not imply from this that being working-class equates with being unrefined, unintelligent or less important than being middle-class. Nor do I consider this example of emerging class transition and self-transformation to be a betrayal of my working-class roots, loyalties or identity. Indeed, my working-class friends and I would openly valorise our class origins and attributes in the company of our middle-class friends, although this was often done in reactive and defensive ways. Rather, my experience of this shift in values and 'ways of being' is significant because it demonstrates the complex, nuanced and sensitive nature of social class and class transition.

I didn't have a good start in terms of my early life and secondary education, as I show in my personal vignettes later in the thesis. Furthermore, this retrospective personal account raises important

[4] I discuss the concept of 'internalisation' and its significance to social mobility later in this Introduction and further throughout the thesis.

questions relating to social aspiration and mobility. It provides a vivid example of the perception of the classed self; the emotional and ontological challenges that are brought about by class inequalities and the range of preconditions and experiences from which working-class people might become socially mobile.[5]

Fortunately, I received inspirational tuition at the F.E. College and with increasing determination, encouragement and self-belief I was gradually able to make some intellectual leaps. These gave me the confidence to apply for and undertake a university course beginning in 1974. However, I still found academic study challenging and had repeated feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth. My self-esteem fluctuated markedly, commensurate with my ability to apply myself to study and in my reaction to coursework grades and examination results.

These feelings of uncertainty and self-doubt persist to this day. Now, in 2020, I still harbour a lingering sense of 'incompleteness'. So, although it might be perceived that I achieved much by eventually completing university degrees in the 1970s and 1980s and becoming an F.E. college and then university lecturer by 1989, I still find it difficult to feel any intrinsic pride in my achievements. Furthermore, depending on the context and the company I am in, I can oscillate between feeling uneasy about, or proud of my class origins. For example, in middle-class environments I can sometimes feel embarrassed, unrefined, unworthy or defensive. Although these sentiments are now more managed, I still carry and harbour a visceral sense of a 'lack' of place and belonging; of feeling like a 'fish-out-of-water'. I can often feel an ambivalence and a sense of being de-centred; feelings which are indistinct and thus difficult to pinpoint. I consider these ambivalences to be what Sennett and Cobb (1973) refer to as the 'hidden injuries of class'.

5 I define and use the term 'ontological' throughout the thesis as relating to 'being' and, in particular, to 'becoming'. I use these terms in the existential sociological sense of ontological security and particularly *ontological insecurity* in experiencing security, or otherwise, in the events of one's life.

These uneasy self-reflections have led me to conclude that they are manifestations of *internalised* classed conflicts in which class is, perhaps, both the generic cause and the nurtured effect. I therefore consider here, in the context of social mobility, how and why social class carries such psychological, ontological and existential concerns that are as significant as the more commonly understood economic, social and cultural distinctions, differences and inequalities. It is these psychical concerns that form the core and direction of this thesis. I show how class impacts on the sense of self of working-class mobiles [6] and how it tends to distinguish, separate, mark, divide and diminish the self, when experiencing social mobility, class transition and in seeking to safeguard and improve wellbeing and to further self-transformation.

The above personal vignette also shows the contextual and contingent nature of aspiration and mobility, however, not necessarily as a series of random events and social and cultural connections that may seem prosaic and unsurprising. Rather, I submit that it is the personal embodied history of these proximal connections and potential discordances that are significant. Moreover, it is the often experienced intimidatory nature of middle-class cultural settings and the resulting interconnectivities that working-class aspirants face when struggling to achieve a 'better life'. This tends to expose both the structural, symbolic and *internalised* psychical inhibitors of class (see Reay 2005, 2015; Skeggs 2004; Lawler 1999, 2000; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001; Sennett and Cobb 1973).

My contacts with the middle class triggered a new class direction for me that was to be life-changing, although not always life-affirming. Furthermore, I experienced some awkward and at the time, unsophisticated reflections about myself and my situation, which to this

[6] I use the term 'working-class aspirant' synonymously with 'aspirant mobile'. This is in order to affirm these key framing concepts and to differentiate working-class aspirational endeavour from that of the middle-class. I argue that middle-class opportunities for social mobility, which I do not discuss in any depth, tend to be more advantageous owing to the greater access to social, cultural and other forms of 'capital' (see Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Savage 2015).

day continue to surface and perplex me. For example, why in my teens, had I thought myself incapable of realising the goals that I was later able to achieve? Why did I take so long to seek and find a different path and way forward?

In addressing these questions I can conclude that my sense of class disadvantage left me 'feeling I was not good enough'; with the anxiety of 'forever needing to catch up' with what I might have done if circumstances had been different; of continually trying to validate myself; of needing to feel a firmer sense of entitlement and self-worth like those middle-class friends seemed to possess; of needing to manage and transcend those *internalised* psychical class inhibitors I experienced in those early days.

Of course, there are many like me, aspirant mobiles who have pursued one mobility trajectory or another and have managed to pass through what can be termed the 'class ceiling'. However, also like me, there are those who have, to a greater or lesser degree, struggled to embrace and internalise the tenets and sensibilities of middle-class life. As I show throughout the thesis, there are many who have found it difficult to fully accept and to feel they belong as an authentic part of that class and its ways of being. Perhaps some have undergone this journey without being conscious of it? Perhaps, they have embraced and *internalised* the social norm of *meritocracy* and the desire to 'get on' without critically reflecting on the process of self-transformation they have undergone, and the potentially nuanced and psychical costs incurred in such a change of being? Or, perhaps their working-class ties have been too strong to relinquish or abandon since they continue to see the inherent worth and power of the working-class? I consider these inner tensions to be existentially profound, puzzling and in need of further investigation.

Moreover, I suggest that such personal accounts are helpful in centring attention on the feelings and reflections of such working-class mobiles.[7] I

[7] See footnote 6 above for a definition and use of this term.

submit that such accounts provide an interpretative basis upon which to examine the psychical aspects of class and self, where class is to be regarded as an *internalised* and embodied phenomenon at both a personal and collective level. As such, evidence suggests that while class aspiration and mobility may be experienced in uniquely nuanced ways by each working-class aspirant, there are potential similarities and overlaps of experience across this disparate group from within the working-class (see Bourdieu 1977, 1994; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Allen 2013; Friedman 2016; Savage 2015). I explore these differences and similarities throughout the thesis.

A definition of class. [8]

There are numerous theories and perspectives of class involving many class categorisations.[9] It is therefore important to clarify at the outset how I am defining social class and the related terms of 'working-class' and 'middle-class'. The thesis adheres to Bourdieu's emphasis on the access, or lack of access, to economic and *symbolic capital* [10] as a benchmark of class position. Hence, I specifically focus on those who are, to varying degrees struggling

> "for the power to impose the legitimate vision of the social world, or more precisely, for the recognition, accumulated in the form of symbolic capital of notoriety and respectability, which gives authority to impose the legitimate knowledge of the *sense* of the social world, its present meaning and the direction in which it is going and should go" (Bourdieu 2000, p.185).

Bourdieu generally places less emphasis on economic capital and strictly speaking does not offer a typology of classes (Crossley 2012). However,

[8] Please note that for clarity and structuring purposes the key terms and concepts cited in this sub-section are defined below in the following sub-section.

[9] For an historical account and analysis of these approaches see for example Savage (2000, 2015); Goldthorpe (1980).

[10] I define and apply these forms of *capital* later in this Introduction and in Chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis.

he notes that in the second part of the 20th Century the then middle-class emerged from the partial separation of ownership from control of the means of production (Crossley 2012, p. 87). In this, the middle-class performed a central role in the control of capital and through the so called 'managerial revolution' secured increasing control and management of the working-class (Sweezy 1942). The emergence of high salary occupations and a dependence upon scarce forms of cultural knowledge, as well as an expansion of education and the increased significance of qualifications, also contributed to this change. The coupling of economic capital with the emergence of cultural knowledge and *symbolic* capital became a significant lever in differentiating class (see Crossley 2012, p. 87).

For my purposes here, I note that, historically, the composition of social classes has been shaped and reshaped within prevailing and dominant economic orders and inherently there is deemed to be a struggle between classes. I perceive the two socio-economic change dynamics of class fluidity and upward mobility to be inter-related and mutually affecting. I also consider social class to be structural insofar as class divisions are amorphously demarcated through socio-economic barriers and emerging and shifting class signifiers (see Bourdieu 1977, 1986, 1990; Lawler 2005; Morley 1997; Skeggs 1997).

I therefore take the view that through a socio-economic hierarchical system of power, control and domination, these fluid divisions restrict upward mobility both economically and in cultural terms. I consider such a fluid class structure to be coercively enduring through the effective access to, or denial of access, to economic and other forms of capital. Social, cultural, emotional, intellectual and knowledge-based capitals are important examples of where and how symbolic power and domination is derived and secured in these fields of social life (Bourdieu 1986, 1994; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

The struggle to access and control such *symbolic* capital enables those who possess it to perpetuate such advantageous positions in the current hierarchical order and thus from this, to derive "degrees of social

recognition" (Crossley 2012, p. 86). I consider those with access to such capitals and the acumen to secure such socio-cultural capital to be relatively advantaged and privileged social groups and thus to be 'middle-class'.

In contrast, the working-class are those with limited or no access to such capitals, or with limited or no experience and knowledge of their effective use. Hence, they more than likely have relatively little power and influence. Potentially, they will be variably subjected to forms of domination, stigmatisation, coercion and restriction in their life chances and choices by those with access to economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital who are thus in relative positions of power as a result of this (see Savage 2015, p. 335; Skeggs 2004). Furthermore, I consider to be 'working-class' those who are historically disadvantaged by *internalised* forms of structural inequality, domination and power. The extent to which members of this class are predisposed to be(come) aspirational and upwardly mobile will be influenced by their relative position within the social space; by the fields in which they practice and relative to their reflexive understanding of their lived experiences and the possibilities for change (Crossley 2012, p. 86). It will also depend upon their perceptions, expectations, rationale and world view as to how they may gain access to available capitals.

Defining class is far from straightforward. Indeed, using terms such as 'working-class' and 'middle-class' is bound to be imprecise, particularly in the context of aspirational endeavour and social mobility since these are phenomena that are multifariously practiced across sections of the working-class. In this, further empirical research would help in clarifying how aspiration and mobility are currently practiced within the working-class given the fluidity and mutability of class relations and structures. This definition of class would seem to be consistent with the sociological thread of the thesis. As I show when discussing processes of *internalisation* (see separate section in this Introduction), these give rise to an examination of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and the embodied self.

I therefore seek to unpick the puzzle of why classed experiences of aspiration and upwardly mobility often present challenges for working-class aspirants when seeking to secure a 'better' life. In this, I focus on why and how aspirant mobiles proximate towards middle-class mores and norms and assimilate these in their mobility trajectories. I also consider the emotional reactions that can arise in making the break with 'familiar' working-class traditions; in such ways of being and the transformations of the self that might arise in 'becoming' middle-class. These psychical impacts of class mobility can be shown to raise confusions over class identity and position for many aspirants were issues of authenticity, entitlement and belonging can emerge (Sennett and Cobb 1973; Allen 2015; Friedman 2016; Knights and Clarke 2013; Lawler 2005; Loveday 2015; Mallman 2017, Sayer 2005). Specifically, anxieties can arise resulting from a sense of a 'lack of fit' and of 'feeling like an imposter'; of being in the wrong social and cultural space at the wrong time. Here, working-class aspirant mobiles are shown to adopt defensive or protective strategies during their mobility trajectories (Chapman 2015; Knights and Clarke 2013; Reay 1998b). 'Masking' and other psycho-social approaches are in evidence; adopted to disguise the discomfort and shame aspirant mobiles can experience when interacting with more 'culturally-dominant' middle-class 'others'.

My intention here, therefore, is to show that such psychical states need to be understood historically and managed reflexively in order to confront the unwanted influences of socialisation and class structure. Such psychical states can materialise into apprehensions that can bring psychical instabilities both ontologically that is, in states of being, and existentially, in terms of concrete human experience. This can threaten a sense of self, place and life direction. Aspirant mobiles can become disoriented, rootless and without a firm sense of class identity and belonging (see Friedman 2016; Mallman 2017; Sennett and Cobb 1973).

In addressing these issues, I engage in a theoretical discussion based on published sources from key contributors to discourses on class, self, social aspiration and mobility. Principal among these is Pierre Bourdieu and his

Theory of Practice (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1994, 2000, 2005, 2009; Bourdieu and Eagleton 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). Of central significance in this is Bourdieu's conceptual interlocking triad of *habitus*, *field* and *capital,* which I briefly define here along with his other key concepts which I apply in the context of aspirational endeavour and social mobility throughout the thesis. However, alongside Bourdieu's considerable contribution I use a particular text that originally inspired me to write the thesis. This is the seminal text by Sennett and Cobb (1973), entitled The Hidden Injuries of Class. I use this throughout the thesis to offer a contrasting, but complementary platform on which to examine the central topic (see Section 1.6).

Bourdieu's concepts in his Theory of Practice.

Habitus can be defined as "an internal organising mechanism. It is the accumulated embodiment and ensemble of durable and transposable dispositions that internalise the necessities of the extant social environment" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 13). These dispositions are formed early in life and comprise our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. *Habitus* captures how we carry within us, or *internalise*, our history (Maton 2012, p. 51). Alongside the *habitus* and inextricably linked to it, is Bourdieu's concept of *field*. Wacquant defines a field as "a set of objectives, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power or *capital*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007, p. 16). Examples of fields include the fields of social class (and the social mobility between classes), the artistic field, or the economic field. In Bourdieu's schema, fields are deemed to follow specific logics and the competition within a given field can be perceived as being like a *game*, with players vying for power, influence, domination and respect. However, unlike a game, while a field follows rules, or regularities, these are *not* explicit or codified (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p.98).[11]

[11] Bourdieu also uses the broader concept of 'social space'. I use this term in the thesis to differentiate it from *field.* 'Social space' is the set of all possible positions that are available for occupation at any given time or place (see Hardy 2012, p. 229).

The third critical concept in Bourdieu's conceptual triad is *capital.* In the context of class relationships this can be defined as a resource, or asset and thus a means of power and influence in a given field. *Capital* permits some groups the ongoing capacity to enhance themselves, while those without, or with limited access to such resources or knowledge (savvy) of how to use them effectively, will struggle to enhance themselves (Savage 2015, p. 46). Examples of kinds of capital include social, cultural, emotional, linguistic, intellectual, scientific and literary capital. In Bourdieu's schema they are to be considered as similar to economic capital in that they are transferable or transposable and are able to be accumulated or converted for use within and across different fields or social and cultural spaces (see Moore 2012, p.100).

However, for Bourdieu it is in what he terms *symbolic capital* that power is derived from these other kinds of capital. For instance, the instrumental, self-interested and transparent nature of economic capital is only a means to an end, for example, in returning a profit or accruing interest. Its undisguised and arbitrary character in the distribution of power and wealth is apparent (see Postone, LiPuma and Calhoun 1995, p. 5). However, *symbolic capital* has the capacity to deny and suppress its instrumental nature and to demonstrate its 'intrinsic' or 'naturalised' qualities (see Moore 2012, p. 100). Furthermore, Bourdieu uses the concept of *misrecognition* to show how these qualities work in favour of some social groups but not others (see Savage 2015, p. 46).

Thus, the power of cultural capital is demonstrated *symbolically* through cultural tastes and preferences which are seen as indicators or *signifiers* of class. They are deemed to be either legitimate or illegitimate depending on the class perspective, but within or against a dominant cultural frame of reference, which can push the idea of some signifiers being superior while others are made to 'appear' to be inferior. For example, cultural disparity and nuanced domination can be shown to materialise through the modern practice of *inheritance*. Apart from the passing over of economic capital to one's kin in the form of property or heirlooms, this can be supplemented by cultural capital. Without necessarily realising it well-

educated parents have the tendency (*habitus*) to pass on the capacity (*capital*), in the form of their own prior educational experience and know-how, to their children to enable them in turn, to succeed in the cultural *field* of school and university and hence to acquire indirectly the means for securing the best jobs and the economic benefits that this brings (Savage 2015, p. 49). However, the fact that this form of inheritance is not direct shows its nuanced power and means that its significance can be *misrecognised* (Savage 2015, p. 49). As Moore (2012, p.101) indicates

> "This systematic denial of the fact that symbolic capitals are transubstantiated types of economic capital involves the process that Bourdieu calls *misrecognition*".

However, the minute that this practice is actually seen as a form of privilege, then it can be contested, and its power can be challenged. The classed parameters of domination are exposed and, under pressure, the 'powers that be' may be forced to make structural adjustments (see Savage 2015, pp. 50-51).This also indicates how cultural capital cannot be construed as a fixed set of tastes, but as a much more fluid or mutable phenomenon.

Furthermore, in the Bourdieusian schema *misrecognition* can be construed as a form of *symbolic domination* or even *symbolic violence*. However, this 'violence' is not evident in the form of physical coercion, but rather through a tacit, *unconscious* acceptance of power and domination both by those who see themselves as 'entitled' and by those who see themselves as unsuitable, ill-equipped, undeserving and dispossessed of such power and domination. Thus, it is a form of structural violence and the above example shows how the power of such forms of *capital* can be symbolically 'naturalised' and disguised when utilised in this way. In class terms it also shows how class domination historically legitimises existing power relations and practice (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1986, 1990).

Bourdieu shows how class domination is manifest and reinforced through access to symbolic capital and class signifiers in areas such as language,

dress, cultural practice, individual taste and education achievement (Bourdieu 1984; Skeggs 2004). Thus, if aspirants in the *field* of social class cannot effectively acquire and utilise such forms of symbolic capital their aspirational endeavours may be thwarted. For example, in the realm of language usage, the experience of being corrected, chastised or patronised for 'misusing' language, or even speaking with a regional dialect, can be seen as a form of *symbolic violence* and *domination* (see Thompson 1984, below in Section 1.4). It becomes more than a mere linguistic issue since it can have deeply felt and shaming consequences for aspirant mobiles, thereby negatively impacting on their aspirational endeavours and sense of self. However, many aspirants have been shown to resist and challenge such aloof behaviour, class arrogance and elitism. They choose to express pride and to defend themselves against such accusations of inferiority and to valorise their working-class cultural, educational and occupational predispositions (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p.19; Stahl 2013; Skeggs 2004).

However, I emphasise that mobile aspirants are more likely to struggle in what Bourdieu refers to as an 'uneven playing field', when compared with aspirants from the middle-class, since they have to make greater step changes.[12] To improve their chances of a better life they need to take greater risks and make more significant adjustments to the embodied self (*habitus)* in overcoming their class disadvantage which may often be viscerally felt (Friedman 2016; Reay 2013, Calarco 2011). It is also likely that the aspirant's reflexive powers will need to be more honed in trying to overcome the *symbolic violence* and *misrecognition* that is meted out to the working-class. These are shown to be powerful social and cultural control mechanisms of class domination that coercively fix, restrict, subjugate and demonise the working-class (Bourdieu 1977; Jones 2011).

Encountering such painful forms of condescension and belittlement can leave aspirant mobiles with indelible psychical scars. For example, levels

[12] I do not discuss middle-class aspiration or mobility directly. I mention it only comparatively in discussing working-class mobility. See for example Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001).

of inner resolve, resilience and self-belief can be severely tested when these forms of class domination occur (Rosenberg 1981; Harter 1993). Yet it is these very aspects of character and temperament that aspirant mobiles may need to reflect upon and confront and perhaps to strengthen, if the sense of 'lack', ambivalence and belittlement are to be transcended. For example, in situations where forms of disapproval such as disgust and contempt are meted out on grounds of class; where ignorance of the correct ways of 'being' and 'doing' is perceived and received negatively, then the aspirant's sense of progression can be shown to falter (Lawler 2014, p. 702; Kuhn 2002, p.117; Reay 1997b; Emler 2001).

Throughout the thesis I utilise other relevant concepts from Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit. Specifically, these include the concepts of *doxa, hysteresis* and particularly *reflexivity*. *Doxa* refers to "what is taken for granted" and to the social reality that goes unanimously unquestioned because it lies beyond any notion of enquiry. It is that which is assumed to be 'given' in relation to the social and cultural world since it is the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through *misrecognition* of arbitrariness (Deer 2012, p. 117; Bourdieu 1977).

For example, later in this Introduction and in later sections of the thesis I make reference to the 'myth' of *meritocracy* and to the rhetoric surrounding this concept. We can perceive this construct of meritocracy as *doxa* owing to its ubiquitous presence and persuasive acceptance across the class structure; its prominence as an 'individualistic' social value in relation to personal advancement, social climbing and striving and the normative assumptions underpinning it. As such, it is shown to subtly disguise deeply entrenched class inequalities and the unequal access to the aforementioned kinds of capital through false notions of a ''level playing field'; through the justification for disparities of wealth and the false claim of 'equal opportunities' across classed society (Savage 2015, p. 398), Bourdieu and Eagleton 1991).

In specific sections of the thesis I also make reference to the concept of *hysteresis.* This can be defined as the disruption in the relationship

between *habitus* and the structures of the *field* to which they no longer correspond. It is the temporary breakdown in self-regulation (*habitus*) which was established to fit an individual to society (see Hardy 2012, p. 129) and, importantly, to a particular class. In the context of aspirant mobility, the changing self can be considered in terms of a process which embraces both a feeling of being at once the 'same as always' person, while socially and culturally 'becoming' a 'different self'. Thus, it is in the experiencing and familiarising of oneself with other social class environments that holds our gaze here and from which *hysteresis* can, potentially at least, emerge. This potential shifting of class agency is essentially bound up with the structural drivers embedded in the cultural machinations of another class which the aspirant wittingly, or unwittingly, *internalises* in the process of class transition (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990). Thus, the focus here is to consider how working-class aspirants experience this psychical disturbance in their mobility trajectories.

The last of Bourdieu's concepts I refer to is that of *reflexivity* and in particular the adjoining concept of a *reflexive habitus*. Reflexivity can be defined as an act of self-reference where examination or action bends back on, or refers to and affects the entity instigating the action or examination. It refers to the capacity of the agent (mobile aspirant) to recognise the forces of socialisation and to alter, when necessary, their place in the social structure.

My intention is to speculatively identify the characteristics of the *reflexive aspirant self* that emerge from particular class-related struggles of upward mobility. In terms of individual temperament, the aspirant mobile can be shown to face many tests of self-worth and self-esteem, where engagement in a self-reflexive analyse of the *habitus* might be beneficial in strengthening character (Baumeister 1993; Rosenberg 1981). As an ongoing historical summation of routinised dispositions and structures, it will require close consideration. At such times the sense of self and of identity is a reminder of the challenging path that awaits the aspirant in 'becoming' one of a different class. Crucially, there are also ontological and existential issues to consider in this line of thinking which I explore in

Chapters 4 and 5 of the thesis (Allen 2015; Ashman and Gibson 2010; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Sayer 2005).

Processes of 'internalisation'.

However, in conceptualising an individual's embodied disposition, formed as it is from early socialisation and involving social and other structures, it is notable that Bourdieu's *habitus* is designed to avoid an inside/outside distinction which dualities such as individual/society, agency/structure and mind/body struggle to make clear or to convincingly resolve (Bourdieu 1990; Wetherell 2005). This raises questions in terms of the functioning of the unconscious and the processes of *internalisation* that Bourdieu refers to as "history forgotten as history' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56). This is critical in understanding how aspirant mobiles perceive their practice of upward mobility and what it might mean to them in terms of becoming middle-class and 'successful'. It concerns how they might account for, reflect upon and rationalise this drive for mobility in order to achieve this success and the avenues they might choose to take in order to achieve this. Moreover, it concerns how they may reshape such practice in transcending class boundaries, while others of the working-class are, seemingly, unwilling or unable to do this (Bourdieu, 1990; Friedman 2016; Swartz 2002; Elder-Vass 2007; Akram 2012; Maton 2012).

For example, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) people internalise through a protracted process of conditioning the objective chances they face. They come to 'read' the future and to choose the fate that is most likely for them. Thus, expectations of future outcomes are based, through the *habitus*, on experiences of past (historical) outcomes (see Maton 2012, p. 57). Bourdieu in his Logic of Practice (1990) notes that it is our material conditions of existence that, through our past experiences, shape our *unconscious* sense of the possible, probable and desirable. We learn where we will do best and where we will struggle and thus, normally, we will seek to avoid those fields which might involve a *field-habitus* clash (see Maton 2012, p. 57). However, this may not always be the case and the process of change may not always be located in the *internalised* unconscious (Noble and Watkins 2003). For example, in the

specific case of aspirant mobiles they may have reached a point in their lived experience were they also *consciously* recognise those fields where they would normally struggle but choose to enter them anyway. They may be prepared to be 'out of their comfort zones' and risk facing 'sink or swim' scenarios in order to action radical changes in their circumstances. These perspectives also suggest sociological inferences of an existential kind, which I consider later in the thesis.

This would seem to be one possible explanation for how aspirant mobiles might be able to transcend their past patterns of socialisation and class reproduction to enable a changed *habitus* to emerge. I use a range of citations and personal vignettes in the forthcoming chapters to illustrate these processes of *internalisation*.[13] This can also provide a theoretical underpinning for future empirical research on the kinds of self-reflexive, internal narratives that surface among working-class aspirants and reveal the perspectives and motives therein. I consider the degrees of reflexivity in Bourdieu's habitus in Chapter 2.

As noted above, another way of understanding processes of *internalisation* as 'natural' is to consider the rhetoric and discourses relating to *meritocracy*. As noted in the previous sub-section Meritocracy propagates the argument that the motivation to aspire and succeed is a 'natural' human predisposition rather than one that can be shown to be culturally loaded; that represents specific social values and norms and that, in turn, reinforces dominant class interests and forms of control. This meritocratic myth is based on the idea that the most able in society will 'naturally' accede to the most influential positions in a given field through a combination of natural ability, savvy and, or hard work. However, this construct can also be seen as a form of society-wide taken-for-granted *doxa*, or conditioning, *internalised* by large numbers of people in advanced economies in the 20th and 21st centuries (Reay 2013). It poses a social reality founded on a 'collective unconscious', harbouring the belief that

[13] As I discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, this perspective on the 'unconscious' has obvious comparisons with the psychoanalytical approach of Freud. However, to consider Freud's work directly would be beyond the scope of the thesis.

equal access to resources, or *capital*, exists for all, while contradictorily ensuring the retention of class hierarchy, status, difference, separation and division (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

This also aligns with and accommodates a *voluntarist* view of personal growth, change and development. That is, one which sees individual agents as largely free, uncoerced and unconstrained in their choice of personal goals and ways to achieve them. As examples of internalisation both meritocracy and voluntarism place individual *agency* (autonomy of action and choice) above social structural class determinants. However, as I discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, this meritocratic position is powerfully 'individualistic' in tenor since it draws upon the idea of ascendant autonomy and agency. The individual's will and character are evoked in order to ignore, sidestep and ultimately transcend structural determinants and the social inequalities that are shown to persist in a class society (Bourdieu 1994; Savage 2015; Bourdieu and Eagleton 1991).

This line of enquiry also approximates to the long-standing discourse in social theory of the 'structure/agency' duality where the tensions and interplay between the wider social forces and the individual agent are shown to be complex, individuated, circumstantial, contextual and contingent (Giddens 1984; Archer 2003, 2010; King, 2010). Thus, because of these interconnections and overlaps I briefly consider the major tenets of this debate, recognising that it has tendencies of 'circularity' and is considered by some to be a sterile exploration (see Wetherell 2005). As I discussed above, I focus instead on Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* as an 'unconscious' forgetting of history and practice, which has been criticised for the very fact that it appears to underplay consciousness in the way agency is formulated. I follow this in Chapter 2, by considering key critiques of Bourdieu's *habitus* and its *determinism* which, some critics argue, offers too limited a space for agency and reflexivity. Thus, in the context of working-class aspiration and mobility, *voluntarism* and *determinism* can be considered as important tendencies that the *habitus* might be shown to contain. They are also another way of understanding how aspirant mobiles internalise and negotiate their

personal limitations and the social constraints in seeking a 'better existence' within the constraints of the embodied self (*habitus*) and classed society.

The alternative to this meritocratic approach might be to adopt a socially immobile and non-aspirational stance, or, to adopt strategies that obviate or negate the rhetoric of 'striving'. However, this may be a challenging prospect given the prevailing structural forces that are dominant in a class structure. Moreover, I note throughout the thesis that sections of the working-class are known to consider social mobility as untenable and even distasteful. Indeed, according to Skeggs, a long-standing tradition shows a defence of working-class life; a pride in its identity; a distancing from middle-class mores and its values (see Savage 2015, p. 365; also, Reay 2013). This is historically endorsed in the forms of industrial action, trade unionism, working-class protest movements and forms of working-class cultural expression and class autonomy.

The above discussion and my reading of secondary sources indicates that working-class mobiles conceive of, prepare for and undertake, their aspirational journeys in complex ways and from different positions within and across the working-class (Allen 2013; Mallman 2017; Friedman 2016; Reay 1997b; Loveday 2014; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003). Aligned to this, I also consider research on the loss of, or threats to, a 'familiar' or *authentic* self as a result of, for example, long range mobility trajectories (see Chapter 4 and Friedman 2016, p. 139). Furthermore, although similarities in the patterns of mobility trajectory may be apparent, as a sub-group of the working-class it can also be shown that aspirant mobiles make up a complex and heterogeneous grouping with disparate motives and drivers; with various perspectives on what constitutes 'success' and as such carry a range of visions of what they might mean by an improved future and increased wellbeing. In this regard, I seek to emphasise that while there are similarities and parallels, each aspirant's experiences of mobility are psychically, ontologically and existentially nuanced in being unique to them. Moreover, each aspirant's temporal life pathway and mobility trajectory is also unique. However, it is important to show how

these experiences are replicated and shared across a range of mobility scenarios (Friedman 2016; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Lawler 1999; Savage 2015; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009 and 2010).

An existential sociology approach.[14]

In Chapters 4 and 5, I develop this emphasis on ontological concerns by adopting an *existential sociology* perspective. This can be defined as one which focuses on 'everyday life' and as such emphasises the centrality of embodiment and feelings within human agency. It can be defined descriptively as the study of human experience-in-the-(contemporary)-world in all its forms (Kotarba and Fontana 1984). This will assist in my focus on the particular emotional, ontological and existential implications of mobility and transition that make up each aspirant mobile's embodied self. Existential sociology expects change to be a constant feature of people's lives in terms of their character, temperament and classed experiences; in their life course in terms of finitude and in their ontology and anxieties about their ultimate demise. This form of sociology embraces one's experience of the social world, the other people that populate it and the culture that provides meaning to that life. The agent (mobile aspirant) is simultaneously the writer, producer and actor on a stage not necessarily of their choosing, but one that cannot be exited without confrontation (Kotarba and Fontana 1984).

Furthermore, I want to suggest that aspiration and mobility are contingent upon and tend to highlight, the dynamic in which aspirants are grasping life existentially, from within a uniquely personal set of changing social circumstances. However, as a group within the working-class, aspirant mobiles can be shown to adopt similar, or shared, behavioural patterns and rationales. By employing varying degrees of endeavour, the aspirant is shown to be striving in such a way that the structural barriers to mobility are challenging, although in many cases such challenges are overcome.

[14] See also Douglas and Johnson (1977 as an example of this sociological approach.

The discussion on the *internalisation* of social and cultural attributes shows how, in some cases, class transition can also take place.

However, I also emphasise that in temporal and existential terms aspirants have one finite life in which to maximise the opportunities that arise and to make life-changing decisions and choices about how they exist in the face of this finitude. Thus, the existential imperative is emphasised, and aspirant mobiles' psychical struggles are contextualised through the lens of this existential sociology. The thesis thus revisits and critiques the debates surrounding *ontological insecurity* (a term borrowed from Laing 1990a). In so doing I use Sennett and Cobb's (1973) discussion of the findings from interviews with aspirant mobiles who are experiencing the effects of social mobility. This American study of predominantly white working-class men undertaken in the early 1970s shows the disillusionment and existential anxieties that they identify as the 'hidden injuries of class'. The authors examine the relevance of these of being. They examine the respondents' self-deprecating behaviour that emerged when making sense of their lives, career pathways and workplace pressures (see also Knights and Clarke 2013). As indicated above, this is useful in showing how shifting class identities can, in turn, often create *habitus clive'* during and following the particular mobility trajectory of the aspirant (Friedman 2016; Hardy 2012; Bourdieu 1977, 2000, 2009).

Research methodology.

The methodological approach adopted is to intersperse theoretical critiques of secondary research with reflexive accounts of relevant past events in the form of personal vignettes, similar to those often found in autoethnographic and autobiographical research. Autoethnography is the study of the self and Reed-Danahay defines this as a form of self-narrative that can be done by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs (Humphries 2005, p. 841). The discerning difference between autoethnographic and autobiographical research would seem to be in the degree of reflexivity in the research process and the extent to which the self can be detached from the subject to engage in an objective account that illuminates a wider

social context. However, this can be problematic since in connecting the personal with the cultural in this way concerns regarding self-indulgence, narcissism and difficulties with generalisability are prone to arise (see Le Roux 2017; Finch, 1987).

However, my research approach is neither strictly autoethnographical nor autobiographical. The personal vignettes are designed to complement and embellish the theoretical discussion in the absence of any empirical research data or findings. According to Denzin (see Humphreys 2005, p. 840) vignettes "ask readers to relive the experience through the writer's or performer's eyes", or as Ellis suggests, to "bring life to the research and the research to life" (Humphreys 2005, p. 842).

Personal vignettes are known to have specific strengths and weaknesses. Their strengths are that they act as a vehicle for reflexive examination and to express the writer's involvement and intimacy in the topic. They can enhance contextual richness and provide a window through which the reader can view some of the pleasure and pain associated with past social phenomena (Humphreys 2005, p. 842; Felski 2000, p. 33). The weaknesses of this approach are that they can be seen as self-indulgent writing and thus narcissistic in style, be seen as mere naval-gazing or self-confessional in tone, in which case there is a danger that the reader's trust will be lost. Furthermore, it may distort the responsibility of the researcher and the authenticity of the work (Humphreys 2005, p. 851)

The vignettes are situated in a time period from 1950 up to the present. However, they mainly focus on my life from 1963 in Liverpool, when I left secondary education. From that time, they reference my years working in the motor trade in Liverpool and later doing a variety of other kinds of work. From then they briefly mention my time at a further education college, again in Liverpool, where I studied 'O' Levels and then 'A' levels after which I left the city in 1974 to attend two universities until 1979. I then took up a full-time teaching post at a technical college in West Sussex, before moving to the East midlands in 1989 to begin a post at a UK university. I do not cover this last period in the vignettes. Thus, in

summary, the vignettes cover times and events in workplace and college contexts and home life in my teenage years and beyond, up to the time when I left home.

The idea of using vignettes emerged from my original interest in the research topic which is based on my own 'lived experiences' and has been further affirmed through early discursive writing and the review of the literature. Moreover, in critiquing the relevant literature on working-class upward mobility it affirmed both subjectively and objectively that sociologically I was representative of this group. Thus, as the opening vignette shows (see pp. 6-9), I am reflectively recording the early part of 'my journey' in the form of a 'living example' of an aspirant working mobile with a story to tell. As Gray notes, I can be considered as "an actor in my own life production" (see Humphreys 2005, p. 840).

The vignettes embrace a range of emotions and states-of-being which I address primarily by relating to class insecurities that trigger changes in levels of self-esteem and self-worth, regret, shame and guilt. I try to show the ways in which these are induced and consolidated or ameliorated through interactions with familiar and unfamiliar classed 'others'. Thus, the vignettes convey the poignancy of pain and discomfort, but also of joy, excitement and satisfaction that I experienced in moving my life forward in my early years. By taking the good advice of respected friends I finally followed the educational pathway to escape class disadvantage.

Thus, the vignettes are autobiographical as well as factual; they contextualise the theoretical discourse and include reflexive elements. According to Macbeth (see Humphreys 2005, p. 840) reflexivity can be considered to be "the turning back of an inquiry or theory or text onto its own formative possibilities". I use this reflexive style in revisiting past events often as memories that I have harboured as 'experiential fossils' that were not communicated openly with my working-class peers. I recognise that the richness of these memories may have faded with time, however, importantly, current situations often bring these memories back to mind thereby underlining their significance. These past experiences of

upward mobility evoke memories of the psychical and social class challenges that I faced and how these have affected me up to the present day. I recall some of the factors of social positioning and manoeuvring that I undertook prior to, during and then beyond my transition to middle-class 'professional' life.

I have attempted to tailor these accounts so as to emphasise the reflexive process involved in the changing of my circumstances, or the inertia that prevented this. In addition, I site the interactions with the 'other', be they with family members, friendship networks, or peer groups or workplace fellow employees in various settings and locations. In so doing, I illustrate how these relationships are instrumental in a reflexive sense, in the development of my psychical interiority and ways in which these experiences have transformed me as a person within my own trajectory.

I do not claim that the vignettes are necessarily significant to others or generalisable within a wider social context. Rather they are intended to illustrate the uniqueness an individual aspirant's mobility pathway and emerging life. While recognising the likely existence of shared experiences and patterns of behaviour among aspirants and their mobile trajectories, I use the case examples and personal accounts purely as an observational mechanism that draws attention to the research question (see below) and how it can be addressed and validated.

Research focus.

The thesis takes the existence of class as a given and a legitimate area of theoretical enquiry. Furthermore, in focusing on social aspiration and class transition, the thesis does not directly consider other structures of inequality, such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, disability or age. However, where relevant to the core thesis I do include a number of direct and indirect references to gender in some of the discussions (see for example, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Lawler 1999, 2000; Allen 2013; Morley 1997; O'Donoghue 2013; Reay 1997a, 1997b). In this regard, although a large number of my references relate to the working-class and in some cases appear to centre on working-class men (such as

Sennett and Cobb 1973), this has not been deliberate. Furthermore, although it may appear so in places, neither have I intentionally focused the research exclusively on white working-class men to the exclusion of other ethnic groups.

In terms of the research sources I have 'triangulated' the academic disciplines of sociology, social psychology and, in a more limited way, existential sociology. This demonstrates the indicative breadth and depth of the research topic. The secondary sources are used therefore, in order to form a bridge for this inter-disciplinary approach. I justify this since, in addressing the research question, I argue it cannot be effectively examined from within one discipline. Historically and geographically, my citations relating to social class are taken from research undertaken in the 20th and 21st Centuries and largely from academic sources emanating from the UK, USA, Europe and Australia.

Through this lens of social aspiration and upward mobility the thesis engages with existing debates on class in examining the internalisation of ideas relating to social mobility as a construct. It does so by critiquing selected secondary research sources, particularly the work of Pierre Bourdieu and suggests that there is a basis for an existential sociology approach to social mobility and class transition. This places *ontological insecurity* and existential anxiety alongside the structural determinist barriers of class as key components and inhibitors affecting class transition. The thesis argues that working-class aspirants often experience significant internal barriers in making the transition into middle-class life. It argues that aspirant mobiles can carry injurious *residues* of their working-class origins during their mobility trajectories and that these often impose social and cultural constraints on a successful transition into the middle-class. In these ways the thesis makes a further contribution to the existing literature on the nuanced nature of aspiration and working-class mobility by extending the theme of 'hysteresis' and 'conflicted interiority' experienced by some working-class mobiles.

The thesis research question to be addressed, therefore, is,

> *In what ways do working-class aspirant mobiles experience psychical, social and cultural tensions and challenges to their embodied self and class identity, during their mobility trajectories and transition to the middle-class?*

The following thesis structure is adopted:

Chapter 1 defines and frames the concepts of working-class social aspiration and mobility and the importance of *determinism* and *voluntarism* in relation to these practices. I then link Bourdieu's key concepts of *habitus, field, capital, doxa*, *symbolic violence, misrecognition* and *reflexivity* and consider the first of two sections discussing the unconscious processes of 'internalisation' of class embodiments. I then provide the first of a series of personal illustrations of my own embodied selfhood and social mobility in relation to Bourdieu's concepts.

Chapter 2 considers a selection of critiques of Bourdieu's *habitus* by key contributors in terms of its determinism and reflexive potential. This will be followed by an assessment of the limits of reflexivity among working-class aspirants and the second of two discussions of 'internalisation' and an interpretation of Bourdieu's *habitus* as 'unconscious as forgotten history' in the formation of the embodied self. Further personal vignettes are included in relation to these considerations.

Chapter 3 focuses on the sentiments, perceptions, emotional states and reactions encountered by aspirants. The so called 'deficit model' of the working-class emphasises the persistent feelings of disadvantage, exclusion, lack, shame and insufficiency. It raises questions of self-regard, self-esteem and the fragility of self, among aspirants. However, this can be balanced against the perceived benefits of mobility such as increased self-respect and wellbeing experienced by working-class aspirant mobiles.

Chapter 4 discusses aspirants' experiences of 'inauthenticity', fraudulence and manifestations of insecurity such as the 'imposter syndrome' that can be shown to threaten a sense of self. An *existential sociology* perspective will be introduced to consider these ontological difficulties. In this regard, the chapter considers how and why a sense of 'belonging' is critical for aspirants in the processes of class identity disruption and realignment. The discussion will be fashioned around the theoretical value of authenticity as a concept, in the sense of a 'familiar' self in the context of social aspiration and mobility.

Chapter 5 considers working-class aspirants' experiences of *ontological insecurity* and the contradictory messages and anxieties that can arise during shifts in class loyalty and identity. Sennett and Cobb (1973, pp. 206-210) use this concept from Laing (1990a) to illustrate a 'double-bind' in the form of a set of contradictory and irreconcilable commands. They show how such 'schizophrenic' situations can create psychical tensions for the aspirant mobile, somewhat similar to Bourdieu's concept of *hysteresis*. I apply an *existential sociology* approach, introduced in Chapter 4, which further contributes to an understanding of the psychical tensions underpinning class mobility. This raises issues of the transformative pressures of change and questions how real and grounded aspirant mobiles can, or need to be, when drawn into unfamiliar cultural territory and where their ability to retain that sense of self and belonging is tested.

Conclusion. The principal points that have been made throughout the thesis will be summarised. This is followed by a discussion of further related areas of theoretical, empirical and qualitative research that might be pursued following my discussions in this thesis.

Chapter 1. Structural determinants of class and their impact on aspiration, mobility and class transition.

1.1 Introduction.

In this first chapter I define and contextualise the framing concepts of working-class aspiration and social mobility. I then follow this with a brief account of *determinism* and *voluntarism*. These aspects and tendencies will be shown to have a bearing on aspirational endeavour and social mobility and will be considered further in Chapter 2 and at later points throughout the thesis. I then link Bourdieu's key concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* and related tools in his Theory of Practice that I briefly defined in the thesis Introduction (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1986, 1990). These are applied throughout the thesis in examining what I refer as the *psychical interiority* or *internalisation* of structural barriers and enablers of class in the *embodied self* of aspirants. I consider these to provide a solid basis upon which to examine aspirants' perceptions of their endeavours and changing sense of self, class and identity, as well as the *ontological insecurity* and existential anxiety that can potentially emerge during mobility and class transition.[15]

The concepts and terms used here are pivotal in exploring this psychic landscape of class (see Reay 2005; Allen 2013; Sennett and Cobb 1973). Such *internalised* structures tend to have a robustness and durability which Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* shows (see Bourdieu 1984, 1990; Skeggs 2004; Sayer 2005).[16] I explore the ways in which structural determinants emerges and how and why these may translate into psychical barriers or enablers during mobility. Bourdieu's perspective on the processes of 'internalisation' of structures is useful here. I consider his

[15] References to 'class transition' refer to working-class aspirants facing the psychical, ontological and existential challenges in morphing into the middle-class and attempting to cultivate a sense of acceptance and 'belonging' within the middle-class. I discuss the key concept of *ontological insecurity* in relation to class transition in Chapter 5.

[16] A more developed explanation of *habitus* is provided in Section 1.4 of this chapter.

use of the 'unconscious' in this and his reference to 'history, forgotten as history' further in Section 1.5 and in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.

The secondary sources used characterise the embodied *aspirant self* as struggling in various ways to adhere to dominant social class structures, with the fixity and fluidity of these structures and with the *signifiers* of class that tend to preserve and differentiate the prevailing orthodoxy of class.[17] Furthermore, there is the tendency for these *internalised* structural determinants to reinforce class insecurities among many aspirants. I therefore consider how these impact on the feelings, perceptions and practice of aspirants. For example, the experience of breaking from working-class cultural ties can show upward mobility trajectories to be complex and disruptive in form and unique in their impact on each aspirant. I also consider how these structural determinants of class might inhibit, for example, the self-assuredness, resilience and confidence which aspirant mobiles are shown to need in order to preserve wellbeing and to be able to interact effectively with their middle-class counterparts.[18] These structural inhibitors can raise difficult issues for aspirants in terms of their sense of self and being. Their sense of place, space and 'belonging' is explored in later chapters (see Friedman 2016, p. 145; also, Allen 2013, 2015; Abrahams 2017; Reay 1997b; Lawler 1999, 2000).[19]

Following this, I include the first in a series of personal vignettes tracking and reflecting upon my own early experiences of aspiration and mobility. The opening personal account in the thesis Introduction set the scene for the autobiographical tone of the thesis (see page 6). These are accompanied by further theoretical interpretation. A concluding section

[17] See Bourdieu's definition and uses of *doxa* as a similar concept to orthodoxy, and other concepts discussed in Section 1.4.

[18] See Chapter 3 for a discussion on levels of self-worth and self-esteem.

[19] I emphasise 'belonging' here because I show later in the thesis how this raises complex issues about the transformative nature of the self and class identity, and of ontological and existential issues pertaining to class transition and self-transformation which, I argue, are far from clear or straightforward.

will then summarise the main points raised and those to follow in Chapter 2.

1.2 Defining and framing working-class aspiration and mobility.

For the purpose of this thesis, I define *working-class aspirant mobiles* as those of working-class origin living in capitalist, industrial and commercial classed societies in the 20th and 21st Centuries, who, in evaluating their class disadvantage and limited capitals, are seeking ways of 'getting out and getting away' (Lawler 1999). In this, they are striving to overcome their perceived class-related predicaments and are thereby, endeavouring to transcend the structural constraints of class. An early study by Gould (see Empey 1956, p. 704) theorised that the more unsatisfactory the present is conceived to be in the mind of working-class aspirants, the more urgent is their desire to depart from it in the future. Gould also speculated from this that the working-class is imbued with a deep all-pervading need to leave the present.[20] However, she also suggests that their social reality compels aspirants to reduce or contain their aspirations because they are unable to accept the risk of becoming 'less' poor. Gould speculates further that, in reality, their aspirations might be limited by their 'classed horizon'. However, her findings appear to contradict this because of that compelling need to leave their present circumstances. Hence, I suggest that a tension of 'being' is evident, which I explore throughout the thesis and particularly in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, research shows that this desire to 'escape' is often tempered by ambivalence with regard to old class loyalties; family ties, or a need to preserve a familiar working-class self. Importantly however, with a formed set of *internalised* dispositions, aspirants often seek to escape from the hidden psychical injuries or mental scars of their working-class life (see Bourdieu 2009; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Reay 2015). This research shows that these classed injuries are indelibly bound into the psyche of the aspirant. Also, owing to this classed interiority, aspirants' attempts at

[20] I suggest later that this expression of urgency would seem to have existential implications, which I explore in the Chapter 5.

detaching from their working-class milieu and in 'becoming' middle-class is often shown to be an incomplete and complex process (Friedman 2016). This incompleteness can be manifest in conflicted ways of being which persist as *residues* of their former classed self, or their 'lived past', in their changing selves (see Bourdieu 1977, 2000; Friedman 2016). I also show that in being aspirational and socially mobile, aspirants are trying, in an existential sense, to reconcile, heal and transcend this former classed self. I contextualise these aspects of socialisation or *internalisation* and the impacts that these have on the embodied aspirational self in Section 1.5, in Chapter 2 and throughout the thesis.[21]

Another view, however, is that the socially mobile can be 'omnivorous' in their cultural consumption patterns and world view. In this van Eijk suggests that they are shown to nostalgically retain habits and practices of the past alongside the newly acquired tastes and subsequent classed experiences (see Atkinson 2015, p. 117). This would seem to put a different complexion on the somewhat negative idea of 'getting out and getting away' and the motives behind social mobility and class transition. Conversely however, Friedman argues that aspirants appear to be 'culturally homeless' since they never feel as though their shifting tastes are truly valid (Friedman 2012). This relates to matters of authenticity which I discuss in Chapter 4. According to Friedman the upwardly mobile can feel guilty for appearing to be snooty and snobbish about their new cultural preferences when in contact with generic family members and old friends. However, at the same time, they also feel embarrassed and stupid when discussing these seemingly 'normal' middle-class attributes of taste with friends or colleagues from within the new 'social space' that they are now part of, or 'feel' they are part of (see Atkinson 2015, p. 117; Friedman 2012; also Savage 2015, p. 217). Again, these areas of class tension are explored in later chapters.

[21] The reference to 'existential' here is clarified in Chapters 4 and 5. It is sufficient here to define it as a fundamental awareness and urgency of being that is experienced by the aspirant.

Given the rhetoric and orthodoxy underpinning *meritocracy*, the idea of social mobility, aspiration and mobility can be viewed as a prevalent social value and norm by a dominant class (see the thesis Introduction; Atkinson 2015, p. 69; Savage 2015).[22] There are likely to be uniquely different factors involving each aspirant's quest and trajectory. Hence, the terms 'aspirational' and 'mobile' can be shown to convey a mix of moral signifiers with positive ones such as striving, hard-working, achieving, self-developing, self-actualising. However, negative sentiments can also be conveyed such as self-centredness; class betrayal; success-fixated; self-regarding and competitively driven to social climbing and cultivated to be in keeping with the prevailing value or ethic of *Individualism* (see Giddens 1991; Sayer 2005). These sentiments can be considered to be implicit motivations for social mobility and are considered throughout the thesis.

Furthermore, as inferred above, aspiration and the drive to be socially mobile can be considered as a socially and culturally constructed 'valued-loaded' hook or device which aspirants have *internalised*. That is, they have been socialised into grasping the idea and desire for a better life. Here, aspirants' sole rationale might be summarised in the expression

> "We have no other option but to strive like everyone else, if we want to secure a better life and experience personal fulfilment".[23]

This presents the idea of aspiration and mobility as, on the one hand a *proto-typical* form of innateness in humans, but on the other, a socio-cultural and normatively constructed impetus found and actively promoted, through the rhetoric of dominant interests in the specific environment of classed societies (see Reay 2005, 2013; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010; Allen 2013, 2015; Felski 2000; Friedman 2016; Knights and Clarke 2013). However, the danger here is of falling into the trap of

[22] For brevity and maintenance of focus it is assumed here that the dominant norms and values of classed societies are considered to be those of the dominant middle-class.

[23] These are my words, and not quoted from another source.

essentialist reductionism were aspiration and the desire to be upwardly mobile, is assumed to be 'natural', regarding it as an unquestionably worthy social, value-driven code of practice that is universally accepted and assumed to exist in all forms of society.

However, closer examination of social mobility shows that there are various kinds of mobility trajectory, indicating the extent to which the aspirant makes adjustments to self and lifestyle. Mobility can also occur inter-generationally where, for example, the daughter secures a higher income and a more affluent lifestyle and wellbeing than for example, her mother had during her working life. However, here, I am more interested in the nature and extent of mobility in the lifetime of a given aspirant. In this, the mobility trajectory can vary in form. This can be clarified by considering the most typical examples. For instance, 'short-range mobility', or small shifts in occupation, status and lifestyle would be evident when moving from, for example, skilled manual/engineer to supervisory grade. Whereas, 'long-range mobility' would be where the aspirant makes big leaps, for example, from skilled manual work to senior professional position. Note here that occupation and lifestyle are closely linked (see Friedman 2016; Sennett and Cobb 1973).

Variations of these two kinds of trajectory would be long-range mobility in a very short time period (a meteoric rise in occupational status and lifestyle) and short-range mobility over a very gradual timescale. Thus, the type of mobility considered varies according to the context, degree, depth, range and composition of the mobility trajectory. Moreover, the extent of psychological and ontological disruption experienced will also vary in terms of the adaptability and resilience of the aspirant in terms of the range of mobility experienced within or across specific class boundaries. Thus, as indicated earlier, the individual aspirant's experiences have unique characteristics (see Bourdieu 2009; Morley 1997; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Friedman 2016; Allen 2013; Mallman 2017).

However, given the class structure, orthodoxy and hierarchical nature of social and cultural reproduction and with the emphasis on large numbers of people 'striving for something better', this tends to be bound up and reinforced through a 'universal' rhetoric. By propagating the idea of a fair and open society with equal access to resources the normative mechanism of a *meritocracy* facilitates upward mobility as a realisable goal (see Atkinson 2015, p. 104; Mallman 2017, p. 2; Savage 2015, pp. 187-189, 215-216).

Here, I consider the basis and rationale upon which working-class aspirants are able to choose and to take this path of upward mobility, to be important, but secondary to my central enquiry into the psychical, ontological and existential impacts of mobility. At first glance it would seem that aspirants desire a better life for a number of reasons. Perhaps they are dissatisfied with their current circumstances. They may have become angry and embarrassed by, or disdainful of their working-class background and are attracted to the material advantages that a better (classed) life can bring. Perhaps they have sufficient self-belief and determination to act in specific ways and to deploy specific strategies to overcome the structural constraints of their current circumstances (see Allen 2013; Goldthorpe et al 1969; Lawler, 1999, 2000; Loveday 2015).

Also, it is possible that each aspirant will have had a catalyst or seminal moment which has triggered this desire to 'shift' and from which rapid, gradual, major or minor change might occur. Or perhaps it is a matter of growing class awareness through association with influential others, or a proximal connection with a new peer group, or a chance encounter.[24] One or more of these possibilities would seem to pertain for the individual aspirant (see Savage 2015, pp. 187-217; Savage 2005, pp. 940-942). There may be patterns and routes to mobility with common factors such as educational attainment and academic qualifications as a basis for career

[24] This is what happened in my own experience, as my opening vignette indicates.

progression and wider choice (Loveday 2015; Morley 1997; Reay 1997b, 1998a, 2001, 2012).

Much of the relevant literature shows aspirants making decisions, life choices and adjustments to their life course by reflecting, in various forms and degrees of clarity, on their circumstances (see Allen 2013; Ashman and Gibson 2010; Bourdieu 2009; Burkitt 2012; Knights and Clarke 2013). I suggest that this, in turn, can be considered as an existential imperative to 'fulfil one's potential' with the need to seize available opportunities and overcome constraints and to acquire the necessary forms of *capital* to enable this to come about (see Bourdieu 1986, 1994). Such resources may not have been available or may have been restricted in various ways in a working-class upbringing. But when aspiration is defined in normative terms it is often accompanied by deep ontological conflicts, anxieties and pressures particularly among the youth of the working-class (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 27; Allen 2013, p. 768). Thus, as indicated above, the rhetoric surrounding aspiration as 'meritocratic' and as a 'virtuous social good' can be shown to obscure the broader inequalities affecting people's capacity to realise their aspirations. This raises psychical and ontological concerns (see Friedman 2016).[25]

Having attempted to frame and contextualise aspirant mobility within class, I now consider how class structures can be perceived as either *determinist* or *voluntarist* in form in the actions of aspirant mobiles.

1.3 Determinism and voluntarism tendencies in social aspiration and mobility.

Here I briefly consider the *determinist* social pressures to maintain order and conformity to social mores. In turn, these can be shown to help in

[25] It is also important to note here that many from the working-class choose not to be socially mobile. They may even resist offers by management of career progression in the workplace. For various reasons, such low levels of ambition, issues relating to self-worth and confidence, or simply preferring a stress-free 'easy life', they may choose to refuse, but may still be respected for their skills and knowledge, preferring to choose a non-aspirational, or non-mobile working life.

understanding the predispositions to become aspirational and to elevate the self on an upwardly mobile social trajectory. However, alongside these *internalised* forces and inner drives is the tendency towards *voluntarism*. This tendency can be seen as one of over-estimating the aspirant's capacity for autonomy and agency in relation to matters of structural compliance and constraint (see Sayer 2005, p. 9). The extreme form of this might be where the aspirant considers that: "No matter what obstacles are put in my way; I will overcome the problem; I will find the willpower and resources to achieve my goals!".[26]

As I show, such hyperbole, while demonstrating inner resolve, may also bring disillusionment if not tempered by a careful assessment and management of realistic possibilities and expectations. Moreover, without the necessary social and cultural *capital* (see Bourdieu 1986, 1994) and viable mobility prospects, such voluntarist tendencies may cause difficulties for the aspirant. Furthermore, the internalisation of prevailing structural norms can become barriers or inhibitors to mobility. This is one important explanation for the limited numbers of working-class aspirant mobiles breaking through the 'class' ceiling in recent times (see Savage 2015, pp. 216-217).

I have briefly articulated the difficulties relating to *determinism* in social structures and the *voluntarism* in the agency of aspirants. However, I flesh out later in this chapter the complexity in these constructs that underpin an exploration of aspirational endeavour and social mobility. As indicated so far, the barriers and enablers of mobility can be shown to have psychical origins and implications, insofar as aspirant internalise these structures to enable, or hinder future improvements to their lives. Here, perhaps the aspirants' perception of future life chances and choices will temper their motivations and expectations (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). Depending on the disposition and character of the aspirant such past experiences can be shown to influence what is perceived to be realistic and achievable in the future and what is not (see Sennett and Cobb 1973; Bourdieu 1994).

[26] These words are entirely my invention.

However, despite these internal (psychical) structures and external (socio-cultural) structural constraints, aspirants would still appear to be able to *reflexively* identify, examine, question, reconsider, clarify, resist, adjust and then select or disregard specific courses of action. They would in effect engage in, or with, their 'internal conversation' (Archer 2003) or narrative, based on their self-scripted account of their life so far.[27] By means of this self-referential act of *reflexivity*, the agent could be said to critically 'refer back' to the issue instigating the action or examination. [28] For example, through various analytical methods they would be able to recognise the impact of primary socialisation on their past actions and, potentially, find practicable strategies to alter their future place and space in the social structure. This ability to reflexively analyse their life circumstances can be considered as either a conscious, unconscious or pre-conscious process, or a combination of these (see for example, Bourdieu 1994; Archer 2003, 2010; Noble and Watkins 2003; Stahl 2013).

Thus, it is in the opportunities and conditions under which aspirants are able to think, feel and act in a reflexive manner in relation to their classed selves that is of most interest here and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.[29] The very process of internalisation would seem to show that the aspirant has the capacity for both independent thought and action, while recognising the past structural conditioning they have embodied and their capacity to adopt a non-critical compliance with prevailing social norms and values. In effect, both can be shown to influence the mind-sets, outlooks, expectations and future lives of aspirants (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).

However, to qualify my discussion so far, Skeggs argues that this presents a short-sighted picture of agency which grossly underplays the degree of

[27] This issue is further explored in Chapter 2. I also contextualise and discuss this idea of an aspirant's scripted narrative within an existential sociology perspective in Chapter 5.

[28] Also, see the thesis Introduction for a definition of reflexivity.

[29] Chapter 2 considers the potentialities and advantages of a 'reflexive self' and its applicability to the mobility of aspirants.

structural fixity in the lives of working-class agents (aspirants) (Skeggs, 2004, p. 52). For example, Skeggs argues that Beck's inflated *voluntarism* ignores the situational power of the 'social' in assessing what kinds of risks agents might encounter and the social resources they can or cannot access in order to make sense of these risks and to act upon them (Skeggs 2004, citing Savage 2000; also Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1986).

This literature emphasises the struggles involved in acquiring the resources or capitals to be able to transcend such structural barriers and is indicative of the strength and endurance of such barriers. Aspirants can be agents of their own destiny, a point I return to in Chapter 5, and have the capacity to reflexively question the implications of choosing to comply with the dominant structures. However, the key point here is to show that this agentic potential frequently stays untapped and dormant owing to the impact of such ingrained and habituated dispositions. For this reason, working-class mobility has been shown to be unevenly distributed and to remain only marginally representative of the working-class as a whole (see Savage 2015, p. 189-217; Bourdieu 1990).

However, as part of my focus I seek to account for the ways in which aspirant mobiles articulate their circumstances and experiences, given that these structures are held and reinforced in the psyche. This of course, needs to take account of the ways in which aspirant mobiles perceive themselves. That is, the subjective experience of their classed lives may or may not be objectively accurate in structural terms. For class cannot simply be reduced to whatever agents think it to be, nor indeed, can class be blamed for all the personal, social, cultural or moral difficulties that aspirant mobiles might experience (see, for example Sayer 2005, pp. 139-167).

However, as I show in Chapter 3, the literature relating aspirants' feelings and sense of selves indicates their need to be respected in relation to their class experiences. This is critical in understanding social wellbeing and the impact of mobility. Aspirants' sentiments can be seen to be linked with the structural inequalities that they experience and how they identify

themselves in a narrative of their classed lives (Bourdieu 2009, 2007; Emler 2001; Kupfer 2015; Mruk 2006). I now consider further the structural impositions on aspirational endeavour by evaluating specific concepts used by Bourdieu and then apply these to the challenges aspirants face in becoming upwardly mobile.

1.4 Linking Bourdieu's Theory of Practice and key concepts to psychical structures, aspiration and mobility.

In the thesis Introduction I indicate that within Bourdieu's theory of practice, the conceptual triad of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* are inextricably linked. Moreover, Maton (2012, pp 50-52) suggests that Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* links past, present and future embodiments of the self. It also links the social with the individual, structure with agency and thus aims to transcend such troublesome dichotomies (see Wetherell 2005). Bourdieu's *habitus* is structured by material conditions of existence and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings, thoughts and ways of being, as well as habitual states, predispositions, tendencies or inclinations in accordance with its own structure (Maton 2012, p. 50).

Thus, Bourdieu links *habitus* with *field* and in this specific area of social space "each *field* prescribes its particular values and possesses its own regulative principles. These principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the relative power position they occupy in that space" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 17). These might be positions that seek to either conserve or transform the structure of relations, or forces that are constitutive of that *field*. Thus, the *habitus* enters a particular *field* with degrees of *capital***,** as economic, cultural and social resources, which determine the levels of power and influence it can command and, as a result of interactive challenges, the *habitus* is reshaped.

Examples of *field* could include social class, education provision, an agent's upbringing, or past life choices. For example, this might be the degree of access to networking, as an example of social *capital* and guidance in specific socio-cultural arenas. For example, as a *field*, aspirant upward

mobility could profoundly impact upon the aspirant's choice of direction in life and for this reason it might be argued, there are existential implications for the aspirant's mobility trajectory.

Bourdieu also uses the concept of *doxa* in a similar way to 'orthodoxy' (see the thesis Introduction). It is through the maintenance and reinforcement of *doxa* that conformity to prevailing social (structural) norms and values are assumed and *internalised* (Bourdieu 1977). This also has a bearing on the earlier discussion on *determinism* and *voluntarism* in Section 1.3. *Doxa*, therefore, is a combination of, and struggle between, orthodox and heterodox norms, values and beliefs. It consists of the unstated, 'taken-for-granted' assumptions, 'common sense' drivers and established structures that lie behind the distinctions that agents are making. It encompasses what falls within the limits of the thinkable and the sayable ("the universe of possible discourses") and "what goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Bourdieu and Eagleton 1991). In this sense it is what is beyond comment or question. Furthermore, *doxa* "contributes to its reproduction in social institutions, structures and links as well as in minds and bodies, expectations and behaviour" (Deer 2012, p. 114). Thus, social norms can be seen as unquestionable givens and as such can be seen as difficult to change at an individual level. Again, this is useful in understanding how and why aspiration and mobility become a feature of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* for some and not others from the working-class.

Bourdieu has further important concepts relating to the *habitus* in terms of the psychical internalising or inscribing of structures, which demonstrate deeply felt forms of class domination within the self. These are both symbolic and actual in form and have the potential to undermine the self-worth of aspirants (see Chapter 3). First is the concept of *misrecognition* (see the thesis Introduction). Misrecognition embodies a set of socio-cultural processes that anchor the *doxic* 'taken-for-granted' assumptions into the realm of social life, most notably in the *field* of class. Citing Bourdieu and Wacquant, Skeggs (2004, p. 4) interprets *misrecognition* as a means of power in the form of cultural superiority and

dominance by the middle-class. She argues that such privilege is ascribed rather than achieved and therefore, is thought of as *natural* and *legitimate*. This essentialising of cultural value as a form of *symbolic capital* by the dominant middle-class enables this power to be hidden, in the sense that it is assumed and hence *misrecognised*.

Similarly, nuanced forms of 'violence' are shown to emerge with regard to social and cultural differences and distinctions of *taste* are established as symbols of social class position. Here Bourdieu uses examples such as the use of language that operate to commit acts of *symbolic violence* and *symbolic domination*. These are demonstrated in the peremptory verdicts, which, in the name of taste, condemn to ridicule, shame and silence those who fall short of the right way of *being* and doing (Bourdieu 1984, p. 512).

Thus, those who possess the necessary cultural capital are able to judge and legitimate what is considered to be good taste (which they can choose to change over time) or, conversely, what is considered to be tasteless. In this way, Bourdieu argues, the dominated working-class is denied this capital in a number of key areas of their lives. Here, language and cultural taste or refinement are notable examples in the *symbolic* terrain of class domination (Bourdieu, 1986, 2009). Through the use of language, symbolic domination may be evidenced in highbrow settings such as education establishments, higher academia and other professional and managerial contexts. It can arise anywhere in the professional world were the middle-class use language and pronunciation as an elitist tool of power and authority. These forms of symbolic domination can be shown to impact negatively on the aspirant's self-confidence and self-worth in daily life.[30]

Most importantly however, Thompson (1984) reinforces the point that this use of language as *symbolic violence* is also a *signifier* of class, thereby endorsing its legitimacy and status. When aspirants from working-class backgrounds are negatively exposed to this form of class signifier they

[30] See also, for example, my personal vignette in Section 1.6 of this chapter; in Chapter 2 regarding the internalising of class inferiority, and in Chapter 3 pertaining to the discussion on self-worth and self-esteem.

might be perceived as being culturally *distanced* from this 'official' style of language and deemed to lack *competence* in its use. In this way, by accepting this ascendant legitimacy without actually possessing the *symbolic capital*, class dominance is reinforced. This cultural linguistic *difference* is similar to Bernstein's earlier use of the 'elaborate' and 'restricted' codes of language that he argued linked everyday language and vocabulary to a particular social group or class (see Bernstein 2003). In this way therefore, language and its form of usage, is shown to be *classed*. Those who can utilise this official language can apply, in a separatist and elitist way, the emotive and dominating practice of condescension, which suitably distances and distinguishes them from those who are dispossessed and disempowered by it (Thompson 1984). Again, being socially mobile can bring such forms of domination to bear when there is a mismatch of class familiarities and sensibilities. For these reasons it would seem that aspirant mobiles need to be mindful of such expressions of domination and the instability and vulnerability of their social standing and sense of place during their mobility trajectories.

This is significant since in protracted discussions of the classed self, feeling 'out of place' in social and cultural situations can be shown to trigger highly sensitive states. Emotions such as shame and humiliation may result in a general malaise of alienation arising from acts of *symbolic violence* administered as expressions of class power and hierarchical domination. Thus, the actions and sentiments of aspirants, which can include such emotional reactions (displays) and threats to the embodied self, are to be seen as forms of structural class differentiation and domination; as the collectively held normative commitments which sustain the social orders. These symbolic practices are shown to advantage some groups (or classes) but disadvantage others. This is noted by Vincent where such emotional displays remain taken-for-granted (*doxa*) and thus unrecognised (*misrecognition*) (see Vincent 2011, p. 1384; also, Skeggs 2004).

By contextualising aspiration and mobility in terms of *doxa* it can be considered as a pre-reflexive, natural, normalised, rational and logical

human enactment in the social *field* of class (see Bourdieu 1977, p. 115; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 74). Bourdieu also uses the concept of *field* to describe "a set of objectives, historical relations that exist between positions anchored in certain forms of power" (or *capital*) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 16). Furthermore, in the context of a class society, aspiration and mobility can be said to take place because it is what people do, or might choose to do pre-reflexively, pre-consciously and normatively. Importantly, from a class perspective, the reasons for becoming aspirational are that unequal power relations are also 'taken for granted' as is the variability of access to resources to ensure access to the 'good life'. This would then leave aspirants with options. One option would be for aspirants to strive to improve their circumstances within the finite time, space and resources available. I would suggest that this is, in effect, an existential challenge in contending with class inequalities. Also, each aspirant is starting from a uniquely different base line with varying volumes of *capitals*. This is what Bourdieu refers to as an 'uneven playing field' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 215; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 98). This has a bearing on the interiority, motivation and resilience of the aspirant's embodied and dispositional self, or *habitus*, to persist in striving in order to flourish in a class society.

The aspirant's *habitus* might suggest an amenability to considerable change, since by the very desire to seek and strive for a better life it shows, theoretically at least, a mutability and this, in large part, has been given thrust by the potentially dislocating or reorienting acts of *reflexivity*. The *habitus* of the aspirant can be shown to be like that of a creator undergoing free and conscious acts of self-creation and assigning to his/herself such life designs (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 133). Furthermore, Navarro (2006, p. 16) suggests that the *habitus* can be changed under unexpected situations or over a long historical period. However, this flexibility to change the *habitus* is not simply an action of 'free will' nor completely determined by *internalised* structures, but it becomes possible by a kind of (dialectical) interplay between the two.[31] As

[31] I briefly considered the key implications of this in Section 1.3.

I discuss in Section 1.5 and in Chapter 2, this gives an indication of the complexity of the *reflexive* process insofar as an aspirant's embodied and dispositional self is shaped and formed into and by, habitual practices. It is shaped by existing structures and experiences of a unique set of historical events, as well as offering the volition to be able to shape and reshape current practices and psychical structures such that, these condition the aspirant's very perceptions of self (Bourdieu 1984, p. 170). This is critical to aspirants in the *field* of social mobility where reflexive re-shaping of the classed self is a constant challenge.

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind the degrees of fix and/or fluidity that take place as inter-class relations change and how this might enable social and psychological clues to how a 'transformative classed self' might emerge and be shaped. For while the system of dispositions enables aspirants to embody, sustain, reproduce and be reproduced by and within, a social *field* this, in itself, is not fixed. In this regard it seems that Bourdieu is arguing that the *habitus* is both fixing and transforming the embodied self (Bourdieu 1977). Also, more broadly, the *field* of class itself is also changing constantly through the dynamics of class struggle; exposing the contradictions and tensions that this throws up and indicating the way class *signifiers* of domination and subordination can also shift. [32] In the midst of this, the mobile aspirant can be said to face both pitfalls and opportunities. Their embodied classed self is at once both held and freed to consider the choices and obstacles of mobility (Maton 2012; Skeggs 2004).

In this way issues of class, self and otherness can be shown to impact on social aspiration and mobility, particularly in the way structures impose and cultures contain, evolve and affect the self as practiced in the lived experience of everyday life and in a variety of social and cultural settings. For example, aspirants may apply for middle-class appointments in

[32] See also Skeggs (2004, p. 48-50) for a discussion on the fluidity and fix of class *signifiers*.

organisations and may be selected initially on the basis of ability and qualifications. However, they may not be sufficiently sensitised to and comfortably familiar with, the nuanced middle-class behaviours and cultural practices of the professional organisation. They may misread, or fail to see, these assumed modes of behaviour, or codes of practice in the organisation's culture (Bourdieu 1977).[33] Furthermore, aspirants may, for example, misconceive the appropriate or expected ways of gaining recognition and respect necessary for enhancing, not only their career prospects, but also their sense of self and wellbeing. They may jeopardise these prospects perhaps through ill-advised, disingenuous approaches or interactions with their workplace peers and superiors. Already feeling a sense of unfamiliarity and 'lack' they may adopt inappropriate practices such as toady or obsequious posturing to gain favour. This might then be detected by their peers or superiors and discreetly noted for future reference. Such behaviours may have resulted from aspirants' historically-classed embodiments, carried unconsciously and emanating from, for example, *internalised* forms of class deference to superiors; from the sentiments of inferiority towards middle-class professionals or experiences of belittlement or humiliation from authority figures in the aspirant's past life (Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; O'Donoghue 2013).

As I show in Chapter 4, such behaviours and aspects of selfhood raise concerns in terms of a grounded sense of identity and the need for feelings of security, familiarity and *authenticity*. Moreover, aspirants caught in such predicaments will also need to quickly assess these nuanced and coded cultural differences if they are to retain their honour, integrity, wellbeing, life prospects and a promising future in, for example, workplace environments. Here, the *habitus* is useful in showing how such incongruous class embodiments can leave the aspirant vulnerable in the absence of sufficient *symbolic* capital.

[33] These are what Bourdieu's refers to as the nuanced 'rules of the game' in a given *field* of practice.

Importantly, Bourdieu contests mobility as a universalising condition (Skeggs 2004, p. 48).[34] Perhaps this might be because of the wide discrepancies of access to the various forms of *capital* in the *field* of class. Thus, in the case of aspirant mobiles, this would determine who is able to negotiate for various forms of capital and who is not; who can move through the specific social space and who cannot.

Thus, Bourdieu's Theory of Practice is useful in explaining social and cultural practice in the context of class and aspiration for some important reasons. Firstly, the concepts of *habitus* and *field* usefully account for the *embodied* nature of classed dispositions, including *internalised* ways of being and for habituated development of the aspirant's character, self-perceptions and behaviour. Secondly, they provide powerful insights into the nature of the aspirant self, particularly the 'internal conversation' (Archer 2003) and the emotional and ontological struggles aspirant's experience, which I explore in more depth in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Thirdly, in terms of both the opportunities and threats to ontological security, *habitus, field* and *capital* provide a useful basis for such a discourse on social aspiration and mobility.[35] They can highlight the differences and divisions in class relations and forms of structural domination that surface in discourses on social mobility.

1.5 Bourdieu's *habitus* and the processes of 'internalisation'.

Here I examine the psychical *internalisation* of social and cultural structures in relation to social aspiration and mobility. The key question is

[34] This might suggest the need for a discussion as to why class mobility is so restricted and limited within the working-class; who becomes mobile and who does not and why this might be. A further discussion might be warranted therefore, to clarify what Bourdieu means by mobility not being a 'universalising condition'. Is he saying that it is negated as a phenomenon by the very existence of class and that mobility is not available to all because of the endemic inequalities of a class structure? This may or may not be a different issue to that of the motivations of those who are aspirational and who, through a reflexive examination of the self, or through other approaches, are able to overcome (or not) the inhibiting structural barriers that I address here.

[35] I discuss further the key concept of *ontological insecurity* in the context of social aspiration and mobility in Chapter 5.

to address why and how working-class agents choose to become aspirational and socially mobile and what the processes are that underpin their inclinations and motivations. I touched on some of these in Section I.2 and consider these issues further in Section 2.5.

As I indicated in the previous section Bourdieu uses the *habitus* to define a set of historical relations as bodily dispositions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 18). Thus, the *habitus* is an internalised organising mechanism based on the knowledge and sensibilities that an agent (aspirant) needs in order to have what Bourdieu refers to as a feel for, and an ability to play, the 'game' of living in its multifarious contexts or *fields* [36] It is this ability to cope, or even flourish effectively in the social space that is central to my use of this key concept (Bourdieu 1977). To quote him

> "The *habitus* - embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history, is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56).

Bourdieu contends that this acquired knowledge is necessarily inculcated appropriately in order for culturally-defined 'products' such as language, taste, economy, or classed life itself, to succeed in *reproducing* themselves in the form of an open and durable system of dispositions. In this regard the *habitus* is a system of socialised norms, tendencies and habits that guide agents' thinking, actions and, as I discuss later in Chapters 4 and 5, in an ontological sense, their very being. For Bourdieu however, the *habitus* is also

> "a product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 133).

[36] See Section 1.4 and the thesis Introduction for a definition of this Bourdieusian concept.

Therefore, such experiences provide the basis for either 'holding' and habitually repeating the dispositions of the embodied self, or they provide the basis for reflexively changing them. Thus, citing Bourdieu, Wacquant indicates that

> "Aside from the effects of certain social trajectories, *habitus* can also be transformed via socio-analysis, i.e., via an awakening of consciousness and a form of "self-work" that enables the individual to get a handle on his or her dispositions." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 133).

However, Bourdieu and Wacquant argue that this can be attempted only after, and on the basis of earlier structuring of the *habitus* which may, or may not, affect changes to later higher-ranking structures. For example, Wacquant suggests that

> "the habitus acquired in the family is at the basis of the structuring of school experiences, and the habitus transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences…and so on from restructuring to restructuring." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 134).

In this regard Bourdieu asks, "how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to explicit rules dictating such practices?" (see Maton 2012, p. 49). This question would seem to provide an important starting point in understanding how class and the *habitus* might be inter-related and how ingrained practices might become unconsciously forgotten, buried in the psyche or *misrecognised* in an historical sense over time. This is the fundamental puzzle for Bourdieu and is what the *habitus* is intended to solve. It is 'structured' by the individual's past and present circumstances. For example, family upbringing is part of its bedrock and 'structuring' in helping to shape one's present and future practices (Maton, 2012, p. 50). However, we are not pre-programmed and merely acting out the implications of our upbringing. Rather practices are the result of an 'unconscious relationship' between the *habitus*, *field* and *capital* which are interlocked.

As I mention above, this captures how we carry forward within us our continuous process of making our history and how we make choices to act in certain ways and not others. This is also useful in understanding the puzzle and appeal of social mobility among some sections of the working-class and not others and the preconditions for some becoming socially mobile and while others struggle to become so, or 'consciously' choose not to be. Thus, why we are where we are at any moment is the result of numerous events of the past that have shaped our path (Maton 2012, p. 51). I explore this temporal aspect from an existential sociology perspective in Chapters 4 and 5. However, what is it about the 'unconscious' that Bourdieu considers in relation to the power of *habitus* and processes of *internalisation*?

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) consider why those from the working-class are less likely than the middle-class to attend university (see Maton 2012).[37] They suggest that innumerable stimuli during upbringing shape the outlooks, beliefs and practices of the working class. For example, in terms of educational (self) confidence Bourdieu shows how class becomes *internalised* as an embodiment and a barrier to many who may then decide not to engage in the game, choosing that is, to 'internalise their disadvantage' and 'regulate themselves out of the system', thus remaining fixed in their class position. They consider that it is "not for the likes of them". Their habitus does not match that of the social context. They are not attuned to the *doxa,* or the unwritten 'rules of the game' (see Maton 2012, p. 57).[38]

[37] This example clearly predates more recent UK government initiatives of wider access to higher education. However, the point is nonetheless valid in the current discussion. See also the example in the thesis Introduction in the section 'Processes of 'internalisation'.

[38] But as I show in Chapters 3 and 4 and in my personal vignettes, the interplay between self-confidence and demonstrating one's abilities is profoundly complex. Some from the working-class take the knocks and, as a result, harbour a sense of failure and disengage, while others muster the resilience to strive despite the knocks and are able, eventually, to achieve.

This explanation of Bourdieu's *habitus* is, however, complex and requires further unpacking. We can see from the first quotation in this section that his reference to 'second nature' implies a *doxic* effect. This is so since much of what aspirant mobiles might perceive and do in their endeavours may be assumed to be normal, taken-for-granted and so commonplace that it is not worth discussing because "It goes without saying since it comes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977). However, what is the nature of the relationship between an historical socialising process and one that is perceived as a forgotten history?

Bourdieu seems to answer this by citing Durkheim, who says that

> "In each one of us, in different degrees, is contained the person we were yesterday, and indeed, in the nature of things it is even true that our past personae predominate in us, since the present is necessarily insignificant when compared with a long period of the past because of which we have emerged in the form we have today. It is just that we don't directly feel the influence of these past selves precisely because they are so deeply rooted within us. They constitute the unconscious part of ourselves. Consequently, we have a strong tendency not to recognise their existence and to ignore their legitimate demands. By contrast, with the most recent acquisitions of civilisation we are vividly aware of them just because they are recent, and consequently, have not had time to be assimilated into our collective unconscious". (Bourdieu 1990, p. 56).

This clearly shows the historical nature and attributes of the *habitus*. However, Bourdieu's reference to the 'unconscious' in this form has generated some controversy about the nature of internalisation processes. Such criticism appears to centre on the extent of 'conscious' deliberation and the ways in which the 'unconscious' replaces conscious action. Furthermore, Bourdieu's insistence on change taking place primarily from within the unconscious, as if the conscious self is not part of the embodiment of durable dispositions, or that it plays only a limited part in change-making and reflexivity is an issue to some (see for example, Noble and Watkins 2003). Bourdieu states that the *habitus* is created and produced unconsciously, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence, that

is, without conscious concentration (see Bourdieu 1984). This is crucial in understanding Bourdieu's reflexivity, which Wacquant, quoting Bourdieu, states

> entails, rather, the systematic exploration of the "unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought." (Bourdieu and Wacquant (2007, p. 40).

However, in the context of social mobility, this raises the serious question of how an aspirant's reflexive capacity and capability actually enables them to become consciously aware of their embodied self, in the sense of being able to articulate it meaningfully in actioning changes in practice, during their aspirational endeavours. Bourdieu (1984) accounts for this reflexive process by pointing to the tensions and contradictions that arise when people encounter, and are challenged by, different situations that may trigger a serious rethink of their circumstances or when emotional imbalances or splits occur in the psyche, which he terms *hysteresis* (Friedman 2016, p. 138; Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 206).

Furthermore, according to Bourdieu, (see Swartz 2002, p. 63) the dispositions of the *habitus* represent informal and practical, not discursive or conscious forms of knowledge. That is, the practical evaluation and informal mastery of opportunities and constraints occur unconsciously. From this, Swartz asks what group characteristics the *habitus* incorporates and notes that Bourdieu has stressed mostly the sense of place in the social order, that is, an understanding of inclusion and exclusion in the various social hierarchies. With aspiration and mobility in mind this would seem to resonate in other research (see Friedman 2016; Allen 2015; Chapman 2015; Morley 1997; Reay 2004, 2005, 2015). It seems that people internalise basic life chances for people of their kind (that is, their class) and the chances of success or failure are *internalised* and transformed into aspirations and expectations (see Swartz 2002, p. 64; Morley 1997, p. 114; Elder-Vass 2007, p. 334).

I develop this discussion on 'internalisation' further in Chapter 2, Section 2.5 since other important aspects of this historical process of class embodiment and transformation are worthy of examination. In particular, I consider the potential and constraints which Bourdieu places on reflexive self-analysis; of the unconscious reproduction of habits of class and how these might inhibit or enable social mobility and class transition.

1.6 The hidden injuries of class.

Much of the thinking for the thesis is drawn from an early and important piece of research by Sennett and Cobb (1973). The authors explore what they term the *hidden injuries* of class experienced by American blue-collar male workers in the 1970s, many of whom have experienced social mobility, but nonetheless feel the discomfort of this in their circumstances. By unpicking the narratives told by their respondents, the authors piece together the sociological, psychological and existential significance in these accounts of life and class position within society at the time.[39] The inner conflicts that they unearth during the interviews are critical here. The respondents are shown to be measuring their own self-worth against the lives of those other than themselves who are in occupations upon which society appears to place more value.[40]

The ambivalence the respondents show is an indication of how the structures of class have been *internalised* and that mobility can generate long-standing mental strife. It also registers the risks involved in being socially mobile and how aspects of character such as fortitude and resilience might play a part in maintaining inner strength.

Sennett and Cobb reflect on their respondents' hopes, fears and aspirations for the future. In so doing, they focus on the *symbolic labels*

[39] The work of Sennett (1999) and Sennett, (2004) is also relevant in evaluating and developing an ontological and existential conceptualisation of class in relation to psychical interiority and working-class aspiration and mobility.

[40] I draw the reader attention here to my opening vignette in the thesis Introduction and my growing dissatisfaction and low sense of self-worth when working as an apprentice motor mechanic.

accorded the respondents which they term the 'badges' of class and ability (Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 62-64). Their respondents have striven in various ways and degrees, for a more fulfilled life, often under challenging domestic and workplace conditions and notably with limited social and cultural *capital*. Their findings reveal many moving accounts and I consider a selection of these here, which are useful in building a picture of the internal, psychical structures of class.

Sennett and Cobb (1973, p. 30) note that an erosion of confidence was evident even among respondents who had palpably achieved success in their occupational settings.[41] The authors ask what it is about a culture that the more it gives, the more it brings feelings of vulnerability. They ask why and how it is possible to consider getting beyond the idea of freedom and dignity in the respondents' individual lives when society is arranged in such a way that they have had, as yet, little taste of either (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 30). Their research is significant in demonstrating how perceptions and feelings are primarily rooted in those received from others, whether complementary or derogatory, which in turn emanate from the wider social norms and the values. However, these are often disingenuously portrayed on the back of fundamental contradictions and *misrecognition* as discussed so far (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). Similarly, as aspirant mobiles their skills and abilities are also linked to their sense of self-worth and dignity. Thus, there are ontological implications in their struggling to be appreciated and recognised. However, this need for recognition and respect is not simply sought on the basis of what they can contribute, but for their very existence as sentient human beings, irrespective of such attributes.[42] I explore these concerns in the ensuing chapters.

[41] See Chapter 3 for a more extensive discussion of self-esteem among working-class aspirants.

[42] I revisit this critical issue in Chapter 5.

So far, I have considered the structural determinants of class constraints and how they are *internalised* by aspirant mobiles. I have tried to show how these can inhibit social mobility from within the self. I now want to move on to look at some personal illustrations which can complement the examples from the published literature. I show some of the ways in which working-class mobility might succeed or flounder in making this significant transition to a middle-class life. Implied in these accounts are the ways in which the barriers to aspiration and mobility register psychically, and how they can be shown to endure. Some further examples from Sennett and Cobb (1973) and others will complement these personal accounts.

1.7 Personal vignettes.

Vignette 1.1.

Class differentiation can be exemplified in forms of deference and a sense of inferiority, as well as in class solidarity and disdain for such structural inferiority. For example, the class disparity in the use of language and intonation discussed in Section 1.4 is illustrated here in a brief conversation with my mother. It occurred at a time in the 1960s when I was becoming more socially and politically aware of my parents' sense of class distinction and domination and how the impact of class structure can reinforce or reduce self-worth. It shows the impact of 'how it is said' rather than 'what is said'. It usefully demonstrates the combination of Bourdieu's 'taken-for-granted' *doxa* and the *symbolic domination* that reinforces the deference shown by the working-class to the social and cultural elite and established middle-class.

I remember watching TV with my mum one night and Reginald Maudling, the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, was being interviewed. My mum said

> *"He sounds so clever when he talks, doesn't he? What he's saying must be right".*

By the very fact that he spoke with a refined or 'posh' accent convinced my mother that whatever he uttered must have been be based on sound principles since he was obviously well educated! I asked her what she thought he was actually saying, but she was not really listening to the content of his utterances, merely the sound he made when speaking. At this stage I was fuming in my chair. I was probably aged eighteen at the time and beginning to react strongly to my parents' views, while proposing alternative perspectives on society more and more in their company.

I cite this family encounter to show both the deference and sense of class inferiority that can surface in working-class homes and how tensions can arise. I was not able to convince my mother that this politician may not necessarily have her best interests at heart. However, if I argued with my parents, especially my dad, they tended to get upset, take it as a personal slight and blame me for disrupting the household. My dad had difficulty accepting any opposition, or any reasoned or reasonable alternative to his views. My parents used to enjoy watching and laughing at TV programmes such as 'Till Death Us Do Part" which ironically portrayed the tensions arising from the conflicting social and political views of members of a working-class family.

My social and political perspectives were becoming diametrically opposed to those of my parents and this continued to bring conflict within the family. Eventually these disagreements became so strong that I chose to move out of the family home. I was gradually becoming more aware of class inequalities and injustices, but I lacked the confidence and knowledge to consolidate this into a purposeful course of action. At this time, I considered myself to be ill prepared for life and had not formulated any conscious sense of social inequality, aspiration or mobility.

The formulation of the *habitus* and impact of *doxa* is apparent in this example. Such snapshots of working-class life reveal compliance and deference to authority based on the flimsiest of foundations. But the above discordant family interchange was eye-opening in experiencing and

reflecting on how *symbolic* capital is received or denied and can be so easily misinterpreted.

Vignette 1.2.

Here I recall some early memories of school life. These portray the dispositional confusion of a lack of clear goal setting which was to set me back for many years.

I vividly recall, with deeply held feelings, my early years at my secondary-modern school in Liverpool in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Thinking back, I would say that almost all the pupils at the school were working-class. Having all failed the 11-plus exam and then the 13-plus, I and my fellows adopted a cavalier attitude, though with fatalistic resignation, in suppressing the feelings of failure that this significant event had brought. I recall rationalising this at the time and thinking I would be ok and how strange grammar schools must be and probably 'not for the likes of me' (see Lawler 1999, p. 15).

Mine was a 'dump' school and we all intuitively knew that, without actually stating it. The staff knew it too. But they treated us reasonably well knowing the 'assumed' academic limitations of their charges. Anyone who seemed to be 'clever' was quietly respected, but usually socially marginalised during school hours at least, without them necessarily facing antagonism from the rest of us.

Thoughts of great achievements in life seemed limited to dreams and fantasies. It wasn't until the final year (1963) when those of us who had not left at age fifteen, (the earliest leaving age at the time) were given the opportunity to sit regional examinations. Inexplicably, the air seemed to clear for us and after years of muddling through in a kind of academic sleepwalking, there was a strange sense of impetus and of starting to knuckle down to do some serious work. An anxiety-based existential nudge perhaps? But by then it was too late. The damage had been done. Our horizons, it seemed, had been irrevocably narrowed, trimmed and set.

I recall one pupil in our final year who suddenly stood out as academically smart compared to the rest of us. I couldn't understand what he was doing, or how he was doing it, or indeed how he had previously been invisible and had now suddenly emerged with this level of ability. It was a mystery how, all of a sudden, he was consistently high achieving. I recall that his manner was reserved, slightly aloof and quietly detached without being overtly superior. Clearly, he had been working hard for some time and, we concluded, he was definitely going to 'go places'. It was an odd time.

With weeks to go before the end of our school lives we began to see how limited our futures were going to be in terms of finding 'good' jobs. Out of the whole final year probably only 2 or 3 pupils were considered able enough to go on to do GCE 'O' levels, or even 'A' Levels! The idea of university seemed distantly mysterious; like a completely different world and well beyond my frame of reference. So, in effect, a process of 'value-realignment' had taken place for one or two in the school. They had somehow grasped the nettle and 'woken up' to the social reality that bettering oneself and becoming upwardly mobile might be a good thing. But for the rest of us at that time and in that context, there was no such value adjustment of any significance. Although, I believe the seeds had been sown somehow in my mind, if only by seeing what was possible in the case of those academically able souls.

As I show in Section 1.6, concerns regarding a failure to connect with the educational ethos and a resulting low self-regard are amplified by the American working-class college students in Sennett and Cobb's research. Respondents recall being "made to feel inadequate" and by a "laying on of culture" they showed how difficult it was for them to effectively internalise the unfamiliar, more *nuanced* middle-class values, norms and practices that are most prevalent in school regimes (Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 26-27). Their research concluded that these difficulties profoundly threaten the individual's sense of dignity and belonging. The researchers use the term 'status incongruity' to show how their respondents were subjected to an unfamiliar set of rules in a social class 'game' of legitimacy

and entitlement where self-respect and the respect of others is a double-edged prize (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 23; Bourdieu 1984, 1990).[43]

These students were self-critical, blaming themselves for their ambivalence about their prospects in the education system. They attributed this to a feeling of not having made better use of their opportunities (see Vignette 1.2 for a similar outlook). There was the strong likelihood of them working in occupations that would provide little engagement or sense of being valued. Significantly however, their disaffection also led them to hold themselves to blame for their lack of self-confidence and for having failed to progress further in life. Comments such as "If only I had what it takes" were significant in their feeling ill-equipped for what they, wrongly, perceived to be the personal *character* attributes to succeed (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 28). The authors suggest that these responses endorse what are, in effect, confused metaphors of self-worth which they suggest might be recast as issues of *freedom* and *dignity* and which the class structure has the effect of undermining among those from the working-class.[44]

Although their research was undertaken in the USA, almost 50 years ago, this still seems to resonate with more recent research. For example, in research by Savage and his colleagues on class in 21st Century Britain they point that despite being successful those from a lower status background harboured a 'lingering sense of deficit' rooted in their psyche (Savage 2015, p. 217).

Such concerns over self-regard are likely to emerge when social and cultural capital is limited and out of alignment with middle-class norms, values and cultural practice (Bourdieu 1986). For example, UK school pupils from families with limited cultural capital felt anxiety,

[43] See Bourdieu (1990) for his use of the phrase 'rules of the game' in the social *field* of class and other social *fields*.

[44] A more extensive discussion of self-worth among working-class aspirants is explored in Chapter 3.

embarrassment and resentment when they realised that, despite demonstrating comparable academic and intellectual abilities to their middle-class peers, they nonetheless felt a profound sense of shame when reflecting on this disadvantage (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001).[45] This in turn had a lasting impact on their confidence and positive hopes for the future with many feeling ostracised and marginalised by their allegedly 'more capable' middle-class peers.

Similarly, this is painfully demonstrated in Calarco's research on the 'help-seeking' strategies of middle-class children in mixed ability and mixed social class schools (Calarco 2011). Here the more passive, non-assertive dispositions of working-class children were demonstrated when comparing their modes of classroom interaction to that of their middle-class peers. By contrast, middle-class children were shown to be considerably more assertive, confident and able to 'tune in' to the teacher's expectations, often adopting brazenly manipulative tactics to get the teacher's attention. This cultural attuning of middle-class pupils shows how 'status congruity' becomes advantageous in securing future advancement.

The working-class pupils in Calarco's sample clearly needed help. However, Stahl (2014) warns about misreading and oversimplifying how working-class youth engage with the rhetoric on social mobility and aspiration. He argues that the complex negotiations around identity and what constitutes self-value and worth are critical at the interface between their 'inner life' and the social context when they are seen to be resisting *doxic* notions of social mobility. From Stahl's perspective, the students underlying emotional makeup and passive behaviour may have been wrongly misinterpreted as 'disengagement' rather than a lack of ability.

However, the above examples show that the structural forces of class can bring about inner tensions among the upwardly mobile, where aspirants are confused about and are struggling to either retain, or to change and

[45] See Chapter 3 for a more extensive discussion on 'shame' and Chapter 5 for a longer discussion on the anxieties and ontological insecurities emerging during social mobility.

adapt to different social values and social mores (Sennett 1999). This is further explored in Sennett's later text in which he considers the discordance and dismay among his respondents who reflect on their dashed expectations in seeking to achieve more in life than the efforts and aspirations of their parents (Sennett 2004). Again, tensions surface when aspirants seek to distance themselves from their parents' lifestyle and values while at the same time wanting to respectfully appreciate their parents' sacrifices and hard work (see Vignette 1.3, also Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Reay 2013).

More recent literature amplifies and qualifies this assertion albeit in conflicting ways. For example, Mallman (2017) notes the challenges to the homogeneity of working-class socialisation and what upwardly mobile aspirants' narratives show when their class origins and ambitions are seemingly at odds. Citing Sennett and Cobb (1973), Mallman suggests that the upwardly mobile enter a moral economy that pits them in opposition to their 'old' selves. The social and cultural separation or splitting from parental, family and community influences poses a potential threat to 'relational cohesion'. Bourdieu calls this a *dialectical confrontation* between a socialised 'working-class self' and an emerging 'middle-class self'. He argues that attempts at full assimilation to middle-class life may bring only 'qualified' success in moving between totally different ways of life associated with different sections of the social space (see Mallman 2017, pp. 19-20; Friedman 2012). Again, one of the main contentions in the thesis is that psychical tensions such as this, prevent a complete class transition from occurring. The 'in-between-ness' and sense of being in a 'no-mans' land' without a firm identity or sense of belonging is something that can persist for many mobiles bringing existential consequences in terms of resolving the feelings of a 'conflicted or lost self' (see Friedman 2016).[46]

However, the above issues of identity and belonging highlight the limits of the determinism in Bourdieu's *habitus* about which his critics have

[46] Chapter 5 discusses the anxieties of such class fragmentation.

variously argued (see Section 2.2). This also shows the extent to which the embodied self can adapt to new social and cultural class positions and the instances where the *habitus* is adjusting (Mallman 2017, p. 20, Atkinson 2015, p. 116), suggesting that it is able to undergo changes through time. This is an important point since in the case of aspirational intent the *habitus,* as Bourdieu seems to have intended, may, depending on the unique character and circumstances of the individual, become rigid and fixed at certain times and then become released or malleable at other times. If this is so, then the question arises as to what structural forces can and cannot be freed up to enable the aspirant's *habitus* to meld with unfamiliar middle-class socio-cultural practices.

Mallman (2017, p. 23) also notes the apparent impasse and contradiction between aspiration and the emotional challenges that can come from 'rising above one's station' whilst at the same time shaking off the constraining notion of 'knowing one's place'.[47] Again, ambivalence can emerge since aspirants can retain parts of their working-class self, such as family influences and a past classed life, while simultaneously seeing these in a different light by becoming differently classed, estranged or detached and by experiencing shifts in their sense of self and identity. Similarly, the location of the self 'in the past' and then as a changed version which has become the 'present' self can be said to create a *hybridised self* which lends continuity to narratives of a disrupted *habitus* and of negotiating incongruent patterns of class behaviour in order to bolster an independent identity (see Mallman 2017, p. 24, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, pp. 25 and 163). Similarly, relational barriers are formed in the families of aspirants whereby the *habitus* is divided against itself (Sayer 2005, p. 26).[48]

Indeed, an ontological disjuncture of a divided self need not be negatively exaggerated. For example, Mallman (2017, p. 24) argues that while

[47] This process of unsticking entrenched class-related emotions is examined in Chapter 3.

[48] A fuller critique of the *habitus* as used by Bourdieu is undertaken in Chapter 2.

aspirants may inherit a 'family-outsider' status, this can be seen as training them to become comfortable (less anxious) about feeling different and so enable them to transfer or channel these class/family challenges into personal resources.[49] By instigating what Taylor (1989) refers to as a reflexive 'turning inward' for approval the classed self can be considered to show resilience, authentication and validation of the shifting character of selfhood (Mallman 2017, p. 24). These innermost dialogical structures of thinking and feeling may, or may not be reflexively transformative in form, to the extent that was discussed in the earlier sections. However, the ontological nature of aspiring will necessarily involve engagement in an iterative or cyclical process of self-conscious evaluation of intrinsic and extrinsic issues related to the self. Again, this aspect of the transmutation of the self in class transition is further examined in Chapters 2, 4 and 5.

Furthermore, this transformational aspect of the aspiration process may create conflicting approaches to previously held social and cultural values. Aspirants may develop a propensity to acquire and display individualistic class differentiation, or to place growing importance on the culturally nuanced mores of the middle-class and to distance themselves from the world views and socio-cultural practices of family members who are not aspirational or mobile. Perhaps, aspirants might become embarrassed or dismissive about the ideas and views which were commonly accepted in their earlier life and peer group. However, in an existential sense they may equally be unable to comfortably, and completely establish and stabilise a new sense of a 'transformed self' when in an unfamiliar social and cultural space and place.

Vignette 1.3.

A number of the above points certainly resonate in my early life, in my domestic setting, as the brief account below explicates.

[49] This point usefully previews the discussion on 'ontological insecurity' which is the central theme and objective of Chapter 5.

Coming into my teens, in the early 1960s, my life at home did not feel particularly comfortable. I increasingly disagreed with my dad on matters of politics and social affairs (see Vignette 1.1). This created an irreversible rift between us which I did not consider to be class related. It was only later, in the 1980s and beyond, in gravitating to a more 'educated' and middle-class lifestyle that I began to reflect on this disharmony. It was my engagement with such matters in an undeveloped quasi-academic way that allowed me to see what I considered to be the limitations and weaknesses in his (and my own) previous socio-economic arguments, which he had held for many years. For 'an easy life', my mother would agree with him, or sit on the fence in ignorance of the issues and how they were being interpreted.

This example of personal development can be seen as a form of psychical 'splitting'. It may be considered typical of how offspring move away from their parents; of how they need to 'leave the nest'. However, aside from this, it was also a realisation that much of the parenting I had received, specifically in terms of the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge, and the perspectives and justifications for our own particular social position, were now no longer acceptable to me. So, I didn't agree with my dad's perspectives on society at that time. However, I also found it hard to coalesce with him, mainly because of his erratic behaviour and temperament. I felt pity for him in his anxiety about poverty and the strangely self-imposing constraints he seemed to harbour. Basically, I suspect he was mildly traumatised by his experiences in WW2, but this did not become clear until much later in our lives. I felt 'held back' by my home life. Although, in general terms, my parents were loving, I felt 'penned in' by the limitations and narrowness of their social perspectives and outlook. I wanted to love and respect them, but I also wanted to escape!

Accounts of this form can be said to reveal an interesting psycho-social phenomenon in that working-class aspirants are, in effect, continually caught in a kind of existential 'double bind' (see the discussion in Sections 5.2 and 5.3). They are striving to seek out and realise new pathways

towards greater prosperity and security and towards a more meaningful and flourishing life (see Atkinson 2015, p. 116; Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 209).[50] This central problem can also be articulated as an anxiety-based ontology of class transition that I develop further in the final chapter of the thesis. I argue that this presents aspirants with significant psychical challenges during class transition and throughout the remainder of their lives.

On the balance of the evidence in the literature and the argument established here, a further qualification to note is that these ontological tensions will mean that many working-class aspirants will lack the desire, determination and resilience of character to strive to better themselves beyond their 'familiar' *field* of class. The aforementioned structural constraints of class can be seen as self-limiting signals in many working-class families. As demotivating objects, they force many to rationalise their situation on fatalistic grounds and to *internalise* the message that they must accept their lot, recognising that there are structural limitations to their *voluntarism* and agency and the extent to which they can strive for and achieve a better life. These sentiments have existential parallels which I consider in Chapter 5.

In moving towards a different class position the aspirant may in fact experience ambivalent feelings and expressions of disloyalty towards and from family members, previous friendship groups, or others who are perceived to hold a 'traditional' working-class outlook. This is a complex matter since aspirants are seeking to better themselves while also facing dismissal and rebuke from their class of origin. This exposes another contradiction (or conflict) which requires some unpicking. The classed narrative is confusing since its message seems to be as follows

[50] Bourdieu uses the term *hysteresis* to explain instances where adjustments to a new set of conditions are not successful (see Chapter 5) and *parvenu*, the feeling of no longer fitting in with family and friends from home, yet not feeling as though they really belong to the new world they have entered either.

"You can, and must, do better with your life than we have done, but don't think you are any better than us by doing so. Remember where you came from, because we won't forget!" [51]

This form of class sentiment is problematic insofar as it shows the contradiction between the pride that may be felt by families for someone 'getting on' in life, but also the envy or even jealousy which the emerging differences in lifestyle and attitudes can engender. Of course, the aspirant may or may not be sensitive to these kinds of class pressure. This would depend on the aspirant's circumstances and relationship with, or attitudes towards, family and peers. It would also depend upon the aspirant's sense of self in relation to their upward mobility. Whether this makes them feel they are experiencing a greater sense of self-worth as a result of this social and cultural progression, or whether this might be tempered by other kinds of inner conflict or ambivalence. The development of socio-cultural difference and division can, as shown, produce powerful discomforts that are difficult to reconcile in the self (Mallman 2017; Friedman 2016; Lawler 1999; Stahl 2014; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Sennett 1999, 2004; Reay 2005, 2013).

1.8 Conclusion.

In this chapter I have examined the structural determinants of class and how these impact on the psychical interiority of aspirant mobiles. I have defined and interpreted the framing concepts of *aspiration* and *mobility* as normative and socially coercive constructs. I show them to be both psychically *internalised* and externally practiced by self and others in response to established socio-cultural norms. These framing concepts are a key feature of the fluidity of classed life, revealing the struggles involved in striving to overcome the barriers to class transition (see Allen 2015; Mallman 2017; Loveday 2014; Lawler 1999, 2000, Reay 1998b, 2005; Stahl 2013, 2015).

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51 This quotation is roughly based on expressions and sentiments in my earlier life. See also Lawler (1999) with regard to ways of checking 'pretension' in family and class contexts.

I have shown that social aspiration and mobility are presented as a self-motivating and social imperative, as evidenced by their widespread take up and practice. However, I show that working-class aspirants tend to buy into the *rhetoric of meritocracy*, which tends to understate, or ignore entirely, the importance of class as a barrier to their mobility and is propagated structurally through the myth of a fair and equal society. I have argued that the structural inequalities largely prevent such mobility and class transition from materialising without a monumental existential struggle and resolve on the part of the aspirant. I have tried to show that by conforming to these prevailing structural norms, aspirants often fail to recognise that their striving is actioned on an 'uneven playing field' (see Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990; Savage 2000, 2015).

Accordingly, I have outlined some of the complexities in the struggles of aspirant mobiles. These have been considered by briefly introducing Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus, field, symbolic capital, doxa*, *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence/domination*. In so doing the central argument is that the structural determinants of class tend to be underestimated in discussions of working-class social mobility. Inversely, there is the danger of over-emphasising the autonomy and independence of aspirants and thus a tendency towards *voluntarism* can be shown. By aspirant mobiles underestimating the extent to which forces of structural *determinism* and *doxa* are *internalised* during socialisation, such aspirational endeavours can bring unexpected psychical challenges (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1994, 2007; Friedman 2016; Atkinson 2015; Reay 2004, 2005, 2015).

Thus, uncovering the assumed, invisible and hidden practices of class helps to show the power of class domination and its effects. However, in the case of social mobility, the assumption is that it is just something that sections of the working-class do. For how else could they overcome the classed restrictions and limitations of their classed lives? I use Bourdieu's concept of *doxa* to show how such a meritocratic guise is *misrecognised* by many working-class aspirants since 'it goes without saying' that social and cultural advancement is desirable and realisable. Also, Bourdieu's

concept of *symbolic violence* shows how middle-class superiority and domination is practiced. This is manifest in the form of class *signifiers* and is reinforced through areas of *taste* such as the use of language (Bourdieu 1984; Thompson 1984).

I also introduced Sennett and Cobb's (1973) work on the *hidden injuries* of class and their research observations. In particular, I underscore the deeply felt concerns regarding dignity and self-respect, self-denigration and the contradictions that emerge from their respondents' accounts of their lives. Given the socio-cultural changes experienced in class transition their research shows how mobility can existentially affect aspirants' sense of being, belonging, place, and identity. The discussion also shows how and why class can be at the root of ontological insecurities that develop and militate against the establishing of a *robustness* of character (Sennett 1999, 2004). This is deemed to be an important factor in increasing wellbeing among the socially mobile in classed societies.

Sennett and Cobb's respondents expressed deeply held feelings and beliefs about their predicaments and how their aspirations to live a better life were being thwarted by feelings of inadequacy, ambivalence, uncertainty, disappointment and frustration. They showed how and why respondents often experience a limited control of events, choices and direction in the psychic terrain of class. Respondents expressed confusion over where respect and dignity are held and maintained. They adopted self-condemnatory attitudes about their sense of personal achievement, often failing to appreciate the full impact of the structural class barriers that prevailed but showing how these profoundly affected their sense of self-worth and options for their future life. Further references to this important work are made throughout the thesis.

The aspirational quest for a better life necessitates, to a greater or lesser degree, an awareness of the value and merits of *reflexivity*. By engaging in the process of self-examination and an adjustment of their sense of class and self, aspirant mobiles can be said to more effectively manage their specific inner obstacles to mobility and to greater wellbeing. The

following chapter therefore explores the concept of *reflexivity* by examining Bourdieu's use and interpretation of the concept. This also requires a more extensive account of how his related concepts of *habitus* and *field* can be operationalised and how, in relation to these, the *embodied self* is a primary focus when addressing the aforementioned determinant structures of class.

Chapter 2. Critiques of Bourdieu's habitus: determinist tendencies; reflexive potential and processes of 'internalisation'.

2.1 Introduction.

In this chapter I study the extent of *determinism* and *reflexivity* in Bourdieu's *habitus* (see Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990, 1994, 2005).[52] It is important to consider the different approaches to Bourdieu's *habitus* through a selection of critiques by his adherents and critics. These contributions are useful in addressing the contradictions, inconsistencies and tensions between individual agency and societal structures. As I have discussed in Chapter 1 Bourdieu's *habitus* is designed to avoid such an internal/external or self/other distinction that such dichotomous paradoxes struggle to fully reconcile (see Maton 2012, pp 59-60; Wetherell 2005).

Some further discussion of this problem is useful in understanding how the *internalised* structural class inhibitors, discussed in Chapter 1, can be further addressed. As I noted, such processes of socialisation become unconscious through what Bourdieu refers to as 'history forgotten as history' (see Bourdieu 1990, p. 56; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 136, footnote 90). In the case of aspirant mobiles, their *internalised* predispositions towards social-climbing; of striving for a better life and greater wellbeing, need to be unpicked in the light of this literature.[53] Thus a critique of Bourdieu's *habitus* is also helpful in considering how aspirants carry their embodied history of class with them throughout their mobility trajectories and whether this explains their predisposition to be socially mobile, to engage in class transition and potentially to 'become' middle-class (see Allen 2015; Friedman 2016; Holmes 2010; Reay 1998b, 2004, 2015).

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[52] As indicated in the thesis Introduction, I take 'reflexivity' to mean an act of self-reference, where action or examination 'bends back on', that is, refers back to and affects the entity instigating the action or examination.

[53] The reader is reminded that I am using the term 'aspirant mobile' as synonymous with the phrase 'working-class aspirant'.

Moreover, it is central to the thesis to establish an understanding of how aspirant mobiles reflect upon and internalise middle-class ideas of 'success'. I therefore critique and summarise these perceptions in order to establish the limitations of such aspirations and expectations.

I consider aspirants' capacity to reflexively examine their embodied *habitus* and whether they are able to harness the capacity to rethink, rebuild and reproduce their selfhood, identity and socio-cultural position, despite their historically habituated practice (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). As I have shown in the previous chapter, the capacity to enact radical change in the self is always offset by degrees of access to various forms of *capital*. Here it is interesting to note how the aspirant mobile's plight can be a confused, conflicted and solitary one in a number of ways (see Friedman 2016, p. 145). In trying to decipher and compete with the different *signifiers* and *symbolic capital* of the middle-class, aspirant mobiles can be deeply affected in terms of their sense of self and a potentially shifting and disrupted identity. Their social outlook, mind-set, disposition, character and ongoing life narrative can also be affected (see Sennett and Cobb 1973; Skeggs 2004; Sayer 2005; Friedman 2012, 2016; Lawler 1999). Thus, Bourdieu's *habitus* shows how class is internally reproduced and how the efforts of the aspirant mobile can be *misrecognised* when competing in an 'uneven playing field' (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990, 2009).

The impact of structural norms and values on the psychical interiority of the aspirant have also been considered in Chapter 1, Section 1.7. However, here I examine the formation of the embodied self by tracing the links with class and its impacts on the temperament and character of aspirant mobiles. For instance, why did the working-class students appear to be less assertive than their middle-class peers in getting the attention and respect of their schoolteacher? (Calarco 2011; see Section 1.7). This seemed to show that the development of class dispositions is the result of internalisation processes where access to forms of 'psychological' or emotional *capitals* might be critical. I am thinking here of such qualities as resilience, inner resolve, firmness, boldness, preparedness and

obviously, from the Calarco's example, assertiveness and confidence (see also Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 88). Would these kinds of qualities enhance confidence and self-esteem in the aspirant if developed in their early years? Would they, as a consequence, build a more robust and non-deferential *habitus*? That is, one able to challenge the social class domination they experience; unwilling to bow to the class advantage and domination of middle-class others; unwilling to be devalued or made to feel inferior or to be treated as such? [54]

Thus, the chapter provides a number of critiques of Bourdieu's *habitus* to consider the extent of *determinism* and rigidity in the way he intends it to be understood. Or, whether it should be perceived as a flexible, durable and a mutable mechanism because of the inherent element of *reflexivity*. I follow these critiques with three brief accounts contrasting the interpretations of reflexivity by Giddens, Archer and Taylor, before moving on to assess the limits of reflexivity in the trajectories of working-class upwardly mobile aspirants. A further critique of *internalisation* to that provided in Chapter 1 follows, focusing on Bourdieu's use of the 'unconscious' in enabling or inhibiting change. I then consider how middle-class ideas of 'success' are *internalised* before providing further accounts of personal experiences relating to the classed embodiment that help contextualise the key points.

2.2 Critical interpretations of Bourdieu's *habitus* in relation to its determinism and reflexivity.

Bourdieu's theory of practice and his development of a *reflexive sociology* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007) have been challenged on a number of fronts. Some have considered the extent to which the reflexive form is manifest within it and from within various specialist areas. For example, the *habitus* has been considered in the context of class with regard to

[54] See Chapter 3 for an expanded discussion of such temperaments in the context of self and value.

transformative learning (Nairn et al. 2012) and in linking emotionality with reflexivity (Holmes 2010; Brownlie 2011; Vincent 2011; Burkitt 2012).

However, this section draws out the main areas of contention with Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* by citing specific theoretical approaches. These seek to clarify its complexity in the context of class and with relevance to working-class aspirational endeavour. Specifically, the key concern is with regard to the *determinism* and therefore an emphasis on structural constraint in Bourdieu's use of the *habitus*. To contextualise this within the ongoing discussion implies that an excess of determinism in the embodied self would stifle the aspirant's capacity to be upward mobile. This is so since such determinist elements would, in specific ways, limit the aspirant's capacity to think and act reflexively in overcoming the constraints or barriers of class. Here, three distinct positions seem to emerge in the critiques of Bourdieu's *habitus* and embodied selfhood which I briefly consider.

The first position is held by theorists such as Lash (1993) who argue that the elements of *determinism* shown to be inherent in Bourdieu's *habitus* do accurately reflect how social structures influence the actions and patterns of practice of the individual agent (aspirant). In this perspective the internalising of such structures is seen as having more influence on the embodied self than that of an agent's capacity for autonomous action. In turn, the agent's capacity to be reflexive is also restricted by this *internalisation* of structures. It is seen as carrying greater weight in the reflexive process than that of agency and similarly, it affects (limits) their life chances and possibilities for upward class mobility (Lash 1993).

The second position is held by those such as Archer (2003, 2010). They argue that although the agent's embodied disposition is brought about by a process of socialisation and their social reproduction is formed through degrees of normative structuration, the elements of structural *determinism* in Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* are far too excessive. Indeed, they argue it is this very human attribute of reflexive deliberation that enables an agent to transcend the structural determinants and constraints

of disposition, exemplified in Bourdieu's *habitus,* and exemplified in the *field* of class and class transition.

Thirdly, there are those such as Crossley (2001, p. 117) who argue that Bourdieu's *habitus* can be shown to embrace the potential for reflexive deliberation, but that this is either largely misunderstood and understated, or that there is a lack of clarity and transparency in Bourdieu's own account of it. Furthermore, they argue that as a conceptual construct the *habitus* has the scope for further development and theoretical expansion within a 'reflexive sociology'.

This is evidenced in Chandler (2013, p. 5) who argues that Bourdieu's *habitus* is limited by its monolithic tendency to see the self as a unified subject and a system of durable dispositions that are socially given (Chandler 2013, p. 18). Thus, Chandler argues that Bourdieu's *habitus* lacks development in terms of the social-psychological potential and dimension of the self in that it gives less attention to individual dynamism, inner-conflict and the complexities that comprise the formation of agency. Instead, Chandler postulates the idea of a socially *saturated* self with an interiority based entirely of an economy of self-negotiated and inter-temporal bargaining of short and long-term interests. These interests are deliberated through the agent's (aspirant's) investment in current cultural capital which is, by default, part of the social structure.

While seeking to be consistent with the aim of Bourdieu's *habitus* as culturally motivated, Chandler seeks to lay greater importance on deliberation and individuality in practice. *Desaturation* and *resaturation* are thus part of Chandler's theoretical development here, whereby reflexivity is composed of the agent's competing interests in relation to the cultural capital at his/her disposal. The agent's 'internal conversation' occurs in the form of a negative desaturation process of questioning motivations and competing interests and constituting a circling back of these upon themselves due to crises in the *doxic* attitude of the agent. These are reframed by a readdressing of cultural capital through a process of resaturation (Chandler 2013, p. 18). It is this desaturation and

resaturation together that comprise the reflexivity of the saturated agent and underlines the 'subjectivity' of agency by allowing a dynamic interplay between conscious and non-conscious contributions to practice.

Furthermore, this reinforces the way in which culture produces more or less conflict in the shaping of agents' (aspirants') lives within different socio-economic contexts or fields (Chandler 2013, p. 20). Chandler cites examples such as the ways in which agents struggle with various forms of disorder, dependency and addiction and how these demonstrate the complex interplay between the socio-cultural circumstances of agents and the socio-psychological impacts of these (Chandler 2013, p. 13). Chandler's approach is of critical importance in drawing out the ontological class-based tensions within a classed self which I discuss further in Chapter 5.

Sweetman (2003) however, gravitates towards a post-structuralist position by considering the shifting forms and norms of identity in 'late-modernism'. Like Giddens (1991, see Section 2.3) he questions whether agents' identities are becoming more reflexive. Furthermore, the all-encompassing nature of the *habitus*, with its predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving, such as posture, demeanour, outlook, expectations and tastes, shows the ontological totality of the concept. Indeed, Bourdieu asserts that this ontology encompasses what he calls the bodily *hexis* at a micro and macro level of human existence as the product of our upbringing (Bourdieu 1984, p. 466).[55] On this point Sweetman argues that

> "the *habitus,* at least partially, reproduces social structure, and as the embodiment of social arrangements and material circumstance it broadly ensures that we fulfil our destiny as members of a particular class" (Sweetman 2003, p. 532).

[55] This concept of bodily *hexis* equates to the physical formation of bodily disposition, the shapes of the body, postures, manners, ways of speaking, the habits of the body and how this determines identity in a 'bodily' sense.

I evaluate further this idea of aspirants fulfilling their destiny in Chapter 5.

This line of thinking also points to the complex nature of the agent's (aspirant's) inner constraints and proclivities and the extent to which these are either consciously self-induced, or arise as a result of *internalisation* and are thus conditioned by prevailing social structures in the form of unconscious adherence to prevailing social norms and values.[56] As the earlier discussion on meritocracy noted, this is shown in Western classed societies were dominant norms such as social mobility and aspiration are valorised (see Friedman 2016; Skeggs 2004; Allen 2013; Savage 2015). This is evidenced in spite of the impeding structural barriers and ontological difficulties faced by the working-class as a whole. However, in particular, it is demonstrated by those aspiring to transcend their prior class dispositions and are morphing into another class identity and way of life.

Considering the subjectivity of selfhood within Bourdieu's *habitus* Crossley (2001) takes a phenomenological position with regard to both pre-reflexive and reflexive modes of action which he contends are equally rooted in habit (see also Swartz 2002). Similar to Archer (2003) Crossley argues that Bourdieu tends to understate the extent to which *rational* and *conscious* calculation enters into everyday life as a matter of course. That Bourdieu's 'feel for the game' metaphor is weak insofar as choices and therefore, the ability to make decisions are usually not exceptional, but more commonplace in daily life, interacting with more spontaneous tactical manoeuvring (Crossley 2001, p. 97).

However, in taking the central aspects of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological analysis of habit, Crossley argues that this actually deepens Bourdieu's conception of the *habitus*. This is because it provides a sense of the way in which habits fit into an ongoing dialogue between

[56] See Chapter 1 and Section 2.5 of this chapter for further discussion on this point.

agents (aspirants) and their interpretations of their changing world. Thus, while habits generate repeatable actions, so actions variously modify and create newly formed habits through conscious and unconscious reflection. Thus practices, actions or behaviours are not to be seen as fully repeatable, fixed or over-determined. Rather, they are to be seen as mutable, with new habits or patterns of behaviour emerging over time and becoming a part of the changing self, often through internal struggles (reflexive *internal conversations* and *hysteresis*) with the changed circumstances, for which the agent bears responsibility (Crossley 2001, p. 117). Thus agents (aspirants) can be said to be determined by structure forces, but also to have the autonomous capability to reflexively determine their practice in relation to those structures. This line of thinking seems to counter the structural-determinist position and offer a more flexible theoretical stance since 'active' agents (aspirant mobiles) can consciously shape their lives in accordance with available opportunities and constraints of social and cultural capital. This is particularly the case when such capital becomes *symbolic* (Bourdieu 1977, 1986, 1990, 1994).

However, questions then arise as to whether this 'reflexive fluidity' is universally accessible across the class structure. For example, in the case of mobile aspirants, it is open to question whether such reflexivity materialises, or is triggered, as a result of uniquely clustered social and psychological circumstances. In this regard Crossley argues, as indicated above that the potential for 'reflective agency' is something of a mystery in Bourdieu's work and that it warrants more transparency. Thus, in using Merleau-Ponty's approach of rooting reflexive states in *habit,* Crossley argues that both pre-reflective actions , those ingrained and spontaneous, and reflective modes of actions, those that we think about and those steered by the 'feel for the game', are equally rooted in habit (Crossley 2001, p. 117).

Calhoun, LiPuma and Postone (1995, p. 6) come more strongly to Bourdieu's defence in describing the power of reflexivity as the ability to evoke rational and 'conscious' calculation in the everyday life of the agent. From this they argue that Bourdieu does, in fact, consider the *habitus* to

be self-reflexive in that, each time it is animated in practice, it encounters itself both as embodied and as objectified history (see Section 2.5 below).

Furthermore, Elder-Vass recognises why Bourdieu is thought to be using *habitus* as nothing more than a conveyor belt for the determination of human behaviour by social forces (Elder-Vass 2007, p. 328). With this in mind Elder-Vass summarises two aspects of the *habitus* where he argues agency and structure appear to conflate in terms of acquired knowledge, namely, a) agents are constitutive of structures and b) structures are constitutive of agents (Elder-Vass 2007, p. 333). In the first case Elder-Vass argues that structures are manifest in the actions of agents, through *internalised* knowledge and emotions and in relation to those structures and the responses to them. In the second case Elder-Vass argues that there is both a metaphorical and literal reading of this. Thus, for example, when treated metaphorically the working-class aspirant may internalise feelings of inferiority. Such an emotional response may result from experiencing middle-class condescending behaviours. But when taken literally what this might mean is that the agent has actually acquired the belief that s/he actually *is* inferior (Elder-Vass 2007, p. 334). Thus, these external forces, conveyed by and derived through, the actions of others, do not 'disappear' into our bodies as such. Rather, their effectiveness derives, in part, from a process that depends upon their effects on the body and mind. I expand further on these processes of *internalisation* and the 'unconscious' in Section 2.5.

Thus, the actions of others may trigger mental states which the resilient aspirant may receive and reflect upon, but then shrug off. However, the vulnerable aspirant might feel them, perhaps viscerally and have them become firmer, more established, and potentially recurring, painful fixtures in their psyche. Thus Bourdieu, in considering the *habitus* as a 'structuring structure' can be said to be suggesting that when we internalise something, such as a feeling of inferiority, it can become literally an embodied part of us (Elder-Vass 2007, p. 334).

This would seem to be crux of the discussion here. In some cases, the aspirants' embodied *habitus* can be so fixed that in seeking better circumstances; in becoming middle-class through a structurally induced expectation; in aping the middle-class, lemming-like, and in feeling their way unquestioningly, they are doing so with little or no self-examination. They may be adopting a non-reflexive disposition during class transition and internalising middle-class mores in a non-critical manner. Furthermore, in terms of wider social and political awareness, the impact and extent of a reflexive process may be minimal or missed/avoided altogether. Thus, in cases of such psychical myopia the idea of 'aspirational endeavour' might be considered to be devoid of critical social and cultural meaning or value.

This difficult problem of dispositional mutability and reinforcement is explored below (Section 2.5) in terms of the interactive and internal processes of reflexivity. Suffice it to say that it is not always clear how processes of learning, adaptation and change occur, nor of how habitual patterns of thinking and feeling persist. However, some forms of psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic practice are known to be successful in accounting for psychical resistances to change or uncovering and facilitating changes in the *habitus*. Such practice may be necessary in order to reflect on life experiences in ways that enable the jettisoning of unwanted or unhelpful ways of thinking (and feeling) and in enabling greater self-affirmation, wellbeing and class awareness. However, as I show in Section 2.5, it appears that Bourdieu struggled to build a sociological theory which could accommodate these concerns and approaches (see Steinmetz 2006; Fourny 2000).

The above critiques provide only a snapshot of an extensive body of material discussing Bourdieu's *habitus*. However, they do show the key approaches in assessing the extent of determinism and the possibilities for a non-determinist reflexivity in the concept. They also go some way towards developing a theoretical explanation of the forms of constraint faced by aspirant mobiles and the ontological mechanisms that can emerge in order to transcend the conditioned constraints embedded in

their class origins. Furthermore, they help in understanding the extent of reflexivity and the forms that take place among aspirant mobiles in terms of the self-limiting mechanisms at play.[57] What I consider to be embodied *residues* from their working-class roots may linger as internal barriers to a more effective and complete reflexive process during social and cultural transition to middle-class life.

The following sections consider some key contributions to reflexivity within social and class theory. Firstly, I outline the work of Giddens (1984, 1991) and his position on structuration, individualism and self-identity. I then follow this by summarising the work of Archer (2003) and her morphogenetic approach and lastly that of Taylor (1989) and his position on the *inward turn* of selfhood. These are not intended to be expansive, however, I include them in order to contextualise the significance and range of interpretations of reflexivity as a concept within a critique of Bourdieu's *habitus* and a discourse on social mobility and class transition.

2.3 The theoretical positions of Giddens, Archer and Taylor on Reflexivity.

Giddens's reflexivity.

Giddens's work on reflexivity has brought considerable critical comment (see for example, Craib 1992; Archer 2003, 2010; Elder-Vass 2007; King 2010). However, here I focus specifically on his alleged failure to consider sufficiently the class impacts of cultural differentiation and the unequal access to resources in what he terms *institutionalised reflexivity* (Giddens 1991, p. 98). His approach requires a self that is able to reflect upon itself in a 'fractured world' while simultaneously externalising the self from social relations. This position has been considered problematic since it presents the idea of a *reflexive self*, but in a normative and idealistic form. It suggests that the self is able to plan its future actions and then reinsert itself back into society through the internalisation of revised

[57] See Chapter 3 for a developed discussion of self-limiting mechanisms and their behavioural implications.

considerations, as if detached from social structure in an *asocial* way. As King suggests, Giddens seems committed to both a form of sociological *determinism* and to the assertion of individual agency at the same time (King 2010, p. 254). In addition, Giddens's model seems to present a problem-free *neutral self* and a form of reflexivity that is normatively accessible to all and devoid of inscription or social position (Skeggs 2004, p. 53).

As a human practice reflexivity is considered to be a cognitive process involving the agent's *internal conversations*, consisting of the often repeated and relatively fixed narratives of agents, ranging from momentary pre-conscious day-dreaming and ruminations to conscious and purposive engagement (Giddens 1991).[58] According to Archer (2003) this shows the self to be a potentially dialogical entity. In addition, Giddens has argued that the development of selfhood has become a 'reflexive project of modernity' (Giddens 1991, p. 33). He argues that it is now a cultural requirement of selfhood to constantly monitor, assess and modify one's actions in the light of current consequences. To reconstruct one's identity through the production of appropriate narratives (Giddens 1991, p. 35). He attributes this significant historical shift to the *individualisation* of the self (Giddens 1991, p. 200). Both Giddens and Beck argue that this has resulted in a reformulation of class identities in late modernity (Skeggs 2004, p. 52; Savage 2000).

However, Bradley considers this position to be only superficially persuasive. She argues that Giddens is making unsubstantiated assumptions in suggesting that a higher degree of reflexivity and an

[58] In Section 1.5, I introduced a discussion on Bourdieu's use of the 'unconscious' as 'history forgotten as history' as a way of positioning the *habitus* as embodied history. I continue this theme in Section 2.5 by considering how the conscious part of practice relates to unconscious, habituated and non-habituated practices, with some relevant examples. Some further examples of reflexive ruminations by agents can be found in Bourdieu (2009, pp. 580-589). Of course, considerations of the unconscious mind are at the core of the Freudian paradigm. However, as indicated earlier a critique of Freud's canon and discussions of topics such as sublimation and repressed needs would take the discussion on reflexivity into the realm of psychoanalysis and is therefore considered outside of the scope of this thesis.

'elasticity of identity' have emerged. She suggests that while we may have a heightened sensibility to the multi-dimensional nature of social inequality this form of social reality is not new (Bradley 2007, p. 213). Furthermore, Savage (2000) also challenges this idea of an erosion of class identities arguing that both Giddens and Beck misconceive the relationship between an individual agent's identity formation and identities formed on class grounds. He argues that their suggestion of a decline in class culture would be better understood as a shift from working-class to middle-class modes of individualisation that are unquestionably class-based (Savage, 2000).

Beck concedes that the socially mobile are, in general, unable to escape the structural forces of society, but he argues that they can in fact decide which forces to act upon and which to ignore (Beck 1992, p.98). For example, he suggests that agents can adapt to economic threats such as unemployment by taking a flexible approach to their own career or job situation. He contends that by reflexive self-examination of their untapped potential, agents can re-invent themselves, for example, through re-skilling and thus survive such structural pressures. Through the reformulation of their individual and deeply personal biographies aspirant agents are able to reflexively reconstruct their identities. This biographical production of selfhood is what Beck (like Giddens) calls 'reflexive modernity' (see Skeggs 2004, p. 52). However, this position is largely falsified historically with, for example, the high levels of unemployment and the collapse of many traditional industries and with no viable alternative job opportunities in the aftermath.

Also, Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992) and Lash (1993) argue that increased risk and uncertainty have sharpened the emotions of fear and anxiety in late modernity. In addition, they assert that routine and habit have been eroded and have been replaced by knowledge that has helped people cope with the loss of these familiar (traditional) social wrappers (Burkitt 2012, p. 460). In considering 'ontological security' in this way Burkitt argues that Giddens is treating reflexivity as disembodied and devoid of emotion, since by basing it solely on knowledge, he is ignoring

the emotional considerations of the self [59]. Burkitt's position is that emotion is the source of all our thinking since it is integral to the relations we have with our world and the people within it (Burkitt 2012, p.461). Similar to Archer (2003, 2010) on the reflexive agency of the 'internal conversation', he asserts that reflexivity is based on the emotionally driven dialogues that humans hold within themselves. In a very real sense, the notion of 'getting in touch with one's feelings' can be considered to be a challenging, often painful, though also therapeutic and healing approach, in which agents (aspirant mobiles) are able to transform their classed selves.

Archer's reflexivity.

Archer's research and route into reflexivity assumes, firstly, that her respondents would be able to tell something about the nature of their own *internal conversations*. Secondly, that people usually have the greatest difficulties in representing their inner dialogues to themselves, let alone to others (Archer 2003, p. 155). An examination of these assumptions is critical in formulating an ontological approach to class. Reflexivity must be said to allow a self-conscious awareness of such self-examination to enable the agent (aspirant) to externalise, that is, to unearth and articulate the nature and forms of such internal dialogues. This is irrespective of the difficulties in facing up to the need for substantial honesty with the self that is necessary in this reflexive process.

Archer's research concludes that respondents displayed three modes of reflexivity that mediate socio-cultural constraints and enablements in quite distinctive ways (Archer 2003, p. 153-154, 165). She classifies three modes of reflexivity as a) *communicative*, b) *autonomous* and c) *meta-reflexive*. She contends that communicative reflexives are unsure about their internal dialogue and need to discuss aspects of this with a trusted other in order to complete their inner deliberations. By contrast, *autonomous* reflexives engage in a lone internal dialogue; are self-

[59] For a more in-depth discussion of 'ontological security' and 'insecurity' see Chapter 5.

sufficient in this and do not want it supplemented by exchanges with other people (Archer 2003, p. 210). She argues that the *internal conversations* of such reflexives are more to do with society and as such, with their aspirations and with an elastication and contraction of aspirations for different subjects and at different times. As a result, they have a higher propensity to change and to occupy new social contexts over the course of their lives (Archer 2003, p. 212).

Archer's third group, the meta-reflexives*,* self-consciously reflect on their own acts of reflexivity. However, they tend to withdraw into self-interrogation; are contextually unsettled, which is demonstrated by a set of practices, including geographical mobility, job changes and career shifts and are therefore not good at setting down permanent roots. Archer argues that these reflexives are biographically volatile (Archer 2003, p. 293). She argues that they are "idealists, ever seeking a better fit between who they seek to be and a social environment which permits their expression of it" (Archer 2003, p. 259). In showing this qualitative breadth and depth of reflexive forms Archer's categorisation usefully contributes to a further understanding of this important human capability.

One interesting and relevant aspect emanating from Archer's classification of reflexive capability is the reflexive's inner drive to aspire which might be shown in the character attributes relating to each of the three types. However, Archer's typological approach may be of only limited value in reaching a core understanding of an ontological perspective of selfhood in relation to class. Given the uniqueness of each aspirant's *habitus* and therefore, their disposition and circumstances, it would seem that any of Archer's three reflexive types might be able to contend with the dynamics and challenges of ontological change encountered by mobiles undergoing class transition. Further empirical research on *reflexive types* in relation to class mobility would seem to be a useful undertaking.

Taylor's reflexivity.

Taylor uses the term radical reflexivity in his examination of the historical development and process of the *inward turn* towards the self which he

contends is a dominant feature of late modernity (Taylor 1989, p. 30). In his non-class-oriented critique, he suggests that while this necessary *inwardness* is reflexive it is not radically reflexive until the agent makes the act of experiencing the object their focus. By becoming, as it were, aware of our 'awareness' he argues that it is in the experience of the act of experiencing that the full meaning of reflexivity emerges. This brings to the fore a kind of presence to oneself which is inseparable from being the agent of that experience. In this, Taylor argues that the self gains a kind of control by standing back and withdrawing from the ordinary bent of experience and, paradoxically, it is in the 'engaging' in the experience that is of most value (Taylor 1989, p. 163).

In this way the process of withdrawing to find rational objectivity is only achieved by an inward examination of our experience of the act of thinking and feeling. Taylor says, "We fix experience in order to deprive it of its power, a source of bewitchment and error". Furthermore, by living the experience more attentively; by being more 'in' the experience the reflexive act becomes more radical and illuminatory (Taylor 1989, p. 163).

This discussion of the reflexive inward turn also has some existentialist implications. The self can be said to be continually seeking to discover, or impart some order, meaning or justification for our lives. We engage in an exploration of ourselves (or clarify key aspects of our self) in order to establish (or affirm) our identity. This is because the assumption behind modern self-exploration is that we don't really know who we are (Taylor 1989, p. 178). This point is pertinent in a discussion on aspirant reflexivity and, as discussed in Chapter 1, can be shown to experience existential confusion, anxiety and ambivalence and potentially a shifting of identity when moving into, and trying to adapt to, unfamiliar middle-class social milieu.

Sayer (2005) amplifies some aspects of Taylor's position when he points out that the embodied aspects of the self are somehow unreachable. The opportunities for bringing meaning to being are evidenced both in our physicality and in the socialised patterns of our thinking. Once learned,

these may change from something we struggle to grasp to something we can think with, without actually consciously thinking about them. That is, according to Sayer, for much of the time our conceptual apparatus is not itself the subject of reflection (Sayer 2005, p. 27). Also, it is not clear at what point, if at all, and if so in what forms, the unconscious embodied self can switch from a lack of reflexive self-awareness of the challenges to the inequalities and disadvantages experienced in working-class life, into a consciously active form of agency capable of making conscious choices about how to change its embodied state of being.

An alternative view is presented by Sweetman (2003) who suggests that agents (aspirants) who possess a flexible form of reflexivity have the capacity to re-fashion the self and that this can, in effect, become 'second nature' rather than it being something that is difficult to achieve (Sweetman 2003, p. 528). He argues that while this reflexive disposition puts such agents at a potential advantage, by having a heightened experiential awareness, they may also face considerable difficulties thereafter in simply 'being themselves' owing to a tension-bound fragmentation of selfhood. Again, this point is of paramount concern in unpicking class transitional angst which I discuss in Chapter 4 and particularly in Chapter 5.

The discourse on reflexivity and the embodied self is clearly extensive and the discussion here has been purposely limited to the main contributions of Bourdieu and his adherents and critics. Nonetheless, it complements other work on the reflexive self. For example, Savage's (2000) critique of Giddens and Beck is useful for similar reasons to those cited above. In addition, Sayer's (2005) critical realist view; Sweetman's (2003) Post-structuralist perspective on reflexivity as a habitual part of selfhood; Skeggs's (2004) largely supportive response to Bourdieu's reflexive *habitus* and Archer's (2003) categorisation of reflexive types, all have a bearing and relevance to aspirants experiencing class transition.

In the next section I contextualise related aspects of the embodied self (*habitus*) in terms of reflexivity and consider the characteristics and limits of this capability in the aspirational endeavours of the socially mobile.

2.4 Assessing the *habitus* and the limits of reflexivity among working-class aspirants.

In response to Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1994, 2009) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (2007) a number of contributors have considered the importance of reflexivity in the *habitus* and the implications of this to aspirants' psychical interiority and ability to progress their mobility pathways (see for example Skeggs (2004); Sayer (2005); Atkinson (2015); Stahl (2013); Sennett and Cobb (1973). The discussion in earlier sections of the chapter showed that there are specific conditional factors that affect the formation and degree of flexibility in the *habitus* of the mobile aspirant. Primarily, these relate to the complexions of *internalised* structures derived from prior experiences of family nurturing; formal education; community life, social networks, workplace hierarchies and cultures. For aspirants, the possibilities of engaging in a reflexive exploration and transformation of habituated unconscious patterns of feeling, thinking and acting would seem to be contingent on a willingness to probe their own interiority as their circumstances change and emerging potentialities are able to be assessed. Only then might aspirants identify their own uniquely *internalised* inhibitors that form their sense of a classed self and a sense of an evolving identity.[60]

But how might aspirants arrive at the point where they are predisposed to make this exploration of their own interiority? Is it not a pre-conscious or unconscious process that is ongoing through *internal conversations* and narratives and the constructive responses of others? The puzzle would seem to persist in the social realm as much as in the autonomous engagement within the aspirant's personal/private world.

[60] Here again, a developed discussion on the benefits of psychotherapy as part of the reflexive process would be useful. However, this is considered to be outside the scope of the thesis.

Another approach in lifting the lid on the forms of reflexivity adopted by aspirants is to be found in examining routinisation; in the habitual daily practices and how these might be adjusted prior to and during mobility and the class transition process (Crossley 2001, p. 104). The 'letting go' of hitherto ingrained embodiments and rituals and the forming of, albeit middle-class, forms of embodiment, is seen to be most challenging in areas of life where class distinction and difference is marked and where socio-cultural practices are noticeably incongruous (see Lawler 2000; Stahl 2013).

The earlier discussion in Chapter 1 of Sennett and Cobb's (1973) research on the *character* and dispositions of the upwardly mobile can be used in contrasting some of the key assertions made here regarding the *reflexive habitus*. For example, the aspirant could develop, or indeed may already possess, the robustness of character to successfully manage the uncomfortable challenges of a class transition process (see also Friedman 2016, p. 135-138).

Furthermore, as part of a reflexive assessment of the self, the aspirant might choose to seek help and guidance in accessing the psychological resources and self-affirming tools to engage in a carefully measured reflexive exercise. Tools such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and other forms of counselling can be seen as aids to build *emotional capital*, which can be used to successfully resolve inner tensions and contradictions. However, there is some empirical evidence to suggest that class is, again, a barrier in terms of working-class aspirants being predisposed to addressing their class scars or hidden injuries and in working to develop a robustness of character through various psychotherapeutic mechanisms and tools (see Waller and Gilbody 2009).[61]

It is also important to further unpack the discussion so far on emotions with regard to the reflexivity in the *habitus*. The reflexive project of the

61. However, again, further discussion of this kind would take the discussion beyond the scope of the thesis.

self needs to embrace states of being beyond mere reflexive 'thinking'. It is also beneficial to consider the range of emotions that make up the embodied self and how these are manifest. These are explored further in Chapter 3. For example, Brownlie (2011, p. 478) has argued for a multidimensional, reflexive approach to researching emotional lives which can help in exploring the stubbornly patterned aspects of emotional life. Holmes (2010, p. 147) however, stresses the need for the 'emotionalisation' of reflexivity, since more work needs to be done in understanding how emotions are involved in reflexivity. Burkitt goes further, arguing that while emotion is considered in theories of reflexivity it is generally held at bay, with it being seen as a possible barrier to clear reflexive thought. He argues that feeling and emotion are central to reflexive processes since they colour the perception of self and others in the social world and actually inform the reflexive self (Burkitt 2012, p. 458).

Moreover, the emotions reactions attributed to the nuanced behavioural practices of class domination can be so subtle and even banal until class incongruities are exposed. Here, such embodiment violations can instantaneously generate emotional triggers such as embarrassment and awkwardness for the unguarded mobile aspirant. No words need be spoken, though they may well be. But the condescension, patronisation, 'snob-value', expressions of disgust and belittlement, as forms of cultural domination, become transparent even when there is a veil of rational behaviour to give it legitimacy (Lawler 2005). An example of this, discussed earlier (see Sections 1.4, and 1.7, and Vignette 1.1) shows the *symbolic domination* embedded in the elitist use of so called 'superior' language and speech. Bourdieu's work on language and taste shows how class-based discomfort emerges and how it can be *symbolically* and emotionally damaging (Bourdieu 1977, 1984; Thompson 1984; Bernstein 2003). Routine acts of class distancing are shown to be fertile ground for inflicting class domination, in forms of aloofness and rejection in the *field* of class.

2.5 Bourdieu's *habitus* and the processes of 'internalisation': further discussion.

At this point I return to the discussion undertaken in Chapter 1, Section 1.5 to provide a further critique of Bourdieu's use of *habitus* as a process of *internalisation* through the lens of the *unconscious* and consider how this might configure in relation to *conscious* practice. This has implications for understanding the reflexive process in Bourdieu's *habitus* and what he means when he refers to the embodied self as an accumulation of experiences, 'forgotten as history', and, crucially, the ways in which habitual practices might be changed reflexively (see Section 2.2 above). Such an examination should clarify how and why the 'class *habitus'* of working-class mobiles is able to adopt middle-class mores during the mobility trajectories of aspirant mobiles. I revisit this complex matter through a further critique of secondary sources.

Noble and Watkins (2003) take issue with Bourdieu for stressing the unconscious nature of embodiment in the *habitus* and his limiting of conscious deliberation to 'times of crisis' (*hysteresis*), which he dismisses as 'calculation' (Noble and Watkins 2003, p. 529). They argue that he conflates *habitus* with embodied practice leading to a confusion of the argument that practice is largely habituated and unconscious by claiming that practice is only unconscious. They note that this remains a contradiction within his analysis. Thus, while Bourdieu stresses "a spontaneity without consciousness or will" he also concedes that the improvisations (for example, made by a training athlete) "are never performed without a certain presence of mind" (Noble and Watkins 2003, p. 529).

From this the authors argue that consciousness is not a simple or singular category. They differentiate between various modalities of consciousness. For example, 'agentic reflection' (that discursive practice in which we consider our behaviour and its principles - an awareness of what we have done and what we can do); 'bodily attention' (the consciousness attendant in constantly monitoring the body when we engage in everyday activities) and 'practical sense' (the levels of awareness and the forms of

consciousness where there is an instinctive competence in engagement - an 'automaticity' and going with the flow - the 'flow state'). This idea of 'being in the zone' they argue, is not pure unconsciousness, but the controlled concentration achieved through 'over-learning' necessary to make things feel 'automatic' (Noble and Watkins 2003, pp. 530-534).

Noble and Watkins favour the concept of *habituation* and they argue that such an approach can account for how conscious behaviour can become unconscious. They concede that much of what people do remains unconscious, however, taking the example of the process of physical training they argue that we have the capacity to reflect upon our practical sense (Noble and Watkins 2003, p. 535). Moreover, learning the 'feel for the game' takes time and enormous application often based on tedious processes of learning for it to become 'second nature'. In this, competence is achieved when we return much of the bodily process to the realm of the unconscious. Thus, they argue, there is a dialectical relationship of bringing behaviour to consciousness in order to alter it, and then habituating that behaviour. By dialectically 'remembering' and then 'forgetting', a 'disengagement' is developed. This, they argue, is an indispensable precondition for continued activity (Noble and Watkins 2003, p. 535). Since it is not plausible to think about all the actions we need to undertake (since we wouldn't actually then have time to partake in practice) they assert that this disengagement saves time and, as a partly conscious state, allows actions to subside below the level of consciousness. This, the authors suggest, allows for the possibility of returning habituated activity to the realm of consciousness since we can forget things because we can recall them (Noble and Watkins 2003, p. 536). Furthermore, they contend that *habituation* could assist in exploring the links between mimicry, repetition, experimentation and appropriation. Perhaps this interpretation of *habituation* may explain how some aspirant mobiles assimilate middle-class mores during their mobility trajectories?

In a similar way Akram (2012, p. 55) wants to make the unconscious aspects of the *habitus* explicit and, like Noble and Watkins, show that Bourdieu's notion of practice is over-reliant on the unconscious. But she

contends that if habit is rejected in place of reflexivity a situation she calls 'hyper-deliberation' may arise such that agents would be caught in a continual process of deliberation, thereby resulting in mental paralysis (Akram, 2012, p. 55). Thus, she suggests that a 'mediatory process' exists that can be seen as a form of 'social conditioning' or of constraints and enablements. Citing Sayer, she challenges Archer's position of privileging reflexivity (see above, Section 2.3) thus avoiding situations where agents are passively moulded by social structures (Akram 2012, p. 50). Whereas, she suggests, they can be shown to actively negotiate them, to absorb them through habit, or through unconscious internalisation. Thus, the structure and agency debate, which Bourdieu's *habitus* seeks to sidestep, remains contentious around issues of non, or pre-reflexive habituation and when placed alongside conscious deliberation. Here, Akram concludes that what is needed is an in-depth and subtle understanding of the aforementioned 'mediation process' and of factors other than reflexivity (Akram 2012, p. 51). Bourdieu's embodied *habitus* may indeed be a construct of value, but as my comments in the opening vignette of the thesis suggest (see pages 6-11) the formation and depth of an individual's habituated embodiment, if problematic to them, may be so inaccessible and impenetrable as to require explanations and approaches, perhaps from disciplines other the sociology and social theory (see Baumeister 1993; Steinmetz 2006; Fourny 2000).

Osterlind (2008) provides a further critique of Bourdieu's *habitus* arguing (much like Freud) that patterns of continuity are important in guaranteeing a certain degree of stability for individuals and for society as a whole.[62] However, she seeks to explore the times when stability potentially leads to stagnation. Interestingly, she uses psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic terms such as *internalised parents* as a lifelong part of the personality that affects the capacity to change the self.

[62] The thesis recognises the importance of Freud in relation to Bourdieu and the obvious overlaps in discussing the latter's Theory of Practice. However, as I have indicated earlier, I consider a formal discussion of Freud's work to be outside the scope of the thesis.

Sociologically however, personality problems are described in terms of *internalised* social structures working to maintain the status quo or *doxa*.

The author challenges the assumption that the personal and political, individual and society are separate, asserting that the inner structures of the self often serve to maintain social structures. Moreover, as discussed earlier in Bourdieusian terms, she asks where these inner structures come from, and how they can be so enduring and sustainable. Concurring with much of earlier the discussion on Bourdieu's *habitus*, Osterlind argues that its main purpose is in filtering all impressions and expressions with stability and continuity (Osterlind 2008, p. 73). In this way social patterns are inherited and experienced as 'natural' and this is most obviously shown when we are insecure or uncomfortable in social situations, or when old habits are maintained even though they may no longer work. She asserts that it is the early experiences that work as a defence against change and avoidance strategies are seen as mainly non-conscious (Osterlind 2008, p. 74).

However, these contributions and critiques of the *habitus* and Bourdieu's emphasis on the unconscious may be questionable, or more a matter of emphasis and degree. The quotation I used in Chapter 1, Section 1.5, does seem to accommodate the possibility for a conscious reflexive assessment of one's disposition. Thus

> "Aside from the effects of certain social trajectories, *habitus* can also be transformed via socio-analysis, i.e., via an awakening of consciousness and a form of "self-work" that enables the individual to get a handle on his or her dispositions." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, p. 133).

This would seem to show that individuals can apply what Bourdieu terms 'socio-analysis' and to enable them to reflexively work on their own *habitus* at the level of consciousness, in conjunction with the unconscious (see above Section 2.4). It implies that it is possible to 'work through' and dislodge unwanted and ingrained thought processes and feelings reflexively, and to bring about beneficial psychical changes to the

embodied self. In considering how aspirants might have *internalised* the predisposition to become upwardly mobile and to then put this into practice, it would seem that the above discussion goes some way to unpicking the constituent elements in such processes. However, for the temporal, historical thread of the embodied self to be short-circuited and for the past experiences (now manifest in current practice) to be confronted, it would seem that Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (looking at *habitus* through his lens of the unconscious) is knocking on the door of another established discipline. I consider this briefly below.

Steinmetz (2006) and Fourny (2000) both question the way in which Bourdieu seems to be distancing himself from the field of psychoanalysis, and thus the work of Freud and Lacan, while using very similar concepts and terms, such as 'socio-analysis'(see the above quotation), in the field sociological research. Furthermore, Bourdieu's early rejection of Freud's psychoanalytic theory and examination of the unconscious appears to shift to an acceptance of its intrinsic merits later in his life (Steinmetz 2006, p. 445). Steinmetz also notes that Bourdieu uses the terms 'disavowal' and 'denegation'. Freud also uses these terms in recognising a particular kind of resistance to the deepest layers of repressed material in which the patient disavows memories even in reproducing them, and where the repressed image or idea can come into consciousness on condition that it is negated. That is, it involves a lifting of the repression, though not accepting what is repressed. The subject still refuses to recognise the negated object as an intrinsic part of the self (Steinmetz 2006, p. 445).

Thus, Steinmetz suggest that Bourdieu's treatment of Freudian psychoanalysis "more often takes the form of admitting Freudian terminology and some psychoanalytic arguments into his texts while surrounding these passages with rhetorical devices that seem to condemn psychoanalysis" (Steinmetz 2006, p446). Throughout his paper, Steinmetz (also Fourny 2000) cite several similarities and parallels between Bourdieu's and Freud's work.

From these accounts the authors argue that while attempting to avoid an inside/outside problematic, Bourdieu's use of the *habitus* is perhaps a negation of his attempts to avoid discussing the unconscious as used in psychoanalysis, and thus in the way Freud discusses it. That is, Bourdieu says he does not use it in this way, but in fact Steinmetz (2006) and Fourny (2000) both show from their findings that he does.

In returning to the context of social aspiration and mobility, how might this discussion be relevant? I suggest a possible connectedness here by contextualising this denegation and disavowal theme to my earlier discussion on what is my secondary theme in the thesis, the manipulative nature of *meritocracy*. I therefore suggest that this could also be considered as a form of 'historical unconsciousness', but in the form of social and individual denial by working-class aspirants. That is, speculatively, some aspirant mobiles may realise intuitively that they are disadvantaged in seeking personal betterment and in trying to develop a 'feel for the (middle class) game' (Bourdieu 1990). However, they strive nonetheless since they consider that the dominant economic, social, cultural order, in its class domination, leaves them little option, particularly in their day-to-day existential struggles for legitimacy and recognition, which has denied them in their classed embodiment. Furthermore, that in so doing, they can be said to be denying the collective power of their class, which, arguably, does not 'need' to aspire or seek to be mobile since it could, at the right historical junctures, be shown to 'see through' this manipulation and seek other courses of (collective) action to resolve class inequalities and domination.

This theme of class denial in the perceptions and practice of aspirant mobiles throws up other issues of 'individualism' which I discussed earlier in Sections 2.2 and 2.3. The unconscious in Bourdieusian terms may seem useful in showing the *habitus* as avoiding structure/agency dichotomy issues. However, a collective class 'unconsciousness' would also seem to be an interesting line of enquiry in considering the conditions and extent to which this might then interplay with a collective 'consciousness' in class

terms and to explore the implications of this in socio-cultural and political terms.

2.6 Working-class aspirant mobiles' internalised perceptions of middle-class 'success'.

A key objective emerging from the above discussions has been to identify the ways and means by which aspirant mobiles unconsciously internalise and consciously perceive ideas of 'success'. What might these notions of success be in classed societies where disparities in wealth and opportunity are starkly differentiated and dominated by a middle-class that appears to distinguish itself using class signifiers? (see Atkinson 2015; Bradley and Devadason 2008; Bradley 2007; Carbone 2011; Loveday 2015; Savage 2015). In Chapter 1, Section 1.2, I speculatively articulated the parameters of and the motives for working-class aspirational endeavour and social mobility. However, these now need to be made more transparent and explicit.

For brevity, I take an obvious and fundamental starting point of where ideas of middle-class success might germinate, by considering studies of working-class social mobility from within the education sector. I include research findings from primary school level through to secondary and on to higher education. Much of the assumed superiority of the middle-class can be shown in this research. However, aspirants' desires for achievement and success, need to be measured alongside the anxiety and trepidation that potentially able working-class pupils and students experience. They are, in effect, 'set up' to be culturally coerced to assimilate (internalise) and mimic the dispositions and practices of the middle-class (See Allen 2013; Calarco 2011; Kupfer 2015; Loveday 2015; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003; Morley 1997; Reay 1997b, 2001, 2013; Reay, Crozier, Clayton 2009, 2010; Stahl 2014). Of course, it is not all one-way traffic, since this research shows this class assimilation process to be fuzzy, incomplete and often challenged, with alternative discourses that defend the working-class, and where pride and collective autonomy is expressed (see Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009; Stahl 2016).

However, this research also shows that working-class perceptions of the 'good life' and wellbeing are often based on specific assumptions about what the 'good life' is, and how it can be achieved. Obvious class-defined goals such as educational achievement through academic qualifications; a good secure job; a comfortable lifestyle and the accompanying material trappings are all evident. However, as Reay asserts, in the face of widening inequalities

> "Social mobility has a totemic role [in UK society] not just figuring powerfully in the strategic policies of our political elites but also capturing the popular imaginary" (Reay 2013, p. 664).

Bradford and Hey (2007) note that 'discourses of success' are, almost by definition, normative and dominant in successful schools. They speculatively use the term 'psychological' capital that they say is differentially distributed and constituted in practices of self-esteem, confidence and self-belief.[63] These are shown to be generated in a range of settings. including the family, community and through friendships. Importantly however, they suggest that these can be transformed into qualities such as resilience and those dispositions needed to cope with the exigencies of contemporary classed life (Bradford and Hey 2007 p. 600).

Moreover, from interviews with aspirational school pupils, they formulate what they term the 'vocabularies of success'. From these responses a range of qualities are recorded including fortitude and determination. 'Trying hard' is valorised along with other qualities including 'stickability', cleverness developed from effort, rather than from natural talent, resilience, patience, tolerance, perseverance, not giving up, and getting focused. Their interviewees, predominantly from working-class Indian and Pakistani communities in the UK, stressed that while getting pushed forward by other people may be advantageous, the capacities for success need to come from "within yourself" (Bradford and Hey 2007, p. 608). Of course, It would be fanciful to assert that such qualities are the preserve

63 See Chapter 3 for a discussion on levels of self-esteem and self-worth in relation to social class.

of the middle-class. However, with greater available cultural (*symbolic*) capital in the social *field* it would be interesting to explore empirically which of these qualities would be seen as most important. Would they be the *internalised* character attributes deemed necessary for success, or those unconscious, 'forgotten as history' forms of legitimacy entitlement that give middle-class pupils/students the edge?

Further research examples apply. Allen's research of working-class female pupils in 'progressive' schools shows how they are drawn to fame and the glamour of celebrity and tasteful fashion, while also being considered naive by school staff (Allen 2013, p.768). The research by Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) can be contrasted with Allen's research. They found that the most able female school pupils' ambitions were being jeopardised by their mothers' anxieties about their own past school lives and their inability to understand the 'nuanced ways' of their daughters' school regimes. As Reay (2013), reminds us, as a rhetorical or policy mechanism for redressing class inequality, social mobility merely scratches the surface of the problem and is unable to compensate for the structural inequalities that persist.

2.7 Personal vignettes.

Vignette 2.1.

Here, I recall an unpleasant interchange while studying for my 'A' Level examinations. I was a twenty-six-year-old mature student at the time and was still finding my way in college, being largely ill-equipped in terms of appropriate academic skills. However, I learned some valuable, though painful lessons as a result of this encounter...

It was 1973 in Liverpool, and I had cause to visit the city's central reference library to do some research for an essay I needed to write. I approached one of the librarians and asked for some help. His demeanour immediately gave the impression that he was very knowledgeable and experienced, but he came across, to me at least, as very aloof. Admittedly,

I was very unsure of myself in terms of knowing which books might be appropriate for researching my subject.
After asking me some probing questions on the topic area I became aware that I was repeatedly replying in a circumspect fashion, and prefixing my replies with the phrase "Well, you know'. I must have sounded very monotonal and unclear about what I wanted because very soon he became exasperated saying "No! Actually, I don't know, and if you can't be more specific then I can't waste any more time with you!" I felt embarrassed and humiliated. It was an intensely demeaning moment for me in a very intimidating and studiously high-brow cultural environment. It put me off going to the library for many weeks and I felt the shame of the encounter to my core. His condescending attitude towards me left an indelible scar that has stayed in my memory to this day. (I consider the emotional nature of shame in Chapter 3).

This kind of encounter emphasises the mismatch of dispositions and embodiments (habitus), in this case, relating to the field of academic knowledge where this knowledge is power and the class differentials that can ensue can conflict with one another. The patronising display of class domination administered to (upon) me by the librarian can be seen as typical of such encounters. It could be said that I simply lacked the academic awareness, experience and study tools to engage in a meaningful dialogue. That is, I lacked the 'intellectual capital' to enable me to tune into the librarian's mind set, cultural field and habitus that would surely have won me over to him and garnered his help. I was clearly not on his wavelength.

But perhaps, when reflecting upon, and rationalising this encounter, in different class and cultural ways neither of us were directly at fault. Perhaps I should have challenged the librarian for his patronising manner? Or perhaps, if my preparation had been more considered, it would certainly have helped the librarian to help me more. This was one of my first emotionally charged encounters with high-brow nature of academia and its class-derived cultural domination.

In later years my aspirational trajectory took me further away from my class origins and, imperceptibly, enabled me to better manage challenging academic research enquiries. However, experiencing these kinds of middle-class academic environment had come late for me. I had moved from garage workshop to further, then higher education as a mature student, having worked for ten years in a manual trade and other types of work that required limited academic skills. Thus, it took me years of adaptation and reflection; of questioning my inner-self and identity, and many similarly visceral encounters before things began to change. In many subtle ways, by increasingly mingling with educated peers, and being able to confidently 'play the game' of being a student, I was 'becoming' someone different. In many respects, I am still 'becoming' an academic.

Yet this personal account seems to say as much about the reflexive potential and character of the aspirant, and their embodied *habitus* as it does about the impacts of cultural capital, social class differentiation and domination and the nature of subjugation in classed society. Aspirational endeavour and striving to be socially mobile can bring about significant challenges and adjustments to the aspirant's embodied self. It can test specific aspects of character when in the proximity of unfamiliar middle-class values and cultural settings. In this regard, trying to analytically separate the two aspects of determinant cultural practices and norms from an aspirant's embodied states and dispositions is clearly complex and problematic [64]. Perhaps a more effective dynamic, indeed, dialectical interpretation of such examples of the class divide, is to place them together and to see the juxtaposition and gulf of difference in the moment of encounter.

[64] However, it is not the intention here to engage in a diverse theoretical debate about the neurological shape and forms of reflexivity as a phenomenological construct.

Vignette 2.2.

Here I seek to historically position my own habitus, aspirational endeavour and potential mobility in a reflexive fashion. However, this leaves much room for further introspection...

After some years gaining academic qualifications and socialising within a middle-class friendship network, I gradually internalised many of the social and cultural attributes of that class. How did this occur and manifest itself? I think it changed me intellectually and marginally raised my level of confidence and self-assurance. I was eventually appointed in 1989 to an academic post where the majority of my colleagues were middle-class. However, many aspects of my working-class self still remained as 'residual' embodiments of my previous life. I still ''lived in' my old head in many ways and could easily 'flip back' to being who I used to be. Was this a barrier to my mobility? The socio-cultural unfamiliarity and angst that I regularly felt was not simply about the new or unfamiliar working practices of the organisation. It was more to do with the 'symbolic capital' in evidence and the nuanced and unspoken social and cultural ways of 'doing things'; the verbal and practice-based exchanges that took place, and how these were taken as 'given' by the majority in the organisation.

Experiencing these fine distinctions; the unfamiliar and middle-class-biased mores and practices, I felt strangely uncomfortable and out of my depth in my sense of self, as the psychical and job-related pressures to adapt became apparent. Occasionally, as in my earlier contacts with middle-class friends, I could smile and put on a front (or mask) in order to cope. But the discomfort I felt in these workplace encounters persisted. I constantly reflected on how I might be more accepted and thus able to avoid being seen as a 'fish-out-of-water' or an 'imposter' (see Chapter 4) and an unsuitable/inadequate' appointee. In these ways I struggled to make the necessary ontological adjustments and to develop coping strategies to fully integrate into this new socio-cultural setting.

This struggle to adapt, or to change my ways of being in order to be accepted and to 'belong', was an ontological and existential matter

because I felt to affect the very core of my being. It consisted of a profound (sometimes sudden and stark, other times lingering and gradual) dispositional change in myself, whereby I had to grow to accept and rationalise the organisation's orthodoxy. Not only did I feel coerced to adopt a range of codes of practice, but I also had to accept this prevailing organisational doxa, constituting an array of unfamiliar middle-class value-laden assumptions and approaches that formed the day-to-day life; the lived experience, and culture of the organisation. The overriding cultural message seemed to be: "This is the way we do things in this organisation". Thus, the appointee either had to learn to fit in, or stymie their career progression, or even leave the organisation.

In this disconcerting and often emotionally demanding and internal struggle the appointee's *habitus* is challenged. This process of developing a sense of class 'belonging' and in securing and stabilising a changing sense of self and identity, also involves a struggle for self-affirmation, and can create ontological disruption and anxieties that can be difficult to control (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 90-98).

How the appointee is seen by colleagues and peers during this process may never be discussed; it may never be entirely clear and known, but impressions will have been formed, nonetheless. The nature of the working-class *habitus* would have been exposed, evaluated, and surreptitiously judged. As discussed in Chapter 1, such forms of class disparity can be seen as symbolic domination (Bourdieu 1994, p. 168; also, Sayer, 2005). Such cultural (classed) dissonance would be likely to develop and persist in workplaces where overt selection policies based on class and social background are practiced. Where aspirant mobiles are appointed on the basis of their potential and proven abilities alone and were their social class disposition or background is not a criterion for selection, then a more 'even playing field' and culture is likely to develop (Knights and Clarke 2013; Loveday 2015). However, honourable and non-discriminatory selection procedures do not always block out class-based biases. Thus, while a positive and non-discriminatory approach and culture can, and often does exist, the discordance for working class aspirants will

be difficult to overcome. Also, the extent of cultural, dispositional and character displacement may be problematic and contradictory both to the aspirant and to the organisation as a whole.

Vignette 2.2 shows the nature and validity of conscious deliberation and the reflexive discussions within the self. Indeed, as Sayer (2005, p. 27) suggests, this may well be the *normal* process of reflexivity in the 'mulling over' of difficult or viscerally-challenging issues and situations as a process of osmosis and of shaping and reshaping.[65] However, the vignette also shows how reflexivity can be undertaken alongside the unconscious cultural biases bound up in the middle-class mores of organisations. In these contexts, the gap between expectations, assumptions and actual experience may generate not only a need for conscious reflection and deliberation, but as Elder-Vass points out, a clear need, or imperative, to modify the *habitus* (Elder-Vass 2007, p. 329, citing Bourdieu 2000, p. 149). Given the *internalised* and habitual nature of dispositions that form in the self over time, this critical idea of *habitus* modification may take a number of forms, degrees and timescales depending upon the specific history, character, internal challenges and mobility trajectory experienced by the individual aspirant.

2.8 Conclusion.

In this chapter, I have evaluated Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and considered the reflexive potential of the embodied self and how this self-examination can benefit aspirant mobiles throughout their mobility trajectories. I have also presented a number of brief critiques of the *habitus* to assess the extent of determinism in Bourdieu's interpretation of the concept. I considered this an important inclusion since the central thrust of the thesis is in assessing the impacts of the structural barriers of

[65] However, any discussion of the 'unconscious' would seem to necessitate the inclusion of the work of Freud and psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, it has been necessary to bracket out this 'grand narrative' if only to retain the specific focus of the thesis. But it is important to recognise that Bourdieu's work on embodied disposition as 'history forgotten as history' is a form of unconsciousness or pre-consciousness.

class in blocking or enabling social mobility that the forms of *internalisation* can bring about in habituated practice. Principally here, I have used the work of Crossley (2001), Chandler (2013), Sweetman (2003), Elder-Vass (2007), and Beck (1992). I then followed this with three brief critiques of reflexivity, specifically, those of Giddens (1991), Archer (2003) and Taylor (1989). Taken together these show how reflexivity might materialise as a mechanism of self-evaluation for aspirant mobiles. I have also included personal accounts of my own experiences of reflexivity. This was followed by an assessment of the reflexive *habitus* and its potential limits in contexts where aspirants might need to consider such self-examinations.

I noted that this discussion on *habitus, field* and *reflexivity* needs to include an examination of emotions which I briefly mentioned in Sections 2.1 and 2.7. The literature appears to show that aspirants may need to reflect on their emotional makeup and if necessary, to raise their levels of self-regard and self-esteem (see Chapter 3). Aspirants may need to reflexively engage in significant personal change or strengthen their inner resolve (see Vignette 2.2), in order to protect themselves against the vulnerabilities derived from class domination during class transition. Sennett and Cobb (1973, p. 30) consider how their respondents feel socially exposed and vulnerable in their upward mobility. The authors suggest that one message resulting from these class vulnerabilities is that people might feel happier if they didn't try to push themselves to socially aspire (1973, p. 31). The implications of this are clearly crucial in assessing the limitations and psychical impacts of the meritocracy.

Thus, mobile aspirants can be shown to face a number of challenges that impact on their sense of self during their mobility trajectory. For example, they may shift from a parochial-minded working-class background to the more 'refined' and privileged ethos of higher education, or to a professional world of work with its accustomed middle-class lifestyle, practices, values and entitlements. In such contexts this unfamiliarity with the new *field* and its social space can generate a range of emotions for aspirant mobiles. Some will be positive, such as the injection of pride

through achievement. However, there can be negative states of being such as feelings of self-consciousness, guilt, betrayal, shame, anger and belittlement and a potential double isolation of no longer fitting in with family and friends, nor with the new world they have entered (Atkinson 2015, p. 116; Friedman 2016, pp. 141-142). Bourdieu referred to this painful breaking away from, and rejecting of the parental mould of being, as *habitus clive'*. Here, the *habitus* is struggling to make sense of these contradictory psychical forces, and an incongruency with dispositions of the past compared with aspirants' emerging new life (see Mailman 2017; Friedman 2016).

The discussion in this chapter has focused on the reflexive nature of social and personal transformation. This shows how aspirants can be active change agents of their own destiny, since they are motivated, for a number of reasons, to change themselves as social beings in a classed society. However, in changing their class surroundings and culture, it is not always clear whether, and how, they may also change themselves in terms of their identity, values, attitudes, and how the display of specific emotions may impact on their changing sense of self. This is crucial to this examination of class mobility and will be considered in later chapters. This also suggests that there is scope for further empirical research to establish a more complete picture of aspirants' feelings and states of being when engaging in a reflexive analysis of their embodied selves and how the tensions of aspirational striving affects the *habitus* of aspirants.

Chapter 3. Working-class aspirants' perceptions of self-worth, self-regard and self-esteem during class transition.

3.1 Introduction.

The previous chapter considered the ways in which the aspirant's embodied self and character could be reshaped by adopting a reflexive approach. It was considered that such reflexivity could help in mitigating or resolving the tensions, contradictions and ambivalences within the aspirant's *habitus*. Here however, I expand upon these concerns of the embodied *aspirant self* by considering aspirants' perceptions of self-worth and their emotional responses to, and struggles against, the impositions of structural barriers in the psychic landscape of class that I discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 (Bourdieu 1984; Allen 2014 and 2015; Friedman 2016; Sayer 2005; Reay 2005).

It is also important to consider this specific 'emotional' landscape experienced by the aspirant in terms of the psychodynamics involved in striving to be upwardly mobile. In so doing, I reveal the contradictory and 'tension-bound' nature of class mobility. In addition, I consider the de-stabilising factors that may prevent mobility, since it must not be assumed that aspirational intent will, in and of itself, bring about a comfortable and seamless change in class position and class identity.

The main focus here, therefore, is to examine the aspirant's perception of their own self-worth and value as they progress towards and through class transition. I provide examples of how self-regard and self-esteem are threatened when confronted by what are, in effect, significant, yet often nuanced, ontological challenges of class. It is also important to understand the strength and degree of emotional impact that can arise for mobiles in the re-shaping of identity during this crucial ontological transformation. This chapter, along with Chapters 4 and 5, focus on these matters in greater depth.

Firstly, therefore, I evaluate aspirants' sentiments and perceptions of self during class transition and provide a background to the emotionality of

aspirant endeavour. Friedman (2016, p. 129) refers to this as "the psychic and emotional life" of the aspirant. There is evidence to show that the emotional fabric of the self is embedded in the hitherto discussed embodied self. The relationship between thoughts, feelings, moods, emotions and behaviours, are, for the purposes of the discussion, deemed to be closely linked. In the case of the emotional makeup of the aspirant, it becomes evident that the way in which a person reacts to a given situation is, in large part a product of their early socialisation or internalisation (see Section 2.5), and hence to the ongoing development of the embodied self (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007; Burkitt 2012; Akram 2012; Noble and Watkins 2003). I consider the impact of emotions such as shame, guilt, envy, jealousy, and pride in social contexts where aspirants are confronted by forms of class domination that may be shown to trigger such emotions.

Secondly, I examine what factors link to issues of self-worth and self-esteem and related emotions such as shame and guilt with regard to class, to determine whether these figure in the context of aspirational endeavour. I look at the evidence as to whether working-class aspirants are prone to experiencing low self-esteem. However, as considered earlier, the extent to which this trait may be evident is likely to vary markedly from one aspirant to another.

The third and final section includes a further selection of personal accounts of specific contexts where my emotions were displayed with regards to self-esteem and feelings of self-worth and self-belief. These experiences show the tensions found in processes of upward mobility and during class transition. In addition, the emotional facets of selfhood located in class-related experiences of mobility are evaluated. These show the sometimes-visceral nature and injuries of a classed life exacerbated during mobility.

It is important to note that some of the secondary sources I use in the particular critique on self-esteem have unavoidably come from within the discipline of Social Psychology. The reason this has arisen is principally because of the dearth of relevant sociological material available in

examining the emotionality of self-esteem. The objective here, therefore, is to contextualise a range of emotions in situations of social mobility.

3.2 Aspirants' sentiments and perceptions of the self during class transition, background and context.

Here I examine some of the familiar emotions that aspirant mobiles might experience when feeling uneasy in middle-class settings, and to evaluate their impact. I consider this useful for the following reasons. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge how structures and embodiments affect the *habitus* in emotional terms and in the reflexive lives of aspirants during their 'short-range' or 'long-range' mobility, class transition and self-transformation.[66] Secondly, to exclude any discussion of emotional responses and challenges to mobility would leave the analysis of the embodied *aspirant-self* incomplete. I revisit this matter again when discussing issues of authenticity among the upwardly mobile in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5 when examining the ontological anxieties of aspirants in their mobility trajectories.

Sayer (2005) notes that emotions and sensitivities exist despite class divisions. So, it is important to see how they are manifest in contexts of upward mobility. Referencing class domination, Sayer states that where compassion is directed 'downwards' to the weaker party, pity can become condescension or humiliation (Sayer 2005, p. 147). He suggests that there are different forms of envy and resentment and even when justified, he says that resentment can be more painful than acceptance for those who have been exploited or excluded. However, in this way, he suggests that the attempts of the dominated to maintain goodwill and avoid this resentment can actually help to maintain their domination and indicate class deference towards the dominant (Sayer 2005, p. 150). Thus, for aspirants, they may wish to reflexively assess the motives for their mobility since their striving may be based on one or more forms of envy. This may lead them to lose sight of why they are actually aspirational and socially mobile in the first place.

[66] See Chapter 1, Section 1.2 for a description of these forms of mobility.

However, according to Steedman, (see Sayer 2005, p. 150) caution is needed to ensure that envy is not confused with injustice. Thus, there is the form of envy linked to the struggle of people who are in a state of dispossession and are seeking to gain what is unequivocally seen as rightfully theirs. Framed in this way, envy can, perhaps, be justified on the basis of attempting to alter a world that has produced considerable inequality and unfulfilled potential. Again, in the clamour of mobility and in becoming middle-class, aspirants may need to self-check the rationale upon which they are conforming to the prevailing rhetoric of meritocracy, social climbing and one-up-man-ship.

More pertinent still is the emotion of 'shame' that can emerge when aspirants move in middle-class circles. Here, Sayer notes that shame has been described as the most social of emotions and a mechanism of social integration, making individuals conform to external judgements and norms. Furthermore, he argues that shame is a particularly private and reflexive emotion which invokes an evaluation of the self by the self (Sayer 2005, p. 152). It is evoked by the failure of an individual or group to live according to their values, or commitments to others. This makes them believe themselves to be defective. According to Williams it can be a response to real or imagined contempt, derision or avoidance of real or imagined others, particularly those whose values are respected (see Sayer 2005, p. 152).

To act in a shameful way is to invite the contempt of others, but primarily self-contempt. It may be prompted by a sense of 'lack' and may be a largely unarticulated feeling, existing below the threshold of awareness, and an emotion that is difficult to get in touch with. But Sayer indicates that it is still capable of blighting the person's life in terms of the self-other relationship (Sayer 2005, p. 153). Sayer suggests that such 'low-level shame' can shade into low self-esteem and that this is particularly common among subordinated groups.[67] However, other research I cite

[67] Although Sayer does not state it explicitly, his reference to 'subordinated groups' here might be taken to include the working-class, since the substantive

below suggests that no clear correlation exists between class and levels of self-esteem (see Section 3.3).

The discussion on structural determinants in Chapter 1 is also relevant here in structurally binding shame to class-based sentiments and specific states of being. Examples include aesthetic shame, such as how one dresses and looks; performative shame, in terms of how one conducts oneself, or moral shame, in which people are expected to live in acceptable ways and to conform to specific (often shifting) standards. Bourdieu's work on the judgement of taste is significant in this respect (see Bourdieu 1984; also, Skeggs 2004, p. 108 and pp. 141-152; Lawler 2005).

However, other forms of shame are also evident. For example, it can be a product of the internalisation of the views of others, which may generate contempt for one's own sense of self and identity (Sayer 2005, p. 154). As indicated above, this is relevant to earlier discussions on class, insofar as class inequalities can mark or stigmatise a person through a shameful failure to conform to the current *doxa* and normative *signifiers* of class. Mobile aspirants may be, or may become, sensitive to how they are seen and judged when in middle-class circles. They may, perhaps, feel they are being subtly coerced into 'refining' themselves in order to conform, with the promise of being accepted if they do so, and thus to feel that they legitimately 'belong". As indicated in Section 1.4, in the context of an 'approved' use of language, this kind of conformity would seem to be based upon an emotionally powerful form of *symbolic domination* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). The work of Schubert (2012), Reay (1998b, 2013) and particularly Lawler (2005) is useful here in showing, for example, how emotions such as 'disgust' can be experienced by working-class aspirants when circulating in the social and cultural preserves of the middle class. This 'classed disgust' or contempt, is often misjudged as immoral. For example, from the 1950s onwards working-class men were shamed when their wives had to go out to work,

discussion in his text relates to class, while also including considerations of gender, sexuality and race.

suggesting that they were 'unable to keep them' on one wage! Similarly, in education, a combination of shame and low self-worth can be felt by those who fail to progress or harbour the threat of failure. In this respect it can be considered to be a structurally generated effect (see Calarco 2011). In Calarco's study, working-class students are expected to compete on equal terms with middle-class 'others' and, at the same time are, implicitly, expected to fail (see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Felski's research on identity and shame among the lower middle-class provides some further examples that show familiar sentiments to those shown among the upwardly mobile (Felski 2000). She recounts the experiences of being 'tortured' by the constant struggle to 'keep up appearances' on a low income. She views this as a 'status anxiety' based on a "craven respect for high culture without any real knowledge of its content" (See also Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 23). Here the anxiety is seen as an internalisation of the 'strictures of authority'; an ultimate example of the psychic self-regulation of a class and the confusing codes of class distinction (Felski 2000, pp. 35-36).[68]

Felski argues that by focusing on the emotion of shame it raises broader questions about identity. For example, does class mobility imply that it has a contingency? She suggests that it does, not simply in economic and sociological terms, but the cultural and psychological dimensions mean that it involves feelings, and a complex psychological matrix acquired in childhood (Felksi 2000, p. 39). She cites Steedman (see Felski 2000, p. 39) in pointing out that class consciousness is ingrained from an early age in the psychological rhythms and flows of the mother-child relationship. Also, that class-based attitudes of fatalism, perhaps a form of pathological determinism, resentment, envy and shame are inexorably transmitted from the working-class mother to the child. Thus, she argues, working-class mobiles can remain 'haunted' by these psychic markings of childhood and are unable to celebrate their class origins because these origins

[68] This reference to anxiety in this form also has a bearing on my discussion regarding class-related existential angst in Chapter 5.

represent a material and psychic impoverishment which they may seek to, or indeed, be glad to escape from. Furthermore, she suggests that such class origins may no longer provide a source of positive identity (Felski 2000, p. 37).

However, again, depending on the context and the perspective of the aspirant, class origins can often be valorised (see Vignette 3.2 on a rationale for the glorification of working-class origins). But why would the aspirant seek to do this? Perhaps it is because there is a deep-rooted need to reclaim the core, or authenticity, of one's class background? Thus, as a result of class transition, one's sense of class identity is in danger of being obliterated by an erosion of social class 'belonging' (see Chapter 4 for a further discussion on this issue). However, such 'nostalgia' may be considered superficial, false, skin deep and contradictory; a confused form of inverted distaste for where the aspirant is heading, and which may be viewed as a curiosity by more 'refined' middle-class observers! (See Friedman 2016, pp. 137, 138). Perhaps such 'retrospective glances' are merely attempts to cover up the reality of the aspirant's class insecurities, which also hide, in terms of class signification and orientation, an excruciating sense of being lost or displaced? I explore the existential implications of this issue in Chapter 5.

However, Felski's work on guilt and shame is useful in highlighting the entangled emotions accompanying class mobility. She defines 'guilt' as a sense of inner badness caused by a transgression of moral values, and 'shame' as a sense of failure or 'lack' in the eyes of others (see also Sayer 2005). Felski contends that shame is related to violations of social codes and a consequent fear of exposure, embarrassment, and humiliation (Felski 2000). For example, according to Lynd (see Felski 2000, p. 39) shame can be invoked by the most trivial of events, yet it can produce excruciating dis-ease among the poor who experience shame when their poverty is exposed before the eyes of others; a discrepancy between certain values and norms seen by others to be 'superior'. She suggests that the opportunities for shame increase dramatically with forms of social mobility. An infinite array of chances of failure portray the fact that

aspirants feel they don't belong (at least in the interim or transition) to the emerging, and seemingly more refined environment, nor to the one they are leaving behind (see also Friedman 2016, 137). Furthermore, Lynd considers this fracturing of old identity and the way shame plays a part in this. The feeling of shame, as a single life experience, throws light on the whole personality structure. In this, she develops a conceptualisation of identity in which a series of clues are offered. She considers this highly complex subject within psychological theory by developing the relationship between the significance of shame, with its involvement with guilt, and the concept of identity (see Felski 2000, p. 39).

So far, the discussions on class inequality and the extent of opportunities for class transition and its related challenges have underlined some key problems for the upwardly mobile. Specifically, these translate into a number of inner conflicts largely stimulated by the normative structures of the dominant middle-class (see Chapter 1). However, as I have emphasised so far, the outcome of these inner conflicts can be an ingrained and visceral sense of 'lack' (see Felski 2000; Sayer 2005). This is often accompanied by low self-regard, low self-belief, or low self-esteem and threats to the individual's self-respect (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 28-29; Sayer 2005, pp. 155-158).

However, it would also seem that some aspirants can find a strength of character and agency from the recesses of their self that enable many to overcome the structural constraints in the social and cultural *field* of class. They are able to sidestep what often appears as class fatalism or defeatism. They are able to demonstrate significant degrees of persistence and resilience which will assist them in moving away and securing a different future. This *inner resolve* will, more than likely, emerge as a result of the self-reflexive engagements and follow-on practices of self-analysis; from aspects of character that show aspirants to be highly motivated and with sufficient self-belief to persist in challenging those negative sentiments and unwanted realities of class subjugation and deterministic, fatalistic rationalisations (see Friedman, 2016, pp. 135-136).

This begs the further question as to whether specific emotions relating to changes in class embodiment need to be confronted and managed. Also, whether this is somehow instrumental in sustaining levels of motivation to succeed and to maintain sufficient levels of self-belief to press ahead, in the face of the inevitable daily challenges. That is, to have the resilience to be prepared to pull away from working-class ties; to weather the storm of potential class detachment and to face possible rejection or estrangements from family and friends and the unwanted scrutiny of middle-class others in forthcoming encounters (See Friedman, 2016, pp. 138, 140).

Of course, these outcomes may not materialise in such a disruptive manner. Some aspirants will be applauded by their family and friends who will feel proud of their social elevation and ambitions and will respect them for it. They may wish them every success in their future classed lives. Such positive responses may indeed help mobiles both psychologically and socially in dampening any feelings of self-doubt, dis-ease, and ambivalence arising from their aspirational endeavours. Aspirants may then feel that they are doing the 'right thing' and feel assured that their closely felt working-class ties can be positively preserved. Indeed, this may be essential if the process of transition is to be achievable with minimal emotional upheaval. For example, this could be realised in the particular case of 'short-range' mobility trajectories (see Friedman 2016, pp. 131, 136-137).[69]

However, in considering emotional impacts, such short-range mobility may bring little or no change; only marginal positive or negative change, on levels of self-worth or self-esteem. The aspirant may not be significantly affected in psychological or emotional terms. This may be the

[69] Friedman (2016) cites Bourdieu in referring to 'short-range' and 'long-range' mobility where the shifting state of the habitus may or may not be problematic. 'Short-range' mobility in occupational terms might be were the aspirant moves, for example, from unskilled manual working-class to skilled manual working-class. In the case of 'long-range' mobility we might see the aspirant moving over time from skilled manual working-class to professional/managerial middle-class with either abrupt or gradual transformations of the habitus.

extent of changes in the embodied self for many aspirants. Thus, in mobility terms this might be considered to be a 'successful' outcome; a manageable socio-cultural steppingstone or journey's end, depending on the ambitions of the aspirant. It might avoid any glaring fractures of *habitus* (*hysteresis*), or situations where the aspirant mobile is psychically unsettled, or experiencing ambivalence about matters of self and identity; of feeling 'out-of-place' or of feeling like an 'imposter' (see Chapter 4). Also, the impacts on the aspirant's family of origin and previous social networks may be minimal. So clearly there are strategies that aspirants can utilise to avoid excessive shaming contexts and where such 'in-betweeness' does not lead to painful and shameful experiences such as those cited in Section 3.4 (see also Mallman 2017, pp. 23-26; Chapman 2015; Morley 1997; Reay, 1997b).

However, the reverse side of this would appear to be a 'detachment' from significant others; the fallout that comes from being socially and culturally 'homeless', and the emotions that can be triggered both in the short and long term. Furthermore, despite the higher utility value that comes from enhancing their social and cultural capital, the aspirant's embodied self can be further undermined with a sense of 'not belonging', or more accurately, belonging 'incompletely' in two distinct classes. They can be said to have 'one foot in both camps, but are not fully immersed, or at home in either', since they embody conflicts generated by such cultural differences of class. The upward trajectory pits them in opposition to their old (other) selves, families and communities (Mallman 2017, p. 20; also, Friedman 2016, p. 142). Here class mobility dynamics can create a fractured *habitus* and a challenge to the ontological coherence of the self. This raises the prospect of a *disembodiment* and dislocation of the self that begs the question whether a working-class aspirant-self can, in cases of such transmutation, successfully complete the transition into a middle-class social and cultural life and to flourish therein. Indeed, as Bourdieu notes, the upwardly mobile face the prospect of a 'failure to fully assimilate into the Bourgeoisie' (Mallman 2017, p. 20).

Furthermore, Friedman states that such mobility dynamics show the aspirant trying to reconcile an array of difficult emotions and demands and facing an exhaustive amount of mental work as a solitary undertaking (Friedman 2016, p. 145). The disjuncture arising from this splitting and separating from class origins, and from familiar traditional cultural *signifiers*, presents the aspirant with anxieties that can become barriers to self-development and wellbeing. This is so since the classed self can be considered to be a split, (or fragmented) self that can, potentially, become unhinged as a result of this socio-cultural transformation.

In Chapter 2, Section 2.8, I showed how Friedman (2016) in citing Bourdieu made reference to *habitus clive'* as "a sense of self torn by contradiction and internal division" (Friedman 2016, p. 129). That is, the negative impact of social mobility on the psychic and emotional life of the aspirant as well as on the ontological coherence of the self. As Friedman says in the abstract to his paper, a divided *habitus* "helps explain how the emotional pull of class loyalties can entangle subjects in the affinities of the past". He contends that this may be why, irrespective of the rhetoric, "upward mobility may remain a state that not everyone unequivocally aspires to" (Friedman 2016, p. 129).

Friedman's article seems to be one of very few that convincingly links the self with class; with the psychological and emotional fallout during class transition and importantly, with Bourdieu's *habitus*. Friedman contends that the upwardly mobile individual is forced to reconcile an array of difficult emotions. This theoretical position follows on from the so-called *dissociative thesis* which argued that social mobility results in a high incidence of social and psychological problems (Friedman 2016, p. 133).[70]

[70] Although not directly related to class mobility, Skeggs (2004, p. 32-33) cites the work of Day on the splits in 'the self' as forms of class conflict. Day draws parallels between Freud, on the divisions in the self from the point of view of the individual psyche, and Marx from the point of view of divisions in classed society. Thus, a model of class structures is shown to link with the individual psyche. The counter view is that aspirants do not experience any problems of this kind and that they are overwhelmingly content and are rarely plagued by disequilibrium. Here, Friedman 2016, p. 133 cites Goldthorpe (1980) as holding this view.

Thus, the *habitus clive'*, or divided self, suggests that the self, while in a state of mobility, is disrupted, fractured or split and in ontological terms becomes incoherent and insecure. Clearly, this idea is complex since it is not clear the extent to which the self, in terms of the *habitus*, is able to deal with this disruption, particularly in emotional terms. Furthermore, if it is able, it is not clear whether it can continuously or intermittently manage the problem in a temporal sense.[71] However, the presumption is that each aspirant's attempts to re-adjust his/her *habitus* will be unique to the individual in the way that they approach this reflexive process (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 53- 118; Stahl 2013; Holmes 2010).

In Chapter 2, I referred to Taylor's 'inward turn' (Taylor, 1989, pp. 177-178). However, another way of understanding this is to consider how the reflexive *habitus* might function as it were, *dialectically.* In this way aspirants' personal challenges could be identified in the tensions of their specific social and personal context. They could then explore these analytically, in order to appreciate the parameters and magnitude of ensuing contradictions. This might be considered an authentic and honest search for the nub of the problem, before identifying possible solutions which might then be acted upon. However, this approach might be seen as somewhat mechanical and even simplistic when put in these terms. Nonetheless, this *dialectical* interplay between the emotional response in engaging in this way; the reasoning or rational thought that can be evoked and the potential practice necessary to make the transformative change, does illustrate the nature of the psychical arena the aspirant is reflexively coping with, in attempting to reconcile a given issue (see Holmes 2010; Reay 2005; Noble and Watkins 2003).

Thus, the aspirant's emotional makeup and internal narrative can both be shown to play a part in understanding and confronting the inner conflict, or the pressing 'social-other'-related problems that class transition can bring. Importantly, the reflexive *dialectic* will include the observations and

[71] This is a further complexity which I discuss in Chapter 5.

reflections on the contributions made by significant others in the aspirant's life. As Holmes says, emotions are felt and expressed in relations with other people and things; they are not easily managed and can emerge in ways that are overwhelming (Holmes 2010, p. 145). This is by no means an easy thing for the aspirant self to cope with.

Thus, in large part emotional relations with others can be shown to play "a more complex part in deliberations" and in forming (and re-forming) the reflexive self (Holmes 2010, p. 142). She argues that

> "people may often be unaware of, or unable to articulate the sometimes-tangled emotions that fuel and emerge from everyday interactions". (Holmes 2010, p. 145)

Furthermore, she rightly underlines the resistance or 'inertia' that can develop in the individual's psychic landscape. The difficulties in the shifting or adjusting of embodiments in the reflexive process are borne out when people do not always quickly move on to new ways of living when experiencing dissatisfactions (Holmes 2010, p. 147). Importantly, these 'new ways of living' could easily apply to the reflexive aspirant's ambitions since, as Holmes notes, individuals may develop new ways of interacting, which may be more emotionally satisfying. However, aspirants may also develop 'avoidance strategies' to sidestep the most challenging emotional aspects of their reflexive process. In this event the self (as durable *habitus*) and its sociality may fail to benefit reflexively, seeing the pain or discomfort as too psychically unsettling or ontologically frightening. In turn, such avoidance strategies may, or may not, stall the aspirant's planned upward mobility trajectory.

In temporal considerations Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) also provide some clues to the emotional aspects of reflexivity, suggesting that 'short-range' mobility is more manageable than the more problematic 'long-range' mobility, particularly when the 'trajectory' of the individual provokes abrupt, rather than gradual, transformations of the *habitus* (see Friedman 2016, p.131). Furthermore, Friedman cites Bourdieu's use of the

hysteresis effect to describe these periods of profound, large-scale changes when there is a mismatch between one's (primary) *habitus* and the *habitus* required in a new *field* (Friedman 2016, p. 131). An example of this long-range mobility trajectory might be that of a working-class student struggling emotionally with identity and cultural issues when adapting to life in an Oxbridge University college or similar highbrow academic environment. S/he may be caught in painful social limbo, of 'double isolation', from both their original and their destination class. This could be shown to be a *habitus* divided against itself and doomed to a double perception of self (see Friedman 2016, p. 132).[72]

But is it possible that the 'splitting' of the self, as described in this way, might be somewhat over-stated? Surely there are cases where aspirants' disenchantment with working-class life has grown so acute that they are more than happy, perhaps desperate, to leave the insufficiencies of working-class life and to embrace those of a more 'refined' and sophisticated, albeit unfamiliar kind? Considering this, Friedman asks

> "Does the contemporary experience of upward mobility [necessarily] imply a traumatic break with the primary *habitus*, or is it fluently incorporated into an individual's band of possible trajectories?" (Friedman 2016, p. 132).

However, once again, this question must remain open at this point, since if we are to assume that aspirant disequilibrium and trauma occurs in every case this must surely be contingent on social context and the specific emotional and psychical profile of the aspirant? In the absence of empirical research and only by detailing specific case examples, could we confirm Bourdieu's theoretical position with regard to the splitting of the *habitus* and the existential and emotional fallout from this.

Friedman's own empirical research highlights some clear emotional difficulties stemming from both short-range and long-range mobility

[72] I have adopted this example from the one that Friedman cites as being used in one of Bourdieu's texts.

trajectories. These include the belittlement and embarrassment felt by one respondent towards her parents whom, she felt, did not have the appropriate cultural *signifiers* for her to feel comfortable when they were with her in the presence of her more affluent colleagues. She was then consumed with guilt for pitying her parents. Another example shows that the emotional imprint of dislocation which can be felt less through the judgement of others and more through self-doubt which leaves some respondents with a paralytic suspicion that they somehow 'aren't good enough' (Friedman 2016, p. 140). Comments such as 'feeling like a fraud' and that a 'fall' was immanent, were also commonplace, leaving the respondent feeling forever in danger of being 'caught out'.[73] Although these respondents should have felt proud and content with their success, with many having striven against considerable odds, they frequently reported the reverse. This was compounded by an ambivalence in the belief that they did not fully 'want to belong' in their destination *field* and that success implied abandoning one's origins (Friedman 2016, p. 140). Once again here, the dominant social norm of upward mobility was coercively disrupting the self's desire for an existentially grounded sense of place or space.

One final example that Friedman illustrates, is profoundly revealing in showing the class tensions between the 'providers' of mobility and the 'recipients'. Friedman recalls the case of a respondent of working-class origins whose parents sacrificed everything to enable their daughter to attend and succeed at one of the best universities. She felt profound guilt that she was the only one in the family who would benefit from this success. But this 'survival guilt' (see also Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 161) was fuelled by her mother's passive aggression, whereby she used the sanction of inducing embarrassment to remind her daughter not to be, or behave, like somebody '*that she was not'* in terms of her class and ethnic origins.

[73] See Chapter 4 for further discussion of this aspect of aspirants' sense of self-worth and authenticity during class transition.

In this way, the upwardly mobile can be made to 'feel' their success as actually a kind of failure. Friedman notes that later in this respondent's mobility trajectory the daughter felt unable to engage with her parents and siblings on an emotional level. The guilt she was made to feel for her success also lead her to feel jealousy towards her siblings' relative immobility and shared social strife. This had actually enabled them to maintain emotional bonds which she was losing through her 'moving on' and thus her fracturing of ties with her family. In this example Friedman demonstrates the complex web of 'psychic bi-products' implied by long-range upward mobility (Friedman 2016, p. 141).

In a similar way Mallman (2017) argues that mobiles enter a moral economy and an upward trajectory that pits them in opposition to their 'old' selves. He also refers to this as a 'divided self' since increased freedom also brings increased vulnerability in relation to selfhood and identity. Bourdieu describes this social and familial schism as a 'dialectical confrontation' between a socialised self in a working-class family and an emerging middle-class self (see Mallman 2017, p. 19). The processes pertaining to learning, or in assimilating, a different class culture is rigorous, and this adaptation is seen in the inherent struggles of the upwardly mobile and in their often-qualified successes (Mallman 2017, p. 20).[74]

From these examples we can see other aspects of emotional and psychic discordance. These include an inadequacy in being unable to help others in an emotional sense; a disengagement and a distancing from envious or shame-based family cultural ties and an erosion of identity through a splitting from cultural practices. In other words, there is a disidentification from the now unacceptable family and class/cultural practices and attitudes, and subtle resentments of family and friends who may feel that the aspirant mobile has 'left us behind'.

[74] See also Sennett and Cobb (1973, pp. 206-210).

A large body of exploratory research on the emotionality in class mobility has considered the visceral experiences of self-worth, much of it in the context of educational institutions (see Abrahams 2017; Allen 2013; Reay 1997b, 2001, 2004, 2012; Kupfer 2015; Mallman 2017; Calarco 2011; Emler 2001). Bourdieu also provides vivid examples of the feelings aspirants have from social encounters that illustrate his concepts of *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 1984, 1994, 2007).[75]

As indicated earlier, the working-class pupil/student is often 'shown up' as being ill-prepared, unduly modest, socially immobile; diffident or (falsely) inarticulate in meeting the requirements set by, and the expectations of, middle-class teachers (see Calarco 2011; Stahl 2015). For example, Kupfer (2015) cites the findings of research on upward mobility in German educational institutions, showing the rifts in the embodied self and how practical changes that are made to improve matters can make things worse, creating marginality, social anomaly and deviance. Specifically, she cites Albrecht-Heide's research (see Kupfer 2015, p. 22) where employed adults were persuaded to change their work role by becoming financially dependent students. Initially, many considered this to be a regressive move. However, Albrecht-Heide concluded that the students eventually accepted this change and were reconciled with the discomfort of the experience. Kupfer also cites Bublitz who recalls a case of a working-class family who coerced their daughter to acquire knowledge from books written in an inaccessible language, expecting her to learn abstract theory that was clearly contradictory to her familiar working-class experiences and the commonplace interactions with others, making the experience oppressive rather than liberating (see Kupfer 2015, p. 22).

Finally, Kupfer cites the research of Theling who recounts female working-class students feeling lonely and not feeling part of the middle-class, yet no longer feeling part of the working-class either. She describes their feelings of isolation and disorientation and their wish to work with working-class people once they had finished their studies so as to increase their

[75] See Chapter 1, Section 1.4.

social contact with those to whom they felt an affinity (see Kupfer 2015, p. 23). Clearly, in this example, there was no positive outcome to *habitus* shift or any aspirational endeavour to become part of another class. However, this shows that in some cases allegiances to class origins can persist and remain unbroken in the wake of exposure to middle-class environments. Theling recommended that working-class students form into groups to enable collective changes in their situation in order to overcome such isolation (see Kupfer 2015, p. 23).

Furthermore, Mahony and Zmroczek (1997), in citing the difficulties of social ascent noted that a number of working-class students found some positives from their ambivalence, such as in writing and reading, which enabled opportunities for acquiring new identities. However, one student noted that while she was seen as successful by her relatives, she didn't 'feel' it within herself. Thus, in this case example there was a mixture of both admiration and resentment. This chimes with the view of Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2010) who thought that working-class academics were unlikely to feel at home in academia and that the higher their position on the academic ladder, the more alienated they would become. As mentioned earlier, both Skeggs (2004) and Chapman (2015) but also Walkerdine (1990) have similarly observed that the higher the position the more uncomfortable working-class academics feel. They cite examples of 'feeling a fraud, of getting found out and that you shouldn't really be there'. This alludes to what is often referred to as the 'imposter syndrome' which I make further reference to in Chapter 4.

In a study of working-class boys attending a grammar school in a working-class neighbourhood in Belfast, Ingram (2009) found that they had difficulty in dealing with two identities. The boys had problems relating openly and comfortably with families in the neighbourhood on the one hand and their middle-class classmates on the other. In another study Hurst (2010) argues that by succeeding in college, working-class students are effectively embracing middle-class types of work when they leave and that this appears to endorse the hegemonic view that manual labour is

'less worthy'.[76] Hurst concludes from this that education favours inequality, competition and hierarchy rather than solidarity, collective advancement and equality. From this it appears that working-class students who get into college are in a tension since they must forego their earlier, established values in order to succeed. Hurst (2010) argues that the competitive individualism required for social mobility, through the educational route, would appear to be a doomed strategy for the working-class to adopt. However, these conclusions are not without criticism. There would seem to be a dilemma here for working-class aspirants. While they may benefit from the resources (capital) that higher education offers, they also seem to be subtly coerced into striving in a competitive environment where, on entry, their classed disadvantages are often not taken into account.

Thus, in moving on to consider the major theme of the chapter of aspirants' perceptions of self-worth, these studies, pertaining to the *aspirant-self* in educational contexts, frequently show the diminishing levels of self-worth and self-esteem predominantly experienced by students from less privileged backgrounds.[77] It is tempting therefore, to assume from this that these character or personality traits are a common feature of those from the working-class and perhaps of the dispositions of working-class aspirants in general. However, given the prevailing *doxa* and legitimation of a universal ethos of competition; the high-performance targets and the normative expectations of high levels of ability, perhaps it is not surprising that many working-class people can be shown to develop a lower self-concept than their middle-class counterparts (see Reay 1997b, 2001). The nuanced differences between working-class and middle-class students are shown, for example, in the 'honourable' naivety and rejection of the importance placed on networking by working-class graduates in the context of the graduate labour market (see Abrahams 2017), or in refusing to appreciate the importance of maintaining the

[76] See my opening vignette for an account of how my own shifting sentiments about 'garage work' seem to concur with the findings of Hurst (2010).

[77] For convenience from this point, I use 's-e' as an abbreviation for 'self-esteem'.

motivation to succeed and the dangers of losing an appreciation of the value of education (see Stahl 2013).

Emler's work on the costs and causes of low s-e in the context of educational under-achievement is also relevant here (Emler 2001). Like Calarco (2011) he seeks to establish whether children fail at school, at least in part, because their self-esteem is low. He reasons that while the most important direct determinant of educational attainment is ability, it is not the whole story. Some students over-achieve while others under-achieve relative to their intellectual potential. Emler further notes that s-e has been viewed as a potential mediator of other factors such as social background. In effect it is a 'proximal' cause through which more remote influences work. It has also been used as a moderator, amplifying or dampening the impact of such variables as degrees of parental support. However, as with the conclusions of others cited below, although s-e and educational attainment are related, they do not appear to be strongly related (Emler 2001, p. 27). On average, the correlations in studies focusing on the profiles of individuals have been low.

Emler (2001) also notes that the level of global s-e does not have much impact on what young people want or try to achieve. However, it does influence what they expect to achieve in the domain of educational attainment. For example, according to McFarlin and Blaskovich (see Emler 2001, p. 28) people with low s-e want to succeed as much as anyone else. That is, they try just as hard, but unlike people with high s-e, they have an expectation of failing. This clearly chimes with Sennett and Cobb's (1973) findings cited throughout this thesis. However, because performance is influenced by effort rather than by expectations of success or failure, there appear to be few differences in the achievements of low and high s-e individuals.

Of course, the setting of these sentiments and signifiers of class are established well before entry into the world of education, and the moulding of selfhood is then further reinforced in such settings in terms of the ongoing 'durability', but also in the potential mutability of the habitus

throughout the rest of the individual's life (see Bourdieu 1984, 2005 and 2009). Such reinforcements of self and its sense of value then appears to stem from questions of how this, in turn, is formed and how significant 'classed others' perceive the individual long before any aspirational intent emerges.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Section 1.2, Sennett and Cobb (1973) argue that self-worth is significantly linked to a core sense of, and need for, legitimacy and dignity. However, in order to establish dignity in their lives and a sense of a core or 'centred self', they argue that the structurally disadvantaged appear to deal with the world in a controlled and emotionally restrained way. This is often manifested in forms of self-sabotage and defensive, or reactive, forms of rationalisation. In contrast, the authors suggest that those who are already attuned to the values of self-respect and rational control have a 'head start' in terms of emotional intelligence and emotional development. Sennett and Cobb are able to get an insight into the ambivalence and fears their respondents have in struggling to grasp the nuanced and changing nature of class (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 22).

However, a further complication is that aspirants cannot be considered to be a homogenous social group. While there may be common patterns of circumstances and context, each aspirant mobile will surely emerge with a uniquely contingent classed profile; a uniquely malleable embodied *habitus* and a unique emotional makeup? Moreover, at some stage in their trajectory, most 'long-range' mobiles will be expected to grasp the social and cultural advantages of middle-class life. As a result, it can be widely assumed, within an established *doxa* that they will cultivate that ubiquitous middle-class capacity to exude a dignified *presence of being* that comes from a class-refined and enhanced self.[78]

[78] This last point is unsubstantiated, although it is largely seen as a commonplace feature of an educated middle-class. See Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1994; also, more obliquely, Goldthorpe et al. 1969).

However, Sennett and Cobb's respondents' ruminations, contemplations and anxieties were shown to be a poignant feature of their classed lives. This showed them as trying to cope with threats to their self-worth (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 63). The adolescents among their respondents were exchanging aggressive 'put-downs' in seeking to better each other and stand out in 'games of inequality' in order to validate themselves (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 65). But they were also shown to be self-defeating or self-condemning and were experiencing feelings of inadequacy for not proving themselves 'good enough' to be loved (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 67). Furthermore, they were shown to be deluding themselves about who they were and should be or have become in life; why states of inertia, procrastination or ambivalence might have set in and why they might choose, ultimately, to do nothing about their situations.

Sennett and Cobb (1973) further concluded that their respondents formulated 'avoidance strategies' by deferring to what were, in effect, quite rational choices that could have improved their predicaments and created more flourishing lives. They also concluded that their respondents' interior emotional world seemed to be at odds with the rational world, with their emotionality taking hold of events. These painful experiences and often confounding outcomes of classed life were manifest in a low sense of achievement, ambition and satisfaction; moderate-to-high levels of anxiety (see Chapter 5) in relation to current and future prospects and ambivalence about making changes in life. Of course, as hinted earlier, these working-class behavioural dispositions are not to be viewed as universal across all sections or groups within the working-class. The point to make here however, is that these class sensibilities are underlying 'tendencies' that can often go undetected in discourses of mobility since the discreet *signifiers* of class can be made to look invisible, disguised or *misrecognised* through the structural strategies of concealment.[79]

[79] See again Bourdieu's conceptual framework (Chapter 2) and also Kuhn (2002, p. 117) noting that "Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being".

However, attempts at 'covering over the cracks' of class is, in itself, an issue of identity and authenticity that is discussed in Chapter 5.

3.3 Levels of self-worth/self-esteem among aspirant mobiles: are there any links with processes of 'internalisation'?

Given the discussion so far with regard to structures and internalisation, it would now seem pressing to consider the current social perspectives towards high and low s-e and self-worth as indicators of personal wellbeing and the extent to which they correlate with class in general and with mobile aspirants in particular. However, since much of the relevant literature on s-e is located within the discipline of Social Psychology this section will explore some of the findings of key contributors to this body of knowledge.

Research within Social Psychology, particularly by Baumeister (1993); Rosenberg (1981); Tice (1993); Harter (1993); Blaine and Crocker (1993); Emler (2001), among others, has examined the concept of s-e, in terms of its social links and the possible causes of low and high s-e. However, from these accounts and other attributed social psychology academic sources, there appears to be little firm evidence to suggest that levels of s-e are directly related to, or indeed affected by, social class background. Moreover, there appears to be little ground upon which to establish a link between levels of s-e and working-class aspiration and upward mobility.

However, this seems surprising given the established and widespread discourses on the personal impacts of class inequality and division; the aforementioned discussions on the internalising of structural barriers; the challenges of class domination and the class injuries experienced by many working-class mobiles (See Sennett and Cobb 1973; Savage 2015; Friedman 2016; Reay 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2013; Skeggs 2004). Considering the social psychology research cited above it would seem, for example, that a person from a poor, underprivileged background, with little or none of the benefits of the social, cultural and symbolic *capitals* previously discussed, may not necessarily experience low s-e. Nor, that

individuals with ready access to the various forms of *capital* will necessarily have high s-e. Thus, a worthwhile exercise here would be to take an exploratory and speculative approach to assessing the incidence of high or low s-e in a given social class. For example, might there be a general preponderance of a certain level of s-e among those of a given social class? Is such an investigation plausible and if so, what might be the result? Furthermore, when considering the socially mobile from the aspirant working-class, could one or other level of s-e be evident or predominant? This section explores these possibilities.

As suggested so far by dismissing any link between s-e and class and in rejecting the idea of high or low s-e being widely represented in a given class, some of the aforementioned social psychology research would appear to contradict many of the critiques regarding working-class agency and the mobility of aspirants (see Allen 2013; Bourdieu 2009; Savage 2015; Calarco 2011). The aforementioned 'hidden' injuries of class were shown to include feelings of low self-worth and conflicting states of ambivalence and related disruptions in the emotional makeup of aspirants (see Section 1.6). Surely therefore, the link between the self (and the aspirant-self in particular) and its socio-cultural environment would seem to have some traction? Furthermore, the thrust of the earlier discussion on psychical interiority, that is, the internalisation of structures, has tried to correlate the effects of inequality and social class disadvantage and the resulting prevalence of a less-valued sense of self (see Section 1.5 and Section 2.5). Indeed, the perceptions, feelings, emotions and contexts discussed above and the difficulties in acquiring, retaining and building self-respect and emotional resilience would surely have a bearing on the aspirant's level of s-e and self-regard?

Moreover, as considered in Section 1.4, central to a person's self-concept is the powerful nature of relationships with social 'others'. That is, the importance of relations with others in terms of the apportioning, receiving and sharing of respect, or indeed, disrespect; the appreciation of competence, or the opposite and the acknowledgements of attractiveness

or unattractiveness, to name a few.[80] The development of a critical self and its counterpose, an assured self, are surely the universal key to a sense of selfhood, irrespective of society or culture? However, as discussed in the earlier chapters, classed societies tend to create and repeatedly reinforce, divisions, differences and invidious comparisons which, in this context of social aspiration, are likely to contribute to inner conflicts and insecurities that class mobiles may struggle to resolve (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1994; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Allen 2013; Brown 2000; Felski 2000; Ashman and Gibson 2010).

From the findings of the social psychology literature I note above, there appears to be general agreement as to the factors pertaining to s-e. The first is in feeling competent, with competence being measured in an area where the individual seeks to demonstrate that competence. The second is in feeling worthy, were the individual can affirmatively ask "Am I a good and worthy person?" (see Mruk 2006, pp. 164-169).[81] Thus, in relation to significant 'others' the individual needs to feel that any judgement of their competence is genuine, or authentic and in the case of worthiness, similarly, any praise they receive needs to be from someone whom they feel is being honest and genuine. Thus, false praise would not be satisfactory, likewise praise from someone not worthy of respect would be vacuous and low in value.

From this we need to assess the extent to which aspirant mobiles with low s-e may struggle in specific ways, such as coping with criticism *and* praise and in coping with certain forms of class-oriented relationship. However, it is important to note that individuals possessing high levels of s-e do not necessarily develop good relationships with others and may become mindful of the disbenefits of boastfulness (see Blaine and Crocker 1993,

[80] See, for example, Sayer 2005, pp. 169-181, but also the social psychological research of Rosenberg 1981, pp. 602-606).

[81] It is acknowledged in some areas of psychopathology that an individual's level of self-esteem is established in the psyche at an early stage in life. See for example, Fennell (1998, p. 298) and Kurzweil (1989, p. 262).

p. 76). Also, in terms of praise it is considered important to avoid hyperbole, that is, to avoid simplistic and inflated praise (see Baumeister 1993, p. 209).

However, it is widely argued that feelings of inadequacy or inferiority can begin early in life during primary socialisation. That is, such feelings can be *internalised* at the very time when humans are developing an indelible sense of self and place (see for example, Bourdieu 2007, pp. 133-134; Emler 2001, p.51; Harter 1993, p. 89). Such feelings of inadequacy in early childhood can leave children feeling that they don't measure up in areas that their parents care about. It seems that they never get over it if their parents are not proud of them.

Harter (1993) considered the social causes and consequences of low s-e in children and adolescents.[82] Conceptually, she equates 'self-esteem' with 'self-worth' and defines these as "the level of global regard that one has for the self as a person" (Harter 1993, p.89). Harter also notes William James's assertion that for the low s-e individual there are two routes to s-e enhancement, a) to raise one's level of competence or b) to lower one's aspirations (or expectations) (see Harter 1993, p. 88). Harter suggests that there are 'natural limits' on the possibilities for affecting competences in a range of important domains of life. These include scholastic, athletic, social, physical and behavioural domains (Harter 1993, p. 89). However, she asserts that standards are generally set high in these areas of life and are highly valued. Hence aspirations are also typically quite high in these domains, making it difficult for those with feelings of inadequacy to confidently dismiss the importance of these areas. Moreover, such domains are also valued by others. Examples of this would be parents who want their children to succeed academically, or peers who stress the importance of social competence or physical appearance. Thus, since it becomes important to the self, the lowering of one's aspirations in these

[82] I am taking 'late' adolescents here to be considered as 'early' aspirants.

areas would be difficult to adjust (Harter 1993, p. 93. See also Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001).

Harter also alludes to Cooley's well-known mirror metaphor of the 'looking-glass self' in which the self is 'constructed' by casting a gaze into the social mirror to determine the opinions of significant others towards the self (Harter 1993, p. 89). Cooley argued that these reflected appraisals by others are then incorporated into, that is, *internalised* by the self. The conclusion from this is that if others hold a particular self in high regard then the person's own sense of s-e is likely to be high or raised. The converse is also the case. If the person is not held in high regard, then their s-e will tend to be lowered or threatened (Harter 1993, p. 89).

Two issues seem to emerge from this. Firstly, this hinges on how the individual decides who the significant others are (a judgement of their specific value) that are making the judgement or assessment of a given self and their level of integrity. Secondly, there may not be any conclusive opinions forthcoming from significant others and thus the reflective appraisals by others may stall, or remain in the realm of confused uncertainty, which may have an equally negative bearing on the self's level of s-e. Such situations may not be that uncommon (Harter 1993, p. 94).

Harter supports William James's position that relatively low s-e is reported by those acknowledging that they 'lack' competence or adequacy in domains for which they have ambitions (aspirations) for success. She says that this concurs with the conclusions of others including Rosenberg (see Harter, 1993, p. 91). Assuming this is the case, then what can we conclude with specific regard to aspirant mobiles from the working class? Perhaps they might self-reflexively decide to redirect their aspirations or focus at specific stages during their mobility trajectory in order to avoid a deepening sense of failure or insecurity? Or alternatively, they may adjust (lower) their expectations to prevent their s-e being undermined. But again, the context and the practical expediencies of life may show these strategies to be implausible or not entirely workable. Further empirical research might clarify these speculations.

Furthermore, while Harter may ultimately be right about the 'natural limits' or ceilings placed on the above-mentioned 'domains', there are perhaps some weaknesses in this line of thinking. The discussion in Chapter 1 relating to *determinism* and *voluntarism* shows how social deterministic (structural) barriers can impede the actions of aspirant mobiles and that they will invariably seek ways of overcoming them. For example, it is important to appreciate that developing levels of resilience and a 'can do' self-belief approach in many of the aforementioned domains cited by Harter, may bring step-changes in an aspirant's former level of self-belief and thus a positive shift in the individual's level of s-e. There are many examples of dogged determination and persistence being applied to previously perceived insurmountable challenges (see Sennett and Cobb 1973; Lawler 2000; Ashman and Gibson 2010; Friedman 2016; Wetherell 2005). This is evident at both a personal and social class level. But again, it is also important to be aware of the pitfalls of *voluntarism* where the individual might be deluded into thinking and feeling that there are no limits whatsoever in overcoming such challenges. In this sense the pathway to raising s-e may best be trodden by the aspirant working to mitigate insecurities within a range of domains, including those that Harter has chosen for her research.

Interestingly, Harter (1993) found that s-e change is most likely to occur during times of transition, for example, moving from secondary school to college. This, she argues, is because such situations bring changes in a person's perception of their competence, where new developmental tasks need to be mastered and where new reference groups will emerge where comparisons with self and others are made. Thus, the person will make alterations to their hierarchy of aspirations deciding which are most important and will become aware of the need to establish new social networks, which will engender sources of both approval and disapproval. This has obvious parallels with aspirants during their mobile trajectories (Friedman 2016; Reay 2013).

Harter (1993, p. 92) also considers the factors militating against s-e increasing for adolescents. These include being disadvantaged by lack of

natural abilities or attributes in the face of hard social comparison standards, or a difficult temperamental style, and/or by a social environment composed of significant 'others' who are neglecting or disapproving. However, while these conclusions may carry some weight from a detached quantitative and positivist standpoint, they are largely normative in tone. For example, who is deciding which 'natural abilities' are valid and how are they deemed to be lacking? Furthermore, in a Bourdieusian sense, who is being the judge of the 'strength of attributes' in the given *field*; who is 'setting the social standards' and determining what is and is not a 'difficult temperamental style'?

Some further social psychology-oriented investigations raise other issues relating to self-worth and s-e which I briefly include here, before summarising this section. According to Rosenberg and Perlin (see Gecas and Seff 1989, p. 253), research that has considered the unmediated, global relationships between s-e and social background has generally found weak associations and sometimes weak and inconsistent results. Again, this is surprising, given my earlier discussions on the insecurities, negative feelings and emotions that have emerged in comparative research on the structural inequalities of class, particularly the effects of class domination over the working-class.

In particular, Gecas and Seff's research sought to measure the effects of social class (as measured by occupational prestige and education) on self-evaluations. They made a distinction between self-efficacy and self-worth as dimensions of self-evaluation, upon which s-e is largely based. Importantly, they considered the impacts of a) occupational conditions, namely, the complexity of the work undertaken, b) the amount of autonomy in the job and c) the extent of degrees of routinisation in the work, since these appear to have a significant effect on the self-evaluations of respondents. Gecas and Seff concluded that respondents considered the effects of self-efficacy to be stronger on s-e than the effects of self-worth (or moral worth). In other words, the above three workplace criteria were the basis upon which respondents could derive greater or less value to their self-concept, depending on how efficacious or

competent they were considered to be (by themselves and by others), in the execution of their work. Indeed, as Gecas and Seff point out, it is possible for individuals to think of themselves as good (worthy), but at the same time to be incompetent persons, or as bad, but highly competent (Gecas and Seff, 1989, p. 356). Thus, self-efficacy and self-worth have different experiential meanings for individuals.

Their research is relevant here with regard to the mobility trajectories of aspirants and how they might position and reconfigure themselves, their future working lives and thus their sense of general wellbeing. The self-concept of the aspirant and by extension their level of s-e can be shown to have a significant bearing on their motivation and resilience in dealing with the challenges of mobility, particularly in the workplace examples alluded to in Chapter 2. As Sayer (2005) states, it is fairly certain that many aspirants will make an imperfect and incomplete transition into the middle-class (see also Friedman 2016; Mallman 2017). Many will, as it were, 'fall by the wayside' owing to their particular character attributes which may include a low level of resilience and a fragile self-concept owing to prior class 'injuries' such as a lack of self-efficacy and/or self-worth.

However, it is important to be cautious here. Some aspects of an aspirant's character may indeed impede their class transition or mobility, for example, in fitting into an organisation's culture, say, in the context of a job application. However, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 there are other external structural factors of class that can do this, which are not of the aspirant's making. It is not merely the individual characteristics of aspirants that can bring about an incomplete and imperfect class transition.

Furthermore, the social motivations and early assumptions about people with low s-e are examined by Tice (1993). She notes that earlier research took the view that if those with high s-e wanted to succeed and to be liked, then it must be the case that those with low s-e must want to fail and be disliked (Tice 1993, p. 37). She notes however, that this assumption has now been largely discarded. Rather, 'positive goals' seem to be out of

reach of people with low s-e or are not part of their ongoing concerns. Their primary aim is to avoid failure, humiliation and rejection by deploying strategies of 'self-protection' so as to remedy their shortcomings. Furthermore, those with low s-e are thought to be more likely to believe failure feedback than those with high s-e since it is consistent with their cognitive structures and expectations. Thus, those with low s-e desire success but expect failure; they lack confidence in their abilities and struggle with accepting praise, believing criticism more than praise, but still preferring to receive praise.

However, the discussion so far, albeit of relevance, is still some way off trying to determine whether the working-class have a greater susceptibility to low s-e. Specifically, it remains unclear whether, by logical extension, aspirant mobiles from the working-class experience this trait disadvantageously when they are in middle-class social and cultural settings. Again, very little evidence appears to have surfaced to draw firm conclusions on this matter. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is clear that aspirants will begin their aspirational journey for a number of reasons and in a variety of different contexts and with an array of critical triggers specific to their circumstances. Thus, to try to establish a link between the level of s-e as a viable precursor and necessary prerequisite to social class mobility will be extremely difficult. However, an attempt to do this remains crucial, particularly in advance of discussions in the remaining two chapters. These consider the classed experiences of *inauthenticity* triggered in social contexts and the anxieties and *ontological insecurity* experienced by aspirant mobiles in seeking to 'belong' in unfamiliar middle-class environments.

Despite the absence of any firm empirical evidence or proof, there is still a possibility that a correlation exists and that there is a profound social-psychological interplay between class, social mobility and self-esteem. However, this is not to say that all working-class people who are upwardly mobile have, or have had, issues with low s-e. As confirmed by Gecas and Seff (1989), to make such a claim would be bordering on ludicrous speculation. But from the previous discussions and cited research there

would seem to be, at the very least, a convincing case for the existence of proximal indicators. So, what might these indicators be and how might they be considered to be barriers to effective mobility and general wellbeing? Might it be more relevant to assume that they may be emanating specifically from class background rather than isolating some independent and individuated factor such as the individual's unique personality or character traits?

Keeping in mind the above findings of Tice (1993) she summarises these as follows:

> "People with high s-e are those who really endorse very positive statements about themselves, claiming to be terrific in many ways. Low s-e, however, is not the opposite. People with low s-e do not depict themselves as worthless, incompetent losers. Rather, they are people who are essentially neutral in their self-descriptions, attributing neither strongly positive nor strongly negative traits to themselves" (Tice 1993, p. 41).

It would seem that they are 'low' in a relative sense when compared to the highly flattering way that those with high s-e portray themselves. Rather, those with low s-e present themselves in a neutral and non-committal way. They are considered to be those with modest means and limited resources who are motivated to protect their sense of self-esteem and behave cautiously and in a risk averse way.

While not leaping to make premature conclusions or resort to simplistic stereotypes about the personality traits of the upwardly mobile, it is interesting what Tice's own research says about those with low and high s-e. Considering the duality of self-protection alongside self-enhancement, the psychological concept of *self-handicapping* raises some interesting considerations. Thus, by putting barriers in the way of one's own success it provides both a protective excuse for failure and enhances credit for success if, or when, it is realised (Tice 1993, p. 44). She takes two examples here. Firstly 'a lack of practice in some activity' and secondly 'a

non-verbal intelligence test'. In both tests the results were the same. Low s-e people self-handicapped when the situation was structured so that it provided protection from the esteem-threatening implications of failure but did not enhance success. Conversely, those with high s-e were more likely to self-handicap if the situation was structured so that self-handicapping enhanced credit for success but did not protect against failure (Tice 1993, p. 46). Tice also examines how people respond to self-presentational demands as a function of their level of self-esteem. She concludes that it is relatively difficult for people with low s-e to adopt either a self-enhancing, or self-derogating style of presenting themselves, having to invest more of their cognitive resources in managing their self-presentation.

Citing Hutton, Tice argues that without a well-defined self-concept low s-e people appear to find it more difficult to process and recall what they say about themselves (Tice 1993, p. 48). Tice notes that Hutton's research contradicts a view of low s-e people as habitual self-derogators. She suggests that this supports the view that low s-e people lack a firm self-concept and find it difficult to present themselves in either a strongly positive or negative fashion. Conversely, people with high s-e appear to be habitual self-enhancers, where boasting comes easily and natural to them and even modest self-derogation is apparently more difficult for them (Tice 1993, p. 48; Blaine and Crocker 1993, p. 76).

From Trice's research some speculative inferences might be made about the social capabilities of people manifesting high or low s-e. Firstly, it seems that in some respects high s-e people appear to be (already) 'ahead of the game' (see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). They think themselves to be good at most things; they want to be recognised by others for their fine qualities and want to achieve outstanding, exceptional things (Tice 1993, p. 50). But again, we cannot conclude from this that aspirant mobiles in particular have, or are deficient in, these character attributes and thus have high or low s-e because of these character dispositions. However, these conclusions by Tice do appear to resonate with Calarco's observations that I discussed earlier of working-class boys

in the classroom not getting or gaining from the attention of their teacher.[83]

On the other hand, low s-e people are neither pathetic self-haters, nor reckless nothing-to-lose self-enhancers. Instead they would appear to be cautious, uncertain people who desire success, but fear failure. The fear often outweighs the desire, hence the element of self-protection in their self-esteem profile. They tend to design coping strategies to protect themselves from the dangers of failure, social rejection and other humiliations (Tice 1993, p. 50). But again, we cannot easily determine from this the extent of low s-e among aspirant mobiles without undertaking further appropriate primary research.

As shown in the previous section, some of these characteristics feature strongly in sociological discussions and accounts of the emotions and sentiments experienced by dominated groups in classed society. It is clear from Tice's work and that of others cited here, that low s-e is not equivalent to self-loathing, rather, as indicated above, people with low s-e can 'manage' such feelings, although their core self-concept may not embrace sufficient resilience for such 'vulnerabilities' to be eliminated totally from the psyche. Furthermore, we need to appreciate that those who are upwardly mobile from the working-class, while perhaps having low levels of self-esteem and even being deficient in other traits, such as self-confidence, are not without these altogether, and as such they can manage, with sufficient self-efficacy, to live a wholesome life.

3.4 Personal vignettes

In this section my personal accounts seek to resonate with aspirants' emotional states during mobility and in the shifts in class position and identify. Examples of how self-esteem can be undermined or strengthened are provided and illustrate the significance of emotionality in working-class aspirational endeavour. These accounts are retrospective in recalling past

[83] See Calarco (2011) mentioned in the follow-on notes to my Vignette 1.2 in Chapter 1. Also, research by Stahl (2014, 2015); Bourdieu (2009).

events in my life. The reader is asked to consider the spirit in which these accounts are written. In some respects, I have adopted an 'informal' style of presentation.

Vignette 3.1.

This account of the last days in my primary school is poignant in underlining the critical impact of educational policy at the time. In the light of this, did I have a sense of my limitations? If so, were these likely to shift over time, or were they being set forever at this critical moment? Would this mean exclusion from material goods, others or places (Bourdieu 1984) as a result of the 11-plus, a watershed moment?

On reflection, the 11-plus examination was a life-affecting change mechanism and a socio-cultural crossroads for all children at that time (the late 1950s). As such, it was also an arbitrary selector which, perhaps unwittingly, significantly tested the self-esteem of children from working-class communities. For those who 'passed' this examination it was a huge step in their lives and a boost to their self-esteem and sense of wellbeing. However, for those who didn't pass, it was, at least in own my experience, belittling and diminishing to one's sense of self-worth. But I think these feelings were often suppressed, deflected, or hidden from view most of the time. You couldn't easily, or openly broadcast sentiments of this nature to your peers. The street culture in my neighbourhood could be characterised as 'pushy' and loud-mouthed, so you just had to smile through the disappointment and feeling of failure and 'get on with it'.

Much has been written about the 11+ examination and the similar intelligence test, two years later, called the '13-plus'. As socio-political educational policies and devices their impact was huge. They were significant levellers and determinants of life chances. If you failed to pass, you were destined for a dump school were the underlying ethos and message was, in effect: "You are not considered to be intelligent. The test proves this. So, we will not deploy resources to help you to become so". This quotation is my own and summarises my interpretation of educational policy and practice at the time.

At a neighbourhood and street level I can't recall there being much competitive behaviour relating to the 11-plus results, although no doubt the parents of those who'd passed and those who hadn't would have been thinking and talking about the consequences for their child. But at street level we all carried on playing in the usual ways and doing the usual activities. My friends and my enemies were still as before. But I think it must have been a process of gradual separation and distinction as we all set off to attend our respective schools. Our school days were spent differently from then on. So, when we met up in the evenings or weekends around the ages of 12 or 13 (in 1960) I can't recall talking about our respective school time, although I'm sure we must have done. The facts were that those who'd passed the 11, or later 13-plus would be racing ahead at their Grammar or Technical schools. I, and those who hadn't, were not really able to closely compare the different curricula and regimes. Although I'm sure the odd comment was made to demonstrate who was ahead and who was behind, or who was working at a higher or lower level or standard in the respective schools.

In terms of the main discussion in this chapter, on the relationship between class and self-esteem, I can only speculate from a now fading memory. Who, among those who'd failed the 11-plus, and who already had low s-e, would have had this reinforced as a result? Presumably, those who had failed and who already had high s-e would have been negatively affected by this social (class) signifier? Similarly, who among those who had passed and had had low self-esteem were reassured by their success and had felt much better about themselves and experienced a lifting of their self-esteem? And who among those who had passed and who already had high self-esteem, would have had their sense of self maintained or raised further, even becoming more ostentatiously boastful? The empirical educational research of the day may well have answered such questions.

But I'm sure in my case that I had internalised a sense of low self-worth, and my self-confidence would have remained low. At that time, I was not going to suffer from what Sennett refers to as 'status anxiety' or 'cultural dislocation' (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p.29). But perhaps some of those

from my neighbourhood who had passed this examination would feel this, once they entered the gates of the Grammar or Technical School? I cite and discuss examples of these anxieties from the literature later in the thesis (Chapter 5, Section 5.3). However, I had already internalised another kind of anxiety, of having been left behind in the post-war baby-boom scramble for the best careers and jobs.

This account of an emerging sense of failure and the resulting sense of self-value, or lack of it, speaks for itself. I therefore continue with a further account during a similar time period, the early 1960's in Liverpool.

Vignette 3.2

My earliest period in the world of work was at once exciting, because it was new, but also a leveller, insofar as I was not really sure whether I was cut out for the type of work I had chosen.

On leaving school with minimal academic qualifications I suppose, like many others, I was not really sure what I wanted to do with my life. In my own case, this sense of a lack of firm direction seemed to link with a fragile sense of self and fluctuating levels of self-esteem. This has continued up until the present day. My character and temperament were such that I always wanted to have a greater self-belief and an inner strength to be able to 'take the knocks' and to be more resilient. Becoming an apprentice motor mechanic thrust me into a manual trade with its culture of hard graft and often harsh working conditions. Like many manual trades this was physically demanding and employed mostly people from the working-class. Certainly, being able to 'rough it' went with the territory!

I recall my sense of self at the time and my level of self-worth alongside my ability and competences in motor mechanics work. Although hardly representative in a research sense, this seems to validate the discussion relating to links between self-esteem and competence as discussed in the chapter. This work certainly contrasted sharply my later move into college

and university life and the conscious desire to 'get on" and finding more fulfilling employment.

My early brushes with the middle-class were similar in some ways, but in other ways different, to those cited in the secondary sources in the thesis. For example, I did have feelings of academic inadequacy and incompetence because I had not developed (and still don't have) some of the vitally important skills needed to succeed academically, such as speed reading, spelling certain words and touch-typing. At various times over the years the lack of these skills has sparked emotions such as frustration and self-criticism. My reading ability has always been a handicap. I can recall instances where I was asked to read aloud in the junior school classroom. I would stumble over the words and feel the shame of this ineptitude, along with the playful rebuke of my classmates, and the mild despair of the teacher. Many years later when I was working as an academic in higher education I often experienced feelings of uncertainty and of not fulfilling my role. At times I suffered from 'imposter syndrome' and feeling out of place. But I was never criticised for my work. Very strange.

The research I have used in the chapter forms part of an ongoing curiosity with the personality and how it is formed. That is, the processes of *internalisation* as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.5 and Chapter 2, Section 2.5. These processes would seem to start at a very early age, but the formulation process is complex as the discussion indicates.

Vignette 3.3

Here I recount my continuing disillusionment with working in the motor trade with its harsh working conditions and 'macho' work culture. In reflective hindsight these experiences proved useful, but they were challenging and soul-destroying at times.

During the first ten years of my working life from 1963 to 1973, I experienced a number of humiliating moments when my self-esteem reached rock bottom, as the account below will reveal. I certainly harbour

resentments and have some buried anger about my lack of confidence, and about the poor direction, support and guidance I received in some of the garages I worked in as an apprentice. But I also recall that I struggled to acquire the practical know-how (savvy) that was needed to succeed in the motor trade. I recall the macho culture in some of the garages in which I'd worked and the risky environment in terms of health and safety.

I recall the working conditions in one particular garage I briefly worked in for eight months. It was a meat haulage company in Liverpool, where the foreman chose to blatantly bully me. He just couldn't take to me. I was working much of the time outside, sometimes in freezing temperatures maintaining large diesel-engined meat haulage wagons using poorly maintained equipment. It was near the end of my time working as a motor mechanic. Consequently, it was not a job I was going to be doing for long. By then, I knew I'd had enough, with the bullying foreman and rats crawling around in the wagon park looking for meat scraps! I recall on one occasion I was lying on my back on a flimsy-castored trolley underneath a wagon removing a differential gear unit, when suddenly a large rat ran past inches away from my face! The work was physically demanding, and the atmosphere was intimidating. I was very upset with my lot at the time. My self-confidence had reached rock bottom and I remember thinking one night on my way home, that I had to move on. I would prove to myself that I could do better than that. Later on, I worked as an insurance agent where the sales staff were mostly nice middle-class people, although I'm not saying that's why they were nice!

So perhaps those crest-fallen moments were a test of some kind. Perhaps, unwittingly I was reflexively engaging with my embodied self and becoming increasingly determined to 'break through' into something different. Perhaps too, I was preparing to build resilience and self-reliance for a more certain educational environment and able to make adjustments or 'habitus shifts' in my embodied self.

Retrospectively, I think this shift away from garage work into college also raised some social class issues and questions of selfhood which I was

unable to answer until later in my thirties. By this time, I was not a typical 18+ student. I was a mature 23-year-old. Except, perhaps, I was still not that mature and as grounded as I perhaps might have been. However, the experience was that I was thrown together with similar mature students who had, like me, and for a number of reasons, not followed the normal educational pathway. Like me, many had worked in jobs that did not suit them and some I recall were women who had started families, perhaps too early, like I had done. Some people were more assured than others, but the mere fact we were there at all showed that we were looking for new directions.

I recall these events vividly, even though fifty years have now passed. So much time, so much history, so much striving, so much buried habituated embodiment (*habitus*) has been consolidated in the construction of my psyche. Thinking of Bourdieu (1984), perhaps my 'bodily hexis' is now unlikely to change very much in this later stage of life.

3.5 Conclusion.

In this chapter I have discussed aspirants' sentiments, emotions and perceptions of self during mobility and class transition. This provides an important linkage to earlier discussions on the *habitus*, reflexivity and the structural barriers to class transition that many aspirants are shown to encounter. Furthermore, by evoking the feelings experienced in challenging periods of class transition it provides an essential link to the emotional realm in the psychic landscape of class. Issues of *habitus* splitting, and the emotional pressures of class severance and class adaptation and adoption are key areas of concern which have been illustrated. The forthcoming chapters pursue the aspirant's interiority further, in other key areas.

The discussion has focused particularly on levels of self-esteem as an indicator of an embodied self and class identity in the context of aspirational endeavour and social mobility. This is principally because, as a key area of the aspirant's psychical interiority it can be a measure of how well or badly aspirants might cope when functioning in middle-class

social and cultural settings. The rationale behind this approach stems from the research sources I have used in earlier chapters and primarily my use of Bourdieu's concepts. These convincingly reveal the nature of class inequalities, ambivalences and contradictions during social mobility. However, from other secondary sources I have used in this chapter, such as Baumeister (1993), Harter (1993) and Tice (1993) it would appear that the correlation between social class, self-esteem and self-worth is weak and inconclusive. Furthermore, there appears to be a dearth of qualitative research offering firm conclusions regarding any links between the experiences of aspirant mobiles during class transition and their levels of self-worth or self-esteem. More significantly, the research focus on levels of self-esteem suggests that raising levels of self-esteem will not necessarily, of itself, ease the pathways of class transition or, more widely, reduce class inequalities.

Nevertheless, I conclude that the research findings regarding self-worth do play a significant part, albeit perhaps tentative, in an understanding of class mobility. This is accentuated by much of the secondary citations I have drawn upon so far. Significantly, the work of Sennett and Cobb (1973), Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1994, 2009), Friedman (2016), Calarco (2011) and Mallman (2017) Lawler (2000) among others, help in confirming this position. These emphasise the insecurities and ambivalences that arise when subtle and nuanced forms of class domination are experienced by aspirant mobiles. Bourdieu's concepts of *misrecognition* and *symbolic domination* further indicate how the aspirant's sense of self-worth and resilience can be tested when such forms of class domination are experienced in middle-class social and cultural settings. The unprepared, conflicted and confused *habitus* will encounter assaults of this kind, manifest in shame and embarrassment for many working-class mobiles, and the dismissiveness and contempt, even disgust, from their middle-class counterparts (Lawler, 2005). The morphing into middle-class ways of being may require aspirants to contemplate the development of inner strengths in the face of cultural and social class nuances and refinements. These can be difficult to rationalise, justify and cultivate, often putting aspirant mobiles on the 'back foot',

thereby further reinforcing class differences, ambivalences and feelings of domination.

The final section of the chapter has considered the incidence of low self-esteem during mobility trajectories and has provided some further personal accounts of relevance to the thrust of the chapter. The following two chapters explore further an understanding of the *habitus*; the self-other relationship and the impacts of mobility and class transition. Chapter 4 examines aspirant experiences of *inauthenticity* and how the tendency to mimic the middle-class can be conceptualised as an inability to maintain a 'familiar' sense of self during the mobility trajectory.

Chapter 4. Aspirants' experiences of inauthenticity, changing identity and 'becoming' middle-class.

4.1 Introduction.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I show how aspirants are able to engage in class transition through a reflexive *habitus* (Bourdieu 2005; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007; Mallman 2017; Friedman 2016, Holmes 2010; Brownlie 2011; Burkitt 2012; Elder-Vass 2007; Sweetman 2003; Reay 2015). However, I also demonstrate how aspirants can psychically and emotionally struggle to manage and often mismanage, the ambivalences, contradictions and insecurities that arise within the self, as a result of social class mobility. Thus, in principle, this process of class transition may either be achievable, or it can also be shown to be ontologically and psychologically destabilising.[84]

However, I want to consider class transition through the conceptual lens of aspirants' feelings towards and sense of *authenticity* or *inauthenticity*. By this I mean that aspirant mobiles can experience and try to adopt and internalise middle-class mores and ways of being which can bring psychical challenges. The reason for taking this approach is to show that the phenomenon of class transition does not merely bring shifts in a sense of class identity and potential changes in the self. Complex though these are, it can also bring internal conflicts in trying to adjust the self to, for example, those unfamiliar social class interactions. If the aspirant is struggling to retain a balanced perspective in such exchanges the cultural gulf that is created can bring a sense of being ontologically insecure. Also, a sense of loss (or lack) of 'belonging' can emerge, thereby affecting that 'familiar' sense of class and self, thus creating (and projecting) a potentially false, fraudulent or unreal sense of self. This sense of loss and an unhinging of the self was identified in Chapters 2 and 3 when discussing the splitting (*hysteresis*) of the *habitus* during class transition (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 2005; Friedman 2016, p. 132). In Chapter 5, I also examine

[84] I provide a critique of *ontological insecurity* with regard to social class transition in Chapter 5.

this sense of a conflicted self in the ontological anxieties which can be deeply challenging for many aspirants, thereby creating further 'injuries' within what Diane Reay refers to as the aspirant's 'psychic landscape of class' (see Reay 2005; Allen 2013).

My discussion of self-esteem and self-worth in Chapter 3, indicates how this process of class transition can generate insecurities through the ways in which aspirants are structurally determined within an ethos of *meritocracy*. In being historically class 'placed' and then in breaking through the middle-class social and cultural barrier, aspirant mobiles face the prospect of disruptions to their familiar selves and their 'used-to' ways of being. Unfamiliar social and cultural settings can unsettle habitual patterns of thinking, feeling and being (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 1990). Moreover, I argue that this sense of feeling out of place can bring an existential dimension. Aspirants mobiles can feel out of their comfort zone; a 'fish out of water'; experiencing an 'in-betweeness', with a foot in both camps, but not fully in either; perhaps estranged from their familiar ways of being and practice. They are in a state of discomfiture from the normative expectations and practices of their newly found middle-class peers. This was noted in Chapter 3 in Friedman's (2016) mention of a *habitus clive'*. Thus, aspirants are, in effect, set adrift in seeking a renewed sense of self and place. No longer working-class and not yet middle-class.

Thus, in trying to resolve these ambivalences and tensions in the self the aspirant behave in an 'unfamiliar' fraudulent manner (see Chapman 2015; Knights and Clarke 2013 and Reay 2001; Sennett and Cobb 1973). This lapse in both a firm sense of class identity and self-concept and a variable disembodiment of the self can be shown to produce a self-defensive and protective disposition by the aspirant. Furthermore, in order to disguise this sense of being an emergent middle-class 'fraud' the aspirant's sense of authenticity, or familiarity, in a range of contexts is essentially compromised. Such inauthentic ways of being and practice are understandably 'cultivated' in order to gain acceptance and the necessary class legitimacy. There is the need and pressure to have a new-found sense of belonging that will allow the aspirant to regain a stable identity

and a renewed sense of self and being. I explore this theme in this and the following chapter while also showing how aspirants' often experience ambivalence and degrees of difficulty in retaining their working-class ties and embodiments. This will be brought into focus as they contemplate the uncertainties of class transition. I refer to this clinging to a past self as the ontological *residues* of class origins (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 213-214; Friedman 2016, pp. 136-137).

I also noted in the earlier chapters that this process of class transition may vary in form and experience. Trajectories may be temporary, prolonged, mild or severe. There may be peaks, troughs and plateaux along the way. However, as a process mobility trajectories need to be viewed as profoundly and ontologically complex, no matter whether the mobility trajectory is short or long range.[85] Thus, where the self is destabilised it can also be shown how and why the aspirant will experience this kind of *inauthenticity* and an accompanying existential challenge to their once familiar sense of self.

In cases and contexts where this is manifest, what forms might this sense of *inauthenticity* take? How might aspirant mobiles go about reconciling identity conflicts, experienced as a sense of unfamiliarity and falsehood? Also, how might they contend with the external perceptions and judgements of and by classed others? Here therefore, I want to explore the context and nature of feeling out of step with oneself in the specific *field* of class and the ways in which a reflexive *habitus* might cope with a destabilised identity and manage such challenges.

The chapter is therefore set out in four parts. Firstly, I consider the value of an existential sociology perspective on the *authenticity/inauthenticity* duality in the context of class transition, class 'belonging' and identity. However, given the magnitude of literature on existentialist thought; the

[85] These terms 'short' or 'long'-range trajectories were referenced and defined in Chapter 1, Section 1.2. Also, in the case of short-term trajectories aspirant mobiles may not make the transition to a middle-class lifestyle and thus may retain working class social and cultural mores.

importance of *authenticity* as a prominent element of that philosophy; the high level of disagreement and controversy regarding the viability of *authenticity* in other branches of social theory, for example in Social Constructionism, I impose some necessary limitations on the discussion.[86] Secondly, I contextualise the *authenticity/inauthenticity* duality within the debate on social class, aspiration, mobility and identity. Thirdly, I show how a sense of fraudulence and *internalised* conflict is evident in the mobility of the aspirant. Finally, I provide some further empirical research examples of where aspirants experience threats to a sense of self and identity as a result of the duality in the context of class and in the specific form I am using *authenticity/inauthenticity*. A concluding section draws together and summarise these lines of exploration.

4.2 An existential sociology perspective on inauthenticity in the context of class transition and self-identity.[87]

Why might an existential sociology approach be pertinent when considering the experiences of aspirant mobiles? In some respects, this choice of approach is rather arbitrary since the *authenticity/inauthenticity* duality is in fact one of the key components of that branch of sociology and certainly of the philosophy itself. However, more importantly, the ontological theme of 'being in the world', or making one's way in the world, particularly in this and the final chapter, lends itself to an exploration of the duality from such a perspective. This, in effect, is what the aspirant is doing in striving to be centred and to self-actualise. As I indicate earlier in the thesis (see Introduction), the crux of discourses on the classed self

[86] I am aware that some of the terms I use here are not fully formed. For example, the use of this duality of *authenticity/inauthenticity* are to be seen as approximations in trying to describe a sense and feel within, or as part of, an experience. The reader is asked to be aware of this. I do not, for example, intend these terms to trigger a debate within a philosophy of phenomenology, or for them to be treated as such.

[87] See the work by Douglas and Johnson (1977); Kotarba and Fontana (1984) and Craib (1976) as examples of this sociological approach.

and its mobility is in understanding the totality of experience of the aspirant in stepping out of one classed world and into another.[88]

However, my argument here is that this transmutation of the self (and its sense of identity) is impossible to consider effectively, without appreciating the disruptions to the self or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1994, 2005; Crossley 2001; Schwartz 1987; Freidman 2016). As discussed earlier, such ontological changes can often compound the injuries of class that the aspirant can experience (Sennett and Cobb 1973). Therefore, I argue that in relation to class, mobility is, in effect, an ontological and existential journey as much as it is a social and cultural shift in experiences of class identity (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 207). Class identity is brought into question reflexively by the aspirant within both the social and psychical context. The tension between a sense of 'belonging' and the endorsement or rejection by the middle-class 'other', can be said to be the aspirant's 'weight in the world' (see Bourdieu, 2009).

As I indicated in Section 4.1, this can leave the aspirant with indelible classed *residues* from their former socialised working-class self. These are shown to persist in later life and to cause ontological insecurities (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 209; Friedman 2016, p. 133). In this sense, the position taken here can be considered as structural determinist. However, this obviously does not mean that aspirants are in some way structurally barred from entry into the middle-class. Such an implication would be misleading and counterfactual. Rather, the evidence shown here suggests that despite and also because of, the prevailing *doxa* and 'myth' of *meritocracy*, becoming middle-class is only possible on an uneven playing field of class differentiation, division and disadvantage. Class transition and self-transmutation is likely to be an incomplete, conflicted and often distressing process (see Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1994;

[88] In this sense it can also be considered from a phenomenological standpoint. However, I am not choosing to formally follow this specific philosophical approach in the thesis.

Calhoun, LiPuma and Postone 1995; Friedman 2016; Savage 2005, 2015; Abrahams 2017; Allen 2013; Carbone 2011; Felski 2000; Lawler 2005).

This transition of class boundaries and a transmutation of a classed self are, therefore, not without ontological and psychic barriers and difficulties. As I have argued in earlier chapters the very class structure ensures the persistence and prevalence of these issues for the aspirant self. One such personal obstacle is in trying to retain a sense of self that the aspirant can existentially and psychically feel at ease and familiar with; that does not turn the embodied self into a living falsification of the former self. Here I am referring specifically to situations when the aspirant is making existential adjustments in order to function and feel comfortable when experiencing the socio-cultural mores of the middle-class (see Ashman and Gibson 2010; Bourdieu 1994; Brown 2000; Collinson 2003; Knights and Clarke 2013).

However, this approach to the idea of an authentic and classed self requires some further clarification. As the earlier discussion of the *habitus* shows, the self can be perceived as experientially amorphous and fluid; capable, within limits, of reconciling the numerous encounters of life in the wake of 'other'-related influences. This view adheres to the idea of the individual having 'multiple-selves', or multiple aspects of one self. However, I argue that such a position can be incorporated into my perspective, since this discussion is not about the construction of the self as such, nor about questioning its existence. Such debates are long-standing and well established in the work of James, Cooley and Mead, (see Harter 1993, p. 89). Rather, the focus here is in registering the 'hidden injuries' of class during transition and how these impair the embodied self of the aspirant. It is about examining the incongruous forms that such injurious feelings can take and the sense of 'fraudulence' that aspirants may struggle with, or feel coerced into, in finding a place and space in an unfamiliar social and cultural realm of class.

However, I argue that the problem, as I have considered it, is located in the threat of the aforementioned psychical disruptions to the *habitus,*

which can conflict with a counter-desire to be at ease with oneself and not to have to contend with such pressures during mobility. Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, some aspirants may question the whole *raison d'etre* of aspiration and mobility but feel caught up in the social imperative and dynamic that the meritocratic myth engenders. Thus, from this perspective the very idea of social aspiration can become an existential threat, if it is not carefully managed (see Sennett and Cobb 1973). But how does this adhere to a discussion on *authenticity* with regard to upward mobility? Are not the aspirant's intentions and ambitions worthy? While this may be so, it could also be argued that to strive, or to aspire, for some of the reasons I stated in Chapter 1, might be considered profoundly questionable given their 'individualistic tenor'. Also, given the structural inequalities of social mobility it could be argued that it can always be dismissed as ineffectual (see Reay 2013). Such approaches of classed life could be seen as being based on somewhat futile or prosaic perspectives and goals. This brings to the fore the wider sense of codes and modes of living, which are, as I have argued, embedded in prevailing norms and values (see Chapter 3 and Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990; Gillies 2005).

Therefore, in the discussions so far on upward mobility, it can be argued that by adopting middle-class social and cultural practices; by following the meritocratic ideal, aspirants are actively engaging in a form of contrivance, trying to be someone other than they are (or have been thus far). By morphing from a working-class self and its embodied ways and in grafting on, or assimilating middle-class ways of being, it can be argued that aspirants are participating in their own disingenuous metamorphosis. We have seen how a distancing from class origins creates ambiguities and that class differences create ambivalence in terms of a sense of 'belonging', even if temporarily and how this might threaten to destabilise the psychical security of the aspirant. Essentially, aspirants are seeking a better, more appropriate life, in keeping with their shifting expectations. They are aware of how the middle-class socio-cultural landscape can offer them something more desirous.

However, I want to argue here that this kind of aspirational endeavour can create, potentially at least, existential insecurities, which I explore more fully in Chapter 5. Bourdieu shows how aspirants are striving to get on a par with middle-class outlooks, in terms of cultural capital, for example, in standards of dress, behaviour and other 'tastes' (see Bourdieu, 1984). However, does this not suggest, in an existential and sociological sense and within the rationale of a class society, that some form of injustice is being meted out? Recognising the inherent inequalities that they have faced in trying to redress the structural imbalance, aspirants can be shown to be profoundly struggling to 'catch up' with the middle-class. In adopting middle-class 'ways' are they also being *inauthentic* in terms of adhering to a 'true-self'? Or is this self the same self, but with some essential, albeit falsely derived intentions?

This line of thinking clearly raises a number of issues. For example, are these forms of class adaptation not justifiable given the rhetoric of seeking the best life (only life) possible? Why take a critical stance towards aspirants for social climbing, given the opportunities for making their lives better? The rationale here also assumes a two-class society, whereas there are other perspectives that would suggest other class divisions, or that these boundaries are in constant flux and that viewing each class as homogenous might be inaccurate or dated (see Savage 2015, pp. 23-53 and Felski 2000, p. 33).

These existential and sociological issues are broached in the following sections through a contextualisation of this theoretical discussion and will be illustrated with suitable examples from the literature.

4.3 Contextualising 'inauthenticity' in class aspiration, mobility and identity.

As I mentioned in Section 4.1, the concept and duality of *authenticity/inauthenticity* is hugely controversial within social theory. For this reason, I set boundaries for the forthcoming discussion and in so doing bracket out many non-relevant reference points and approaches to the treatment of this duality as an area of theoretical discussion. This is

primarily because I treat and articulate this duality in a specific theoretical and applied manner.

In order to clarify my approach, the paper by Vannini and Franzese (2008) is helpful since, as I do, they selectively choose to survey the literature on *authenticity* as a social psychological phenomenon in relation to the self and personal identity. In so doing they exclude, as do I, the extensive body of literature on the *authenticity* of cultural objects, such as artistic texts and performances, as well as the literature on the *authenticity* of social and situational identity, for example, the *authenticity* of members of sub-cultural groups [89]. In addition, they "privilege studies of authenticity that make this concept a central, rather than peripheral or accidental focus" (Vannini and Franzese 2008, p. 1621). Furthermore, in the theoretical literature they limit themselves, as do I, to covering the theoretical discussion that has sociological roots, or the explicit potential for social research and application.

I also avoid consideration of branches of social theory that dismiss the idea of *authenticity/inauthenticity* as a myth such as that of post-structuralism which considers the dualism as contingent in nature. For example, Lamla notes that "references to some essence of a truthful stance towards the subject's inner self, one's needs, feelings, motives and so on, are often criticised as false consciousness" (Lamla 2009, p. 171). However, despite this contention, my approach, in keeping with the central theme of this chapter and the thesis as a whole, recognises the notion of a sense of falsity or fraudulence when considered in the context of the aspirant seeking to re-establish a sense of class identity and belonging in transition to and from within the middle-class.

[89] However, in the case of class, I note that it can be conceived as a socio-cultural phenomenon and the distinct characteristics of the different classes, along with the hegemony of the middle-class, creates distinctions and differences in the behavioural characteristics of each class within the social and cultural realms of classed society.

Furthermore, as I discussed in Chapter 3, structural domination can bring about a sense of low self-regard through a structurally induced inferiority (see Section 3.3). I argue that this is based upon a deterministic social coercion which can also lead to emotional vulnerabilities for aspirants that may not have existed if it wasn't for this class domination. Consequently, I contend that a structural-determinist stance is defensible (see Chapters 1 and 2) with regard to aspiration and mobility. This will often see the aspirant gravitating to 'inauthentic agency' and practices through proximal relations with middle-class peers and/or superiors. However, this would not necessarily be deliberate or even calculated, in the sense of a premeditated act of falsity or fraudulence. Rather, aspirants will be largely influenced and formally or informally directed by the opinions of middle-class others, especially those in authority. This raises the prospect of aspirants experiencing feelings of deference, awkwardness and anxiety and even a tendency towards ingratiation and obsequiousness, when in middle-class social and cultural domains (see for example, Akram 2012; Ashman and Gibson 2010; Bourdieu 1990, 1994; Neilson 2015).

For example, in terms of a gravitation towards and adherence to the dominant social and cultural values and norms, the aspirational pathways still involve mobiles having to contend with hierarchical power relations. As the examples below suggest, these tend to coerce aspirants into doing what significant middle-class 'others' do. This, in turn, reinforces feelings and thoughts that they have to comply with the expectations of these assumed-to-be superior 'others' in accordance with those values and norms of accepted class practice. In this regard the Bourdieusian stance of aspirants having to culturally comply and integrate by learning the 'rules of the game' in the social *fields* of class is, again, applicable. This will see aspirants facing challenges in the process of 'finding their feet' and trying to establish themselves in their new middle-class environments (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990). In critiquing how working-class cultural practices are exposed, these working-class 'ways of being' appear not to fit in well with middle-class cultural norms. This is highlighted in the work of Skeggs (2004); Savage (2015) and Jones (2011). Indeed, they are often shown to be embarrassingly and humiliatingly inadequate. The aspirant brings

these inadequacies to the table, but desperately needs to sweep them under it! It is through these powerful underlying *signifiers* and messages of class domination that aspirants will find class integration challenging and will test the strength of their previously formed self-concept (see Friedman 2016; Reay 1997a; Rosenberg 1981).

Thus, aspirants are, in a specific sense, a special case, insofar as they may experience a conflicted class ambivalence in struggling to grasp these middle-class ways of doing and 'being'. There are ulterior motives in accepting and internalising these practices, but nevertheless they need to tread carefully to avoid such misplaced and emotionally painful exposure. This ambivalence and internal pressure can be viscerally felt, particularly in having to reflexively jettison or mask embodied working-class ways of behaving and being and having to learn new middle-class ways in order to avoid such ontological and social class incongruences. I argue that this process and struggle in 'becoming' has existential sociological implications. Furthermore, the insecurity and anxiety induced by these experiences is worthy of further discussion and is, therefore, considered further in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, consideration of the *authenticity/inauthenticity* duality necessitates a short discussion, or thematic approach, relating to existential sociology with regard to the self and identity. This will consider how the notion of a 'familiar' self is to be sustained by aspirants during class transition and in the transmutation of a classed self. This notion of an 'authentic self' is, therefore, perceived to be a useful anchor or compass in understanding how a realignment of class identity might transpire.[90]

Furthermore, there is also scope to consider the basis upon which aspirants seek self-actualisation as a form of authentication of their full potential through upward mobility. Alternatively, there is the opportunity

[90] A number of arguments are posited against the idea of an *authentic self*. These prefer to perceive the self as multi-faceted or take the position that there is no 'core self'. Rather, the individual functions in a number of guises depending on the context and/or responses to the actions and views of others.

to widen their horizons through the realisation of hitherto inaccessible forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1994). Through this widening of knowledge and experience, aspirants might expect to gain greater leverage and an enhanced sense of self and of higher self-esteem and wellbeing. In this dynamic process, a consideration of *authenticity* would also seem vital in experiencing greater resilience. Similarly, the personal validation emanating from, or in spite of, significant class others; the legitimation of practice in given social *fields*; a heightening of self-respect and sense of dignity and more respect from others, would also seem to be linked to an increasingly grounded and authentic self (see Abrahams 2017; Bourdieu 2005; Collinson 2003).

However, if, as the above benefits suggest, class transition and a transmutation of identity is perceived by aspirant mobiles to be a positive and wholesome process and outcome, then the question still stands as to how the self and a sense of identity, can be re-configured. This enables aspirants to feel they truly 'belong' in the middle-class, without this displacement and sense of an inauthentic self arising. Furthermore, if social mobiles can successfully adopt middle-class norms and practices and adapt their previous selves appropriately, will they not then be fully and truly middle-class? Or will they merely consider themselves and always be considered by middle-class others, to be 'blow ins' from another class? Will they not be seen as phoney copies of the middle-class; perceiving themselves as 'wannabees' perhaps, who will never be the genuine article? This line of reasoning goes some way to setting the parameters for a discussion on *authenticity* in the context of class transition (see Felski 2000; Friedman 2016; Savage 2000, 2005).

The orientation here, therefore, is primarily in the context of 'self-other' class relations and how, when the discordances of class transition are brought to bear on the aspirant, the sense of a 'familiar self' is dislodged and/or undermined. The aspirant mobile experiences an 'ontological crisis', for want of a better phrase, through an inability to effectively adapt their sense of 'being' to the social and cultural mores of the hitherto unfamiliar middle-class. The 'familiar self', previously known in the

aspirant's working-class life, faces systematic erosion to the point where a firm identity is no longer in place and a sense of disorientation is present before any re-identification can be formulated. Thus, the essential theoretical approach taken here is based on making sense of this idea of a shifting or mutable class identity (see Bourdieu 1990; McNay 1999; Giddens 1991; Friedman 2016, 2012; Lawler 2005; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010).

However, the idea that aspirant mobiles prescriptively progress and then straightforwardly adapt to the values, tastes, social mores and cultural preferences of the middle-class is questionable. Rather, I argue that the forms of class transition can be piecemeal, amorphous, unfocused and uncertain and thus the trajectories and the attributed experiences of it can, at first glance, lack clarity and explanation. The processes of transmutation are shown to be far more self-conflicting and troublesome for the (dis)embodying self. It is in unpacking these experiences that I wish to show how the issue of *inauthenticity* becomes a central feature of identity realignment (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 263-271; Savage 2015, pp. 209-217; Felski 2000; Stahl 2013).

So, what does this say about the 'true' motives of aspirants and the nature of class disentanglements? In what ways and to what extent, do they actually lose, in an ontological sense, the embodied sense of a working-class self and 'become' middle-class in the sense of a new identity? Can they in fact develop such a new identity and completely shed their working-class ways of being? What are the implications for the self if they cannot? What does the empirical research literature reveal about the ways in which aspirants describe their sense of self in experiencing class transition and a change of class identity? How 'real' and 'true' and complete does this experience feel to them? What are the sociological, psychological, emotional and ontological implications for this transmutation of the self in class terms?

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, aspirants in class transition will attempt to reflexively make sense of disruptions to their embodied self and, in so

doing, seek some form of class re-identification and realignment to middle-class mores. Thus, my focus here specifically relates to this in terms of the social psychological and psychic tensions that can arise for mobiles. The ways in which the aspirant's durable embodied self might be coerced into becoming reflexively adaptive is key here. Moreover, in attempting to resolve the ambivalences and the emotional and psychic discomforts that may ensue, the 'social other' will invariably raise issues of *authenticity/inauthenticity* (see Bourdieu 1977, 1990; also, Archer 2010; Brownlie 2011; Carbone 2011; Lamla 2009; Reay 2013; Skeggs 2004; Four thought 2017).

Similarly, as I discussed in Chapter 3, for the purposes of this approach I am treating social mobility as a classed phenomenon made up, as it were, of a number of quantum steps, stages or events within which questions pertaining to this *inauthenticity* issue come into view [91]. For example, I am interested in the ways in which the aspirant mobile's emergent links, or proximity with middle-class social and cultural mores might develop or stumble in relation to a sense of self. Also, it is important to examine the extent to which aspirants are able to move on from, reconcile or perhaps abandon, prior working-class practices and mores and how they might translate these as a loss of a 'familiar' self, but nonetheless, a self that the aspirant could still feel at ease with. This would be seen to vary according to the aspirant's particular classed history, *habitus* and mobility trajectory (see Sennett and Cobb 1973; Bourdieu 2007; Lawler 1999; Friedman 2016).

However, as I mentioned earlier, the reference point here is in understanding how aspirants psychically and emotionally experience and react to these encounters and how they respond to the ways in which their thoughts, feelings and practice are received in the range of middle-class

[91] Similarly, according to Bourdieu (see Mallman 2017, p. 21) in his analysis of how the *habitus* might change in early life, the break away from class origins (which results from inculcation in formal education) is: 'simply the last of a long series of infinitesimal breaks, the culmination of innumerable differential deviations that, in the end, constitute the great shifts in social trajectories'.

contexts. As I noted earlier (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3), Cooley showed in his account of the 'looking glass self' (see Harter 1993, pp. 88-89 and p. 99) that our identity is moulded through a 'mirror of how we see others seeing us'. For example, we can ask how the uncertainties and discomforts of feeling like a 'fish out of water' are experienced. Or, more positively, we can consider how the affirmations and reassurances of feeling like a 'fish in water'; of 'belonging' are experienced in class terms and how they might create and reinforce an *authentic*, or *inauthentic* sense of being.

For example, Kuhn (2002, p. 117) poses a somewhat extreme existential case of this by saying

> "if you know that you are in the 'wrong' class, you know that therefore you are a worthless person".

However, this is not to argue that it is only class-related contexts where such *inauthentic* sentiments and insecurities can emerge. The implications of this were discussed in Chapter 3, with examples of how the threats to self-worth and self-esteem are potentially diminishing at the core of one's being. However, as I allude to in my Vignette 3.3, power relations and workplace hierarchies can be shown to distort the classed basis of such forms of domination. Thus, conveying or displaying the symbolic artefacts of class in the wrong setting can not only evoke shame and embarrassment, but can also bring a sense of being out of sorts and out of place; of feeling unaccepted, unwanted and ultimately, in such settings and practice, socially and psychically disoriented. On top of this, there can be evidence of the *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence* I referred to in Chapters 1 and 2 (see Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 1994, 2007). This may also contribute to a lack of a strong self-concept in selfhood and an ontologically troubled sense of reality for the mobile aspirant. The important aspect here then, is to consider the factors inducing such negative aspects of, and responses to class transition.

4.4 Aspirants' experiences of fraudulence, the 'imposter syndrome', 'lack of fit' and internalised structures.

In this section I show how the ambivalence and insecurities of class transition, discussed so far, affect the responses of aspirants in attempting to conform to meritocratic norms. The examples chosen here illustrate and expose how and why feelings of social and cultural incongruity can emerge. Here, I am not directly concerned with the moral or ethical considerations of class inequality, although, of course, these are a crucial part of such severances within the self and the *hysteresis* effect that Bourdieu has emphasised (see Friedman 2016, p. 132; also, Sayer 2005). Rather, my purpose is to expose and highlight the structural and existential consequences of this conformity to *meritocracy* that social mobility discourses often sidestep. I am more concerned here with how the underlying feelings of class illegitimacy are reinforced through the confused messages conveyed by dominant class *signifiers* and the prevailing *doxa* (Savage 2015, p.209; Bourdieu and Eagleton 1991).

The following examples are from the education sector. While this has no specific significance, it is indicative of a significant portion of qualitative research on social mobility emanating from academia. The aspirant's feelings of fraudulence, and thus implicitly a sense of *inauthenticity*, are detected, sometimes indirectly, in discussions of shifting class identities. For example, Stanley (see Morley 1997, p. 114) reminds us of the class system within academia where working-class students in elite institutions evoke 'hidden injuries' of class in the form of the most painful and powerful feelings of inadequacy and failure (see also Reay 1997b, 2001; Reay and Ball 1997; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009; Reay Crozier and Clayton 2010; Lawler 2000).

Morley suggests that such residue(s) of self-doubt and self-blame can lead to a belief in one's own inferiority, worthlessness and powerlessness (See also Elder-Vass 2007, p. 334). I would also argue that, in the context of upward mobility, such threats to self-affirmation are ontologically challenging. Such sentiments have resonance in an existential sociology of selfhood that I outline in the thesis Introduction and explore further in

Chapter 5. However, I show how such privileges as access to education and the cultural and *symbolic* capital that it requires and promises, have been used to divide, isolate and confuse the sense of identity and the sense of worth and confident groundedness of many aspirant mobiles.

The assertion here is that class domination is 'kept alive' by ensuring social distinctions and divisions through a hierarchy of values and, as Trevithick states (see Morley 1997, pp. 114-115), the differing class perceptions of these, which have become embedded in the aspirant's consciousness. But more specifically, McIntosh uses the concept of 'feeling like a fraud' (see Morley 1997, p. 115). In this, she argues that hierarchical structures and class stratifications inevitably breed feelings of fraudulence and a sense of being an imposter in the hallowed halls of the academy. The point here is that prevailing academic structures tend to reinforce social class hierarchies which, in turn, can evoke potent feelings of self-doubt and the fear that someone will discover that "you do not belong" or "you are out of your depth" (see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003; Knights and Clarke 2013; Chapman 2015; Loveday 2015; Reay 1997b).

However, such an awareness of a threat of fraudulence does not necessarily, or by default, link the aspirant to feelings or actions that might be conceived of as *inauthentic*. For example, McIntosh suggests that there can also be a refusal on the part of the aspirant to collude in such a pretence (see Morley 1997, p. 115). Such a refusal would appear to expose a kind of 'self-preservation disguise' in the upholding of these hierarchies and social divisions. It would seem to show the aspirant adopting an adherence to an *authentic self*; a more honourable and 'true' position. I would also argue that such forms of 'resistance' to a sense of becoming *inauthentic*, shows a self that is gravitating to a position of integrity and is trying to maintain congruency with its own true self and those values.[92] Thus, we might conclude here that despite the feelings of

[92] Examples showing tensions in this form are provided in the last section of the chapter.

academic illegitimacy and inadequacy, the working aspirant's sense of feeling like a 'fish out of water' is actually shown to be a fish more than capable of swimming with, or against, the strongest of tides.

Abrahams's (2017) research also shows resonances with the above examples. Her research of working-class graduate students shows how and why they express different sentiments, value interpretations and ethical positions in their approach to securing work experience placements and future employment when compared to their middle-class graduate peers (Abrahams 2017, p. 628). We might conclude from her paper that working-class graduates adopted a more honourable and fair-handed approach to career progression. However, it also points to issues of 'fraudulence' in the face of unfair disadvantage. Her work examines the way in which the middle-class graduates used their parents' social networks as leverage to network more effectively than their peers from less affluent backgrounds. However, we can also ask whether the approach taken by the working-class graduates was not simply naïve in expecting their degree status alone to be enough to move their careers forward. Abrahams also indicates that graduates from both social classes acknowledged that using outside connections was a kind of 'cheating' and that it was probably wrong for the middle-class graduates to avail themselves of this class advantage to secure work experience placements employment. However, the question here is whether the 'expedient' approach adopted by the more privileged middle-class graduates was actually dishonourable or in any way fraudulent.

Abrahams argues that the middle-class within academia set the rules in this social and cultural *field* (Abrahams 2017, p. 631; see also Bourdieu 1977, 1986, 1990; Loveday 2015; Reay 2001; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010; Stahl 2013, 2016). Therefore, she argues, middle-class students are likely to possess a greater awareness of the subtlety of these rules; to keep up with the changing nature and nuanced interpretation of these rules and to more effectively use this cultural capital. Also, they can take as given the cultural advantage that can be gained by such agency. Thus, while the working-class students in the sample might have been thinking

"I don't really belong here", or more relevantly, "I don't possess these kinds of social connections", their sense is of a world not made for them (Abrahams 2017, p. 632).

Meanwhile, the middle-class graduates whose parents are 'well connected' might argue that such 'tactical nepotism' is merely an expression of legitimately 'playing the game' and is not really cheating as such (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007, pp. 98 and 118). The fact that the working-class graduates' responses suggest that they wanted to feel they achieved a degree 'on their own merits' says much about their sense of an *authentic* selfhood. Of course, the middle-class students have also graduated. However, Abrahams concludes that the working-class graduate had a stronger need to 'prove it' to themselves and that accepting help from wherever or whoever, in climbing the occupational ladder, would 'devalue' them and their achievements. This eagerness to prove their worthiness and honour relates to a cultivated disposition, an inscribed embodiment of entitlement, in the schemes of thought, as indicated by Bourdieu (1977, p. 15; Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 25-30).

However, attempts by these working-class graduates to understand and use a system 'not of their making' brings issues of *authenticity* and the sense-of-self to the fore in the *field* of class. Here, honour and integrity might be interpreted as naïve foolhardiness where, somehow, they have not grasped, or at least not appreciated enough, the full extent of their relative class disadvantage and how they can become the butt, or the victims of systemic inequality. Abrahams's use of the term 'honour' counts for little when pitted against this middle-class expediency and access to greater degrees of *symbolic* capital. It shows how middle-class graduates have the inside track in the race to the top, in employment prospects. It also shows how any justification they have for their pragmatism offers greater cache than the (academic) integrity shown by the working-class graduates (cf. Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 79-90; Reay 2013).

For surely, as Jones argues, the working-class is repeatedly shown to struggle in a 'rigged society' where you can only aspire to something if

you know it and fully understand its nuances (Jones 2011, p. 175). Retaining a sense of a solid, grounded and secure self-identity is clearly difficult when things don't feel genuinely accessible or fairly offered. A persistent sense of an 'unequal reality' about or around oneself, in terms of place and social field, can create anxieties for aspirants which I consider in Chapter 5.

Abrahams questions further why her working-class graduates find this 'elitist' networking by their middle-class counterparts so dishonourable. She suggests that this is because they "have more to loose and have further to fall" (Abrahams 2017, p. 633) and that they do not feel a sense of entitlement in being able to exist and compete in the middle-class field that they were venturing into (Abrahams 2017, p. 632). Furthermore, she suggests that they feel their success in the labour market must be attributable to their own work ethic and commitment; that they have had to fight harder than middle-class students to get where they are. However, paradoxically, she concludes that they also need to believe in the construct of *meritocracy* and the worthiness of striving, in order to believe in themselves, that they can 'make it' in the educational system (Abrahams 2017, p. 633; Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 27-28).

Again, the inculcation of meritocratic sentiments by the working-class graduates can be contrasted with those of the middle-class, who believe they have already proved themselves by going to university and are functioning on the basis of a more confident 'sense of entitlement'. Even though they don't wish to gloat about the benefits that their parent's contacts can bring, they do appear to have an awareness of their class advantage. They argue this on the basis of the social reality that they find themselves in. They recognise that having a degree is no longer enough to secure access to the best jobs. They just need a 'foot in the door' with an influential 'other' to contact, since, "if you don't know anyone then there is not much to distinguish you" (Abrahams 2017, p. 634).

This awareness of their class differential and advantage is alarmingly transparent in many respects. Thus, while Abrahams's orientation in her

paper is to focus on Bourdieu's use of the durable *habitus*, it can also be shown how a middle-class *habitus* "can confidently move in a world where the *habitus* experiences ease, recognition and familiarity" (Abrahams 2017, p. 634). Compared to the working-class graduate the socialising of the middle-class self is a different experience in terms of a taken-for-granted (*doxic*) way of being and of making their way in the world.[93] Their sense of legitimate belonging and an entitled place in orienting the self appears to have different parameters, social signifiers and class privileges. Thus, by effectively 'playing the game' the middle- class *habitus* can be said to be *authentic* 'in its own skin' and it's being. Given the rationale and normative boundaries of the context, is it not therefore, in comparable terms at least, being true to itself?

By contrast, working-class graduates are less familiar with the middle-class social space that characterises, indeed epitomises, academia. It would seem that their *habitus* is not yet fully adapted and that they are more insecure about their worthiness to exist in this social field. They are also less attuned to the changing nature of 'the game'. Stretching this point further, it could be said that, in a naively tragic way, they see their degree status as occupying a bigger space in shaping their opportunities. It appears tragic since, by already achieving a degree they have, of course, proven themselves. However, the important point here is that in a profound sense, and in existential sociology terms, they do not 'feel' it, in the sense of them being comfortable with their own familiar self-worth and being.[94] In an ontological sense they already possess an unreal and undeserving sense of self. They find themselves, as Abrahams suggests, in a different mental area, but they do not appear to fully realise it (Abrahams, 2017, p. 633). This is a central part of the working-class aspirant's reality, which I explore further in Chapter 5.

[93] I use the phrase 'being in the world' as a reference point here and particularly in Chapter 5, since it is useful in discussing the class ontology of the aspirant.

[94] In Chapter 3, I endeavoured to get inside this problem in discussing self-worth and esteem.

I continue the discussion a little further here by considering Abrahams's findings and conclusions. This helps in unpacking a number of concerns regarding class mobility and *inauthenticity* in the way I am using the term here. Primarily, the working-class graduates in her sample appear to be clinging to the 'falsity' of meritocratic values which they want to believe in. In the respondents' accounts it is not always clear whether they are fully aware of this, or whether there is a kind of double take. That is, they recognise this falsification, but choose to, as it were, bury their heads in the sand, or rather, turn their heads the other way. It would seem that they are adopting a moral stance on the basis of integrity (Abrahams 2017, p. 633-634). They also appear to be *misrecognising* their relative class position with regard to *symbolic* capital. However, I must emphasise that Abrahams does not actually state this point. I am only inferring this conclusion from the accounts of respondents in her paper. But surely, as successful working-class graduates, they would be aware of the criticality of mobilising whatever capitals they might have at their disposal?

However, Abrahams wonders whether her working-class respondents are refusing to accept how social capital is accessed, constructed and maintained through mutual exchange and mutual recognition. She argues that this is because they seem to intuitively know that they have nothing (else) to offer other than their degrees; that they have limited, or no exchange power or value; that they are not owed any favours which might help them climb the career ladder (Abrahams 2017, p. 632). Furthermore, Abrahams suggests that by overriding the nepotism and social (*symbolic*) capital that is accessible to their middle-class counterparts they are showing, as noted by Bradley and Ingram, the resilience that they have had to demonstrate throughout their lives as they fight to be recognised as worthy in society (see Abrahams 2017, p. 636). Their sense of honour is part of their class *habitus*, developed from a dominated position which relates to feeling devalued (Skeggs and Loveday 2012) and to whether they "feel pride, shame, envy or contentment" (Sayer 2005, p. 22).

This would seem to register the 'double-bind' of class aspiration. That is, managing a conscious sense of disadvantage juxtaposed to the struggle

for recognition, respect, and for a strong sense of self-concept, dignity and identity. The fact that some of Abrahams's middle-class respondents indicate that they are only too aware of the advantage their connectedness brings, and that some even admit to feeling guilty about it, is doubly alarming (Abrahams 2017, p. 630).

However, in terms of who is more *authentic* in this clamber for further capital and job security, perhaps the difference is marginal rather than marked? Both groups of graduates are using the resources and talents at their disposal. A 'foot in the door' as opposed to 'making it by themselves' shows a tragic realism which seems to airbrush out the question of honour or fair play. The sense of an authentic self, based on honour, can be attributed to this kind of 'unassisted self-actualisation' in meritocratic terms. While this would seem undeniably laudable, it would surely only bring dividends if they were able to secure comparably favourable forms of work experience and later employment, without the 'connections' that the middle-class graduates had? This is the most compelling aspect of class disadvantage. It is infuriating; it generates anger and frustration at the glaring and profound injustice of the situation; it makes transparent the *symbolic domination* at play. Again, the working-class graduates' position of disadvantage is *misrecognised* in the *field* of play (Bourdieu 1986, 1990, 1994; also, Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2010; Lawler 2014, p. 711).

A further example is useful in showing how feelings of fraudulence can emerge in the context of shifting class identities. Allen's (2013) research in a highly sought-after performing arts school compares the different pre-conceived ideas of pupils from different backgrounds. Allen references Reay's work on the 'psychic landscape of class' (Allen 2013, p. 764). Reay engages with the entanglement of social and psychic practices through which class is lived and felt, with particular reference to working-class children, who are educationally 'successful' or surrounded by generational desires for class mobility where failure and judgement looms large (Reay 2005, p. 917). Allen notes that because of the visual nature of performance arts, the idea of 'fame' operates as a powerful symbol of

success. In this she references Walkerdine with regard to the emerging cultural orientation of working-class children and their desire to become rich and famous (see Allen 2013, p. 768). Walkerdine says that

> "the lure of fame …offers working-class girls the possibility of a talent from which they have not automatically been excluded by virtue of their supposed lack of intelligence or culture" (see Allen 2013, p. 768).

However, Allen's respondents felt that the performing arts school's ethos disapproved of such 'famed-based' aspirations because it revealed that pupils' who held these aspirations showed a weak 'feel for the game'. Working-class pupils reported that they were being pushed towards more esoteric careers, associated with high-cultural genres. They were being forced away from naïve thoughts of 'dream-like' jobs. Allen speculates as to whether the School knew that the girls would not secure such unrealistic job goals, but also that these girls were already preconditioned to fail. Thus, the pupils' naivety may show an honest aspirational desire, and of the possibilities for their future working life, but that it also marks them out as ill-equipped to succeed. The students themselves, even confessed to having 'false illusions' and were apparently aware of how pretentious this 'lust for fame' was. One of the girls remarked that "It makes you look really shallow" (Allen 2013, p. 769).

Furthermore, according to Burke and McManus (see Allen 2013, p. 769) the interview questions put to candidates applying to elite art schools reflected a middle-class *habitus* and cultural capital, and that the knowledge of popular culture among working-class applicants was *misrecognised* as 'lacking' and improper, resulting in these applicants being judged as 'unsuitable' (Allen 2013, p. 769). Also, according to Flemmin (see Allen 2013, p. 769) it appears necessary to abide by the rules of a particular *field* in order to partake in the practice going on in that field, and to accumulate resources and to invest them in acceptable ways.

Thus class becomes a matter of 'getting it right' in terms of cultural knowledge (see Skeggs 2004, p. 54); to show a willingness to transform yourself; to be willing and able to play, and live (become immersed in) the game; to become a viable, legitimate player; to be willing to reject the codified class signifiers *misrecognised* in the aspirations that were deemed to be naïve and fanciful. However, Allen rightly notes that in this 'showing willing' and recognising the judgements of 'others' it is possible to see moments of disorientation that characterise the *habitus* clive'. The entry into an unfamiliar field can leave the aspirant uneasily positioned between two ways of being and thereby self-questioning the *habitus* (Allen 2013, p. 770). At these moments, ways of being-in-the-world are no longer effective. There is a clear 'lack of fit', and, I would argue, a sense of a 'fraudulent-self' is evoked where a 'familiar' identity is challenged.

As well as raising matters of genuineness and fraudulence with regard to identity, these also indicate *existential* issues for aspirants of all ages and across genders which, it is hoped, they would come to recognise through self-monitoring and reflexivity. Allen's study concludes that pupils' aspirations for fame tend to remain and that they are painful and incomplete. Thus, the performing art school's elitist ethos and practices produced uncertainty and anxieties for these working-class aspirants with regard to how they should exist in the world. These anxieties will be more widely considered in the next chapter (see also Reay 2001, 2012; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009, 2010).

As I showed in Chapter 3, much of classed life for the working-class is a search for dignity and respect. This is shown to be constantly under threat with the unequal distribution of social and cultural capital which symbolically signifies and reinforces social place and position. Furthermore, this is shown to affect the individual's sense of self-worth and the desire for an unequivocal sense of belonging. Sennett and Cobb (1973, p.58) coin the phrase 'badges of ability' noting the conflicting effects on the sense of self when their respondents consider what they really want to do with their lives. In this the authors adopt an existential line of enquiry (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 201 and p. 207). In terms of

what might bring aspirant mobiles a better life, they suggest that the innermost desires of respondents can be shown to be in conflict with those held by their family and peers, or with the wider social or economic constraints and normative imperatives. Thus, the ideas of aspiration and mobility as a means of escaping from one's class of origin, may raise other issues such as the desire to live a life that was truer to their own sense of a worthwhile existence (see Lawler 1999). By being drawn towards, or tied to, the expectations of 'others' and often ambivalently aligning with the wider socio-cultural norms, the self's *sense-of-being* can be compromised, and *inauthentic* in conforming to such agency and practice. This is of critical importance in terms of an existential sociology stance with regard to the wellbeing of the aspirant self. Interestingly, it can also be argued that to be effective, class aspiration needs to be focused and goal driven. But wanting to better one's circumstances without actually know how to bring this about, and without a valid set of reasons, would appear to be one of many reasons why such upward mobility might fail, or remain incomplete (see Friedman 2016, p. 140; Mallman 2017, p. 20).

I now move on to cite further examples that help to illustrate the significance of this sense of *inauthenticity* in mobility trajectories. The tension-bound situations in which aspirant mobiles might struggle to re-affirm their identity and to survive and progress in middle-class contexts, often brings such questions of selfhood to bear.

4.5 Further critiques of aspirants' experiences of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity'.

A very telling expression of striving to adopt the mores of the middle-class, while at the same time trying to retain a strong sense of self and self-worth, can be shown in the daily lives of aspirant families. This has been graphically shown in many accounts in the media, some humorous, others less so; some even to the point of being tragic. Some of these portrayals show suburban life in the form of 'keeping up appearances' in displaying (often mistakenly), the perceived middle-class norms of cultural practice. These can be shown to be excruciatingly absurd and often detrimental to the psyches and lives of those family members trapped in

this struggle to be one thing rather than another. In what we might term the '*inauthenticity* of style and taste' the family life of the upwardly mobile shows many instances of misplaced adherence to supposedly middle-class ways of living (see Savage 2015, p. 210 and Felski 2000).

For example, in keeping with the sentiments of discussed by Felski (2000), I suggest that many aspirant parents are under self-imposed pressure and often ignore their psychical and emotional needs and those of their children. Similarly, they are often shown to be withholding forms of affection, and imposing controlling conditions on their children's freedom. These parents appear to be misguidedly fearful of stepping out of the perceived and expected norms of practice. They are seen to display characteristics of pretentiousness, artificiality and snobbery which, among other things, compromises and undermines the possibilities for them to demonstrate unconditional love for their offspring (see Felski 2000, p. 37; Kuhn 2002). Significantly, such *inauthentic* displays of class are, paradoxically, administered in the name of an *authentic* middle-class lifestyle.

For example, parents may prevent their children from getting dirty in play, unless they are involved in 'legitimate' leisure pursuits such as rugby, a seemingly middle-class sport. These presumed *signifiers* of middle-class modes of practice, such as ensuring that their children are tastefully dressed, show the tensions in day-to-day practice in not having the necessary economic and cultural capital to actually 'pull this off'. The aspirant family can be shown to be constantly on its guard against putting a foot wrong and exposing their 'true' working-class identities.[95] However, as I have argued, such ill-advised cultural practice is structural in form, but is also a product of an aspirational clamour, within the rhetoric of *Individualism* and *meritocracy*. Notwithstanding, it is presented as a

[95] For example, in Chapter 3, I cite Felski (2000) in her accounts of the impacts of shame in attempting to 'keep up appearances' among the lower-middle-class. Here, I would suggest that such practices might also be displayed among sections of the aspirant working-class.

personal, family choice matter, highlighting the embarrassment, humiliation and misplaced search for class identity that can spring from it. Invariably, the social context is critical in ascertaining the degree of latitude for the aspirant in being *authentic* at any time. For example, though strident attempts may be made to disguise the fact, the practice of middle-class compliance, or mimicry, can be deeply troubling for the reflexive aspirant mobile (Bourdieu 1984, 1994; Allen 2013). This can be especially troublesome in the workplace, where not 'rocking the boat' might be doubled-edged in its consequences. On the one hand, compliance and conformity can bring the assurance of acceptance from senior (middle class) colleagues. However, such compliance may undermine the aspirant mobile's sense of autonomy and may test the latitude for being able to disagree or contest workplace ideas, perspectives or practice, which may, or may not be encouraged in a given organisational culture. There are also contractual constraints to consider. For example, by 'speaking their mind' aspirants would need to reflect on the consequences, and much would depend on the culture and the structure of the organisation. Egalitarian workplace cultures, for example, may not see an individual's social class background as an issue, and transparency in this regard may be liberating for the aspirant mobile. Thus, the possibilities for acceptance and a sense of belonging will be contingent on the context, and largely on testing the water to assess the degree of disadvantage that one's class background might bring (see Ashton and Gibson 2010).

It is also important to note that, historically, the struggles of the working-class have been proudly fought and achieved much in winning the right to vote and to organise for improved working and living conditions. Moreover, the idea of social mobility and of becoming middle-class can be seen as a 'default process of expediency' on the basis of securing a 'better life' rather than having the desire to be 'classed' differently. Indeed, it would appear that the class system has not been that responsive to the aspirations of the upwardly mobile (see Savage 2015, p. 216; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Friedman 2016). Such research shows aspirant mobiles frequently experiencing a kind of class guilt because had they not played along with the meritocratic myth, it would have been problematic for them to

rationalise the travails of class transition. As my earlier examples show, mobiles can resent themselves in the striving and clamber of social climbing. Thus, there is psychical element at play, or at least an effect on identity and emotional security, thereby making the process of self-re-identification potentially challenging.

Other research sources are also relevant here. For example, Savage (2005) revisits the Affluent Worker Study by Goldthorpe et al (1969) in order to re-analyse working-class identities as they were depicted in that original landmark research. Savage's conclusions are useful here in showing the underlying issues of *authenticity*, or class identity, by focusing on what he terms the 'ordinary'. He suggests that two key processes were at work which may not have been emphasised enough by Goldthorpe's researchers at the time. Firstly, during that decade (1960s) of rising *individualism* the working-class respondents in Goldthorpe's study were concerned to define themselves as 'ordinary' when comparing themselves with what they termed an 'upper class'. They understood themselves to be 'ordinary' because they had to 'make their own living'.[96] Second, there was a relational contrast being made between the 'natural' and the 'social'. The view of many of Goldthorpe's respondents was that those who did not act 'naturally' but acted out of 'social' considerations were disdained. In this, Savage suggests that Goldthorpe's respondents may have been referring to the middle-class. However, it is more likely that they were referring to those who act out of 'false' or affected social motives. Savage argues, that by contrasting themselves in this way, the respondents could feel better about their individuality because of its contrast with the actions of 'snobs' or 'social climbers' (see Savage 2005, p. 943).

[96] The assumption here is that Goldthorpe's respondents saw these classed 'others' as members of the 'upper class' because they did not work, as such and thus were not forced to earn a living. Savage could be suggesting here that Goldthorpe's respondents were adopting a 'workerist' position in asserting their working-class identity. However, it is not entirely clear from Savage's revisit to the Affluent Worker Study that the respondents carried such views in a conscious, politicised sense.

In another example, Friedman's respondents intonated issues of *authenticity* in some of their responses regarding their mobility trajectories and the reflexive improvisations of their *habitus*. For example, Friedman interviewed the banker James, who accounted for his 'long-range' and smooth trajectory and the extreme scale of this. This culminated in him being given a senior management position at the backend of his career (Friedman 2016, p. 135). However, Friedman notes that James thought that because he knew his institution thoroughly this allowed him to maintain a coherent sense of identity while successfully adapting to the changing conditions in his occupational field. James commented that his colleagues would be likely to regard to him as a 'professional Yorkshireman'. This was because he never pretended he was anything that he wasn't. James remarked that even though he had risen to a senior position from working-class origins, he was always open about his background; he didn't change his regional accent; he didn't develop any airs or graces or adopt other elitist or classed mannerisms.

While some of these points were inconclusive from Friedman's first-person interview text, the intimation is that in these ways James felt that he had retained his *authentic*, 'familiar' classed self. Furthermore, Friedman suggests from this extreme, and perhaps very rare example of long-range social mobility, that James did not, in fact, break with his earlier classed *habitus* since his slow and steady progress allowed him to gradually 'get a feel for the game' as he arrived at, and went through, each stage of his trajectory. Thus, his primary socialisation and experiences of class were retained or 'held', and he was able to preserve an *authentic* sense of his background as a working-class Yorkshireman (Friedman 2016, p. 135).[97]

However, this begs a number of questions in terms of the earlier discussion on *internalisation* and the *habitus* (Sections 1.5 and 2.5). Why do some working-class mobiles change their 'ways of being' and identity in class transition, while others do not, or not in the same way, or to the same

[97] This section is interspersed with my own comments, although the generic ideas are Friedman's.

degree? Again, there can be numerous early life experiences and nuanced instances within the individual aspirant's trajectory that will affect their sense of, and reaction to, a changing sense of self. Moreover, when we say, 'ways of being', this may also mean a number of things. It may be because of subtle changes that are made from the influences of significant 'others'. For example, in one's mannerisms, or use of language and local dialect, or the development of one's vocabulary, which are *internalised* in various forms, in the embodied self (*habitus)*. These can be said to occur at different rates and degrees over time, depending on the range of the mobility trajectory and any interruptions to, dips or peaks, in this transformation of selfhood (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007; Bourdieu 1990).[98]

However, this says little about other changes in the embodied self, such as social, cultural and political attitudes, or attitudes towards the views and behaviours of classed others; the changes in one's temperament as middle-class influences begin to sink in (see Vignette 2.1), and old class sentiments begin to be questioned or stridently retained on grounds of old class loyalties. Thus, when we ask whether we have changed as a result of class transition, we can also ask whether we have become less or more inclined to retain an *authentic*, 'familiar' sense of self. In which 'compartments' of, or contexts of the self or life have we reflexively questioned when and where this *authenticity* has been abandoned, or where it has been fought for and retained, and at what cost? (see for example Ashman and Gibson 2010; Bourdieu 2005).

[98] On a personal note, my local dialect changed (virtually disappeared) or dissolved markedly during my class transition. I have no conscious recollection as to how or why this happened. However, some of my early life peers made similar significant shifts in class mobility but seemed to retain their local dialects. That has always been a mystery to me.

However, strangely, when I return to my original home place, my local dialect tends to re-emerge within hours! As one of Friedman's respondents articulated, because of this, I could be seem as being *inauthentic* in trying to give the impression (artificially) of being someone I used to be but am not any longer. But such an assertion would warrant further investigation.

Numerous contextual examples of tests or threats to the 'familiar' abound. For example, as I discussed in Sections 1.3 and 4.3, aspirants might feel inclined to ingratiate themselves in the company of their boss and to curry favour; to seek career progression by behaving in a toady manner. But another part of them may be saying

> "No! You know you shouldn't be doing that! You are showing a lack of integrity and your boss will not respect you for it! You must strive to be recognised for your talents, abilities, efforts, commitments, loyalties. These will show your true self and self-respect. Remember Cooley's "looking glass" or mirroring effect and reflect on how you need to see how others see you".[99]

Of course, the aspirant may wait a long time for workplace recognition and career progression, or repeatedly fail to understand the subtleties of coping and managing in the *field* of organisational culture and in manipulating the 'rules of the game'. Furthermore, the aspirant's workplace may not be geared to being effective and transparent in monitoring and appraising the progress of its employees, and so aspirants may find themselves in a career progression stalemate. Thus, behavioural responses and outcomes of a classed self-transformation can come in many forms. Forms that show, or react to, the unsavoury aspects of human nature such as the distancing; the competitiveness; the snobbery and condescension; the general demonization of the working-class which the aspirant will need to manage effectively (see Jones 2011; Bradley and Devadason 2008). Those dispositional traits cited above such as a toady, obsequious, ingratiating manner might be attributed to aspirants seeking to overcome or disguise their insecurity and their need for acceptance in the workplace cultures of the middle-class. Hence once again, the social and cultural need for acceptance and recognition can bring *inauthentic* actions and responses to challenges which may be 'forced' rather than 'natural' to the character of the aspirant. But then again, as Abrahams (2017) shows (see Section 4.4), some will try to stay true to themselves

[99] This quotation is a fabrication and my own words entirely.

despite the opportunity, albeit limited, of adopting alternative human behaviours and strategies.

Friedman (2016) cites a number of further cases which illustrate the *authenticity* issue. For example, his respondent Lee, was from the working-class, but had experienced a short-range mobility trajectory. Lee also mentioned the term 'professional'. But unlike the banker James (see earlier in this section) he used the term to draw a *symbolic boundary* between himself and other aspirant mobiles whom, he argued, had effectively abandoned their 'roots' but, significantly, had still tried to demonstrate their working-class identity by over-emphasising their local accent and local knowledge (Friedman 2016, p. 137). Friedman concludes that interviewees like Lee viewed these exaggerated performances of class identity as fundamentally *inauthentic*, and as phoney examples of 'over-identification'. They were careful to distance themselves from such behaviours, demonstrating how the *habitus* of such short-range mobility carefully guarded against any identity mutation (Friedman 2016, p. 137).

Other cases cited by Friedman show aspirants 'holding true' to their class origins and upbringing, even to the extent of actively stunting their own upward trajectory, often when they had been formally offered career enhancement. The discomforts of associating with the snobbery and lack of 'common manners' of their senior colleagues appeared to be too much to accept. Friedman concludes from these examples that the *habitus* functions to protect, psychologically, from the potential dislocation of social mobility (Friedman 2016, p. 137).

Such issues of 'internal conflict', ambivalence and identity can also emerge where, for example, chosen modes of dress may be subtlety judged to be inappropriate by one's middle-class seniors in the workplace or other socio-cultural contexts. This is evident in Waskul's, account of being unable to resolve the dilemma of sincere (others' expectations) and *authentic* (own preferred self-image) (Waskul 2009, p. 53). Getting it wrong can be to the detriment of the aspirant's chances of career progression. Such compromising, in being unable to choose what to wear,

may be interpreted as either a trivial or fundamental issue in an aspirant's daily life. The compromise and the painful contradiction of betrayal of what is thought to be the more *authentic* person are again evident (see also Friedman 2016, p. 140). Here too, the external impact of the threat of *inauthenticity* can be compared with the internal feelings of self-doubt. As discussed earlier (see Sections 1.7, 2.8 and 3.3), the suspicion of 'not being good enough'; of 'not meeting the requirements and expectations of others'; of 'not matching up' reaches deeply and indelibly into the aspirant's psyche. Again, Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic domination* holds true in these examples and contexts where taste and belonging are prevalent (see Bourdieu 1977, 1984 and also Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992).

In this way, Skeggs (2004) also considers how the 'entitlement' of the middle-class self is derived in considering the dominating ways in which taste is legitimised. Acknowledging Bourdieu (1984) she argues that the requisite knowledge is not only about knowing a set of rules but also in possessing the logic in order to reproduce them. However, she argues, what this assumes is that one group (the middle-class) already has the 'right' culture and that others (the working-class) need to learn it. For example, she stresses that it is not just a question of what clothes are to be worn, but *how* they are worn (Skeggs 2004, p. 136). Interestingly, Skeggs points out that 'imposters' can be spotted because, as the 'newly arrived', they will unavoidably give away signs of the burden of, or 'lack of', attainment and incompleteness of their cultural competence (Skeggs 2004, p. 136). [100]

While Skeggs is actually focusing on the Nouveau-riche here, it is not that far removed from my concern with upwardly mobile aspirants who will face similar scrutiny and, as Skeggs points out, the new arrivals may not yet have been able to embody the required and assumed 'superior' disposition. They do not [yet] know how to 'get it right' and are opening up a gap between representation and disposition. Furthermore, the accrual

[100] I use quotation marks here for emphasis and they are not in the original text.

of cultural capital needs to be in the right composition, of the right volume, with the right knowledge in the right way (Skeggs 2004, p. 136). Thus, there are obvious parallels between Skeggs's analysis of the 'aesthetic self' and the *authentic*, or 'familiar' aspirant self that I am considering here.

4.6 Conclusion.

My focus on the *authenticity/inauthenticity* duality here is deliberately narrow. Its application is used to address the problem of the mobile aspirant experiencing ontologically challenging social and cultural encounters in middle-class terrains. My reason for using this duality is that *authenticity* in the context of shifting forms of identity, is a major component of existential thought, and, as such, an existential sociology approach is deemed essential in supporting my argument in such matters of the self. A sense of *inauthenticity* in practice is likely to occur in the experiences of aspirant mobiles entering and 'being in the world' of the middle-class. In Chapter 1, I noted how such experiences are inherent within the rationale of mobility, in a meritocratic-oriented class society. This approach is in tandem with earlier discussions on class transition and how the structural determinants of class can inhibit aspirational goals.

My purpose here is to use the main threads of existential sociology to point out how aspirant mobiles' lives are ontologically challenged in specific encounters with the middle-class. Their socialisation through a durable *habitus*, despite reflexive adjustments, often puts them at odds with middle-class mores which makes such 'ways of being' difficult to internalise in attempts to build a sense of classed 'belonging'. I have sought to illustrate therefore, the ontological, psychical and emotional costs to aspirants in attempting to, experientially, make sense of these *inauthentic* and 'unfamiliar' encounters and to highlight the difficulties involved in addressing this ontological instability.

Furthermore, I argue that, given the structural-determinist coercions of class differentiation, and the aspirant's urgency for a re-stabilisation of class identity, such *inauthenticity* is actually defensible on social-structural and social-psychological grounds. Such acts of 'fraudulence' are shown to

arise from inter-class discomforts and anxieties, and an inability to contend with the nuanced nature of the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). These rules of the cultural *field* of class are considered by Bourdieu as the manifestation of middle-class domination. Owing to the pressures imposed on the aspirant to seek both a better (classed) life in existential terms and in complying with the prevailing norm of a *meritocracy*, the aspirant is shown to be conflicted by the resulting ambivalence, yet is responding rationally, given the inherent structural rationale of classed society.

The final chapter considers further the ontological challenges facing aspirants by exploring further the concept of *ontological insecurity*. Thus, the working-class aspirant's experience of the anxieties of selfhood requires consideration as a separate topic in the thesis. These are to be seen alongside the previous discussions on low self-esteem and the value of self, the fracturing of *habitus*, and the challenges of an *inauthentic* selfhood, as discussed in this, and earlier chapters.

Chapter 5. Working-class aspirants' experiences of ontological insecurity and the anxieties of selfhood during class transition.

5.1 Introduction

Aspirational striving for acceptance and belonging can be conceptualised as one whereby defence strategies may be adopted by aspirants as a protection against emerging class unfamiliarity and vulnerability. As the previous chapters have pinpointed, aspirants' experiences of class transition can be shown in terms of threats to the *habitus* and self*,* particularly in displays of class-related fraudulence and *inauthenticity*. The so called 'imposter syndrome' can arise during aspirants' attempts at 'becoming', and belonging to, or feeling at ease with, the middle-class (Chapman 2015). These experiences can also be shown to intensify feelings of inadequacy and insecurity which are often disguised by a 'masking' of these feelings in social situations. Thus, in order to avoid being exposed and 'found out' and in displaying a 'lack of fit', inadequacy or incompetence, aspirants can develop such coping strategies when interacting in middle-class social and cultural contexts.

This can often be seen as requiring the adoption of falsities of selfhood and by a 'splitting' or a form of compromising of the 'familiar self'. However, this, in turn, can indicate a confused sense of self and class identity, with such inner tensions remaining unresolved in the mobility trajectory and in the aftermath of the class transition process. These psychic effects on the aspirant's sense of feeling like a 'fish out of water' have been considered in various interpretations of *ontological security* and *insecurity* by, among others, Bourdieu (1977, 1984); Friedman (2016), Ashman and Gibson (2010); Allen (2013), Holmes (2010); Sennett and Cobb (1973) and Skeggs (1997).

These psychical concerns are explored further in this chapter, offering evidence of a persistent sense of a 'conflicted' self. That is, of feeling a sense of an incomplete and/or fragmented social and cultural existence. In such class conflicting encounters the aspirant's sense of place and space can be shown to be profoundly unsettled when experiencing this form of

transformation; a morphing of the working-class *habitus*, into a middle-class self, within a prevailing middle-class social and cultural orthodoxy (see Bourdieu 1984, 1990, 1994, 2005; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007). This conflicted and disoriented sense of being can be shown to challenge not only the aspirant's continuous sense of an affirmed existence; of a social presence from others that avows belonging, but also the difficulties in managing the anxieties that can be experienced and which disrupt the psyche of the aspirant. There is also evidence to show that such anxieties can persist throughout the aspirational process and beyond; which can figure strongly in the aftermath of class transitional life. Conceptually, this presents the idea of a troubled psychical legacy of aspiration triggered by the 'normative' nature of mobility.

What is of interest here is how aspirants cope with these anxieties and the existential challenges that Lawler (1999 and 2000) refers to as 'getting out and getting away' and the tensions and psychical imperative that this generates.[101] We could also add the notion of 'getting on and up' as part of the class dynamics of this social climbing and striving for betterment. This effectively embraces the search for a better life-course, albeit within a middle-class orthodoxy, and taken together, forms the basis of discussion in this, the final chapter.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the specific challenges involved in a changing sense of self and class identity resulting from mobility and class transition. I also framed much of that discussion within an existential sociology perspective to further explore these challenges. I continue that approach here by unpicking the kinds and causes of anxiety that aspirants can be shown to experience. In the chapter's final section, I recall some of my own experiences of class-related anxiety that surfaced during my mobility trajectory and I attempt to make sense of these experiences by applying threads from the theoretical discussion developed in the chapter. Thus, this theoretical discussion will focus primarily on *ontological insecurity* and

[101] See also Vignette 3.4.

'existential angst' as framing concepts, while also bringing into consideration the emotionality underpinning these class tensions that can arise during such mobility trajectories.[102]

Thus, for the purposes of this discussion, I take the term 'ontological' to mean the 'sense of being' experienced by working-class aspirants, or the emerging ways of being and 'becoming', in the specific context of class transition. Furthermore, I use *ontological insecurity* to describe how aspirants struggle to make sense of the significant personal and social changes of class transition, when contending with a reflexive *habitus,* and how they grapple with the consequent psychical, social and cultural shifts in their classed lives.

The chapter is therefore, formed of three main sections. Firstly, I explore the sociological and existential relevance of *ontological insecurity* and the contexts in which it can be experienced by working-class aspirants. This approach links with the discussions in Chapter 1 on structural inhibitors, and shows how, from a selection of specific standpoints, they are linked to this existential sociology approach.[103] Secondly, I critically identify the root causes of class-related anxieties prior to, during and following class transition. I show that such class 'anxieties' are effectively evaluated using an existential sociological approach to such psychical disruptions. Thirdly, I provide a selection of relevant examples of aspirants' experiences of anxiety and *ontological insecurity* and include a selection of personal vignettes that illustrate and amplify such experiences. I do not include these to claim generalisability or universality of the experiences discussed.

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[102] In Chapter 3 I chart the experiences of self-esteem and self-worth among aspirants. This provides a critique of emotionality and working-class aspirants' perceptions of self and value.

[103] In particular, in Chapter 1, I charted the ways in which aspirants struggle against the imposing structures of class society; the ways in which such structures inhibit opportunities for self-enhancement and thus the realisation of aspirational goals. Similarly, the discussion on emotionality, self-esteem and shame in Chapter 3, and the classed experiences of fraudulence and inauthenticity in Chapter 4, each, in their different ways, illustrates the challenges to the classed self that raise profound ontological and existential issues of 'being' and 'striving' in a classed society.

Rather, I use them to show that there are a number of notable cases and contexts were such experiences can take place. I then summarise the key points and reiterate the significance of the discussion.

5.2 Experiences of ontological insecurity and existential angst during class transition.

This section considers an existential sociology perspective on aspirants' experiences of *ontological insecurity* in the context of class transition. It also provides a theoretical backdrop to the more applied, contextual and personal examples illustrated later in the chapter. By arguing from an existential sociology position, I show how the tensions, anxieties, contradictions and expressions of insecurity can emerge and persist during and after class transition. However, by considering these psychical expressions of insecurity and anxiety, I avoid consideration of mental states such as psychosis and other areas of mental illness diagnosed in the field of psychiatry, which are outside the current focus.[104] Rather, the focus here is primarily sociological, while using selected tenets of existential thought and social psychology, in an attempt to develop a broader account of aspirants' insecurities and to open up the social and cultural contexts of social mobility where these tend to occur. It is not, therefore, the intention to consider these issues through a theoretical exposition of Existentialism as a philosophy, nor through specific branches of Psychology, Psychiatry or Psychotherapy.[105]

For reasons of brevity therefore, I take the existential sociology view that the self is, in and of itself, a 'becoming' or continuously emergent entity.[106]

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[104] However, see for example, Schwartz (1987); Laing (1974, 1990a, 1990b); for a consideration of these central aspects of psychiatry and their social implications.

[105] However, see Craib (1976), for example, in linking the disciplines of Sociology and Existentialism from the work of Sartre, and from Laing (1990a) in the field of existential psychiatry.

[106] Here I want to be clear about my use of the concept of 'becoming'. It is not my intention to engage in the established philosophical literature on the 'self' and 'being'. That would take the discussion outside of the scope of work. But I quote Charles Guignon here, who cites Heidegger on the nature of 'self as: "an unfolding 'event' or 'happening' that is so thoroughly enmeshed in a shared lifeworld that

Thus a shifting and transforming self is deemed to be an existential reality exemplified in the quest to 'become' a changed self in realising a better existence and life experience than hitherto. Accordingly, aspirants, in seeking to be socially mobile, are doing so in the only life that they will have and are thus able to live. This, I argue, underlines the imperative of many aspirant mobiles as a social group and is the basis of the rationale for upward mobility as both an individual and a social enterprise (see Knights and Clarke 2013; Ashman and Gibson 2010).

This allows me to argue that the limits of life, the life chances and life choices can be shown to be ever present in the aspirant's psyche (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 95). For the aspirant this can be seen as the experiential and existential basis and momentum at the heart of being socially mobile. It also amplifies the urgency underlying the limited timescales of a finite life. As a cornerstone of existential thought, it is this awareness of *finitude* that can be shown to trigger a profound exigency among many aspirant mobiles to achieve this better life while time remains; before it is too late. Indeed, it can be seen as an urgency in facing the aforementioned structural barriers, both internal and social, that can generate such angst before age and other constraining human factors inevitably come into play.[107]

Earlier chapters of the thesis have considered a number of class-inhibiting and structural constraints on aspirational endeavour and mobility.[108] However, from a theoretical standpoint the aspirant's perceived mind-set and sense of a changing identity and existence can be shown to have a direct bearing on their intended and actual mobility trajectories. Here, I

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there is no way to draw a sharp line between either self and world or self and others" (Guignon 2004, p. 120).

[107] This position certainly resonates with my life, where I have felt a perpetual anxiety of trailing behind and needing to 'catch up' with many of my peers who, for reasons such as a better start in the education system, appear to have progressed sooner in aspects of their lives.

[108] See Chapters 1 and 2 for a discussion on structural class barriers and the impacts on agency and aspiration.

consider the ways in which aspirants react to and feel their way through what might be described as an ontological minefield of class transition experiences and self-induced change. This is shown in varying degrees of resistance, or forms of denial, in the transformation of the aspirant's being and, in the realignment, or re-building of identity. Again, this discussion supports my central argument relating to a lingering and embodied interiority of self-limiting class disadvantage (see Bourdieu 1994; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Abrahams 2017; Allen 2015; Stahl 2014; Lawler 1999; Brown 2000; Friedman 2016; Harter 1993).

Evidence also shows how aspirants can display naïve yet honourable behaviours in social fields such as higher education, where the dominant social and cultural norms and practices of the middle-class are ascendant. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 4, Abrahams (2017) reveals how working-class graduates found themselves in uncomfortable and compromising states of being in recognising the injustice, class advantage and the questionable tactics of their middle-class peers in order to secure appropriate career opportunities.[109] The working-class graduates sensed the unfairness in which their middle-class peers could access 'cultural capital'. However, they had no effective means of resolving this class-related injustice. These aspirants were not only 'playing the game' by an unrealistic set of rules. They were also experiencing this discomfort, despite their academic legitimacy and entitlement to exist and survive on equal grounds. However, Abrahams argued that they were choosing avoidance or self-protective strategies because their sense of self was undermined by a *habitus* that had grown to recognise a lack of self-worth and of feeling vulnerable and thus devalued (see Harter 1993; Tice 1993; Baumeister 1993).

This form of social bind is well documented by Sennett and Cobb (1973, p. 37) where they show how mobiles were inclined to blame themselves for circumstances clearly not of their making. As discussed at length in Chapter 2, this is also central to Bourdieu's emphasis on the reflexive

[109] See Section 4.4.

alignment of *habitus* and *field* and the practice emerging from class domination (Bourdieu 1977, 1984). The anxieties and ambivalence underpinning this feeling of misplaced identity, detachment and disconnect are the focal points of the aspirant's shifting sense of existence during their attempts to undertake class transition or to emulate the 'ways of being' of the middle-class. As such, the psychical and emotional states that accompany these anxieties are worthy of further and deeper exploration.

As discussed in earlier chapters, one of the key contentions in the thesis is that aspirant mobiles are psychically constrained in their opportunities for personal development in a classed society (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu and Eagleton 1991). As such I am not saying that they are always consciously 'choosing' to become 'middle-class'. Indeed, there are numerous examples of working-class solidarity, valorisation, honour and defences of working-class culture, that would contradict this claim. For example, the positive expressions of working-class identities found in industrial action, in working-class protest movements and trade unionism (see also Section 4.5). Rather, I am saying that the means and ends whereby aspirant mobiles can successfully steer this, albeit reflexive course of social and cultural betterment, will find them challenged in adopting other options that enable them to avoid the norms, values nuanced 'ways of being' that are representative of middle-class life.

Furthermore, there will be exceptions to this tendency, where an aspirant's class identity and *habitus* is not necessarily affected so markedly (see Friedman 2016; Bradley and Devadason 2008). However, while I ignore such anomalies, they may provide a basis for future research. Uncontrovertibly, each case of mobility can be said to have unique facets in the retaining or shedding of working-class traits and an awareness of what can be gained and what can be lost by such a psychical transformation (see Section 1.2).

However, I now return to the earlier discussion. From the particular examples I have used and in developing an existential sociology

perspective to account for the anxieties of mobility, aspirants are likely to ask pointed questions of themselves. For example, they may ask: "Who was I prior to becoming socially mobile?" or "How have I changed as a result of making these adjustments in my life?" That is, "Who have I become". "How will my circumstances change as a result of pursuing these life-enhancing challenges?" (see Sennett and Cobb 1973). These profoundly reflexive and existential questions illustrate the instinctual and perhaps courageous nature of an aspirational self in class transition; a transforming self that is contemplating deeply uncertain times, where the actions and life decisions being undertaken are shown to be precarious, often psychically unconscious and invariably ambivalent (see Savage 2015, pp. 187-217). The discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 considered these experiences, focusing on the imposition of structural constraints on agency through *internalised* adherence to dominant social norms. In parallel with these earlier discussions therefore, an ontological account of class mobility and transition is also necessary here, to take these internal and structural/social limits of freedom into account.[110]

Such inward-facing questions of an existential and ontological nature, pinpoint the uncertainties and confusion of such a self-enhancement 'project' for the aspirant.[111] The anxieties surrounding the value attached to identity, in terms of its stability, indicate where and how individuals are caught up in a structural web of aspirational striving. The essential point I make here is that this striving to aspire is often undertaken in a normative fashion, as a 'life-affirming project' but often without realising the class-

[110] This use of the concept of freedom is a central feature of existential thought (see for example Wartenberg 2013, pp. 31-36 and p. 128). This is so since it is said that a major source of anxiety is the challenge of deciding how to live one's life when confronted by an infinite number of choices.

[111] The use of the term 'project' is pertinent in considering social aspiration from an existential sociological perspective. For example, according to Sartre, life "is something we have, whether we like it or not, it is what we do with what we have been given, with the materials with which we are provided at the start of our lives, and which we turn into something else in the course of our lives...and that the important issue is whether we can go beyond what we are given to start with, and produce something new" (see Craib 1997, p. 165).

bounded obstacles and the extent of the domination of a middle-class orthodoxy.

Closely linked to such reflexive questioning, Neilson (2015) seeks to show how differing class experiences of increased 'precarity' underpin a subjective shift from ontological 'security' towards 'existential anxiety'.[112] He argues that existential anxiety is to be understood as a mental unease induced by the self-reflexive perception of life's precarious character and is intensified by the reality of deepening social and material precarity. He considers ontological *security* to be the everyday trust in the continuity of life, encouraged by circumstantial security (Neilson 2015, p. 184). Presumably then, he would consider ontological *insecurity* to be a lack of trust in the continuity of life that is brought about by circumstances, both social and material, that are insufficient to sustain both the bodily and psychical reassurance necessary for physical and mental wellbeing?

Neilson elaborates further on an understanding of this existential anxiety, referring to it as

> "an overwhelming and physically manifesting state of fear, distress, loathing and dread which derives from the human awareness of the transient and fragile nature of life" (Neilson, 2015, p. 185).

While this definition of the 'angst about being' might appear acutely pessimistic and even overly dramatic, it is nonetheless valid here in contextualising such painful psychical experiences as similar to aspirants' sense of a shifting social reality. I argue that this is because of the risks and uncertainties experienced in the mobility process and the frequent encounters of instability that can be experienced in many aspirants' mobility trajectories.

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[112] 'Precarity' refers to the widespread condition of temporary, flexible, contingent, casual, intermittent work in post-industrial societies, brought about by the neo-liberal labour market reforms that have strengthened management and weakened the bargaining power of employees since the late 1970s. See also Savage (2015, p. 333-358).

Tillich, for example (see Neilson 2015) makes use of the term 'anxiety fate', which refers to the fears derived from the precarity of our contingent circumstances. Thus, he argues, in everyday practice, existential anxiety is inversely related to the experience and perception of an everyday predictability, stability and continuity of life, or ontological 'security' (Neilson 2015, p. 185). Presumably then, we should conclude from this that an absence of these assurances engenders the insecurities that accompany much of the fluidity of classed life for the aspirant mobile. While predictability and stability are not guaranteed for anyone, irrespective of social class, the aspirant can have the additional aforementioned issues of a conflicted psychical interiority to contend with, which require reflexive resolution (see Chapters 2 and 3). In contrast to this view, others such as Giddens (1991) present a somewhat more neutral or non-class perspective on ontological security and reflexivity (see Section 2.3). Giddens specifically refers to the everyday experiences of personal safety, security, friendliness and a viable self-image that allows us to continue to pursue life despite these ontological threats and risks to our state of being (see also Beck 1992).

Importantly however, Neilson, asserts that people respond to anxiety induced by changes to their circumstances in complex and differing ways (Neilson 2015, p. 185). As I show later in the chapter, class mobility can be ontologically overwhelming to the aspirant in a psychical sense. This is particularly the case when self-conscious moments are mixed with a fragility founded upon ill-preparedness for class transition and there is a lack of awareness of the nuanced nature of middle-class practices. Indeed, on the face of it, the aspirant's skills and abilities may not be in question, or a problem to them. These may be confidently managed using what we might call the 'externalities of practice' and the use of 'masking' to hide the vulnerable working-class self by conveying the 'performative' image of self. However, it is this vulnerability that stems from the unfamiliarity and discomfort of moments of *hysteresis* that can arouse the innermost form of insecurity in the self (Friedman 2016, p. 131; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). It is this that is central to my use of *ontological insecurity* as a framing concept.

However, it is also the expectations and judgements of others that can reach into the interior of the self and can be most injurious. As I indicated in Chapters 3 and 4, a lack of resilience and one's perceived sense of ineptitude; self-doubt and threatened self-esteem are all manifestations of class insecurities. When such sentiments are sparked, they often result in profound embarrassments, leaving indelible anxieties that can sit at the core of aspirant's being, to be re-triggered when experiencing *symbolic violence* and *domination*. The everyday trust in the continuity of everyday life (Neilson 2015, p. 185) and that existential assurance may be brought into question, with shame erupting and contributing to an undermining of the self.

Other characterisations of existential angst linked to social aspiration can be usefully added to Neilson's explanation. For example, Knights and Clarke (2013) say that this *ontological insecurity* is about the questioning of the self over concerns of time, destiny and the meaning attached to our actions.[113] Furthermore, according to Fineman, work provides an illusion of realness and permanence in the face of the unconscious fear that everything is fleeting, fragile and meaningless (see Knights and Clarke 2013, p. 16). Also, Sennett and Cobb (1973, p. 91) refer to the fear of being powerless and about "falling into nothingness" when reporting the sentiments of their respondents' interpretation of what they see as happening to the social fabric. Specifically, they note the sense of inadequacy that some of their respondents feel in their new-found position of workplace responsibility. From this they identify a feeling of dependence on those for whom they are responsible, but do not respect, which leads to a lack of respect for the self.

Knights and Clarke (2013) also suggest that an increasing tension exists between trying to fulfil career aspirations and finding meaning from work itself.[114] This seems to emphasise a further ontological double bind.

[113] This point is attributed to Sartre (see Knights and Clarke 2013, p. 16)

[114] See Section 5.3 for accounts of *ontological insecurity* and Section 5.5 for vignettes that elaborate on this line of thinking.

However, this potential contradiction is necessarily avoided or suppressed by the illusion and rationalisation bound up in the normative rhetoric, suggesting there are great benefits that can be derived from this striving and becoming socially mobile. Such instances of potential alienation and existential anxieties are cited in other contexts later in this section (see Section 5.3 and 5.5). However, it becomes clear that the paradox of aspirational striving for recognition in these ways is perpetually overshadowed by the ontological threat that human life might be potentially reducible to trivial or pointless objectives. However, I note the inherent nihilism in this line of thinking.

The existential sociology argument here suggests that individuals living in modern contemporary, individualistic and materialistic classed societies are intuitively striving for increased wellbeing in terms of a stronger sense of purpose in life. Moreover, it can often be hard to justify the futile, meaningless and absurd nature of social and occupational life in such an epoch (see Fromm 2007). Consequently, it would seem necessary for aspirants to reflect on why and how striving can often be so challenging in their anxious clamour for betterment. For as long as they face such existential and structural class barriers, working-class aspirants would appear to have few options other than locking onto this intensive work ethic and normative practice.

However, this needs to be balanced alongside broader working-class social and cultural expressions of solidarity. For example, in seeking a better life, the working-class identities of aspirants may be retained, preserved and valorised in a collectivist sense. Such an apparent contradiction and opposing stance here, only serves to emphasise the existence and nature of a wider class struggle where far less appreciation of, and attention to, individualistic meritocratic approaches is given greater ascendency.

Thus, at certain points in their endeavours and trajectories, aspirants may sense a futility in their striving. This would seem to bring the whole aspirational project into question, especially were matters of identity, respect, legitimation, entitlement, recognition and acceptance are

contextualised in terms of class domination. The reflexive moments of 'stepping back' may bring a realisation that there is a kind of absurdity attached to this clamour in the name of a consolidation of self-worth and self-actualisation. That acceptance from middle-class others, either by those in superior positions in the workplace, or in other cultural spaces may, ultimately, have a hollowness about it. As Sennett notes, in much of his research, these sensibilities surrounding such a predicament may have much to do with the aforementioned interiority of 'lack' and low levels of self-belief that many aspirants are shown to experience (Sennett 1999 and 2004). However, as indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, such realisations may also be over-shadowed, or be in tension with, structural norms that reinforce the immediate reality of classed life and the ontological urgency, indeed imperative, of striving within specific constraints, for a better existence.

So, from these existential stands of thought, it would seem that anxiety can be aligned with *ontological insecurity* since, as Neilson points out, the material and social aspects of people's circumstances can be distinguished according to whether or not they promote ontological security or existential anxiety (Neilson 2015, p. 185). Favourable material conditions such as stable employment and a regular income would seem to be contingent on the aspirant's ability to manoeuvre within and between economic and structural class relations. Furthermore, the optimal conditions for ontological security would seem to derive, therefore, as much from the means to secure solidarity, mutual unity and inter-dependency and collective responsibility. Inversely however, existential anxiety and/or *ontological insecurity* would be triggered where division, difference, competition and individualism prevail (Neilson 2015, p. 185).

However, as Neilson also states, people's (aspirants') responses to anxiety can vary in complexity and form according to the range and gravity of changes in their circumstances. As I have shown, working class aspirant mobiles can face considerable challenges and disruptions to the format and stability of their lives. The lack of pre-requisite knowledge or 'savvy'; the limited access to the *capitals* necessary to legitimately 'play the game';

the unfamiliarity with contextual rules and refinements that would enable a stability to materialise; a lack of the self-assuredness and inner-strength to develop, often without a strong self-concept when socialising within a potentially hostile and alien class, all take their toll in an ontological sense (Friedman 2016, p. 139).

Thus, there can potentially be limited trust in the continuity of life since this lack of familiarity with new class experiences might leave the aspirant existentially exposed and psychically vulnerable to the social refinements of day-to-day middle-class practice. Of course, the extent of this vulnerability would depend on the extent of mobility and class transition (see Friedman 2016, p. 138).[115] For example, aspirants experiencing abrupt, long-range mobility trajectories that may take them beyond their familiar occupational or cultural realm and social class stratum, may feel this vulnerability more intensely than those making marginal and gradual social class adjustments.[116] Then again, making long-range changes over a long period of time may mean that the aspirant has a greater opportunity to make adjustments to the *habitus* (see Section 4.5, in the case of the banker James in Friedman 2016). Thus, the uniqueness of the individual's aspirational journey will determine the extent of existential angst and *ontological insecurity* experienced and the degree to which this does, or does not, have long term effects on the psyche.

Furthermore, in citing and quoting the psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1990a, pp. 39-61) and his existential analysis of schizophrenia, personal alienation and *ontological insecurity*, Sennett and Cobb take his definition of the

[115] I suggest that this can be perceived by the range (the extent to which a middle-class lifestyle is successfully adopted; the frequency (the number of changes, steps or leaps taken to achieve this, or not) and the temporal (the time taken to make these changes or transitions. So, the aspirant may experience short, abrupt changes; short, marginal changes; prolonged, significant changes, or long gradual changes.

[116] It is possible, of course, for the aspirant to experience short-range mobility and, in terms of occupation and class culture, to not actually merge into the professional or middle-class. But since the thrust of the thesis is concerning 'class transition', I am largely citing examples were aspirants do in fact enter the world of the middle-class.

latter to be a feeling that the self can survive whatever it encounters in the world. Thus, such a self is open to new, disruptive, even painful experience and has achieved the strength to be vulnerable (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 201). However, they argue that from a sociological standpoint, that is, looking at people from the outside in (from the social to the self), rather than the psychological approach, of looking from the inside out, (from the self to the social), it is important to appreciate that society imposes the necessity for defensiveness in human socialisation and thus prepares the psyche for dangers that may arise in psycho-social human relations (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 202).[117]

Again, this alludes to the 'masking' effect referred earlier in this section. For example, in focusing on newly appointed or promoted employees in hierarchical organisations, their findings suggest that such aspirant mobiles can, in an existential sense, leave themselves open to new experiences and to risk being 'wiped out or lost' (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 202).[118] Thus, the ability to get by from day-to-day is something that we need to trust. But, they argue, there are organisational limitations on this, insofar as the organisation's culture and regulatory constraints require the employee to be guarded and to possess and cultivate a self-protective frame of mind. This is what their respondents have done. There is a sense in which the employee needs to avoid getting hurt so that if/when things go wrong, such as the threat of losing one's job; of being reprimanded; of being passed over for promotion, or having to cope with power plays and dismissive behaviour, they are able to put a distance between their (protected) inner self by displaying the (masked) self that is seen by others.

[117] As I had indicated elsewhere, the approach here is social psychological as well as sociological, forging and affirming the overlaps between the two academic disciplines. Research on the self and on society makes this link incontrovertible.

[118] I suggest here that Sennett and Cobb's reference to being 'wiped out and lost' is psychoanalytical parlance for the individual being, as it were, psychically 'annihilated'.

Such masking and a detachment and managed psychical splitting of the self may be seen as necessary, in an existential sense, in order to hide one's true feelings and to enable social and cultural survival. In a pragmatic vein this would enable the aspirant to fulfil the professionalism necessary within the logic of a business culture. From this, Sennett and Cobb ask whether this protective defence; this splitting of the 'real' person from the 'performing' individual is a form of social schizophrenia similar to the patients treated by Laing (1990a) and what he termed the 'divided self' (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 206).

However, they also then question the relevance and validity of 'schizophrenic social structures' (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 206), a concept that was considered plausible and given that label at the time when Laing was practicing. This was given credence in accounting for divisions of the self over the whole of society, rather than being limited to the few psychotic individuals studied and treated by existential psychiatrists, such as Laing (1990a; see also Laing and Esterson 1974). Sennett and Cobb consider this concept to be sensible to a point. This is so, since the inter-class organisational dynamics of praising and selecting people for promotion and career enhancement necessitates people compartmentalising themselves. They argue that the endemic and default 'rules of selection' in workplace hierarchies do not let all people have a 'distinctive character'; that not everyone is singled out for attention, praise, reward and respect. Thus, although it can be assumed that 'masking' of the self is common practice to a greater or lesser extent, the response of individuals affected by this 'unfairness' within the hierarchy, is to engage in a defensive and protective splitting of the character (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 206; also, Knights and Wilmott 1983; Friedman 2016; Allen 2013).[119]

However, following in the shadow of Laing, Sennett and Cobb have some further concerns about this concept of 'schizophrenic social structures',

[119] My quotation marks in this paragraph are used merely for emphasis.

arguing that it washes over important social differences. Thus, for example, if someone who, in conventional terms, is labelled 'insane', it may just be because they are in fact simply more sensitive to the contradictions of the social order. But the authors then ask, if this were the case, what makes the mass of people, deemed to be sane, 'insensitive'? Furthermore, they ask whether this mass of people is all insensitive in the same way? Sennett and Cobb argue that a division of the self in a social sense, is different from the case where people are diagnosed as psychotic or schizophrenic by psychiatrists (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 207).[120]

Sennett and Cobb argue that such psychical 'splits' are obviously very different in form and process to those in a psychiatric context. In the case of Laing's patients, the inner feelings and disconnected language of the individual shows the pain of a human being that is being psychically pulled apart. However, some of Sennett and Cobb's respondents act as though their work situation has nothing to do with the 'real' self. Thus, their 'inner' self is separate from their competence–based outer self, giving them boundaries within which they can feel a sense of freedom and without responsibility for their social position. This, the authors argue, defends them against the pain a person would otherwise feel if they had to submit the 'whole of themselves' to society which makes their position a vulnerable and anxiety-based one (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 208). Thus, they argue that this dividing of the self in terms of a 'real' self and a 'performing' self, is not the same as the severe traumas that diagnosed schizophrenics experience (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 208).

Importantly, Sennett and Cobb also wish to underline a structural issue here. They cite research on the language used by people with schizophrenia suggests that the sense of a 'divided self', or the contradictory modes of self, occurs because the individual is caught in a

120 For example, the authors cite the cases of religious conversion (dividing the sacred from the profane) and political conversion (where the individual tolerates an abhorrent world but has a vision of a world not yet known, which guides his/her current actions).

'double bind'. They define this as a set of mutually contradictory commands, which has the person trying to obey these commands in situations that are often emotionally charged and anxiety-inducing. However, this anxiety arises because such commands are conflicting and irrational and impossible to complete simultaneously (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 208).[121]

Initially, the authors see this description of a double bind as valid, given the authority relations practiced within their respondents' workplaces. They provide the example of responsibilities being given by a boss to a newly promoted and competent employee as a mark of respect. But this then raises the risk of the employee's existing bonds with workplace peers conflicting with those of the boss. This sets up a complex tension by measuring the command-reward relationship against the feelings of fraternity and sensitivity to others (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 209). The employee (aspirant mobile) feels this conflict and is potentially able to see beyond the institutional demands but is pitting the obligations to the boss against a set of humane values. This is a familiar workplace context where a promoted aspirant is forced to choose between their own career enhancement and their solidarity with workplace peers.

However, Sennett and Cobb argue that this is not quite the same form of 'double bind' as that cited earlier in the case of a 'divided self'. It is not an irrational impossibility of two simultaneous opposing actions. The appointed individual can undertake the task, but they can also detach themselves from it. Although this is a contradiction in the face of taking orders within the authority relations of organisational hierarchies, they can in fact alienate themselves in order to ward off the pain that the contradiction threatens to cause (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 210). But the value of this splitting and detachment may not, of course, be appreciated by the peers over whom the newly promoted aspirant now has authority. Thus, by unpicking these double binds and contradictory

[121] The authors note the work of Gregory Bateson and his team for this research (see Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 208).

tensions in the aspirant's life we can see how an *ontological insecurity* can emerge. In this example, the aspirant is torn by irreconcilable class tensions; seeking to progress in life but trapped in a moral bind of loyalties to fellow workers and to the obligations that comes with the new workplace appointment.

There are similar tensions in the case of family loved ones, who know the mobile aspirant as their former classed self. They and the aspirant may sense the emergence of a mutual rift and a distancing with regard to earlier family ties, behaviours and values. This may, as a consequence, potentially engender painful decisions about the newly forming direction of the aspirant's life (see Vignette 1.3 and Friedman 2016, pp. 140-141).

Clearly, these internal and social conflicts and contradictions are not merely to do with inter-class dynamics and a duality of dominant/dominated power relations. They also have an ontological and existential form and thus have important implications. They profoundly affect the nature of and set limits on freedom and inhibit the means to make life more fulfilling. I argue therefore, that this act of the self 'becoming' or morphing into another self to reach a higher level of wellbeing can, currently, only take place within the context and restraining boundaries of existing class society (see Allen 2013; Skeggs 1997; Reay 2005; Gillies 2005;). For example, Allen (2013) notes how her working-class student respondents experienced a jarring and discomfort which demanded a realignment of dispositions and aspirations. These students expressed a constant state of disorientation about their place in the world, revealing the deep *ontological insecurity* of entering fields in which they were not the natural inhabitants. They revealed a continuous sense of 'lack' and fragility and it was clear that they had years of knowledge and experience to make up for, before they would be on a par with their middle-class peers (Allen 2013, p. 776).

Other workplace examples include the research by Brown (2000) which considered the prevalence of technology in business organisations and how employees seek the protection of the self, in order to preserve their

ontological security. Moreover, Ashman and Gibson, (2010) consider the ethical aspects of organisational policies and practices by focusing on mental health in the workplace. As with the aforementioned authors, they seek to show how approaches such as organisational development, surveillance and monitoring represent direct and often deliberate attacks on the individual employee's sense of identity, which can result in serious mental health conditions. Collinson (2003) meanwhile, examines how forms of insecurity can overlap and intersect in the formation of workplace selves and organisation power relations. He also argues that attempts to overcome these insecurities can have contradictory outcomes. 'Conformist', 'dramaturgical' and 'reformist' selves may be reproduced in organisations where surveillance is prevalent. He argues that a greater appreciation of the insecurities generated in such organisations can enhance an understanding of the ways in which power relations are reproduced, rationalised, resisted and sometimes transformed (Collinson 2003, p. 536-541).

In summarising this section from an existential sociology perspective, it would seem that there are distinct constraints in the forms of social mobility, class transition and transformation of the self and identity available to working class aspirants in the mainstream of modern class society. These ontological, social and cultural boundaries and parameters of aspiration and mobility are shown to create significant anxieties and insecurities. Indeed, an existential sociological perspective might locate social aspiration as a central feature of human existence (see for example, Douglas and Johnson 1977; van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker 2005). Also, it might appear uncontroversial to assert that all human life involves periods of personal and social struggle. Furthermore, questions such as "How can I live a better life?" may be predicated on other questions such as "What should I do with my life" and "What might I realistically achieve and become?". Such existential questions would seem to acknowledge the two aspects of social theory cited in Chapter 1, namely *determinism* and *voluntarism*. These might enable the aspirant to consider the parameters and limitations of time as a resource. Humans act, in the first instance, in order to maintain and continue their survival and with an urgency to

thrive, since our finitude is ultimately a primary constraining feature of our existence (Wartenberg, 2013).

The above discussion should clarify how the aspirant's conflicted feelings; ontological insecurities or anxieties, are directly related to the structural forces and relations that have brought them about. The following sections elaborate further on how these life and class anxieties play out in psychical and ontological degree for working-class aspirants. Furthermore, the personal vignettes in the final section further underline the contradictions, both psychical and existential, facing working-class aspirants, while noting that both the working-class and indeed the middle-class are bound, in different ways and degrees, to an existential challenge, given that they are conjoined by a classed society.

5.3 The roots of class anxieties and internalised histories in the context of mobility and class transition.

In Section 5.2, I considered the relevance and value derived from adopting an existential sociology approach in interpreting the experiences of the aspirant mobiles when undergoing class transition. Such an approach focuses on how aspirants experience moments and periods of existential crisis in the form of an *ontological insecurity* (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 201; Laing 1990a, p.39; Skeggs 1997; Knights and Clarke 2013; Allen 2013; Neilson 2015; Reay 2005; Friedman 2016; Bourdieu 1984).

These psychic problems of instability and anxiety may, in varying degrees, manifest in a 'conflicted self' when the aspirant is struggling to manage *internalised* tensions and contradictions. These psychic and existential life-questioning experiences are akin to those discussed by Friedman (2016). Friedman (2016) citing Bourdieu (2004), uses the term *habitus clive'* to account for these disruptions and *hysteresis*, which can lead to what he then terms the unsettling of the 'ontological coherence of the self' (Friedman 2016, p. 129 and 138-139). Similarly, Reay (2005, p. 911) considers the 'psychic landscape of class' while Allen (2013) also notes this and how, in 'doing aspiration' it is lived and managed in a class-inflected social space.

Other research has addressed class-related anxieties, where such existential challenges are contextualised in specific social and cultural settings. One notable example of research related to social class, meritocracy and mobility focuses on gender differences in the educational sector and specifically on the barriers and opportunities of educational achievement. This research identifies anxieties in both the working-class and middle-class and how they are differently managed in each case. In the secondary school sector, class-oriented anxieties are experienced by parents and their children, again with marked class differences, but also in terms of gender, where the class impacts appear to differ between girls and boys (Gillies 2005; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003; Allen 2013; Reay 1997b, 2001, 2013). In higher education much of the research addresses issues such as the classed differences of students in their attainment levels and the approaches of graduates in furthering their future careers (see Abrahams 2017; Morley 1997; Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009). Knights and Clarke (2013) however, consider the anxieties experienced by academic staff in universities. They focus on the stress levels and the ontological insecurities relating to perceived self-worth; to research output, academic prowess and the ambivalence about the respect they felt they deserved, but did not receive, for their hard work.

The workplace generally is an obvious breeding ground for anxiety. Tensions can be generated in relation to 'status acquisition' and career enhancement, as noted by Sennett and Cobb (1973).[122] Also, in Chapter 3, I showed how the aspirant's *habitus*, in undergoing reflexive self-examination, is trying to make sense of the psychic and emotional changes being experienced in the social and cultural space during class transition. I noted how and why these psychic tensions and feelings of ambivalence can emerge and how they are compounded by a persistent anxiety-based sense of confused class identity, insecurity and feelings of a lack of entitlement and belonging. The reflexive splitting of the psyche

[122] As a cornerstone piece of research Sennett and Cobb's findings and observations are considered later in this section.

(*hysteresis*), considered in the previous section is paralleled, in a different sense, by a splitting of class identity as the aspirant struggles to adjust to class mores, values and practice (see Mallman 2017, p. 20).

However, here I emphasise that such anxieties of class transition often spring from the imposition and proximity of the classed 'other', whereby the aspirant can be made to feel 'all at sea' in matters of social and cultural inclusion, cohesion and ontological security. In this, the very essence of the aspirant's being is of feeling unsettled, both consciously and unconsciously, especially when their own expectations are not felt to be matched by the norms of engagement within a newly experienced middle-class social reality. The disappointment that can arise is often visceral when attempts at mobility and class transition falter or are challenged; when the aspirant's powers of adaptation are found wanting or fall short of the expectations of their middle-class peers.

As I have noted throughout the thesis, this can leave aspirants with a profound sense of *hysteresis*, that is, feelings of displacement, exclusion and abandonment, often inducing self-criticism or even self-loathing. It can also trigger rationalisations in the form of self-deceptions in an attempt to excuse the aspirant's own inadequacies or shortcomings. Such psychological and ontological stratagems can be seen as forms of defence introduced in order to manage these personalised crises that are a product of the structural constraints of social mobility (see Sennett and Cobb, 1973, p. 157). Anxiety resulting from frustration and anger can also arise when feeling trapped in a working-class environment, yet feeling the ambivalence, guilt or shame for seeking to 'rise above one's station' and wishing to move out and up in society (see Lawler 1999; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003; Reay 2001; Reay and Ball 1997).

Moreover, since education attainment is a critical point of origin for aspiration and mobility, it is also important to note how anxieties surface and are expressed in an ontological sense in this socio-cultural *field*. In particular, the research by Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) is useful,

with their focus on educationally successful working-class schoolgirls and the psychical factors that come into play in managing school and later university life. The authors provide a rich picture of comparable home lives, highlighting the dispositions of the schoolgirls in their respective educational endeavours and the different class-related ways in which anxieties and emotions are managed within the girls' families. They argue that conceptualisations of anxiety are largely built around various forms of conflict and suggest that at the conscious level, anxieties may be named and talked about. However, at the unconscious level anxieties continue to be powerful even when they are beyond the rational influence of language and that this is often ignored in many sociological discourses (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, pp. 89-90).

Furthermore, the authors reveal the depth of concern parents' have over their children's schooling and why this provokes such intense disquiet. They argue that social reproduction issues are at the heart of parent's experiences and that anxieties are primarily to do with the fear of their children failing. This in itself is significant since it indicates that the parents have already anticipated an uphill struggle to survive and compete in an unfamiliar/unequal cultural space. It shows that the parents have almost instinctively *internalised* a 'shame-related embodiment of disadvantage' and inferiority as class identity indicators or expressions of low self-worth. Once again, we see how a sense of 'lack'; of insufficiency, of inadequacy and of a lagging behind, or, of always trying to catch up, are shown to be class-related in the socialisation of many in working-class families. However, I argue that these are not simply emotion-inducing sentiments. Rather, they are ontological insecurities with attributed anxieties that can make for a stress-induced debilitating lifestyle for these parents and their offspring.

However, in a separate paper, the same authors caution against an inadvertent pathologising of working-class life (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003, p. 289). They suggest that such a 'deficit model' tends to underline popular (mis)conceptions of working-class families. This model tends to inaccurately emphasise that working-class families

somehow lack that which ensures success for schoolgirls from middle-class families. Moreover, this kind of research does seem to dwell on middle-class parenting practices that appear to reproduce structurally advantageous life chances (see research by Lareau in Mallman 2017, p. 20). This creates a blurring of the causes of structural inequality and simplistically shows working-class backgrounds as 'something to escape from' in the name of *meritocracy* (see Lawler 1999). Once again, such individualising and personalising of 'lack' disguises the structural and nuanced disadvantages endured by many working-class families and by the aspirants from whence they emerge. As I have illustrated so far, in some of the critiques of the mobility literature and in some of my personal vignettes, the historical importance and complexity of family class origins are a central feature and ever-present backdrop in the changing lives of aspirant mobiles. These ontological insecurities and their attributed anxieties are carried by aspirants as they make their way, in an existential sense, through their mobile trajectories and their attempts to sidestep the structural barriers of class.

Furthermore, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) show that the power to succeed is implicated not simply in the possession of various *capitals* (in a Bourdieusian sense), but in the actual self-formation of the individual subject. They argue that for all working-class young women, the fact that they are engaged in a process of transformation, of 'becoming' different from their families; by producing a different and 'hybrid subjectivity', it impacts powerfully on their conscious and unconscious lives (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 142).[123] However, this psycho-social landscape of class and educational success can bring as many fears and anxieties as those felt by educational failure. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody's research

[123] These are my quotation marks here with regard to 'becoming'. Also, by suggesting that 'all' working-class young women are engaged in a process of social (or class) transformation is unclear here. Firstly, not all working-class schoolgirls will be educationally equipped to be as successful as those in Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody's sample. Secondly, not all working-class girls will be socially and culturally predisposed or willing to aspire to be upwardly mobile like some the schoolgirls in their sample. The cases the authors analyse show differing degrees of preparedness, even though these schoolgirls demonstrate high educational ability and achievement.

is also revealing in making sense of the complex emotionality that is bound up in the depiction of being successful or of being or feeling a failure. It also shows the roots of the anxieties among working-class schoolgirls and their families. They conclude that while there is in fact no less anxiety among middle-class schoolgirls and their families than among working-class families, the anxiety is clearly read and managed differently.

Much of the focus of their research is on the parenting, particularly the mothering practices and how these also differ in class terms (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 108). When anxiety-related problems emerge, these are often interpreted, and often dismissed, by school staff and the education system at large, as a lack of ability, confidence and worth. Moreover, the parents' behaviour is often dismissed as being 'too sensitive'. Yet the authors' research sample consists of working-class schoolgirls who are showing academic potential and proving their ability, despite these pathologising preconceptions. Furthermore, the research reveals how, historically, failure in education is often the norm for the schoolgirls' parents, particularly the mothers. Many of the anxieties, frustrations and the sense of powerlessness they express are shown to have deep and profound roots. When dealing with school practices they have to negotiate difficult issues of difference. Issues that middle-class mothers do not have to go through (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001, p. 126).

The authors note that a sense of inferiority and impotence keeps the working-class parents at a safe and generally passive distance from the affairs of school and university. Thus, when issues do arise parents feel unable to challenge the decisions and views of school staff in an 'appropriate' manner, harbouring as they do, these feelings of inferiority and deference. They do not tend to negotiate and to overcome the emotional barriers that their own poor experiences of school life had helped to construct. However, when they do make attempts to challenge what they consider to be injustices, they are seen as stroppy, aggressive and inept, often causing great embarrassment for their daughters, thus undermining the respectability of the family (Walkerdine, Lucey and

Melody 2001; Skeggs 1997). Also, according Reay working class mothers tend to lack the certainty and self-representation of 'entitlement' that middle-class mothers have (see Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 128).

Furthermore, in their interactions with teachers these working class parents show a lack of conviction about their point of view and knowledge of the education system; of how it works, and how they might work it to their advantage.[124] Thus they are vulnerable and at risk of being patronised, fobbed off and infantilised, which also contributes considerably to their frustration. Such *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence* were discussed at length in Chapter 2 and in this section and is clearly shown to be anxiety-inducing.

Thus, anxieties abound in this classed arena based on other emotions such as shame (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2) that is lived psychically but is produced socially and should therefore be understood as psycho-social in nature (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody et al 2001, p. 145). But again, I would also argue that these anxieties are manifestations of an ontological and existential-oriented predicament since they reach the very foundation of being and show an urgency that rails against such profound injustices in these parents' classed lives.

Importantly, the working-class parents in Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody's sample have above-average educated girls, but they often experience economic deprivation, denying themselves their family needs so that their daughters might successfully aspire as individuals. Yet, because of this some of the daughters are shown to hide significant psychic defences and guilt. This is evident when the daughters avoid making a fuss or avoid seeking help when it is clearly needed; in being anxious to dispel the notion that university is 'real' work, compared to the working lives that

[124] Once again this alludes to Bourdieu's 'feel of the game' (noted in Chapters 2 and 3), in knowing and confidently using the *symbolic* capital which plays such a significant part in acceptance, recognition, entitlement and belonging in the social space (Bourdieu 1990).

their parents and relatives have endured, but then harbouring self-doubt and wondering whether this might actually be true. They grow to realise that their path to their goal is a lonely one and that psychical or economic help will be limited (see also Mallman 2017, p. 20). Furthermore, they tend to detect the intense anxiety their parents experience in managing home and work life and in being able to effectively support them in their school life. The authors emphasise how this kind of painful separation shows a denial of anger about their parents having little to give, but with the underlying belief that if their parents had the resources, they would surely give a great deal. In one case, the schoolgirl shows an 'outer armour' that is displayed to disguise a fear that there is little contingency to prevent things falling apart (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 142-146). Yet, counter-intuitively they suggest that these defences were ensuring the girl's success at university. The 'double bind' is that while this disguise may be emotionally harmful, it is essential in a pragmatic and survivalist sense.

The authors speculatively suggest that this kind of disassociation, splitting and fragmenting of subjectivity is experienced in order to succeed and to be able to cross the class divide. It can be seen as a way of coping with the terrifying differences in practices, subject positions, modes of discourse, performance and a double-edged regulation that the two worlds of home life and school/university life provide (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 146). Bounded as they are by class difference, these differences are repeatedly *misrecognised* in the social reproduction of a self-reinforcing and ruling *doxa* (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Deer 2012, p. 120).

In addition, I argue that these accounts of aspirant student anxieties contain existential considerations, largely as a consequence of the structural class barriers that I critiqued in Chapter 1. These very able working-class schoolgirls are experiencing a complex ontological double bind. They don't want to pressure their parents for help, and appreciate they are sacrificing so much for them already. However, at the same time, they feel unable to turn to them when they really need to, because they

know that they, the parents, may be intellectually, academically and culturally ill-equipped or powerless to help. The authors argue that such distancing or splitting from their parents is likely to engender feelings of hopelessness, or despondency in the schoolgirls (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001, p. 152).

It would seem that something is happening to deflate the determination of these girls and hinder their progress. The authors suggest this is because there are no structural reasons why they 'should' succeed, and that they have to rely on their own inner resources; in an existential sense they have to take on huge responsibility for themselves and their parents in 'going it alone' (see also Friedman 2016, p. 145). Their hopes and aspirations, and those of their parents, tend to become intertwined with the pain of separation and the anxiety of becoming a different person through a loss or shift in identity (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 163).

This threat of losing and changing one's class identity is one that only appears to affect working-class pupils in this context. Of course, middle-class schoolgirls also have to strive to succeed, but they are shown to have a more in–tune interiority that aligns better with the culture and ethos of school and university. Unequivocally, working-class girls are under such pressure to make something of themselves as autonomous, reflexive beings and to go through such a profound ontological transformation to do it successfully in a prevailing middle-class academic world.

At such critical moments in their lives it is these crucial aspects of their interiority; their self-destructiveness; of allowing themselves to 'give up' despite their proven academic ability, that provides ontological clues to this existential angst and an ontology of classed disadvantage. This, the authors argue, needs to be understood and managed, in order for a complete ontological separation from their parent's ways and sentiments (their embodied, historical selves) to occur. This is necessary, if a complete 'hybridisation' of the self is to occur in what they term a 'psychic economy', and to make a complete class transition (Walkerdine, Lucey and

Melody 2001, p. 163; Bradford and Hey 2007). Thus, taking this research as a whole it would seem that the central message is clearly one of a psycho-social struggles of profound separation and loss for working-class parents and their children. This is particularly the case for female students going away to university, where 'localism' is often considered an option, in order for parents to keep them close by and for the bonds of family relationships to remain intact (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, p. 153).

Michael Merrick also suggests another aspect of this story of separation (Four Thought 2017). He says that to walk away from who we are, and where we are from, raises issues, not just about a change in identity, but also about virtue and morality. He concludes that the recipients of a good education needed to heed a warning. That while they might consider themselves virtuous and intellectually 'better' compared to, say, their parents and less educated peers, it might be unwise to pit 'home background' against 'academic' in the context of wellbeing and self-actualisation. Those who refuse to shed their heritage may have valid reasons for this. Aspirants often struggle to manage this *ontological insecurity* when they end up with a foot in both camps, thereby inheriting an 'outsider' status, an ambivalent sense of selfhood, and leaving a cultural chasm in between (see also Friedman 2016, p. 142).

I now want to complete this section by revisiting some of Sennett and Cobb's (1973) respondents' accounts of the anxieties they experienced during mobility and class transition. Among the many 'hidden injuries' of class that Sennett and Cobb identify, 'existential angst' is shown to be present in many of these accounts of confused identity and insecurity. As noted in Section 3.2, the authors use the terms 'status incongruity' and 'status anxiety' in helping to understand the psychic confusions and existential disquiet that was expressed by the blurring and weakening of class loyalties and identities (Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 27 and 29). Their respondents appeared to be uncertain of their sense of place in a shifting classed society, and the authors (and many of the respondents) sought to establish a logical rationale that might explain the basis for this

ambivalence and ontological detachment. Was it their respondents' fault that they felt this way? How could they account for these experiences and sentiments in relation to these new and unfamiliar class positions, which were expressed in existential terms?

The authors show that in some cases, respondents felt defensive about their sense of honour and dignity. They secretly feared that because middle-class others, who they had contact with, were better 'armed' with, among other things, a greater self-assuredness, people did not respect them enough for their efforts in bettering themselves and the lives of their families (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 19). The authors were made aware of the compelling nature of dignity as a human need. That in being socially mobile, these respondents seem to be cast into 'limbo' where there was never enough dignity, and what dignity there was appeared to be of a wounded form (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 191-214).

In trying to unpack Sennett and Cobb's use of 'dignity' and 'honour', it is not clear whether they are using them in a general sense, or as over-arching terms for a number of other sentiments that were expressed in their research interviews. As I discussed in earlier chapters (particularly Chapter 3), this threat to the aspirant's dignity is actually a triggering of feelings of, or threats to, self-worth or self-esteem and a pricking of the pride that would be expected to be felt by successfully achieving a 'better' lifestyle; of following the meritocratic ideal.

In deciphering their respondents' narratives, we can sense that the agency and the process of social mobility create anxiety in a number of ways (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 29). The authors ask, "What is it about the prevailing culture that is structured such that the more it gives the more it makes the socially mobile feel vulnerable?" (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 30). Also, what is occurring when the tools of freedom, such as the knowledge acquired through formal education, that enables social enhancement, become sources of indignity? In this, Sennett and Cobb speculate that if the leaps of change of class position are so viciously destructive perhaps people might be happier if they did not try to push

themselves so much and to strive in this way. They suggest that no matter how it works psychologically, perhaps morphing into the middle-class is not what people from the working-class should be doing with their lives (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 31).

Of course, the problem with choosing to be non-aspirational, which is the authors' inference here, is that the same issues of a need for an 'affirmation of dignity' alongside the invocation of feelings of inferiority and low self-regard will be present and may also persist among a 'non-aspirant' working-class. After all, it is this internalising of the markers of class and the pathologising of the working-class that is so well documented in the work of Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2007; Skeggs 2004; Jones 2011; Savage 2005, 2015; Reay 1997b, 2012; Sayer 2005 and Lawler 1999, 2000. This would seem therefore, to add weight and value to the idea of escaping one's class origins; in grasping the future benefits that mobility can supposedly bring, if and when, or irrespective of whether such anxieties can be overcome.

However, as I noted in Sections 4.5 and 5.2, it is important to mention that large numbers of people in Western class societies choose to remain true to their working-class identities and to feel proud of their class roots. They consciously decide to avoid getting swept along by the aspirational and social mobility rhetoric. However, there are also examples that show forms of 'hybridisation' in this regard. Some individuals appear to be able to progress in their careers and reach 'high status' positions while choosing not to express deference. They are able to retain a positive cultural stance and expression of their working-class identity (see Friedman 2016, p. 135). However, given the weight of middle-class cultural influence and dominance, this admixture of class loyalty alongside significant career progression would seem a hard balance to achieve and maintain.

This, I argue is at the heart of the puzzle and struggle for self-actualisation for working-class aspirants. It is a kind of existential trap which sets up the dilemma of whether to stay or go; whether to strive irrespective of the *symbolic violence and domination* and *misrecognition*; whether to face up

to, and grapple with the anxieties of mobility; or whether to accept the weight of structural determinants and be resigned to a position of classed domination (Bourdieu 2009; Sennett and Cobb 1973; Felski 2000; Friedman 2016; Ingram 2009; Loveday 2015).

From their research findings Sennett and Cobb suggest that existential anxieties emerge in the form of self-blaming as a result of failures in life and unexpected misfortunes. These might come from losing one's job and not having the wherewithal to prevent such occurrences, or to pursue viable alternative pathways (see also Sennett 1999, 2004). Furthermore, anxiety can stem from being blamed for failing others, such as family members, which can generate feelings of inadequacy, shame and guilt. However, the authors show that these feelings of inadequacy can be 'masked' to give the impression of being in control of things, but they suggest that such forms of self-protection, perhaps in the form of denial, might only intensify the initial anxiety experienced (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 34).

As I also noted in Chapter 1 (Section 1.6), there are tensions and anxieties that can arise in families were aspirants seek to distance themselves from the economic limitations of their class and community. Rather than remain integrated and to work to support their working-class communities, they may, perhaps, desire to distance themselves from the limited resources experienced by parents, siblings and earlier social networks. As I showed in Chapter 4, aspirants who become educationally successful may secure an occupational status that significantly improves their income, material life and wellbeing, giving them wider future options. However, this too can create tensions and distancing from the original family and friends. Or, they may feel trapped and unfulfilled in the generic family, if this appears socially and culturally constraining or uninspiring (see Friedman 2016, p. 142).

For these reasons aspirants can be drawn into the *meritocratic* trap and normative drive to be socially mobile. There is also the now universal expectation that families will form, grow and ultimately separate. For

example, there is the adolescent identity-based anxiety of simply feeling the need to be different from their parents and to seek an independent life. Perhaps the latent frustration of needing to 'fly the nest' is a predictable outcome, but one which has different class implications for the young of working and middle-class households (see for example, Lawler 1999, 2000; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). Also, there is the inherent unease attached to doing things that might be enjoyable, but the fear that one would be inept in doing them; of being 'nothing special', or no better than others; (Sennett and Cobb 1973, pp. 63-64).[125] While Sennett and Cobb do not elaborate too far or deeply in discussion on such matters, it is perhaps possible to speculate from their interviews that their mobile working-class respondents have at various times undergone class and family-related anxieties of this form.

Sennett and Cobb also cite numerous examples were feelings of powerlessness, and in some cases profound despair are manifest even among respondents, who have successfully transcended their class origins in pursuit of more comfortable lives. For example, despite their mobility, the authors note how respondents do not feel in control, and that their class position appears to have little to do with, for example, their improved earnings. Respondents felt it had more to do with the power 'inside' the person (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 36). The authors conclude from this that class and self are conjoined by states of existential angst. Aspirants feel this powerlessness along with ambivalence and vulnerability even when they have proven, unequivocally, to be successful in their working life. This is evident in the case of school life (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001) or in the experiences of university students (Reay, Crozier and Clayton 2009) or graduates (Abrahams 2017). They are in effect holding themselves responsible for the anxiety that springs from these

[125] See also Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2001) who discuss the double-edged sentiments surrounding 'ordinariness'. There is the security and comfort of feeling and being like others, yet also an insecurity attached to being ordinary and not wanting to 'stand out' from the crowd. By avoiding being different or 'noticed' it can be appreciated how this might be an ill-advised mechanism, since it could be a barrier preventing self-actualisation that might only transpire through some form of upward mobility.

sentiments. Sennett and Cobb suggest that something hidden and perverse is at play, such that aspirant mobiles lose the conviction of their dignity when they try to take responsibility for either an increase or reduction in their freedom (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 37). As I noted in Section 5.2, this repeated reference to freedom and the anxiety that is induced in relation to it, is a central feature of existential sociology when examining experiences of *ontological insecurity* and the plight of working-class aspirants.

Furthermore, when aspirational endeavour plays out in the workplace, it is often conveyed and interpreted by others as individualistic, seeking to impress for personal advancement. But this would surely be a rational response, given the prevailing culture which is shown to have *individualism* and enlightened self-interest at the core of most organisational cultures? However, Sennett and Cobb argue that in trying to prove themselves as worthy, mobiles are often displaying hidden feelings of self-doubt while attempting to assert their essential worth and worthiness. Moreover, the authors suggest that such acts of self-validation, if not carefully managed, can be seen as overly self-absorbing, obsequious and thus counterproductive. It would seem to put the uninitiated aspirant at odds with the acceptable cultural boundaries of practice; failing to recognise the subtler ways of 'playing the game' by the ineffective use of an established, yet seemingly unwritten set of rules (Bourdieu 1977, 1990). This would appear to be one of the most difficult aspects of class disadvantage and obstacles to class transition. It is difficult to qualify the nuanced nature of cultural norms and practice that are conformed to and are, as it were, under the surface, coded, and not obvious or transparent.

Indeed, one of the unsavoury psychological and contradictory spin-offs of this is where Sennett and Cobb's respondents' express resentment of the fact that society has created a split between the many, who are just 'ordinary' workers, and the few individuals who are members of the professional and upper middle-class (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 73). Yet, despite this resentment, respondents thought of themselves as lost among

the ‘many’. They were afraid that there may be some truth in this image and were thus inheriting and harbouring the burden of self-doubt and shame at not striving harder to succeed. This again shows the doubly induced anxiety of rejection, which can trigger self-criticism to the point of self-condemnation. In this way, the authors demonstrate how the burden of class is contradictorily rationalised, whereby the upwardly mobile *internalise* this rationality and the way it impacts on those who lose the most by being classified as such (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 76).

For the upwardly mobile of the working-class to aspire in the ways described here, means a degree of abandonment of or severance from the communities of their childhood and class roots, which can in turn engender a range of alien, existential and psychic upheavals (see Friedman, 2016, p. 139). This is as much to do with experiencing a range of cultural incongruities, were the aspirant doesn’t yet know the nuanced rules and practices of their new position and thus find themselves temporarily caught between two different cultural worlds during class transition. They feel something is wrong in terms of their sense of self, identity and place, which they struggle to understand and rectify. Indeed, as was noted in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, both Bourdieu and Sennett and Cobb have observed how *misrecognition*, *symbolic violence*, and *status incongruity*, can create a loss of a grounded, familiar, *authentic* self and the essential dignity that accompanies it. These forms of displacement of the self are shown to emanate from social class domination. They are transmitted through the reinforcement of orthodoxies *internalised* in the self, but also through contradictory *residues*, which the aspirant may carry in an existential and historical narrative on a day-to-day basis. Thus, this personalisation of structural conflict often leads aspirants to unjustifiably blame themselves for their uncomfortable predicament, while the social structures that reinforce these dominating processes remain hidden from view (Bourdieu 2000, p. 8; Sennett & Cobb 1973, p. 21).

5.4 Reflections of ontological insecurity from an existential sociology standpoint.

In summarising the discussion so far, the remaining two sections of this final chapter identify and contextualise *ontological insecurity*, from an existential sociology perspective and through personal vignettes. These accounts will underline the tensions experienced during class transition. I suggest that such ontological tensions and preconditions of anxiety are centred in relation to society generally, but also to class, and are shown to emerge early in life and to continue throughout adulthood life. In this, I concur with Bourdieu (1977, 1994, 2005, 2009 and Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007) in that these *residues* of the working-class self can never be completely silenced or eliminated despite the aspirant's strenuous efforts to assimilate into the middle-class. These *residues* can often leave an indelible mark on the aspirant's sense of self and identity and show the difficulties experienced in morphing into a middle-class self.

Here, the psychical tensions, ontological insecurities, and anxieties of upward mobility can be aligned with one of the cornerstones of existential sociology, that aspirants take responsibility for their actions. Crucially, this is predicated on the finitude and other constraints of their existence. Thus, in defining their changing identity aspirants may come to recognise the social limitations of freedom within which they choose to live. In the quest to flourish, the angst that can underpin social striving and the imperative of this life equates to the reality that, despite contending with the structural barriers and the individual and social limitations of class, their lives are finite. Within the constraints of class, it is a life that is chosen to be lived, with the growing awareness of time and resource constraints, within which aspirational potentialities can be considered and the means by which these may be progressed. This recognises that they have just this life to live and that they must strive to make it as wholesome and fulfilling as possible, despite the psychical tensions and ontological

insecurities of class that they experience. This has profound implications for the aspirant's social and psychical self-management.[126]

5.5 Personal vignettes.

The following personal vignettes contain reflections of experiences of *ontological insecurity* and existential anxiety in my life. I use them to add colour to the research cited and critiqued throughout this chapter. As is often the case in using such examples, there is the assumption that the writer is attempting to ground such illustrations as representations and generalisations from the theoretical perspectives provided. However, it is not my intention to claim that these accounts are in any way representative of some broader pattern of mobility experience. I add them in support of the general thrust of the thesis discussions. I have merely sought to emphasise the interplay between the 'uniqueness' of individual aspirational pathways and trajectories of mobility, and the processes underpinning these life journeys that potentially show similarities of form because they are structural in nature. Thus, I wish to emphasise that in the absence of a formal empirical research exercise, these personal accounts, while offering a flavour of particularity, hopefully encourage future empirical research that can test the wider relevance of their specificity.

Vignette 5.1.

Here, I consider the roots of my own class anxieties by drawing on relevant secondary sources used so far. Some of my conclusions certainly require further examination. However, the discussion in the chapter will hopefully have addressed these sufficiently.

Where did my particular class anxieties originate? If they were (are) particular to me then why were they, and how were they manifest? Mallman contends that life trajectories of the upwardly mobile tend to germinate in early experiences of family and community, and that these

[126] Useful accounts on the constraints of freedom can be found in a number of texts with an existentialist focus. For example, Wartenberg 2013, p. 31; Fromm 2007, pp. 88-109.

make a significant contribution to class mobility as well as class reproduction. Also, he argues, when class mobility is experienced it often involves an embodiment of the conflicts of class (Mallman 2017, p. 19-21).

I do not recall experiencing a conscious or positive sense of, or desire for aspiration in my early, formative years. However, this is not so surprising nor does it, in my view, contradict Mallman's point. Intentions and desires emerging from the early life experiences in one's home and social life can be reflexively ponderable and developmental, whether they be positive or negative, including those of a direct class-related nature. These can as it were, lie dormant and can re-surface later, when accumulated experiences and decision points arise at specific stages later in life.

I noted in the thesis Introduction how I experienced a paucity of intellectual engagement and guided curiosity in my early home life, with very limited learning resources available beyond practical craftwork tools and an encyclopaedia! My parents had received a very limited formal education in their day, so their perceptions of its value were undoubtedly influenced by their own specific experiences of it. Although they wanted the best for me, in terms of school work, I recall that there was little direct on-task guidance or support from them, in terms of developing my application and concentration skills and knowing what was required from the school regime (see Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Friedman 2016; Allen 2013). Rather, I recall that I experienced the day-to-day excitement of much unmonitored and generally unstructured street-play, which was perhaps valuable in developing social bonds, but insufficient in preparing me for the rigors and demands of school life.

However, there were issues that I began to experience relating to my dad, who was very insecure as an individual. This was partly due to his brutal experiences of life in the Royal Navy during WW2, which I think left him traumatised. So, I contend that he had little choice but to make the best of things, like many others of his class. But he would oscillate in his moods so markedly that I was often unable to gauge where I stood with him, and

how he was going to respond to me when he returned from work each day. Sometimes, he would be engaging and considerate, while other times he would ignore me and leave me feeling that I had done something wrong; leaving me bewildered as to what I might have done. On other occasions he would be very frustrated and flare up in anger and hit me or verbally abuse me. This was in the early to mid-1950s in post-war Liverpool, where scarcity and poverty was widespread among the working-class.

I recall that as I approached my teen years it seemed that my parents' class-limiting horizons inhibited any chance for them to consider what future they might prepare for me. Moreover, it was as though the whole local community was feeling its way on a day-by-day basis as best it could. The immediate economic pressures of finding and securing work; of bringing a wage home; of trying to make a living, and to make a comfortable home in post-war Britain presented considerable challenges within my working-class community. Trying to overcome the constraints of limited social and cultural capital can be seen as a breeding ground for family tensions and anxieties affecting peoples' day-to-day wellbeing and future prospects.

This retrospective and reflexive probing of my early life in 1950s Liverpool leaves me to conclude that my primary socialisation, disposition, and class ontology was formed during such familial and social struggles. It was a kind of 'microcosmic' world so contained and 'localised' that in some ways an 'external' world did not exist, or could not be perceived to exist.[127] *I think these social and psychological tensions were, in many cases, managed by repressing or 'masking' the reality through behaviour such as humour, as people seemed to carry hope for a better future in their heads and hearts. The overt signs of an epoch of Individualism had not really arrived at this time in my community.*

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127 As I indicated above Walkerdine et al (2001, p. 153), the anxieties experienced by many working-class parents is also manifest in the 'localism' shown in the pull and bonding of the 'familiar' in working-class communities and their desire for their children to stay local and their fear of them commuting long distances when entering Higher Education.

Given my parents' personalities and the class constraints of the day, it is difficult to separate out, or distinguish between the psychic tensions and the emotional tapestry that I was developing and that I 'held within me'. However, later I did develop anxieties which have persisted to this day. I would say that at that time, any thought of a better life, or of more hopeful horizons would have been in the realms of fantasy and dreams. It was as though these were somehow being blocked out, with my social reality being one of day-to-day routine and spontaneous street-level survival, within an unrefined and 'culturally limited' existence. However, my parents were intent on providing a comfortable home, although it was a great struggle for them with the threat of poverty and insufficiency being ever-present.

It is only by reflecting on these circumstances decades later, that I realise that I did not get a good start. For example, I was a poor reader, without ever knowing why, and I still find it difficult to speed or scan read. I tend to get by through determination rather than by skill or innate ability. It seemed I was destined for mediocrity and my educational experience at primary school and up to age eleven (in 1958) was, from memory, no more than satisfactory. I certainly didn't stand out or shine in any subject and I think I was intuitively aware of my limitations. These academic strengths and weaknesses were evident from my end-of-year school reports which often concluded that:

"He shows some promise, but he could do a lot better"!

However, I was somehow keen to do well, but by the age of eleven, I had an instinctive feeling that I was going to fail in some way. It was just an embodied state of being that was present within me. So, I went to a secondary modern 'dump' school, which set me back for many years. It triggered a feeling of forever trying to catch up and trying to make things right by trying to fulfil my potential, while not knowing the limits of what that might be. So this, in effect, is or was at the time, my class ontology, and I carry the scars of that past life to this day. However, by contrast, there were at the time kids in my street who went to grammar schools as

a result of their efforts in the 11 and 13-plus national selection exercise. I recall how their pathways were being forged in distinctly different directions to mine, as a result of their educational experience.

It could be said, that I was conflicted by uncertainty and insecurity and this, I feel, was the root of my anxiety, which I believe I internalised early on. I often experienced shame, rejection and loneliness. However, this was strange, given that in street play I was gregarious and sociable. But perhaps it was a coping mechanism, enabling me to 'mask' my vulnerability, and to carry a certain 'inner will' to 'get on with it'. By coping in that world of my childhood, it might suggest the idea that one would get toughened up and be able to build resilience. But it didn't happen for me. I was not particularly assertive and certainly not 'alpha-male'. Nor was I a leader, and I recall that I lacked a sense of direction most of the time. Rather, there was a distinct sense of 'muddling through'. I also developed a sensitivity which showed me to be vulnerable later, when in the company of others. So, this strange combination of sentiments and moods was being cultivated, but it would be difficult now to ascertain with any clarity how my particular 'self' was being formed. These are merely fragmented reflections of my formative years which perhaps others reading this may be able to recall in a similar way?

As 'homemakers' it could be said that my parents were 'distantly' aspirational, at least in that regard; implicitly seeking to 'keep up appearances' and seeking respect from, and friendship with, neighbours. I think my father sought the respect from those of higher rank in his place of work. But he was angry with himself for not being more skilled, which I feel brought him his insecurities, and which I think I inherited back then.

His predicament is certainly resonated in some of Sennett and Cobb's (1973) respondents. As I mentioned earlier, my father would oscillate in his moods from intense anger and frustration at the way society was treating people like him, and then he would switch and appear resigned to his fate and become a more considerate and supportive dad to me by trying to make the best of a bad lot! This would have certainly rubbed off

on me when looking for grounded role models and not really establishing them from any viable source.

Ontologically, I was unable, with any clear vision, to step outside of that environment as a confident individual. My plans were locked in fantasy and dreams rather than any coherent set of steps that would 'take me somewhere meaningful'. Yet despite the knocks and bruises encountered at home, in the street and at school the overriding feeling was that 'we were all in the same boat'. But of course, the social structures of the day had ways of contradicting this notion. It was a kind of downward facing solidarity. And this boat was not, at least in my personal case, destined for anywhere magical in terms of a future of prosperity.

I have struggled many times with resilience and thoughts that my life is going nowhere. This to me is an existential issue as much as it is social or cultural, and which underpins a 'class fatalism' shown by many in the secondary sources I have cited.

Here, I am mindful of Sennett and Cobb's observations of fifth and sixth grade pupils in their chapter "Sources of injury", and of Calarco's observations of working-class pupils not getting the attention of their middle-class teacher. This shows how teachers tend to act on their expectations of the children in their care, in such a way, as to make the expectations become a reality (Sennett and Cobb 1973, p. 81; Calarco 2011). Pupils that meet the teacher's expectations tend to be singled out in subtle ways, while the 'other' children pick up the teacher's hidden cues that their performance and level of ability would not be greeted with as much enthusiasm. From these research examples the 'ordinary' boys in class acted as though they were serving time, as though schoolwork and classes had become something to wait out; a 'blank space' in their lives that they hope to survive and fill in other ways. Even though it was noted that these children liked their classes, and thus were not bored in any way.

However, as Sennett and Cobb note

> "It is as though they have lost any expectation that the school would help them, that this experience would change them or help them grow as human beings." (Sennett and Cobb, 1973, pp. 82-83).

Vignette 5.2.

Here, I reflect further on life after school (1963) and after my time as a so-called 'grease-monkey' (1969).

Despite my accounts of feeling despondent about my future in my early teens, I think by my late teens and early twenties things began to change. Much of my aspirational zeal and developing journey was made up of a strangely deep-rooted belief that I was actually capable of doing things other than those I had been doing previously. This was due, in large part to the middle-class social contacts I mentioned in the opening section of the thesis Introduction. Prior to embarking on further and then higher education, I began to perceive my earlier types of work as variously tiring, tiresome, testing, stressful, demeaning, boring and alienating. All really positive and life-affirming then!

These experiences and sense of my predicament were countered by more positive periods of personal development and fulfilment, and a sense of achievement and pride. But I often thought that I was somehow needing to 'catch up' with what I assumed others had already achieved. This internalised urge to strive was, therefore, coloured by an unwanted competitiveness that was, in effect, a stressful, destructive driver that carried elements of despair for me. Perhaps these thoughts were merely the projections of a restless and conflicted self? But I also think it was a realisation of my limitations, conflicting with my ill-conceived belief that I could improve myself and my life and eventually 'catch up' with others in those areas of life I sought to develop. I had known many who appeared to demonstrate a more rapid and acute upward trajectory. However, this underlying preoccupation with the actions of others has been a constant irritation and frustration for me. Thus, while I consciously hated the

internalised, psychical effects of being competitive, I was often unconsciously and tragically drawn into encounters involving this 'social deficit' approach, which I found to be profoundly debilitating on a personal level. I conclude, therefore, that this uncomfortable competitivity arose primarily from the structural distinction and differentiation of class which seemed to propagate social difference and discord.

In terms of this Chapter's content much of these reflections have obvious relevance and hopefully resonate with the reader where applicable. I now offer one final recollection in the vignette series.

Vignette 5.3

I conclude these reflections on class anxieties with an account which essentially brings me and the reader to the present day. A final opportunity here to look back at a life journey with only time and room to consider a meaningful future and a body of, hopefully valuable experiences to pass on.

So, what anxieties have I experienced in relation to class transition? How have these developed and been managed? How can I describe and critique them? My classed experiences of higher education followed a decade or more of working in various semi-skilled jobs. But I think by my early twenties (circa 1967) I was conscious of seeking something better. As indicated in Vignette 5.2, I had begun fraternising with educated, middle-class lovers of folk music and conversing with them regarding life prospects. Their demeanour and their measured confidence inspired me. In persuasive and supportive ways, they were convincing me of my untapped potential. Although, from their own, more elevated, class situation they could not possibly have fully understood mine.

However, slowly, through these interactions I began to realise that I was not merely a victim of some preordained (class) destiny. I could do something concrete and constructive about my predicament, and consciously focus on my emerging aspirations. I began reading books with an energy that I did not have previously. I met my first wife who had been

to a grammar school and had her sights on university. She was grounded and not condescending. She introduced me to learned things. I was on my way.

So, many years, indeed, decades later (2020) I now have an opportunity to further reflect on how my life has developed. Of course, I still carry the scars (hidden injuries) of my class origins deep inside, but there are other parts of my former self and identity that have changed, indeed, developed. I have a different sense of my abilities which allows me to feel more confident where hitherto I would not have been. I am not as deferential to the middle-class 'other' as I once was. But I still carry a 'chip on my shoulder' from feeling diminished and having had a less than satisfactory education early in life. Since I was (am) a late developer I still don't know when I will have caught up! But in an existential sense I know that, within the prescribed limits of finitude, it is in my hands, and always will be.

I will, of course, continue to reflect further on these past events. But with that urgency of finitude I will embrace the future in the belief that my inner conflicts can be 'worked through' and there will be smoother and brighter times to come. I now draw some conclusions from the chapter's discussions.

5.6 Conclusion.

This chapter has explored some of the contexts and root causes of anxieties experienced by mobile aspirants undergoing class transition. By adopting an existential sociology perspective, the discussion has focused on the concept of *ontological insecurity* and the shifting class-related contexts within which this impacts on the psyche of the aspirant. In so doing, I have sought to make a contribution to existing discourses on the 'psychic landscapes of class'. In particular, I have explored the nature of the struggles that aspirants encounter in trying to make these psychical adjustments. Furthermore, I have assessed the extent to which aspirants are able to surpass the structural determinants of class that they face during social mobility and class transition.

Such an ontological approach has taken account of class divisions, structural differentiation and the existential effects that these have on working-class aspirants' experiences as members of the dominated class. In addition, these divisions and forms of disadvantage can be shown to be fluid and variable in degree and over time. However, I have argued that persistent patterns and structures limit the opportunities for working-class aspirants to reflexively unpick, and make sense of their circumstances, and to take positive action to overcome the tensions and anxieties that they can harbour during the course of their classed lives. I have argued that each working-class aspirant can be said to have a uniquely nuanced set of thoughts and feelings about their past. These can be seen as historical *residues* relating to their current circumstances and to their sense of social place and future desires; in short, to a sense of their own destiny and how they can take responsibility for it.

A number of assertions are therefore tested in this chapter. First, by adopting and embracing the prevailing values, manifest in the culture and practice of the middle-class, working-class aspirants are likely to face ontological challenges and insecurities. These emerge and form part of the psychical structures that inhibit the very processes of class transition, self-transformation and identity indicative of such upwardly mobility. As has been discussed, aspirants are likely to become psychically unsettled in this breaking away from their working-class origins and this can be seen as a painful and existentially fraught process of reflexive disembodiment and re-embodiment of the self. This is what Bourdieu (1994, 2005, 2007) refers to as the *hysteresis* of the *habitus*. Furthermore, each agent's disposition and character will have a bearing on the extent to which they embrace or struggle with these ontological challenges. Thus, in a theoretical discussion of structural determinants (see Chapters 1 and 2), it is important to avoid reductionist conclusions or to generalise about the aspirant's experiences of class transition. The impact of such psychical deterministic structures will present in uniquely different ways and contexts to each aspirant, depending on the course of their classed life.

Secondly, in experiencing these ontological schisms in class transition the discussion suggests that aspirants often adopt ambivalent patterns of thought and forms of action. By being exposed to misconceptions of what 'more attractive' middle-class social and cultural mores might be, aspirant mobiles may continue to harbour anxieties of dislocation from their familiar family, group and working-class origins. Such perspectives may result in a 'politics of envy' (see for example Friedman 2016, p. 138), owing to the inherent anger, embarrassment and emotional discomfort that come from aspirants mixing in unfamiliar social and cultural circles. This can also reduce a sense of wellbeing and flourishing, at least initially, by wanting to 'belong'; to be accepted, and to integrate into a new socio-cultural environment. However, importantly, this can also manifest in aspirants seeking to retain loyalty to their working-class social networks and communities. This sense of seeking class assimilation can, therefore, bring insecurities, inducing aspirants to construct, perhaps falsely, a new social reality, a new 'self' and identity and set of behaviour patterns. These can be shown to emerge in order to avoid feeling existentially detached or abandoned; of being exposed; or of standing out as someone 'different' and thus feeling out of place (Skeggs 2004; Jones 2011; Savage 2015; Friedman 2016). The frequent use of 'masking' was discussed in this regard.

Thirdly, by recounting, and harbouring their previous, and now shifting life narratives, or what Archer (2003) terms *internal conversations*, aspirants can be shown to existentially reflect of their classed past and future prospects. This sense of shifting selfhood and identity is a complex area of enquiry, and again, is considered unique to each aspirant. By asking "Who have I been, who am I now, and who am I becoming?" there is a growing issue of where and how the aspirant's past is brought into sharp focus by the class transformations and mutations taking place.

As Sennett (2004) argues, individuals can develop with the conscious awareness of doing something well for its own sake. But this is not simply a question of personal ambition; rather it provides the individual with a sense of self-respect through a *becoming* from within the self. Thus, there

is the implicit suggestion that the roots of aspiration and wellbeing may not be directly or obviously linked to the externalities of action, or an accumulation of aptitudes. Rather, that there is an ontological thread, which forms a bridge to the possibilities of greater self-enhancement.

As an approach, existential sociology usefully questions the motivations underpinning human aspiration and personal striving. Indeed, the act of striving itself and the effort required in this, implies the emergence of stresses and the need for coping strategies, in order to manage the sociological and psychical challenges that aspirants face (see Friedman 2016, p. 145). One of most important ontological facts about human beings is that they inherently demand that things make sense, in terms that can be understood and that their world is therefore deemed to be *rational* (Wartenberg, 2013, p. 114). However, by extension, the construction or evolution of class societies as rational entities would seem to be questionable.

Conclusion.

The reader should recall the central theme of this thesis. This has been to undertake a critique of the ways in which socially mobile working-class aspirants experience structural, emotional, ontological and existential barriers and anxieties when attempting to build a better life and to integrate into the middle-class. I have focused on the structural determinants of class and how these are *internalised* and thus impact on the 'psychical interiority' of aspirants. These determinants are shown to affect aspirants' sense of class identity which can be said to shift during their mobility trajectories. In so doing, this can create psychical conflicts within the embodied self or *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). This exploration has necessitated an examination of relevant secondary research sources on class, social mobility, class transition; the embodied dispositional self, reflexivity and existential sociology.

As a core theme, I have critiqued the experiential effects of aspirants striving to feel at one with themselves while functioning in middle-class environments and I have framed these struggles as 'hidden injuries' taken from the seminal text by Sennett and Cobb (1973). This has provided a good basis, alongside Bourdieu's conceptual framework, upon which to explore particular class-related issues in the mobility of aspirants, which I have examined in separate chapters.

In the Introduction and in Chapter 1, I provided some essential definitions of social mobility and outlined the different forms this can take. I briefly evaluated Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *field*, *capital, doxa*, *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence* and *domination*. This enabled a critique of the structural determinants of class as barriers to mobility. Chapter 2 focused on Bourdieu's most familiar concepts of *habitus* and *field* in the form of a selection of critiques from his adherents and critics and considered the extent of determinism in the *habitus*. The essential point was to show how the internalisation and the embodied self (*habitus*) of the aspirant might reflexively transcend the structural determinants of class. Chapter 3 attempted to link the challenges to aspirants of low self-esteem that may be encountered when experiencing middle-class

domination in various settings. Other emotions were evaluated that could be triggered in such situations and how these too might have a bearing on the changes in selfhood and identity resulting from social class mobility. In Chapter 4, I explored the ways in which aspirants can experience 'inauthenticity' and a loss of the 'familiar' self in middle-class settings. I showed how aspirant mobiles often experience the 'imposter syndrome' and feel out of their depth and in the wrong social place and space. Chapter 4 also introduced an existential sociology approach drawing out the main tenets of such an approach. Finally, in Chapter 5, I considered the ontological challenges involved in reflexively managing these psychical states in everyday life, which is the central theme of the thesis. I argued that this sense of the 'unfamiliar', and *ontological insecurity* can induce existential anxieties which are difficult to resolve within the mobility trajectory of the aspirant.

Throughout the thesis I have taken a 'theory-only', that is, a non-empirical approach in addressing the central area of study. Consequently, in the absence of primary data, I have drawn upon secondary sources from sociology, social psychology and, to a limited degree, existential sociology, to critique these theoretical perspectives. I have used Bourdieu's conceptual framework (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990, 2007) and applied it in the area of working-class aspiration and class transition. To complement and to form a bridge between these theoretical critiques, I have compiled a number of historical accounts as vignettes of my own experiences of aspiration and class transition. In these I have also expressed the class-related difficulties I experienced when trying to move out and away from my original class circumstances and in seeking a place of 'belonging' and a stronger self-concept to more effectively facilitate my mobility trajectory. The challenges discussed in these personal accounts are intended to resonate with the secondary sources used. I have therefore, used these accounts as an illustrative device for the reader, emphasising their personal, transparent, reflexive, ontological and, occasionally, existential character.

However, I have also included these accounts to emphasise my view that in each case of mobility, aspirants can present with uniquely nuanced characteristics and circumstances. Nevertheless, there may be similar and shared experiences and patterns of aspiration and mobility among aspirant mobiles from across the working-class. However, it has not been my intention to assert that these might exist as broad generalisations. The research outcomes, therefore, provide a summation of the experiences and the impacts of class division and inequality on aspirant mobiles from the selected secondary sources; their reactions to these, and the strategies they adopt to resolve the resulting inner tensions. Moreover, in so doing I have not side-stepped the need to register these sentiments and the psychical conflicts that these experiences have brought.

My early point was to assert that while the class structure persists and is retained in the psychical interiority of aspirants, the terrain of class is continually being realigned and reshaped in Westernised classed societies through the struggles between classes. I have asserted that the place of aspirant mobiles in these struggles is a feature of the 'meritocratic imperative'. I have argued that this is a rhetorical and doxic device designed to ensure the continuing clamber and striving for a better life. Perhaps contentiously, I have argued that this is falsely portrayed as a wholesome entity (see Sennett and Cobb, 1973, p. 170; Allen, 2013, p. 761; Reay 1997b; Skeggs 2004).

I began the thesis by defining the framing concepts of social aspiration and social mobility and followed this by considering the complex interplay between *determinism* and *voluntarism* in the way aspirants inwardly negotiate their aspirational pathway. I also briefly discussed the familiar duality of structure and agency, but stressed that I didn't want to delve into this debate since it would detract from the main theme of the thesis, that is, the ways in which aspirants experience mobility and how the embodied self is affected in this process. However, despite the need to marginalise the structure/agency discussion, I considered there to be an inescapable value in exploring the processes of *internalisation* and the social/cultural worlds of the aspirant by considering Bourdieu's *habitus* as

'history, forgotten as history' and in locating his use of this in the conscious and unconscious interplay of habituated practice and the aspirant's struggle with the endemic inequalities of classed society.

I also didn't want to lose focus by getting distracted in a protracted discussion on the prevailing social value of *individualism* although, from the research undertaken, this did appear to underpin the rationale behind, and practice of, social class mobility. The opportunities for class transition in a class society are there for working-class mobiles if they choose to strive to become middle-class as a perceived pathway in securing a better life. However, I have reinforced the key point that this is not the only option open to them, although this is the central message within a given 'rhetoric of meritocracy'. However, while aspirant mobiles may have some latitude in transforming and elevating their social and cultural status and wellbeing, the thesis argues that this remains, for the most part, inaccessible to the majority of working-class citizens largely due to the lack of various forms of (symbolic) *capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). However, for brevity and focus I have made brief mention of these discussions.

In critiquing the barriers to aspiration, mobility and class transition the main thrust of the exploration has been in understanding how these psychic vulnerabilities are experienced by aspirants. Also, why and how aspirants' experiences of mobility can often profoundly affect their sense of worth and belonging in their transition to the middle-class. I have argued that it is this problem of an often 'conflicted interiority' and of a reflexive embodied self, or *habitus* that is at the centre of this enquiry. This has been considered alongside the externalities of social and cultural tastes and other signifiers of class (Bourdieu 1984). When coupled together these two major forces, the internalisation of norms and the impact of shifting class signifiers, are shown to reinforce the structural determinants of class disadvantage and to be burdensome to many aspirants in their assimilating into a middle-class life.

Furthermore, it has been the contention that because of this 'conflicted structural interiority' (process of internalisation) many aspirants are

unlikely to fully achieve class transition and personal self-actualisation in a harmonious fashion, without sufficient access to, or possession of, the necessary social, cultural, symbolic and emotional capital. There is, I argue, scope for looking further at internalisation, and towards a social psychology that examines further the hidden injuries of class and selfhood across a wider research population.

However, as implied here, some forms of class mobility do not result in class transition. That is, some working-class aspirants undertake short-range trajectories and make quite limited advancements in their social, cultural and occupational lives without actually leaving the working-class. Thus, while my focus has been towards those aspirants whose trajectories have taken them into the socio-cultural world of the middle-class it is important to appreciate that many encounter psychical disruption and other forms of *hysteresis* even though they do not experience such a complete form of class transition.[128] Further research on these 'marginal' mobiles would seem to be worthwhile.

Primarily, the thesis has encapsulated critiques and arguments about the extent to which aspirants are able to manage and transcend such *internalised* or habituated psychical class barriers which are shown to reinforce and compliment the 'external' structurally determinant forces of class. The psychical nature of reflexivity for the aspirant has necessitated a critique of selected conceptual mechanisms principally applied from the work of Bourdieu, and particularly in relation to his use of the reflexive *habitus* (the embodied, dispositional self). I have used this framing concept to consider the ways in which aspirants might adjust to a shifting, transitional and post-transitional class identity and existence.

[128] I reiterate here that Friedman argues that this runs counter to the positions of others such as Goldthorpe (1980) who argue that aspirant mobiles are overwhelmingly content with the progress of their lives and are rarely plagued by any cultural or emotional disequilibrium (see Friedman 2016, p. 133).

However, as I showed in Chapter 2, the strength of this reflexive capability and agency has raised concerns regarding the extent of *determinism* in Bourdieu's use of the *habitus*. In turn, this has brought into focus questions about the strength of evidence supporting the idea of working-class aspirants having sufficient agency to be able to make such a class transition and to fully adapt to middle-class ways of being, and socio-cultural life. I have noted that Archer (2003) among others, has been instrumental in critiquing Bourdieu's *determinism* in the *habitus,* where she argues that agency is strong enough to transcend these structural constraints through managing and formulating appropriate *internal conversations*. However, she did not discuss 'class' aspirants as such.

I have argued, with the support of others such as Crossley (2001) and Chandler (2013) that there is both a danger of *voluntarism* in positions such as Archer's, and in the context of this thesis an underestimating of the impact and struggle by some aspirants, in transcending habitual thinking and feelings of embodied selfhood which Bourdieu highlighted. Thus, I have argued that while a reflexive *habitus* might bring specific challenges for working-class aspirants, that is, in harbouring a 'conflicted classed self' as a barrier to an effective self-examination, it would seem to provide a good basis for internally reconciling and managing class transition. In this way the discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 were important in conveying a structural-determinist bias towards an 'ingrained' *habitus.* In the context of aspiration, mobility and class transition, this is important in recognising the limits to reflexivity, as Bourdieu's interpretations of the *habitus* were positioned. I have also discussed the limits of reflexivity when using sociological and social psychological lenses. I also noted that in his early career Bourdieu dismissed psychoanalysis and psychotherapeutic methods as a viable approach to reconciling and transcending structural barriers. However, later he appeared to appreciate the value and benefits of these and developed a similar nomenclature (Steinmetz 2006, p. 450, Fourny 2000; Bourdieu 1977, 2009).

Furthermore, the discussion on the *habitus* was to show it to be a useful framing concept for speculatively understanding the interiority of the

aspirational self. This was so since its internal structure offered both the potential for self-generated change, through its reflexive capacity, and limitation, through its determinism, in the form of normative compliance and its history of *internalised* embodiment and disposition, for a range of possible mobility trajectories. For the aspirant, the chosen trajectory would thus be contingent on both psychical and social 'other'-related possibilities.

In setting out my argument for a broader and deeper understanding of the structural limitations of working-class mobility, I have also integrated other key Bourdieusian concepts into the thesis, such as *misrecognition* and *symbolic violence* and provided contextual illustrations. Similarly, in what Bourdieu calls *doxa*, I have showed how such powerful concepts of class domination can tend to go unspoken because 'it goes without saying' how social class reality and practice is perceived and received (Bourdieu 1977). This was done in order to develop the argument that the social *field* of class is shown, paradoxically and contradictorily, to limit the personal trajectories of many working-class mobiles.

This has led me to critique the work of Sennett and Cobb (1973) and the 'hidden injuries of class'. The authors elicited numerous accounts of respondents struggling to rationalise their experiences of their own mobility trajectories and the psychical, ontological and existential fallout from such experiences. This examination revealed concerns about the anxieties that lay behind their sense of self and identity as a result of shifts in class status, and how these did, or did not, resonate with my own psychical uneasiness or those of other mobiles that I had examined in the secondary sources. In particular, the authors' interpretations of such *ontological insecurity* pinpointed the contradictory patterns of the respondents' thoughts and feelings. These were showing higher than expected levels of self-effacement and lack of dignity and self-worth, even when it was unequivocally evident that they had worked hard and 'deserved', that is, were 'entitled' to the respect that they were unable to embody. This for me (and for the authors) was a major trigger and

suspicion that something very odd was happening in the worlds of these respondents.

However, it wasn't simply that Sennett and Cobb's respondents carried insecurities in their mobility trajectories. Rather, it was that it was much more a part of their being; their existential reality, that was for them an abiding ontological disempowerment that it seemed they would never be able to resolve. They, as in my own case, were unable to shake off the injurious *residues* of a class identity, a legacy that was indelibly, psychically immovable. Again, further research on the incidence of aspirants taking up various forms of therapy and how they did, or did not, overcome their ontological tensions and insecurities would seem worthwhile, albeit beyond the scope of this thesis.

The thesis has considered other psychical features pertinent to a shifting working-class aspirant identity and how these may or may not be resolved when becoming assimilated into middle-class social and cultural life. My intention in exploring aspirants' sense of self-worth and self-esteem, has been to see how these are linked with, or are part of, feelings and emotions such as shame, self-loathing and a lack of self-belief, self-respect and dignity. I wanted to see whether these 'negative' features of selfhood may, or may not be minimised or dissolved, in the adjustment of the *habitus* and a change in class identity. From a number of secondary sources that I have used, the conflicting evidence for this has not enabled me to assert that a direct correlation is evident. This was surprising since in my own case, experiencing low self-esteem, for example, seemed to intensify when my own class-related inadequacies were exposed. The 'imposter syndrome' and the 'fish-out-of-water' scenarios I have included have also showed how such 'inadequacies' as a sense of unworthiness or worthlessness can be triggered and can linger in the aspirant's psyche. The thesis has explored these specific areas of character, personality and selfhood in the sense of aspirants' adjusted identities being based on their accumulated life experiences and narratives, and how the deeply held and *internalised* barriers to flourishing can remain buried and largely illusive.

The thesis has drawn heavily on the work of Bourdieu in seeking to show how aspirants tend to be, metaphorically speaking, psychically and socially attuned, like a bird with an irreparably damaged wing. In attempting to develop and shine they tend to embrace and re-live patterns of self-doubt and harbour past insecurities that negatively impact on their levels of self-regard, esteem and motivation. Thus, their striving for self-actualisation and for a clearer sense of resignation of a 'familiar self' is marred insofar as they find themselves ill-equipped to access appropriate forms of knowledge, (an epistemological issue) and information (a socio-cultural issue) in achieving their personal goals or aspirations. For example, an examination of Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* shows how such ingrained self-perceptions are 'glue-like' and fixed until specific life events provide opportunities for intense self-reflection from which shifts in self-actualisation may materialise in the form of a *post-hysteresis*. Thus, I have tried to argue that aspirants can, and obviously do, achieve their life goals, but not without carrying these psychical injuries and challenges.

My decision to include a discussion on an existential sociology perspective is based on the necessity to show that it is a useful approach for showing how the anxieties experienced by working-class aspirants are an inevitable manifestation of a class rationality. I wanted to introduce such an approach to show the *temporal imperative* built into the life destinies of aspirant mobiles and the urgency that often underpins their endeavours. That is, how they are generically empowered to determine their own destinies. However, mobile aspirants are still subjected to the social forces of class domination, and of class disadvantage. Thus, when considering their destinies aspirants would need to be mindful of these structural determinants and not to imagine that by being mobile, they will be presented with limitless opportunities to acquire social and cultural *capital* in their symbolic forms. The thesis tries to show how and why these will be a struggle to acquire and that the limits and opportunities are not only within the individual aspirant's disposition or character to overcome. Thus, aspirants will need to be aware of the extent of these structural obstacles in their daily lives. They will need to avoid the distorted and dangerously misguided *voluntarism* that can be invoked through the socio-cultural

mantra and rhetoric of *meritocracy* that keeps large sections of the working-class striving to achieve 'success' and a flourishing life.

To summarise, the thesis makes a novel contribution to existing debates on social mobility by focusing on the psychical interiority of mobile aspirants from the working-class. The psychological tensions and ontological anxieties they experience alongside the structural-determinist barriers of class are shown to be key components and inhibitors affecting class transition. The thesis argues that aspirants are likely to carry injurious *residues* of their classed origins within their mobility trajectories. With the inclusion of personal accounts of mobility, the thesis has shown that these often impose social and cultural constraints on a successful transition into the middle-class.

Studies of the psychic landscape of class show that a fragmentation of selfhood, resulting from inner-class tensions, is ontologically challenging to the self through the confusions regarding identity at play when escaping, realigning and then accepting a re-formed self as a result of class transition. These ontological challenges and insecurities of aspiration and upward mobility have been explored throughout the thesis.

As I pointed out in thesis Introduction this study of class mobility does not focus directly or heavily on other forms of inequality, exploitation or domination. However, implicit in the critiques is the recognition of research on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and their relevance to discourses on class. Where necessary, I have indicated where class inequalities link with these other bodies of research and have used examples accordingly.

In the construction of the thesis it has often proved challenging to find suitable words to suit the context I have been addressing. Therefore, the vocabulary used in the discussions on the embodied self may seem awkward at times. Terms such as 'beingness' and 'becoming', authenticity and inauthenticity, true-self and false-self, are 'best fit' attempts at registering the ontological and existential sociology approach taken.

Further empirical research would help in clarifying how aspiration and social mobility are currently practiced within the working-class given the fluidity and mutability of class relations and structures. Also, what specific issues of relevance emerge from my personal vignettes. In pinpointing 'processes of internalisation' this may also provide a theoretical underpinning for future empirical research on the kinds of self-reflexivity and 'internal narratives' that might surface among working-class aspirants and reveal the perspectives and motives within. Further empirical research on reflexive types (post Archer 2010) specifically related to class mobility and transition would seem to be a useful undertaking. There is perhaps, also scope for further empirical research to establish a more complete picture of aspirants' feelings and sentiments and 'states of being' (ontology) when engaging in a reflexive analysis of embodied selves and how tensions of aspirational striving might affect the *habitus* of aspirants. Furthermore, it may be that only by detailing specific case examples could we confirm Bourdieu's theoretical position with regard to the 'splitting' *(hysteresis)* of the *habitus* and the existential and emotional consequences of this.

Finally, it would be beneficial to engage in an empirical enquiry into the ways and extent to which aspirant mobiles actually lose, in an ontological sense, the embodiment of their working-class self, in 'becoming' middle-class, in the sense of acquiring a new identity. Can they actually develop a new identity and completely shed their working-class 'ways of being'? What are the implications for the self if they cannot? How 'real' and 'true' might this feel to them, and how might this be measured and tested?

APPENDIX

The factors that triggered my social mobility:

- *In most respects I had outgrown mum and dad's attitudes (not an uncommon occurrence)*
- *I had experienced a contrast of approaches to life by meeting my wife's parents, who weren't necessarily better people. They weren't. But they were 'different' in social and political outlook*
- *I had seen dead ends because of my limited level of competence in working in the garage trade*
- *I had met a group of people who became friends, many of whom were going through to higher education, or were there already, or who were working in cleaner and more 'respectable' professional jobs*
- *They, and my wife had opened my eyes to reading books and I was reading much more than I'd ever done, and with enthusiasm*
- *I'd seen and 'felt' the prospects of other options and pathways of life*
- *I'd developed a modicum of self-belief and positivity, although I was conscious of being so far behind some of my friends. They'd had a better educational experience up to and post-18*
- *I no longer carry a sceptical, 'anti-intellectual' disposition (inverted snobbery?) as a 'mask' or cover to protect me in my much-felt comparative ignorance. This was the deeply felt 'residue' of a 'workerist' attitude to employment, (the idea that manual work is the only 'real' work) a kind of misguided, short-sighted, uncultured and defensive way of thinking, feeling and being. This, as I say, was a result of feeling insignificant and worthless when I compared myself to the friends and others, I'd begun to mix with*
- *However, the above factors drove me to enrol at a local college. A transformative experience owing to inspirational tuition, and things began to change*

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