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# Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility

## Abstract

Increasing social mobility is the 'principal goal' of the British Government's social policy (Cabinet Office, 2011: 5). However, while policy perspectives present mobility as an unambiguously progressive force, there is a striking absence of studies looking at the impact of mobility on individuals themselves. Drawing on 39 lifecourse interviews with upwardly mobile respondents drawn from the UK Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion Project (CCSE), this paper examines how mobility affects the psychic and emotional life of the individual. More specifically, it examines how mobility influences social, familial and intimate relationships, as well as the ontological coherence of the self. Following Bourdieu's (2004: 127) description of his own upward trajectory, the paper argues that the concept of a divided habitus, or habitus clivé, may be particularly useful for understanding some iterations of the contemporary mobility experience, particularly its most long-range forms. Such a concept, it argues, helps explain how the emotional pull of class loyalties can entangle subjects in the affinities of the past, and why – despite prevailing political rhetoric - upward mobility may remain a state that not everyone unequivocally aspires to.

## Introduction

In 1981, Pierre Bourdieu prepared to give his inaugural lecture as the newly elected Chair of Sociology at the Collège de France. Standing at the very summit of French academia, one might have expected Bourdieu to eye the event with a deep sense of pride. Yet this couldn't have been further from the truth. The lecture, in fact, engendered a profound sense of ambivalence within Bourdieu. It 'brought home', he recollected in *A Sketch For A Self-Analysis* (2007), all the 'internal contradictions' contained within his habitus. Raised by an uneducated postal worker and his wife<sup>1</sup> in a tiny peasant village in the French Pyrenees, Bourdieu experienced extraordinary long-range upward mobility. Academically successful from an early age, he was sent to a local boarding school in Pau before progressing to an elite preparatory school in Paris and eventually the prestigious *Ecole Normale Supérieure*. Yet, despite enjoying such improbable academic success, social mobility came at a considerable psychological price. In particular, Bourdieu (2000: 16) believed that the enduring discrepancy between his high academic achievement and low social origin had instituted within him a habitus clivé, a sense of self 'torn by contradiction and internal division'. Indeed, it was this tension that was so dramatically brought into focus in the run-up to the inaugural lecture. On one hand, his instinctive disdain for the misrecognition of academic legitimacy and, on the other, the crippling insecurity of a 'self-made Parvenu'. Such inner conflict was also intensified by the fact that Bourdieu's father had just died.

‘Although I know he would have been proud and happy’, he noted. ‘I made a magical connection between his death and a success that I conceived of as a transgression and a treachery’ (Bourdieu, 2004: 109).

Bourdieu’s vivid account of upward mobility is fascinating, primarily, because it runs directly contrary to the dominant discourse on the experience of social mobility. Across the political divide mobility is routinely presented as an unequivocally benevolent force, the principal indicator of a fair and just society (Friedman, 2013; Milburn, 2013). Yet, Bourdieu’s story highlights the potential costs of the mobility experience, of its adverse effects on kinship ties, intimate relationships and the ontological coherence of the self.

However, there is also a slight irony in Bourdieu’s self-analysis when read through the lens of his wider social theory, and in particular his notion of habitus. Bourdieu famously (1984: 101) argued that the dispositions flowing from habitus were so durable that in the vast majority of cases they stayed unified through time (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133). But this conception of the habitus – as an enduring matrix of dispositions flowing from primary socialization – appears to contradict his own experience of long-range social mobility.

It is therefore these two elements which act as the departure points for this article. First, drawing inspiration from Bourdieu’s self-analysis, I aim to reorientate the debate on British social mobility by delving into the *subjective*

*experience* of upward mobility. Drawing on 39 lifecourse interviews, I examine in particular how mobility affects the emotional life of the individual and how in some cases it can lead to 'hidden injuries' (Sennett and Cobb, 1977) of unease, anxiety and dislocation. Second, in doing so, I also aim to interrogate Bourdieu's notion of habitus. While Bourdieu considered his cleft habitus as a very rare occurrence, he rarely explicitly engaged with mobility in his empirical work. I argue, however, that mobility provides an ideal staging point to examine the explanatory reach of habitus, particularly its resilience in the face of individual social change.

### **Social mobility and the mutability of habitus**

The *habitus* represents a key conceptual tool in Bourdieu's social theory, representing both a 'structured' and 'structuring' force in explaining social action. Bourdieu argued that those located in neighbouring positions in social space are socialised with similar 'conditions of existence' (meaning stocks of capital and distance from material necessity) and these conditions act to form the 'structure' of their *habitus*. In turn, this structure goes on to generate 'structuring' dispositions that guide social practice (Bourdieu, 1990: 60).

However, significantly, Bourdieu (1984: 101) argued that the dispositions flowing from the habitus are so robust that in the majority of cases they stay unified, meaning that those with strong initial reserves of economic, social

and cultural capital are likely to accumulate further and vice versa (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133). This durability is also a strong source of psychological stability, according to Bourdieu (1990: 52-64), because it ensures that one's practices are preconsciously orchestrated with, and validated by, those from homologous social backgrounds:

*'Through the systematic 'choices' it makes, the habitus tends to protect itself from crises by providing itself with a milieu to which it is pre-adapted as possible' (Bourdieu, 1990: 61).*

According to Bourdieu's critics (King, 2002), this conception of the habitus is almost antithetical to social mobility, implying that the individual will always self-eliminate from ambitions 'not for the likes of us'. However, it's important to note that Bourdieu's (1984: 114) conception of social space was constructed along *three* dimensions – volume of capital, composition of capital *and* 'change in these properties over time'. Thus he did have a theoretical conception of social mobility – albeit a somewhat limiting one – as a 'band of more or less probable trajectories' based on one's 'volume of inherited capital'. Crucially, though, this notion of 'trajectory' does not necessarily imply a threat to habitus. Instead, with most gradational short-range mobility, the habitus is equipped with the resources to 'improvise' and adapt to new social fields (1990: 57). In this way, contrary to his critics, Bourdieu did acknowledge that the dispositional architecture of the habitus was subject to change, according to both 'new experiences' (Bourdieu, 2000;

161) and also via conscious, intentional self-fashioning or pedagogic effort. Yet he saw the nature of this change as gradual and fundamentally limited by the childhood dispositions that will always act as the 'scaffolding' of habitus (Wacquant, 2013: 6). In other words, primary dispositions are 'long-lasting; they tend to perpetuate, to reproduce themselves, *but they are not eternal*' (Bourdieu, 2005: 45).

Bourdieu did acknowledge that long-range social mobility can be more problematic, however, particularly when individual trajectories provoke abrupt rather than gradual transformations of habitus. During such moments of profound change, when there is a mismatch between one's (primary) habitus and the habitus required in a new field, Bourdieu (1977) argued that a *hysteresis* effect takes hold:

*'As a result of the hysteresis effect...practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are objectively confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted'*  
(Bourdieu, 1977: 78)

In most of his work, Bourdieu explored hysteresis in terms of habitus shifts wrought by large-scale changes in field conditions, such as that posed by the Algerian War of Independence (Bourdieu, 1979), the introduction of the 1914 French State Code on inheritance (Bourdieu, 2002; 12) or the French Students revolts of 1968 (Bourdieu, 1988: 151). However, in later work (1998;

1999; 2004) he also began to explore how hysteresis is experienced at a personal level, particularly among the socially mobile. In *The State Nobility* (1998: 106-7), for example, he explored the experience of working class students adapting to life in the upper echelons of the French education system. These class 'transfuges' were caught in a 'painful' position of social limbo, of 'double isolation', from both their origin and destination class. While they certainly attempted to adopt the cultural dispositions valued in their new elite milieu, they were never able to 'erase their nostalgia for reintegration into their community of origin' (107). Indeed, he noted that the hysteresis experienced by the extreme upwardly mobile (like himself) often had profound psychic implications (Bourdieu, 2004: 127). Drawing on the psychoanalytic notion of 'splitting of the self' (Fourny, 2000; Steinmetz, 2006), he noted that such a dislocation of habitus and field could produce a painfully fragmented self, a habitus clivé:

*'The product of such a contradictory injunction is doomed to be ambivalent about himself...to produce a habitus divided against itself, and doomed to a kind of double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities' (Bourdieu, 1999: 511)*

Yet while this notion of habitus clivé is forcefully invoked in Bourdieu's own self-analysis, it remains a concept only fleetingly explored in his empirical work. This was perhaps because he saw its occurrence as fundamentally rare, the 'exception that proved the rule' in terms of the general ontological



coherency of habitus. However, according to the (nationally representative) sample explored in this article, along with other contemporary studies (Savage et al, 2015), long-range social mobility – in Britain at least - remains more commonplace than perhaps Bourdieu would have presumed (See Table 1). This therefore poses an important question – does the contemporary experience of upward imply a traumatic break with primary habitus, or is it fluently incorporated into an individual’s ‘band of possible trajectories’?

### **The emotional experience of social mobility**

Although relatively underexplored in Bourdieu’s work, the social-psychological impact of social mobility has been extensively debated elsewhere. In Britain, this literature can largely be grouped into two competing strands. The first, perhaps more dominant view is rooted in the work of John Goldthorpe (1979). Goldthorpe mainly focused on structural changes in mobility, but in 1974 he did briefly investigate the subjective dimension of mobility. Significantly, Goldthorpe concluded that the mobile in his study were overwhelmingly content with the progress of their lives and rarely plagued by cultural disequilibrium. The pivotal explanatory factor, he argued, was that these men were invariably surrounded by others who had experienced similar trajectories and who acted as reciprocal forces of ontological security. This finding has since been echoed by Marshall and Frith (1999: 33) whose

quantitative comparison of ten countries also found little evidence that mobility causes personal dissatisfaction.

This more celebratory view of the mobility experience has been highly influential, particularly in Britain where it has only fuelled policy assumptions that mobility is beneficial for the individual (Friedman, 2013). It has also stymied competing understandings of mobility, particularly a strand known as the 'dissociative thesis' (Sorokin, 1959; Musgrove, 1963; Stacey, 1967; Strauss, 1971; Hopper, 1981). This literature, which traversed both US and UK academia in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, furthered the argument that social mobility had a largely 'dissociative' effect on the individual, resulting in a higher incidence of social *and* psychological problems. Indeed, ever since Durkheim (1951: 246-47) remarked on the relation between mobility and anomic suicide, investigations in various national contexts have probed the implications of such disruption. Sorokin (1959) in Russia, Jackson and Marsden (1962) in the UK, and Sennett and Cobb in the US (1976) all found that the upward mobile frequently experience problems of isolation, vulnerability and mental disorder.

Although Goldthorpe was largely successful in silencing this work, some of the key ideas have lived on. In particular, writers such as Skeggs (1997) and Reed-Danahay (2002; 2005) have examined how upward mobility can be particularly problematic for women. Reed-Danahay (2002), for example, examines three generations of women living in rural France, exploring how

these women's desires for both geographical and social mobility is tempered and curtailed by a strong sense of 'duty' to family, and particularly the traditionally 'female' role they are expected to play within it. Such aspirations are further complicated, according to Lawler (1999: 12), as 'women's desires for, and envy of, respectability and material wealth' have long been portrayed as markers of 'pretense and triviality'. Walkerdine et al (2001) deepen this focus by examining how the educational success of working-class women impacts both their conscious and unconscious lives. Highlighting how the emotional costs of female mobility are 'lived as psychic but produced socially' they argue forcefully that the mobility experience must be understood as profoundly psychosocial (Walkerdine et al, 2001: 150-163).

Other studies have reversed this focus, looking at the experience of upwardly mobile men. Reflecting on his own upward trajectory, French sociologist Ebron (2013: 18) describes the acute discomfort of a habitus split between two worlds, 'so far separated from each other that they seem irreconcilable, and yet which co-exist in everything that you are'. Reay (2002) and Ingram (2011) also underline the substantial psychic costs incurred by working-class boys, highlighting the enormous amount of emotional, intellectual and interactive work they must produce to combat the misalignment between masculine dispositions forged in the family and those needed for educational success.

And finally there is also a substantial literature examining the mobility of ethnic minorities. Work here has focused on how ethnic bonds may actually act to inhibit (or de-incentivise) social mobility (Srinivasan, 1995; Bourdieu, 1999: 158-167). Rollock et al. (2011), for example, describe how upwardly mobile Black Caribbean's are often forced to abandon embodied markers associated with their 'blackness' in order to gain acceptance in the white-dominated middle-class.

It's clear, then, that the subjective experience of mobility is highly contested. However, both these strands of existing literature are arguably hampered by age or by a bounded focus on education, gender or ethnicity. In contrast, my aim here is to provide a more holistic analysis of the *lived experience* of social mobility and explore possible intersections between gender, ethnicity and class movement.

### **Outline of the research**

I draw upon data from a mixed methods study of British social mobility. The study involved secondary analysis of survey data on cultural taste and participation originally generated during the 2003-6 Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion (CCSE) Project (n = 1564) and 52 *original* follow-up interviews. Although the CCSE project yielded many important findings (See

Bennett et al., 2009), the research team did not consider the role that social mobility may have played in structuring their results. The first part of my project involved identifying respondents within the CCSE sample who had experienced upward or downward social mobility. Although social mobility can be conceptualized using various measures (including education, income and even geographical movement), I was particularly interested here in mobility through Bourdieusian social space. However, as the CCSE did not contain survey measures of Bourdieu's capitals, I decided to use occupational class as the best proxy for social space trajectory. Mobility was therefore defined in terms of an upward or downward change in respondent's simplified 7-class NS-Sec occupational class, versus that of their primary parental earner aged 16. Changes from classes 6 and 7 (semi-routine and routine) to classes 1 and 2 (managerial and professional) and vice versa were defined as long-range mobility and any other class changes as short-range. Table 1 indicates the mobility outflow percentages in the survey sample<sup>2</sup>. For example, of those respondents in managerial and professional employment, 21% were long-range upwardly mobile, having had a primary parental earner employed in routine or semi-routine work.

The second part of the project involved drawing a stratified sub-sample of 52 mobile respondents from the CCSE survey sample and conducting qualitative lifecourse interviews at their homes in November and December 2012. The interview sample broadly represented the contours of the overall sample,

consisting of 39 upwardly mobile interviewees (24-short-range and 15 long-range) and 13 downwardly mobile interviewees (12 short-range and 1 long-range). Of the short-range upwardly mobile, 11 were women and 13 were men; of the long-range upwardly mobile, 9 were women and 6 were men; and of the downwardly mobile, 7 were women and 6 were men. In terms of age, interviewees ranged from 25 to 81, capturing the experiences of a variety of generations. 8 interviewees were non-white (4 long-range up, 3 short-range up; 1 downward) and interviews took place in urban and rural locations throughout England, Wales and Scotland. One of the main advantages of interviews was that they allowed me to get a more nuanced sense of each interviewee's mobility *trajectory*. In particular, I was able to ask detailed questions about their parent's, and their own, reserves of economic, cultural and social capital. This qualitative detail allowed me to better locate both interviewee's original and current position in social space. As I was particularly interested in changes in cultural identity, I also asked interviewees to give me a tour of their home, explaining when and where they purchased their furniture, pictures and ornaments, and why they liked them. Due to limited space, this article will concentrate on interviews with the 39 upwardly mobile respondents.

**Table 1: social mobility outflow tables (CCSE, weighted data)**

Origin class	Parent's class					Total
	I/II	III	IV	V	VI-VII	
Professional/Managerial	50%	13%	6%	10%	21%	100%
Routine non manual	41%	16%	4%	14%	25%	100%
Small proprietors	29%	10%	17%	10%	34%	100%
Technical/lower supervisory	32%	14%	7%	15%	32%	100%
Semi Routine/Routine	21%	10%	5%	12%	51%	100%
Total	33%	12%	7%	12%	35%	100%

### **Mobility and successful improvisations of habitus**

The life histories of 14 upwardly mobile respondents (10 short-range, 4 long-range) revealed mobility trajectories that had been largely psychologically smooth. For the 4 long-range respondents, the crucial factor here was mobility *speed*. Despite having travelled long distances, these respondents had invariably progressed in a gradual manner, with sharp inclines invariably taking place towards the end of their careers. Significantly, all four had been successful in large businesses, steadily rising 'up the ranks', as Ray (67, chemical engineer) put it. At 18 James (now 65), for example, had started as a cashier at a high-street bank. After 10 years at branch level he started to rise up the bank's management and after a string of further promotions eventually rose to join the bank's board of Directors. While James was aware of the extreme scale of his trajectory, the steady, back-loaded nature of his progression, in an institution that he intimately knew and understood, had

allowed him to maintain a coherent sense of identity whilst also successfully adapting to the changing conditions of his occupational field:

*James: Several colleagues would say I was a professional Yorkshireman.*

*XX: What does that mean?*

*James: Well, I never pretended I was anything that I wasn't. I opened up on my background, I never changed my accent or tried to develop any, y'know... So there was a determination, but I can honestly say, not obsessively so.*

It is possible to see here how this quite extreme long-range social mobility did not necessarily imply a break with the habitus. Instead, with such slow and steady mobility, James's habitus had time to 'get a feel for the game' in each new rung of the occupational hierarchy. Moreover, in James's case, the gradual pace of mobility had also allowed for the privileging and maintenance of primary cultural experience - so formative in the hardwiring of an internally coherent habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 42-6). Thus, James was able to combine his occupational success with being proud and 'open' about his background as a working-class Yorkshireman. Other interviewees displayed a similar confidence in reconciling the dispositions of origin and destination:



*Ray: Someone looking at me would see me living in Cheshire, member of a golf club, driving an SK Jag, 5-bedrooms. Yet, last week I went to a brass-band concert and I'm a season-ticket holder at Leeds United.*

*XX: So would you still call yourself working-class?*

*Ray: Yes, I am.*

*XX: What does that mean to you?*

*Ray: That you've worked to get what you've got, that it hasn't come down from above, as a class thing. It's very much that. No aspiration to be middle class, or upper-class, I am what I am.*

*XX: So you don't think you've changed much?*

*Ray: Difficult one that. Others looking in from the outside might say by God he has. But I don't feel I have (Ray, retired analytical chemist).*

Bourdieu (2005: 47) argues that one of the main improvisatory skills of the habitus, when faced with a new field, lies in its ability to 'selectively perceive and transform the objective structure...while, at the same time, being transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structure'. Ray's experience clearly chimed with this sentiment. While he was aware that others may detect contradictions in his taste, or a sense that he had 'changed', he had not consciously noticed any alterations and was confident that his primary, working-class habitus remained intact.

It was also interesting that these four respondents closely resembled the respondents in Goldthorpe's (1981) original study – they were all men, all baby boomers, and all described experiencing mobility alongside close friends from similar backgrounds. These demographic characteristics are important because they may have acted to protect these interviewees from significant disruption to their habitus. As Lawler (1999) notes, male upward social mobility has long been legitimated through the heroic narrative of the 'working-class boy made good' and therefore the male habitus may be equipped with a more extensive (and socially acceptable) 'space of probable trajectories'. Moreover, the fact that these men's upward trajectories had taken place during the British post-war period of high absolute upward mobility, and each had therefore reported sharing their experiences with consociates from similar backgrounds, may have further acted as a buffer against status anxiety or cultural dislocation.

Moving on to the 10 short-range upwardly mobile respondents, the most important factor structuring their trajectory was less speed of mobility and more the *distance* travelled. These respondents had made relatively modest progress, largely from working-class origins to intermediate occupations, and most had stayed in their geographical area of origin and/or were in relationships with partners from similar backgrounds. Consequently, any mismatch between habitus and field was minimal, a fact underlined by their

pride in their working-class origins. This was often clear in the décor of their homes. Karl, for instance, showed me his display of instruments from a local Yorkshire miner's Brass Band, which both he and his father had played in, whereas Bill's house was adorned with photos celebrating the various successes of his local football team<sup>3</sup>. For these respondents, the retention of a working-class identity was a clear source of pride, a badge of honour:

*When I go back to Liverpool I'd never want to be called a Professional Scouser<sup>4</sup>. I love my city; I love my roots (Lee, 53, children's entertainer).*

Lee's mention of the term 'professional scouser' was particularly telling here. Unlike James who used a similar term to illustrate his ability to straddle fields, Lee deployed the term to draw a symbolic boundary between himself and other upwardly mobile Liverpudlians who had effectively abandoned their 'roots' but still tried to demonstrate their working-class regional identity through accent and local knowledge. Yet interviewees viewed these exaggerated performances of class identity as fundamentally inauthentic, as phony examples of overidentification, and were careful to distance themselves from such mythical figures. Indeed, the derisory figure of the 'professional Brummie<sup>5</sup>' and 'professional Geordie<sup>6</sup>' were also invoked by Steve (51, medical secretary) and Janet (74, local government officer). The 'professional local', then, neatly captured how the habitus of these short-range mobility respondents carefully guarded against identity mutation,

inclining them to exclude certain practices as unthinkable, as acts of treachery against their upbringing:

*Although my income puts me in the middle class bracket I still hold true to my upbringing. I come from a large council estate where everyone was on the same income. There was no trying to go one better than your neighbours. That's how I feel the middle class are; always have to go one better (Kevin, 50, quality manager).*

The importance of such cultural authenticity, of 'holding true' to one's upbringing, was so strong that for some respondents it even involved actively stunting one's own social mobility. Elaine, a 53 year-old nurse, had been earmarked as a 'high flyer' by her clinical manager several years ago and had been strongly encouraged to apply for a number of promotion opportunities. But, she explained, further progression 'was just never what I wanted'. She noted that for a short time she had been on the 'practice board' but had struggled to work with some of the 'snobby' doctors:

*My husband's got a very nice car, a red Audi TT. One day I had to take it to work but when I got in I didn't know how to lock it. And I was talking about it at the board meeting, saying how stupid I was, and one of the consultants looked at me as if to say 'how on earth are you driving an Audi TT'? And that's what it's like. A lot of the time they'll just imply they're a bit better,*

*y'know? But if I were on an even-par, then that thought just wouldn't have never entered his head, would it?*

While Elaine could have pursued further upward mobility, she had repeatedly rejected development opportunities. Significantly, this appeared to be bound up with a rejection of the cultural milieu - with its associated taste snobbery and lack of 'common manners' - which such mobility would bring her into contact with. It was possible to see in cases like this, then, as well as through the invocation of mythical figures like the 'professional scouser', how habitus functioned to protect respondents, psychologically, from the potential dislocation of social mobility. Unlike the habitus of the 4 long-range respondents, which had changed but 'within the limits inherent in their originating structure' (Bourdieu, 2005: 47), the habitus of these short-range respondents seemed to rebuff change, compelling them to reject choices that might induce a confrontation between the dispositions formed in primary socialisation and those demanded by a particular destination (Willis, 1977; Walkerdine et al, 2001: 154).

### **'Moments' of Individual Hysteresis**

While the upwardly mobile respondents mentioned so far had all managed to successfully navigate variations between habitus and field, it was notable that the vast majority of my interviewees, 25 of 39, had experienced mobility as

more problematic. To understand why, it's important to return to mobility *speed*. Rather than steady and linear, most respondents reported that their mobility trajectory had been structured around a number of short, abrupt bursts (usually early in life) that had invariably been troubling, even traumatic. Cerin (50, fiction writer), for example, who was brought up in a housing 'scheme' in Glasgow, recalls the first few months of taking up an assisted place at an elite private school aged 11:

*Cerin: The trouble was when I got off the bus to come home, I had to wear my hat and the whole uniform with the blazer. But in that time it wasn't really done. And a skirt where it couldn't be more than an inch and a half above the floor. So you can imagine what looked like to people in the scheme (laughs)*

*XX: Did you feel self-conscious?*

*Cerin: Yeah, very. People would shout names at you. They would just ridicule you.*

*XX: How did you feel?*

*Cerin: Like I was between two worlds. My family were generally okay about me being a wee bit different, but some of my aunts and uncles, my cousins, they kinda distanced... they thought I was getting above myself.*

It is precisely in these instances, where habitus suddenly finds itself 'out of sync' with the objective structure of the field it finds itself in, that Bourdieu

(2000) argues the *hysteresis* effect takes hold. Thus while Cerin's habitus desperately tried to respond to a profound change of educational field, such a response took time and in the lag that followed she had to battle what Bourdieu (1977; 83) terms the 'negative sanctions' of relatives. Other interviewees reported similar 'moments' of hysteresis. Dan (37, local authority manager) recalls an exhausting period of self-questioning when he went against his parents' wishes and began studying at Durham University ('Am I doing the right thing here, do I have the ability to do this, the self-belief'), whereas Frank (60, computing manager) recalls the severe resentment of childhood friends when he left his native Falkirk to build his own luxury home in an affluent nearby village.

Significantly, the impact of such moments of hysteresis varied greatly. For some it had been followed by an Icarus-like fall downward, as they sought to return to a more familiar social and cultural environment. However, in most short-range cases, the effect of hysteresis was more subtle, leaving a manageable yet enduring memory of mismatch. Pat (60, youth worker), for example, spoke movingly about an abiding memory of watching his working-class parents arriving at his boarding school during a first year bank holiday. All the other boarders were being picked up in 'fancy cars' and taken out for the day by their families, but Pat's parents couldn't afford to take him out and arrived on the bus to spend the day with him at school. For Pat the feelings invoked by seeing his parents walking up the drive, in full view of the other

pupils and teachers, had been deeply unsettling. At once acutely, excruciatingly embarrassed, Pat was also simultaneously consumed by guilt for pitying his parents – a guilt, he said, that had stayed with him throughout his life. For Karl, a 45-year old engineering executive, the linger of hysteresis had manifested through a persistent insecurity about occupational status. Karl had spent 10 years gradually progressing through middle management before being promoted to a research and development team where the other staff were all graduates. Initially, the manager refused to grant Karl's promotion because he didn't have a degree, but eventually this was overruled. Yet Karl described an abiding insecurity about his lack of educational capital:

*Karl: I think it's probably more me, I'm not sure they even think that. Like you get quite in-depth discussions on technical aspects and it isn't accent, it's the language I use. I'm very much a kind of 'a spade is a spade', I don't use big words. English has never been a particularly strong subject of mine.*

What was significant here was Karl's awareness that his status-anxiety was not the result of any snobbery or downward judgement from his colleagues, but more an internal niggle, a residue of being catapulted into such an alien environment. Indeed, what Karl and other's experiences demonstrated was that however sought after, sudden upward movement in social space can dislocate the habitus, initiating a painful and disorientating struggle to



reconstruct one's sense of place within social space (Bourdieu, 1999: 470-471)

### **Habitus Clivé**

While most short-range respondents had managed to overcome, if not completely resolve, the effects of hysteresis by reversing, halting or slowing down their mobility trajectory, this was not the case for those who had continued to travel upwards. Indeed, for 10 long-range upwardly mobile interviewees, the effects of hysteresis were unbending.

In one sense, these people had travelled so far in subjective terms from the objective conditions in which their habitus had been formed, they were unable to ever fully adapt to their destination. Despite many years in new occupational and cultural milieus, these interviewees lacked the requisite mental and embodied resources to acculturate. Helen (39), for example, had been brought up in South London and, after studying drama at university, had gone on to become a theatre director. Although she had enjoyed significant success – running her own theatre aged 26 – Helen says she had spent ‘many unhappy years trying to be accepted by the theatre elite’. Helen attributed much of this to the way that embodied markers of her working-class background – her South-London accent, her large hooped earrings, her choice of sports trainers - were judged by others in the industry. She noted,

for example, that a number of journalist's interviews had referred to her 'Chav earrings' or 'gypsy clothes'. Indeed, on occasion, such judgements had directly affected Helen's career trajectory:

*Like I did this pilot for Channel 4 where they were getting a director into an inner city estate to teach kids about theatre. And I went in to do this screen-testing and they were really keen, saying 'you're really good, you come from the same background' etc. And then in the end they said 'we're really sorry but Channel 4 have made us go with a middle class guy' because they said 'people just won't believe you're a director, because you don't look like a director. Whereas the other guy isn't great, but he looks like what people expect a director to be'.*

Echoing the work of Skeggs (1997) and Lawler (1999), there was a sense here that the dominantly middle-class 'theatre world' had marked Helen as 'other', of displaying the 'wrong' type of femininity. It was also notable that the majority (8 out of 10) of *these* long-range interviewees had experienced *diagonal* upward trajectories into the upper left quadrant of Bourdieusian social space (cf. *Distinction*), where cultural rather than economic capital constitutes the more dominant currency. Thus, unlike the long-range interviewees mentioned earlier in the article, who had all experienced upward movement into business - where the dominant capital is economic and arguably easier to accumulate - these interviewees required a 'naturally' embodied cultural capital to be legitimately recognized in their adopted

occupational world (XXX). However, such a resource was elusive and hard to simply accrue and deploy (Bourdieu, 1984: 65-68). As Helen explained:

*I could definitely play the game more, change my voice, be more of a player, but it's just not me. I'm never going to be in that club.*

Individuals like Helen, then, continued to pay the price, psychologically and objectively, for possessing a classed and gendered habitus ill-adapted to the conditions of their occupational field. While she identified that she 'could' try to be more of a 'player', in terms of performing the dispositions necessary for acceptance in the theatre world, she was also aware that to do so would involve another painful contradiction, a betrayal of what she internally knew to be the real authentic 'me' (Bourdieu, 2000: 160).

In other cases, the emotional imprint of this unending dislocation was felt less through the judgements of others and more through an internal self-doubt. Here, the pull of habitus left many respondents with a paralytic suspicion that they somehow 'weren't good enough' (Mark, 42, script writer), that they were a 'fraud' (Carol, 58, counsellor), or that a 'fall' was just around the corner (Helen). Peter (52, arts PR executive) noted how he continually expected to be 'caught out' by colleagues in PR:

*That is maybe what I take from my background. You can't think outside of your class or your level too much because it'll all go terribly wrong.*

While one might expect such achievement ‘against-the-odds’ to engender pride and contentment, these individuals reported the opposite feeling. Upward movement, for them, was accompanied by a lingering anxiety that they had exceeded their own ‘field of possibles’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 110). This ambivalence was often intensified by a corresponding belief that they themselves did not fully *want to belong* in their field of destination, that success somehow implied abandoning one’s origins. Harriet (28, lobbyist) had experienced this throughout her life. Brought up by first-generation Tamil Sri-Lankan factory workers in North London, Harriet had won a full scholarship to one of London’s most elite private schools before going on to study English at Oxford. Throughout her education Harriet recalled a distinct sense of what Walkerdine et al (2001: 161) term ‘survival guilt’ – a feeling that her parents had continually made sacrifices for a success that only she would benefit from. Moreover, she described how this feeling of guilt was indirectly fuelled by her mother’s passive-aggression:

*But with mum, definitely, there’s this sense of shame. So when I got into [private school] she didn’t tell me, she just left the letter on the radiator. And when I got into Oxford, she came to visit, but she always does this thing where she makes you feel embarrassed to repeat things and names, makes you feel they’re a bit lame, like you’re trying to show off.*

This passage illustrates what Bourdieu (2002: 510) calls the ‘contradictions of succession’, where the upwardly mobile experience ‘success as failure’, as a

betrayal of those who have nurtured and created them. Moreover, Harriet's feeling of 'shame' also appears linked to a strongly gendered pitfall of upward mobility – namely the fear of pretension (Lawler, 1999). Harriet's mother thus employed the sanction of inducing 'embarrassment' to continually remind her daughter not to *seem to be* something, in terms of class pretensions, which she is not authentically from 'birth'. In this way, upward mobility provokes a gendered 'call to order' – a sense of 'who does she think she is?'

(Bourdieu, 1984: 380). For Harriet, who had gone on to become a successful political lobbyist, such feelings of shame were intensified by a sense that, through achieving, she was a traitor to her two siblings, both of whom had tried and failed to win scholarships to private schools:

*There's this thing where they've all had this really shit life and I've had this really nice life. So yeah I have massive guilt...because mentally and emotionally I feel real barriers...because I don't know how to help. I help out a lot with the financial administration of the family but I can't really engage emotionally.*

Again here Harriet demonstrates the complex web of psychic bi-products implied by long-range upward movement (Sennett and Cobb, 1973; Walkerdine et al, 2001). Not only was Harriet guilty about her success, but she was also jealous that her siblings' immobility and shared social strife had allowed them to maintain emotional bonds. In contrast, her own privileged experience had stripped her of the emotional tools to 'help'. Moreover,

Harriet's feelings of estrangement were exacerbated by the fact that her trajectory had also entailed a distancing from her family's Tamil Sri-Lankan culture, of losing her Tamil linguistic skills and losing contact with her local Tamil community. This difficult intersection between class mobility and changing ethnic identity was even more acutely felt in the testimony of Udita, 44, whose parents were first-generation Ugandan Indian, and had spent their life running a newsagent in the East End of London. Udita had gone to university and was now a graphic designer. Her trajectory had been marked by an exhausting balancing act between the cultural values of her ethnic and occupational identity. This manifested most prominently when Udita decided to divorce her husband, with whom her parents had organised an arranged marriage, in her late 20s. For Udita, this decision was intimately connected to ideas of feminist emancipation that had been introduced to her at university and had been informed by advice she had received from white female colleagues at the time. However, the divorce had caused an irrevocable rift with her parents and the local Indian community:

*Udita: I don't regret getting divorced, but since I got divorced my status in my own community has not been very good. I never get invited to functions. Like my parents never brought me to events, they always kind of kept me in the background because they were ashamed. One of the problems is that they weren't highly educated, whereas some of my friend's parents, they were more open to change.*

*XX: Did your education have a bearing on getting divorced?*

*Udita: Definitely, because I had the confidence, the knowledge about the legal system in Britain, which gave me the opportunity to move life forward.*

For Udita, then, divorce was the source of a multitude of difficult emotions. At once a proud signal of gendered freedom and financial independence, it was also the root of a strong sense of shame – an emotion from which, she noted, it was almost impossible to escape:

*But because my family is linked very much to the Indian community, even if I don't want to be, I'm pushed back...y'know somebody knows someone ...When you're a child your family are so important to who you are, those experiences shape who you are. And the thing is you can't escape them. I've actually had therapy about it – been to the Landmark Forum - to get over my issues. I tried to escape, but it's so ingrained.*

In this remarkably lucid passage, Udita demonstrates a striking reflexive awareness of the abiding impact of her primary socialization. Her precarious position has endowed her with an 'extraordinary' lucidity and an ability to practice a form of self-analysis that reveals the 'objective contradictions which have [her] in their grasp' (Bourdieu, 2002: 511). Yet, significantly, despite having amassed such deep personal insight, Udita is unable to prevent this familial disidentification from engendering a deep sense of shame. Indeed, her mention of therapy indicates that such shame may have been 'regulated

through repressive mechanisms' and subsequently left enduring psychic scars (Walkerdine et al, 2001: 158). As Bourdieu (2002; 511) notes 'the family is at the root of the most universal part of social suffering, including the paradoxical form of suffering based in privilege'. For Uditia the result of such social suffering was a profoundly conflicted sense of self, oscillating between the loyalties of family and the opportunities of mobility:

*I've always thought I've never really belonged, but then I always thought it was just me, y'know? Because I didn't believe totally in Indian culture, but I didn't belong in my English friends' lives because they were a lot more free. So I've always drifted, dipped in and out of different cultures, always been quite a detached person.*

Such a sentiment of being torn between two worlds, of being 'culturally homeless' (Friedman, 2012), was common among all 10 long-range upwardly mobile respondents. There was a common sense of being 'stuck in the middle' (Cerin), of 'not knowing where I fit in' (Peter), and each had their own stories of the significant emotional labour required to reconcile such contradictory sources of identity.

I would like to finish by honing in on the mobility experience of one interviewee in detail – Anna. I have chosen Anna's story not because it is somehow hyperbolic – although admittedly her trajectory is quite extreme - but more because by examining one story in detail it is possible to convey the



intricate manner in which the constant renegotiation of habitus took place for these interviewees over their lifecourse. Now a toxicology registrar in Glasgow, Anna (29) had been brought up in a council flat in Dalkeith, a strongly working-class area of Edinburgh. Her Dad had left when she was five and her mum was long-term unemployed. Her two brothers had both become involved in drug crime, and at the time of the interview one was standing trial for attempted murder. Amid this disruptive familial upbringing, Anna had nonetheless achieved highly at school and taken a place at medical school in Edinburgh. University had initially been quite traumatic, a moment of hysteresis punctured by a deep sense that 'everyone was better than me'. However, Anna described that in the intervening years - at medical school and now as a practicing medic - she had gradually grown in confidence. There were still constant insecurities, of not knowing the 'right' things about culture and politics (she recalls a particularly 'excruciating' incident where she got London Mayor Boris Johnson and tennis player Boris Becker mixed up at a dinner party), but in fact feelings of dislocation were much more acute in terms of origin than destination. Indeed, as with most long-range respondents, it was the mismatch between habitus and field of origin that caused most suffering. Anna described, for example, that she had tried to remain resolutely close to her mother throughout her upward journey:

*I really just want to make my Mum proud of me, to show her that she's done a good job!*

Yet paradoxically with every new achievement in Anna's professional career, she was travelling further away from her family culturally, geographically and symbolically. In one telling passage, she told me:

*Anna: And then I started working, having all this work hard, play hard, be-a-bit-hungover-at-work days. And I had such a good time but I would feel so guilty. Like I lived in two totally different worlds. One world where I'm doing well, and I feel really lucky. But then I look back at the world my Mum lives in and it's horrific.*

*XX: Why do you feel guilty?*

*Anna: Because like.. I'd never want to see like myself as snobby, but I do just see...(long pause)...things that...awww....it feels terrible even saying it. Like I'll go into her house and think 'oh my god I can't believe you got that' and then feel terrible about it...because then I've changed, do you know what I mean? And I don't want to change, if that makes sense?*

*XX: What sort of things [of hers] do you mean?*

*Anna: Like I would never wear anything...no sorry I don't think I can say. I don't want to look down on them. I can't bring myself to do it.*

This was an incredibly emotional moment for Anna (and for me too), where she began to cry. In the process of exploring her feelings of guilt, the two sides of her habitus had suddenly and unexpectedly collided. She had

become acutely aware of her double-bind, instinctively wanting to pass comment on her mum's taste but immediately hit by the feeling of betrayal implied by expressing any such judgement. Yet, while she may not be able to utter the words, to socially instantiate such feelings, it was clear that this double perception of self was painfully present in Anna's mind, the source of much stress and anxiety.

## **Conclusion**

As Hillier and Rooksby (2005: 37) note, the 'question of the durability of the habitus' is probably the 'greatest challenge' facing the concept. Perhaps the main reason for this is that Bourdieu rarely engaged empirically with the precise conditions under which the habitus is likely to be altered, adjusted and/or disrupted. In this article, I have aimed to begin to fill this empirical gap by examining habitus through the lens of upward mobility. Primarily, my data reveals that the mutability of habitus is heavily dependent on a person's mobility *trajectory*. However, by trajectory I refer not just to the *range* of upward mobility but also by the *speed* and *direction* of movement through social space, as well as a person's particular combination of class, gender and ethnicity<sup>7</sup>. While habituses travelling at slow speeds, covering short distances, and moving towards the economically dominant quadrant of social space were more likely to enact psychologically smooth improvisations, such

trajectories represented a clear minority among my interviewees. In contrast, most had experienced mobility as a distinctly bumpy and non-linear ride punctuated by abrupt moments of hysteresis. Among 10 long-range upwardly mobile respondents – the group most celebrated in prevailing political rhetoric – mobility had been particularly difficult. Indeed, the majority of these individuals appeared to possess the same cleft habitus so vividly self-diagnosed by Bourdieu in the run up to his inaugural lecture. Facing upwards in social space they routinely battled feelings of insecurity and inferiority, and facing downwards they were invariably met with a sense of guilt, estrangement and abandonment. Mobility, in short, brought with it a slew of hidden emotional injuries.

I should emphasise that this is not to say, as some previous literature has suggested (Stacey, 1967), that these individuals were unhappy people or suffered from psychological disorder. Not only is it far beyond my expertise to make such an assertion, but I must add that most interviewees seemed to be battling this multitude of emotions valiantly, even perhaps ‘successfully’. While I would stop short of interpreting this juggling act as constitutive of what Abrahams and Ingram (2013) term a ‘chameleon habitus’, I do agree with these authors that being ‘between two worlds’ had endowed many respondents with a unique capacity for reflexivity and self-analysis (Bourdieu et al, 1999: 511).

However, what I think this data is more useful in illustrating is the profound *psychological imprint* of social mobility. Whether successfully managed or not, reconciling such an array of difficult emotions clearly demanded an exhausting amount of mental work, a load only intensified by the fact that this was largely a solitary undertaking. Indeed, many noted that our interview had, in many ways, constituted a somewhat cathartic exercise, bringing to the fore many thoughts and emotions that they had never expressed before.

Sociologically, these findings have implications in two main areas. First, for those working with Bourdieusian theory, the article underlines both the strengths and the limitations of thinking with habitus. Despite those who have argued that social mobility remained a rather undertheorised area of Bourdieu's analysis (Lawler, 1997; Bennett, 2007) the narratives described here demonstrate how useful habitus can be as a theoretical tool to help unpick different iterations of the mobility experience. Yet it is the relatively high percentage of long-range upwardly mobile respondents, and accompanying cases of habitus *clivé*, that represents the main challenge to Bourdieu's formulation. Far from being 'exceptions to the rule', these respondents constituted a significant minority of my overall sample. While this number may not be high enough to threaten the entire notion of a unitary class habitus, it does indicate that the contemporary British habitus may be subject to significantly more inculcation, alteration and disruption over the

lifecourse than Bourdieu envisaged (Lahire, 2011; 36-41; Reed-Danahay, 2005: 65).

Second, the findings illustrate that in a rush to assert a normative commitment to increasing social mobility, British politicians, policy makers, and even some sociologists, seem to have passed over the complexities of the mobility *experience*. Here my in-depth qualitative analysis reveals that upward mobility may not always be so straightforwardly 'beneficial', particularly at the individual, subjective level. Indeed, examined from the lens of emotional wellbeing rather simply economic or occupational achievement, the 'success' of mobility is uncertain. While the contemporary experience of upward mobility involves indisputable gains in economic capital and social status, such benefits often come at a considerable psychological price.

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu's never father completed his schooling and his mother left school at 16 (Greenfell, 2011: 12)

<sup>2</sup> When the data collected from survey respondents are adjusted to represent the population from which the sample was drawn, the resulting data are called weighted data.

<sup>3</sup> In Britain, both brass bands and local club football are traditionally associated with working-class culture.

<sup>4</sup> Scouser is a colloquial term for someone from Liverpool

<sup>5</sup> Brummie is a colloquial term for someone from Birmingham

<sup>6</sup> Geordie is a colloquial term for someone from Newcastle

<sup>7</sup> Of course habitus may also be affected by factors other than social mobility, as demonstrated in the work of those like Wacquant (2011, 2014) and other papers in this Special Issue (Aarsath, 2015; Darmon, 2015)