



***Pure Notions! An Ethnographic Research of Social Class Mobility from Limerick City's
Regeneration Communities.***

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ABSTRACT

Pure Notions! An Ethnographic Research of Social Class Mobility from Limerick City's Regeneration Communities.

Growing up in poverty and experiencing social exclusion within marginalised communities can significantly hinder educational and professional success. This research explores the journeys of individuals who have overcome these challenges in Limerick's most disadvantaged housing estates. By analysing their personal narratives, the study aims to understand how they navigated poverty and deprivation to achieve upward social mobility. The investigation examines the interplay of social factors that facilitated successful mobility for individuals from four specific locations: Ballinacurra Weston (my childhood home), Southill, St. Mary's Park, and Moyross, which are all characterised by persistent disadvantage and poverty despite Regeneration policies implemented since 2007. Firstly, the research looks to identify the 'pull factors' that enabled individuals to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and disadvantage. Secondly, the study investigates the impact of upward mobility on participants' social class identity. This involves the identification of shared markers of working-class identity and an examination into how these markers were affected by a shift in socioeconomic status by drawing on Bourdieu's concept of Habitus Clivé. In summary, the research focuses on understanding how individuals navigated the complexities of social structures and their own evolving identities within the context of social class.

The research employs a qualitative ethnographic approach, allowing for a flexible research process that adapts to emerging themes and issues raised by participants. The primary data source for the thesis was twelve in-depth ethnographic interviews. Furthermore, to gain a broader societal perspective on class, a digital ethnography was conducted using X (formerly Twitter) records from 2018-2022, focusing on narratives surrounding social class issues and problems in modern Ireland. The findings from this digital ethnography informed the interview questions and supported the interview data, ensuring validity and robust research. To further enhance the research, I leveraged my insider perspective by incorporating autoethnographic methods, through reflections, journaling, and the creation of vignettes. Through these processes I brought my personal experiences of upward mobility to bear on the data, providing unique insights into the lived reality of class mobility.

The complex and multifaceted nature of social class necessitated an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. Therefore, this study combines Bourdieu's concepts of capital,

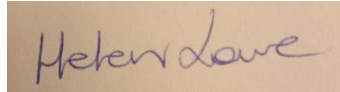
habitus, and field with Chetty's research on neighbourhood effects, and Sen's Capability Approach. This approach facilitates novel interpretations and methodologies that a single theoretical perspective cannot provide, enabling a deeper understanding of social class and its impact on working-class individuals' lives.

Findings revealed the crucial interplay of strong family values, supportive communities, and accessible education. These structures often complemented each other, highlighting the importance of interconnected support systems. However, despite achieving upward mobility, participants experienced a 'displaced sense of identity' as they struggled to reconcile their working-class roots with their new social standing. Therefore, this research emphasises the need to empower marginalised individuals through community-based initiatives, equitable education, and support systems that foster resilience, a sense of social justice, and personal agency. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex factors shaping social class mobility and its enduring impact on individual identity.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or any other person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

Signed:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Helen Lowe".

Helen Lowe

Date: 24th January 2025

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Abbreviations

- APA American Psychological Association

ATD	All Together for Dignity
CA	Capability Approach
CBS	Congregation of Christian Brothers
CDC	Community Development Corporation
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DOE	Department of the Environment
ED	Electoral District
ERSI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
Eurostat	Statistical Office of the European Communities
FÁS	Foras ÁiSeánna Saothair - Irish National Training and Employment Authority (currently known as SOLAS)
FF	Fianna Fail (Irish Political Party)
FG	Fine Gael (Irish Political Party)
FET	Further Education and Training
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council.
GARDAÍ	Police Force of Ireland
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HEA	Higher Education Authority

H.Dip	Higher Diploma
HP	Hausse and Pratschke the professional group commissioned by the government to design the deprivation index in Ireland
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
JC	Junior Cycle
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LRA	Limerick Regeneration Agency
LRFIP	Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
MIREC	Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAUL	People Against Unemployment in Limerick
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
POBAL	Pobal is a non-profit company that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the European Union
SA	Small Area
SCWM	Social Class Worldview Model
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SOLAS	State Agency Overseeing Further Education Training in Ireland
SSS	Subjective Social Status
TA	Thematic Analysis

TD	Teachta Dála (a member of the Irish Parliament).
TUS	Technological University of the Shannon
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain.
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
VTOS	Vocational Training and Opportunities Scheme
X	Formerly Twitter

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Poverty is more like a gravitational field compromising social, economic, emotional, physiological, political and cultural forces. Each person's escape velocity is different, relative to their specific circumstance....poverty and the forces it brings to bear are likely to determine the course of a person's life (McGarvey, 2018, p.121).

Limerick has more areas of deprivation than any other city of its size in Ireland (Inequality Ireland, 2022). Approximately 35% of Limerick's population live in disadvantaged areas, with data suggesting issues of high unemployment, low levels of education, high single parent rates, and low social status (Limerick City & Council, 2023). The Regeneration areas of the city – Moyross, Southill, Ballinacurra Weston and St. Mary's Park, score amongst the highest deprivation levels in the country on Pobal's Deprivation Index in 2022.¹ Intensifying the poverty is the fact that bordering these extremely disadvantaged areas are other disadvantaged and very disadvantaged neighbourhoods that are traditionally working-class communities with mostly older social housing stock (Limerick City & County Council, 2023). According to the OECD (2023) it takes nearly five generations for children of poorer families to reach the average income in their country. This staggering reality highlights the fact that unequal opportunities are not only a moral concern, but they also impact economic and social success. Darren McGarvey quoted above, claims that the speed in which one escapes poverty is relative to one's personal circumstances. This research focuses on the relatively rare phenomenon of "escaping poverty" by examining the personal accounts of individuals who grew up in some of Ireland's most disadvantaged social housing estates, specifically within Limerick. These narratives detail their journeys of upward mobility, exploring how they achieved a life they value, aligning with Sen's (1999) concept of well-being. Furthermore, the study critically examines how historical local and national policies have contributed to the marginalisation of these communities by limiting their access to important forms of capital.

This study employs an ethnographic approach to contextualise social class within modern Ireland, specifically exploring the lived experiences of individuals who grew up in some of the country's most impoverished areas. It traces the pathways chosen by these individuals as

¹ The Pobal HP Deprivation Index is Ireland's primary social gradient tool, used by numerous government departments and state agencies for the identification of geographic disadvantage, in order to target resources and services towards communities most in need (Pobal, 2022).

they navigated challenges and strived to build a positive and secure future for themselves. For the purpose of the research, ethnography is explored via three different methods. Firstly, a digital ethnography was conducted to explore Irish public perceptions and experiences of social class issues in contemporary Ireland. This involved analysing asynchronous conversations and statements related to social class on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter). Secondly, auto-ethnographic vignettes are punctuated throughout the research to represent my own views and experiences of social class mobility, growing up in the social housing estate of Ballinacurra Weston. Lastly, in-depth ethnographic interviews were conducted with participants who grew up in social housing in Limerick city, in order to document their lived experience of social mobility, and how that impacted their own development and sense of sociocultural belonging. The interviews are the core data collection method of the research and are supported by the other two forms to ensure validity through triangulation. The theoretical framework is informed by Raj Chetty's research on the impact of neighbourhoods on individual's success patterns, Amartya Sen's Human Development and Capabilities Approach, and Pierre Bourdieu's Capital and Habitus.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to document the voices of a number of Limerick people who rose from their working-class roots in disenfranchised communities in the city by means of education, skill training or professional progression. Crucially, their stories are told from their own perspective, as members of these communities are often excluded from participation on public discourse on social class issues (O'Donnell et al., 2021). The interviews were conducted using an ethnographic approach and were subsequently analysed alongside the digital ethnographic research to create robust findings. Using autoethnographic vignettes, I added my own voice to include the story of my journey from working-class origins to the participants accounts, with the aim of creating a more meaningful thesis. Furthermore, by sharing my experiences, it incorporated a reflexive element that acknowledges my positionality. This allows the reader to understand how my personal perspective may influence both the analysis and interpretations of the data. Thus, creating transparency and credibility in the contextualisation of the findings within a broader narrative. In addition, it builds a deeper connection to the research by allowing readers a personalised insight into my own journey and those of the participants, by creating a more immersive reading experience. This project examines the motivating factors that propelled these individuals away from the limitations of their disadvantaged backgrounds towards the transformative effects of

education or skills training. It aims to add to the existing corpus of knowledge on the understanding and emotional effects of social and educational mobility, in a bid to provide insights into the personal qualities and circumstances that contribute to upward mobility. It determined the effects of not only personal agency and advocacy in this journey, but also the impacts of external structures which can serve to perpetuate and reproduce inequality. This research investigates how individuals within marginalised communities exercise agency to navigate internal and external challenges and construct meaningful lives. Sen's Capability Approach provides a framework for understanding their achievements and the ongoing process of balancing internal and external factors in their pursuit of a fulfilling life. Moreover, it explores the effects that mobility has on identity and sense of sociocultural belonging. Bourdieu provides a framework with which to examine identity formation and development and understand how these influence a person's trajectory in life. A Bourdieusian lens allows for a critical examination of social class mobility, enabling us to challenge prevailing narratives and gain deeper insights into how an individual's identity and habitus are transformed through upward or downward social movement.² Ultimately, this knowledge can serve to inform policy on both educational and community development in these areas. Since the middle of the last century theorists have postulated that social class mobility has a dissociative effect on the human psyche, with Bourdieu (1984) describing it as a painful and divisive experience creating a double perception of self. Reay (2015) describes mobility as a potentially terrifying shift away from the safe and familiar, one that instils a powerful desire to hold onto a working-class past even as people move up the social ladder. Subsequently, this investigation seeks to establish whether participants in the study had to alter or lose elements of their working-class cultural identity to be accepted in middle-class 'spaces'.

1.2 Rationale and Motivation for the Research

I was inspired to undertake this research as a result of my own personal experience of growing up in one of the most disadvantaged estates in Limerick, and the challenges I faced in my journey through education and professional development. Additionally, my professional experience of working as a teacher with students from disadvantaged backgrounds provided a further motivation as I witnessed the continuous failure of the structures and systems that the students studied within. These enculturating experiences have shaped my epistemology and ontology, and moreover my social identity, influencing an

² Bourdieu describes habitus as 'people's social conditions of existence that produce classificatory schemes that constitute the principles of their vision, their perceptions and desires' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.8).

adoption of the critical paradigm and to question the dominant narratives and power in societal structures. I wish to design research which will identify and challenge systemic inequalities in society, and advocate for social justice and change for disenfranchised groups.

Tajfel & Turner (1979) claim that social identity occurs when individuals derive a portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups such as social class and community, amongst other structures. Therefore, I would affiliate a portion of my social identity as a working-class female from a very disadvantaged background. Furthermore, Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that these social groups people belong to are important sources of pride and self-esteem. I have a strong sense of pride in my achievements based on the challenges and barriers that interact with growing up in poverty and marginalisation. I also find a place of pride in others who have achieved a life they have reason to value from similar disadvantage and can relate closely to their social identity and communities. Subsequently, my life experiences thus far, along with my social identity have driven my instincts and motivation for this research.

1.2.1 Researching the Lived Experience

My place of origin is Ballinacurra Weston, an estate on the Southside of Limerick City, best known for poverty, crime, feud activity, and deprivation. The youngest of four, I was the first in my family to finish second-level education and the first to go to college. The majority of my childhood peers chose very different routes in life, with most of them gravitating towards drugs and crime, and sadly for some, this path ending in death or jail time.

Making positive choices in a neighbourhood like Weston is not easy and it tends to bring ridicule and ostracisation. In reality standing still can be easier than moving forward in these estates, because being different can lead to both physical and emotional abuse. McGarvey (2017) argues that ‘it’s not easy to express yourself unless it aggressive. Most other forms of emotions are kept in check by threat of violence...this makes growing up in a deprived community an oppressive experience’ (p.16). In my childhood neighbourhood poverty was rife and drug dealing offered a quick solution to money shortages, therefore, when the drug trade became popular in Ireland, our community changed rapidly as many local families quickly got involved in crime. Limerick city neighbourhoods became places of feuding, criminality, violence, so for the people living in these estates fear and intimidation were the normal daily emotions.

My chosen pathway to educational success was a unique one within my family structure, and an even rarer one in my community, therefore, I always had a personal and professional

interest in identifying the circumstances that motivate individuals towards positive choices and goals, particularly in contexts where destructive behaviours and negative decisions are prevalent. Collectively, I believe our personal accounts can provide a shared narrative and a rich tapestry of individual histories that can help to inform policymakers, educationalists, and communities to find solutions to aid others in similar situations. My pursuit of higher education presented significant challenges. I encountered instances of 'classism' and 'othering,' particularly within the education system, where I experienced teacher bias stemming from my socioeconomic background. Furthermore, navigating the search for employment proved difficult due to limited access to social capital and the stigma associated with my residential area. Moreover, in my professional teaching career, I have often observed discussions about poverty and disadvantage being dominated by perspectives from individuals with limited or no firsthand experience of living in socially disadvantaged communities or experiencing poverty.

The four Limerick city estates and their surrounds, which are the sites of research, tend to receive a large amount of negative press and the language surrounding their discussion tends to be deficit based. Highlighting the success stories of individuals who have overcome poverty, and disadvantage can serve as a powerful source of inspiration and guidance for others. By examining their journeys, we can identify replicable strategies that empower individuals to navigate their own paths out of poverty. More importantly, these lived experience stories should serve to influence policy in both education and community development and practice.

1.2.2 Professional Experience

I qualified as a secondary school teacher in 2005 and began working in an all-boys school in Limerick City. Intuitively, I gravitated towards the area of Special Needs and immediately empathised and loved working with students on the margins. Throughout the course of this work, I have become increasingly frustrated with educational policies at both meso and macro level, as I have continually witnessed students from low socio-economic backgrounds failing at the hands of the Irish education system, which is predominantly middle class and economically driven. From my professional experience of nearly twenty years in educational institutions at both second and third level, the current system does not seek to engage these challenged students at their level or celebrate their cultures or habitus in the curriculum delivered. Instead, the system attempts to fit these students into a rigid academic system of 'one size fits all' with exam-driven outcomes and a process of testing that favours the social

and cultural capital of the higher echelons on the social class ladder. Cruz (2021) eloquently compares working-class people navigating a predominantly middle-class world as ‘ghosts’ or spirits. She argues that to become seen by the world one must assimilate to the cultures and norms of the middle-class or choose invisibility or annihilation. This is especially true, in my experience, within the Irish education system which can fail to meet children where they are, ‘to survive the system you have to become more middle-class – which is obscene, really, when you think of ourselves as an egalitarian society..... the system is marginalising them’ (Collins, 2019, *The Irish Times*, 26th Jan 2019). This ‘forced assimilation’ to middle class cultures or hegemony leads to the devaluing of working-class cultures, the erasing of personal and family habitus from areas of our cities, and places pressure on children to change an integral part of their identity to ‘fit in.’

1.3 Positionality

Insider researchers have been characterised as either total insiders, where researchers share multiple identities e.g., ethnicity, class, or partial insiders, who share a single identity or a few identities with a degree of distance or detachment from the community (Chavaz, 2008). Therefore, I would have to deem my positionality as an insider, as I share multiple identities with the participants of my research. My personal history with my lived and professional experience prohibits me from being an outside researcher. I am deeply aware of the potential bias and subjectiveness that could have infiltrated the study, in terms of both the process and the product. As a result of my work experiences, education, and professional development, I come to this inquiry not as an impartial observer, but as someone with a deep familiarity and empathy towards those who experience upward mobility. Therefore, to make the best use of ‘self as an instrument of inquiry’ for this study, it was necessary to be conscious and reflexive and to observe ‘with critical awareness familiar situations’ (McCracken, 1988, p. 22). Freire (1974, p.3) understands reflexivity to be a process where people better organise themselves, chose the best responses, test themselves and act and ‘change in the very act of responding’.

My beliefs, political views and cultural background had the potential to affect the research process and impact on the research findings, therefore, it was necessary to be reflexive to ensure the integrity of the study. Reflexivity is defined by Callaway (1992, p.33) as ‘a continuing mode of self-analysis. Freire (1974, p.3) understands reflexivity to be a process where people better organise themselves, choose the best responses, test themselves, act and ‘change in the very act of responding’. Despite this subjectiveness and insider researcher positionality I have endeavoured to adopt a balanced, analytical view in the study. I believe

my ‘on the ground’ and in-depth knowledge of social class mobility from a Limerick city Regeneration estate, has been an advantage. This insiderness helped me to build strong, trusting relationships with the participants, which resulted in rich data. Structures and strategies used to mitigate subjectivity in the research is addressed in greater detail in the methodology chapter in a comprehensive discussion.

1.4 Research Questions and Embedded Questions

This study aims to understand how the main social structures in an individual’s life interact with social class to create push and pull factors in upward mobility.

The central research question encompasses several embedded questions:

- What is social class identity, and how does it shift and evolve with upward mobility?
- What is the significance of education, family, and community in the lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- What are the challenges and barriers posed by classism and social class inequality?

1.5 Overview of Chapters

Chapter One outlines the aims and objectives of this study and provides a foundation for the thesis by defining the research questions. I also discuss my own positionality in this chapter, along with the ethics involved in carrying out such a deeply personal project. The chapter contributes to the overall thesis by underpinning the research problem and indicating how the findings will contribute to the overall field of study. It provides a roadmap of the thesis by outlining the content and organisation of each chapter.

Chapter Two, ‘Theoretical Framework’, outlines and critically analyses the theoretical frameworks applied in the study. The three main theorists whose work is employed in this thesis are Raj Chetty, Pierre Bourdieu and Amartya Sen. Chetty provides a framework for exploring the impacts of neighbourhoods and communities on an individual’s chances of social mobility. His work also provides both structures and insights with which to examine the characteristics of the Limerick City neighbourhoods, the focus of this study. Bourdieu provides a framework to examine social class identity through his theoretical underpinnings of capitals, space and Habitus. His theory informs the approach taken in this study in the context of the evolving identities of the participants as they moved up the social ladder.

Finally, Sen's Capability Approach is utilised to measure the pathways to success that participants chose and facilitates an exploration of the impacts of agency and system while they were on this path to achieving their freedoms and a life of value. A small number of additional theorists are employed in the study and their role in the research is also outlined in this chapter. This combination provides the theoretical basis from which to examine the relationship between individuals and social systems in upward mobility.

Chapter Three defines and frames social class as a concept for the purpose of this research. The chapter identifies the main metrics of social class from both an international and national perspective. This research employs theories that support a grassroots approach to understand how class stratification is defined and measured in modern society. This approach provides a more nuanced evaluation of social class, which is essential for fully appreciating its impact on the lives and experiences of the study participants. The chapter captures both the subjective and objective metrics of class to create an encompassing framework that measures not only the typical economic measures of class but also perceptions and identifications of social class.

Chapter Four analyses the socioeconomic status (SES) of the four study sites of Ballinacurra Weston, Moyross, Southill, and St Mary's Park using the key metrics of education, employment, and family status as indicators of deprivation levels on a national scale. Employing Pobal's HP Deprivation Index, it compares these communities' deprivation levels to both local and national averages, revealing their relative positions within broader poverty contexts.

Chapter Five provides a critical analysis of local and national socioeconomic policies through the lens of the theorists Chetty and Sen. This analysis reveals potential contradictions between these community-based policies and the factors identified by these theorists as crucial for social class mobility. Specifically, some policies may inadvertently reduce access to essential forms of capital within these communities by homogenising the population and limiting opportunities for cross-class interaction. The chapter examines the harmful impacts of key policies which served to create further layers of poverty in these areas, such as residualisation and regeneration.

Chapter Six, outlines and details the approach taken to the study, including the methodology, the data collection and data explication processes. It begins by outlining the study's background, paradigm, and rationale. Next, a description of the methodological approach, including the three primary ethnographic methods employed: digital ethnography, in-depth

interviews, and autoethnography. The data collection process, including participant sampling, access, and selection criteria is detailed, followed by the analysis procedures, emphasising ethical considerations and member checking. Finally, a reflection on the role of my own vignettes within the study is outlined with a discussion on reflexivity, defining the measures taken to address and minimise potential biases inherent in my role as an insider researcher. Finally, the generalisability and transferability of the research findings are presented with the main limitations of the study.

Chapter Six details the study's methodology, data collection, and analysis. It covers the study's paradigm and rationale, followed by descriptions of the methodological approach including the three primary ethnographic methods employed: digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, and autoethnography. Participant sampling, access, and selection criteria are outlined, along with ethical considerations and member checking. The chapter then addresses the researcher's insider positionality, aligning this with the measures taken to mitigate for subjectivity and bias with a heavy emphasis on reflective and reflexive practices, concluding with the study's generalisability, transferability, and limitations.

Chapter Seven explores social class issues in modern Irish society, from a digital ethnographic perspective. Early in the research the potential for subjectivity is recognised, given my personal connection to the study sites. To mitigate this, multiple research methods are employed, including a digital ethnography of social media discussions on social class in modern Ireland. This approach provided valuable insights into public perceptions and experiences, enriching the interview process and validating findings with a broader national perspective. This chapter introduces digital ethnography and explores the landscape of social class discourse on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) at both local and national levels. It also discusses the conceptual framework applied to this particular area of the study as it requires a unique approach to structure the data collection, analysis and findings in a credible manner.

Chapter Eight introduces the participants, providing brief profiles and contextualising their social and cultural backgrounds. This chapter enhances the ethnographic narratives by allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives. Profiling situates and contextualises the participants' background, beliefs, and behaviours which is essential for accurate interpretation of the data collected from the interviews. Therefore, the purpose of the descriptions allows for deeper exploration of the experiences of the participants in their journey through social class mobility, by outlining their family backgrounds, cultural influences, and significant events that shaped their habitus, behaviours, and perspectives. It also signifies the role and relevance of each participant to the study, by

signposting their educational and professional trajectories which ultimately resulted in their social class mobility.

Chapter Nine presents the findings from ethnographic interviews, offering insights into the lived experiences of individuals who grew up in working-class communities within Limerick city. This chapter explores the interplay of social structures and individual agency in shaping the participants' journeys through social class mobility. It investigates the push and pull factors within key societal structures of family, education, and community, which influenced their experiences and their efforts to break the cycle of poverty and challenge the predetermined trajectories often associated with their socioeconomic backgrounds. It also examined the interactions of these push and pull factors with the additional considerations of the participants' agency and key personality traits, to gain a deeper insight into the complex dynamics of social class mobility and the challenges and opportunities that individuals face in their pursuit of upward mobility. Finally, the chapter examined the impacts of social class mobility on a person's sense of belonging and social identity using Bourdieu's framework of *Habitus Clivé*. This determined that all of the participants experienced some form of shift in their identity that left them feeling 'in between' two class systems of working and middle, and a sense of dislocation and not belonging to any particular social identity emerged in the findings. Indicating that class mobility can have a disruptive impact on a person's identity.

Chapter Ten synthesises the primary findings from the interviews to address the research questions and evaluate the supporting role of the digital ethnography. It discusses the participants' lived experiences of working-class identity from an insider perspective, aligning with an ethnographic approach. Building on this foundation, the chapter explores the impact of upward mobility on the participants' sense of self and belonging, employing Bourdieu's concept of *Cleft Habitus* to analyse the findings from chapter nine. Subsequently, the role of social capital in facilitating upward mobility is investigated, followed by an examination of the participants' agentic practices in overcoming poverty. The chapter concludes by contrasting external perceptions of disadvantaged communities with the internal lived experiences of residents, highlighting the influence of stereotypes and labels.

Chapter Eleven, 'Conclusion', this is the final chapter of the thesis. In this chapter I revisit my research questions along with the aims and objectives of the research. Next, I summarise my research and outline the distinctive characteristics of the study, making recommendations on the findings and the contribution and impacts this thesis makes to knowledge.

1.7 Conclusions

This ethnographic study facilitates an understanding of the lived experiences of individuals from Limerick city Regeneration areas who have achieved upward social class mobility. Central to, and the most important aspect of the study, is the voice of the participants. They were invited to share their stories and life experiences of living in a working-class area, and how they chose less journeyed pathways of education or skills to develop success and achievements in their professional lives. The ethnographic interviews and digital ethnography alongside my own autoethnography collectively created a contemporary representation of social class issues from the perspective of the working-class. The research highlights both the motivating (pull factors) and limiting factors (push factors) for working-class individuals seeking to achieve change and growth through education or skills. Given the underrepresentation of working-class voices in academic and Irish literature, this study aims to contribute to the existing corpus of knowledge on upward mobility by incorporating the perspectives of those with the lived experiences of achieving upward mobility from areas of extreme deprivation.

This chapter serves as a foundation of the thesis by providing a clear outline and roadmap of all the chapters and explaining how they will address the research questions and objectives.

Torn Identity in Class Mobility - My Lived Experience of Social Class Purgatory....

The sense of torn identity or *Habitus Clivé* (Bourdieu) in my life is a very true phenomenon, I believe I live between the social class strata of middle and working. I consider myself sometimes to be the mongrel amongst pedigrees, but I always remind myself that mongrel breeds are strong, resilient, intelligent, and tend to live longer than pure breeds!! Therefore, it is not necessarily a deficit or negative comparison in my life. Personally, it just means that I look and sound a lot like the environment I operate within, but internally I can be very different. When I became socially mobile, it created conflict in my life, I came from a ‘socially disadvantaged’ area, I did not like growing up there, it was fearful, chaotic and judged by outsiders, but I knew life there. I understood the flow of our society, the language and accents, and how people operated. When you start moving in circles of different class systems, it is like moving country, people speak and act differently, and cultures seem a million miles apart despite a very small geographic distance. Human interactions and parts of cultural practices appeared very different to me in the beginning of my journey, despite never leaving a small town.

Class mobility ultimately changes a person, I began to adapt to ‘fit in’ and hide certain parts of myself in case they unveil my background, and I become judged for that. I was never and will never be ashamed of where I am from, but in certain circles it is easier to avoid disclosing your background because it takes a lot of energy not to respond to people’s comments and judgements of the area.

Researchers like Bourdieu and Reay, purport that social class mobility creates a sense of duality in a person, where an individual is always grappling with their past identity as a new one emerges. Feelings of guilt and remorse on ‘denying’ or leaving behind your place of origin and its cultures, tastes and habits, for a new set. For me, I remember it like a mourning of the ‘past me’ as the ‘new me’ emerged, I had to let go of a lot of my old *habitus* to function in a middle class setting, and while new tastes, hobbies and knowledge emerged, the

old parts were dying off to make room. Sometimes because of this evolution, I feel like I am betraying my family and neighbourhood, I have become the traitor to their cultures and habits, and the mantra 'who does she think she is' sometimes bounces around my thoughts, as I hear my accent and vernacular shift and adapt to middle-class surroundings. It is a constant contradictory state, because when I am around my old friends and neighbours, I am my old self and my accent and vocabulary change or revert back and I feel comfortable and nostalgic, but I also enjoy going home to my own new life as this is where I want to be. I compare these feelings and experiences to a tree in a constant state of change and torn between seasons:



I believe this image captures identity beautifully, beneath the surface of the tree are roots embedded strong and deep into the ground. This is my place of origin, my home, my roots, the part of me that is deepest and strongest, this is my family, my early education, my neighbourhood, my social class. These are the elements of my life that formed unchangeable parts of me, my reactive temper, my curiosity, my love for family, friends, and life, my boldness and courage. The rest of the tree is open to change and adapts to its environment. Firstly, my experience with upward mobility feels like a harsh winter for a tree who must survive in extreme conditions, I lost parts of myself that I can never recover, and I was forced to grow and adapt in difficult circumstances. This process shaped my development, sometimes in unnatural ways. The spring compares to education in my life, it has played a role that continues to bring hope and new situations. While the summer is my husband and

children, full of life, warmth and happiness, and my greatest achievements. Finally, the autumn is representative of constant change, the old parts dying off to make room for the new. I believe journeying through social class mobility is comparative to experiencing four seasons simultaneously, where I am trying to find a state of being and space that is comfortable and can reconcile my past and present in a genuine way, but the space does not yet exist, so the cycle of change and adaptation to new environments and situations continues, living in the 'in-between'.

When spending time with Dr Seungho Moon in Loyola University as part of a Doctoral Mobility Programme, his work enlightened me to the importance of imagery in autoethnography. He focuses on different methods of expressions and representations when studying identity and encourages researchers to move beyond the boundaries of text in their storytelling. Consequently, images of nature have always come to my mind when I want to explore my own identity, class, and culture. In reflection I believe nature is representative of my identity and development, because nature is 'dependable' 'fixed' and 'predictable' we know the seasons will change and we know how that will impact nature year in and year out. This predictability is attractive to me because I grew up in a very chaotic and unpredictable environment, I gravitate towards nature as it is mysterious but never fails to follow a fixed pattern of change that human life can depend upon and trust. Seasons punctuate time in a knowing manner, change happens slowly with warning and signposts, unlike growing up with poverty and disadvantage where change happens in violent and unpredictable outbursts. As I believe social class mobility represents the in between parts of nature in seasons, I also compare the image of a swirling leaf in frozen grass to this experience. It is the end of autumn trying to 'find a spot' in winter.



When moving between class systems and new surrounds, it takes time to discover the new pattern of life and learn the accepted mannerisms and language. Over time it gets easier, but sometimes my behaviour, my use of language, and my accent belies my surroundings, and I become unsettled and unsure like the swirling leaf in rooted grass, I stand out and struggle to find the comfort of roots.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the lenses through which the literature and data collected in the study are viewed. Collins and Stockton (2018) argue that a strong theoretical framework can support the researcher to explore existing predispositions about their study and help data coding. Therefore, given the complex and multi-dimensional nature of social class mobility I have chosen a rigorous theoretical framework that combines a mixture of sociological, philosophical and economic theorists to provide a number of perspectives to examine and interpret the data. By integrating theories from different disciplines, the research improved in depth and breadth by providing a robust analytical foundation, to create a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of social class and upward mobility. Social class issues are often complex and multi-faceted, therefore, combining theories from three different fields led to innovative approaches and insights which encouraged novel interpretations and methodologies that may not have emerged from a single theoretical perspective. Thus, the three theorists employed in the study sought to position the research, and frame the data collection, coding and findings.

Firstly, Bourdieu's Capital, Habitus and Field were used to frame and contextualise the approach to social class and identity taken in this study. Secondly, Chetty's theory on the

impacts of neighbourhoods on social class mobility was used to examine the characteristics and impacts of place in intergenerational mobility. Finally, Sen’s Capability Approach was employed to explore human development, aspirations and ideas around designing a life of value. Sen provides a framework for the concept of success that transcends traditional economic theories. According to Saldana (2015) theory construction should be central to the process of qualitative research and purports that utilising the frameworks of noted theorists should be used to strengthen qualitative studies. Therefore, conducting theory-centric research is important as it guides the study by providing focus while also connecting the data to existing theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the application of theories to research also helps in identifying strengths, weaknesses and any potential bias that may affect the findings.

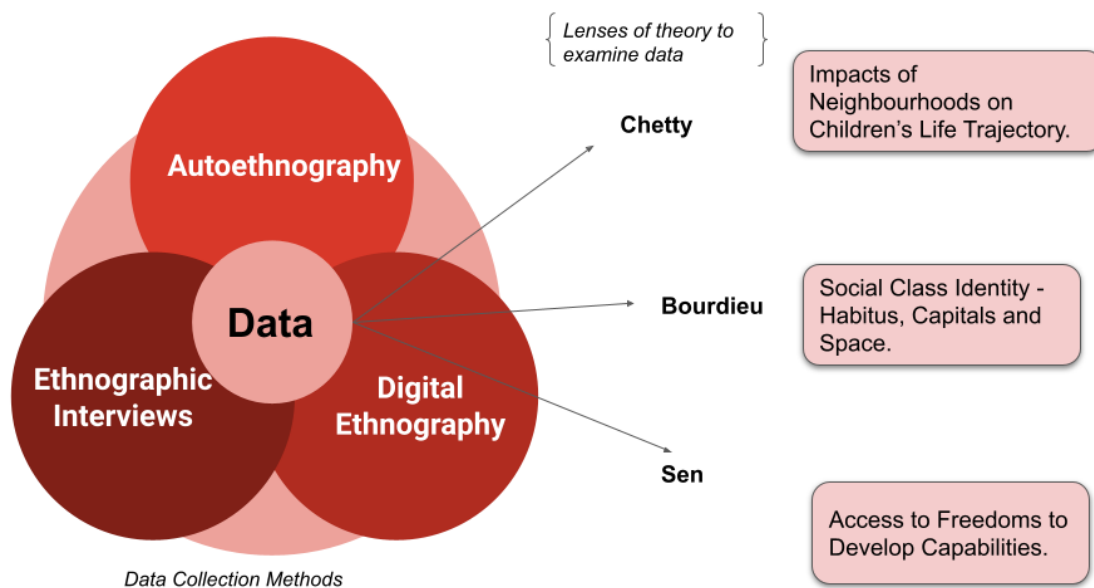


Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework - Data Collection & Analysis

2.1 Bourdieu: Capital, Habitus & Field

Bourdieu remains one of the most influential contemporary sociologists in the area of social class theory. He has created a framework with which to study social class position and its impact on an individual’s development and successes in life. According to Lareau (2011), Bourdieu’s model draws attention to ‘conflict, change, and systemic inequality, highlighting the fluid nature between structure and agency’ (p.361). Bourdieu’s theory facilitates an exploration into how inherited and learned dispositions can influence a person’s achievements and life trajectory at agentic and institutional levels. Influenced by sociologists

such as Weber, Cassirer, and Durkheim (Wacquant, 2022), Bourdieu (1984) developed a cultural lens to examine what society perceives as having value, therefore power, enabling certain classes to create, maintain and benefit from 'legitimate culture'. Bourdieu (1993) purports that the dominant middle-class dispositions i.e. their values, norms and tastes hold greater merit and respect in ruling circles, therefore, providing a middle-class person the upper hand when navigating areas such as education, careers and politics (field). Conversely, working-class values, norms and tastes are less respected amongst the ruling classes, thus, working-class people find themselves at a disadvantage while trying to navigate through middle-class dominated social spaces. Thus, Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically generated, and continually re-legitimised through the relationship between agency and structure (Navarro, 2006). His work provides a useful framework and terminology with which to discuss the systems that allow groups or classes maintain and reproduce inequality across a range of social and economic fields. Bourdieu defines capitals as resources an individual both inherits and acquires throughout their life, which they use to develop a life of value. In addition, Bourdieu (1977) postulates that habitus, results from the inculcation of surrounding culture, and manifests in the form of tastes, mannerisms, language and accents etc. Habitus is deeply ingrained from childhood, developed from interactions with family, education and peers, it reveals itself in how a person presents themselves in society. Habitus although unique can also be shared amongst individuals from similar backgrounds or social classes. Finally, field, is described by Bourdieu (1992) as a social space comparing it to a competitive arena where people are defined by their social position relative to others. In this competitive space, the accumulation of an individual's habitus and capitals operate to progress their position in their chosen field over time. Capitals can be accumulated or exchanged in return for position and power in the chosen social space. Typically, fields represent social and economic institutions such as politics, education and industry. The next sections will explore Bourdieu's Capital, Habitus and Field in more detail, identifying the interactions of all these factors in impacting social class identity.

2.1.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Capitals

According to Bourdieu (1977) capital refers to the resources available to individuals which impact their life in an advantageous manner. He divides resources into three main categories: economic (ownership of finance and material assets), social (networks of people, relationships and acquaintances) and cultural (values, knowledge and skills that are valued by

a given social group). These subtypes of capital have an intrinsic value in and of themselves, however, Bourdieu (1986) asserts that these three forms of capital are exchangeable but notes that economic capital is a prerequisite for the other two forms. Therefore, social and cultural capital are the ‘transformed, disguised forms of economic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 24). Consequently, when capitals are accessed by individuals, it becomes a form of currency. Riley (2017) states that these capitals can be measured both quantitatively and structurally, indicating that different classes in society may possess varying amounts of capital. Bourdieu’s idea of capital is therefore designed to provide a map of the main social divisions in the current society.

2.1.1.1 Social Capital

Social capital can be defined as ‘connections among individuals i.e. social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (Putnam 2000, p. 19). Researchers have argued that this type of capital is the most influential and powerful of all three. Bourdieu (1986) saw social capital as belonging to the individual rather than the social class collective and stemming from an individual’s social position and status. The right connections enable a person to advance socially and to exert power on groups. Social capital theory contends that social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of other capitals and advantages. Machalek & Martin (2015) define it as any feature of a social relationship that produces reproductive benefits. Theory suggests that interpersonal relations generate utility for individuals as they provide resources which can be used for progression in life. Adler and Kwon (2002, p. 23) argue that ‘it is the goodwill available to individuals and groups.’ Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relations. Therefore, it is purported that it is possible to grow the returns from an individual’s capitals through social connections. Bourdieu defines this as the ‘multiplier effect’ of social capital. This effect hypothesizes that ‘membership of or access to the right networks provides opportunities to grow other capitals and improve career chances through access to resources embedded in a social network’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249).

Moreover, Chetty (2015) claims that social capital is the most important form of capital to influence class mobility. He contends that exposure to different socio-economic groups and the influences and connections they bring to an individual’s life can be the biggest determinant of economic mobility. Creating a network of relationships is the ‘product of investment strategies, individual or collective, aimed at reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term’ (Richardson, 1986, p.22). This indicates the

absolute importance of social capital in this study of social class mobility. The research indicates that in exploring social networks amongst working-class individuals, non-inherited social capital can be as important if not more important than inherited social capital, in creating multiplier effects for these individuals who lack the inherited capitals of the dominant classes, this will be explored further in chapter eight and nine. Alecu et al (2021) support these findings when they describe the power relations that dominant class possess in large volumes compared to the working classes, and how this power is generated through elite networks of people. Moreover, the dominant classes protect these networks by creating barriers to inclusion of them. This solidarity can be ‘to maintain and perpetuate the group's dominant position, through formal and informal restrictions on social interaction and circulation’ (ibid, p.511). Which leads to the exclusion of the working-class from these influential networks. Ultimately, social capital is productive; it allows individuals to achieve things not possible when they act alone (Bourdieu, 1981). Social capital can be categorised into both hereditary and non-hereditary:

Hereditary Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986) claims that social capital is the resources linked to ‘the possession of a durable network of institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (p.248). Family social capital includes the social relationships, values, and norms shared by a family and is positively linked with children’s mental and physical health status (Quick et al., 2021). Parental influence may take many forms, such as modelling behaviours, establishing household routines, and creating home environments that support or dissuade behaviours. The quality and amount of social capital available is positively correlated with the possibility of reaping benefits and reaching goals. The effect of social capital is considered particularly crucial to providing children with access to opportunities that support their optimal development, thus hereditary capital can be the first and most important link to social capital. Bourdieu (1993) describes the family as the main site of ‘accumulation and transmission of social capital’ (p.33). Putnam (1995) echoes this, stating that the family is the most essential form of social capital. However, Bourdieu argues that the type of intergenerational transmission of not only social, but economic and cultural capital depends on the social class status of the family and can serve to reinforce social inequality (1990). Consequently, working class children can find themselves at a disadvantage to middle class children who inherit richer forms of capital, economically, socially and culturally. Research commonly reports that children born into households of poverty are significantly more likely to

experience poverty in adulthood (Bjorklund and Jantti, 2009). This can also be defined as the ‘intergenerational transmission of poverty, which is the private and public transfer of deficits in assets and resources from one generation to another’ (Bird and Higgins, 2011, p .4). Therefore, hereditary social capital plays a vital role in shaping individuals’ life chances and opportunities. It emphasises the important role of social networks and relationships in achieving upward mobility.

Non-Hereditary Social Capital

Social capital is not exclusively inherited from one generation to the next but can also be transmitted through membership to valuable networks stemming from recognition from influential individuals. This non-inherited form has the potential to be a compensatory capital for social actors who lack in other forms of capital such as economic or cultural (Denord et al., 2011). Non-hereditary social capital supports personal development, social cohesion, and economic progress, complementing hereditary social capital by providing additional support and access to opportunity (Sawhill, 2020). The OECD (2001) highlights that having a broad network of social connections outside of the family can increase an individual’s resilience and adaptability. These networks can provide resources, and information that assist individuals to navigate challenges more effectively. Bourdieu (1984) highlights the consequence of both inherited and non-hereditary networks in shaping individuals’ life chances at upward mobility. Furthermore, he argues that social capital is linked to power and social inequality and those who can effectively build and leverage non-hereditary social capital has the potential to gain advantage in fields, such as education and employment (ibid).

2.1.1.2 Cultural Capital

Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital focuses on the collection of social markers of class positions such as skills, tastes, mannerisms, material belongings, and education. He purports that these characteristics are acquired by being part of a particular social class, therefore, sharing these similar forms of cultural capital with others in the class creates a sense of collective identity and social space. According to Veenstra (2007) cultural capital encompasses ‘educational capital, social background and the cultural tastes fostered in personal and parental educational experiences’ (p.14). Indicating that cultural capital is intergenerational and passed down by parents to children. Moreover, in society certain forms of cultural capital are valued and regarded more than others. The dominant middle and upper

class can hold to esteem and respect specific tastes, skills and educational achievements over others. Lareau (2011) highlights the inequity surrounding cultural capital and institutional attainment stating that ‘cultural training in the home is awarded unequal value in the dominant institutions because of the close compatibility between the standards of child rearing in privileged homes and the standards proposed by these institutions’ (p.362). Hence, Bourdieu (1984) claims cultural capital can be a major source of social inequality, arguing that cultural assets confer power just as economic capital does. Therefore, the children of wealthier parents are more likely to have the knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and cultural experiences that gives them marked advantage over those without similar levels of cultural capital. He identified three forms of cultural capital. First, the embodied state refers to the ‘long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 17). Capital in embodied form requires learning or developing a skill or habit, which includes language, mannerisms and preferences. An accent or dialect is an example of embodied cultural capital, as accents are defined as one the most recognisable socio-economic characteristic amongst social class groups. This will be discussed further in chapter six, where digital ethnographic findings report that accents are the strongest identifier that can serve to separate and isolate working-class individuals from their more privileged peers.

In addition, the objectified state is defined as the possession of cultural goods e.g., art, books, musical instruments, etc. Finally, the institutionalised state is the form of educational qualifications or credentials such as degrees or titles that symbolise cultural competence and authority (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu’s research highlights the direct link between cultural and economic capital, i.e., wealthier strata of society tend to have access to ‘legitimate culture’ and can gain respect and power because of their cultural values and know-how. Cultural capital is often acquired over time, usually it transfers intergenerationally, giving the children of wealthier families an advantage over working-class children who have to acquire cultural knowledge through education and their own life experiences. Working class families do not have generational cultural capital to pass on the right set of knowledge on values, norms and attitudes that equate to power, acceptance and connections in the key institutional structures. Therefore, cultural capital can lead to deep-seated levels of inequalities across social class systems, in particular in the area of translating capitals to value and power.

2.1.1.3 Economic Capital

According to Bourdieu (1986) economic capital is quantifiable and can lead to other forms of capital, as it provides the means necessary to obtain them. In general, it is a source of income

generation which can be converted into money as well as other capitals (Bourdieu, 1996, quoted in Ding & Wu, 2023). For example, in regards cultural capital, economic resources can gain a family access to elite fee-paying schools and universities, along with access to arts, and cultural experiences, which in turn build cultural capital. Furthermore, it enhances individuals' positions within the social class hierarchy through their economic access to resources, opportunities, and power, which can also translate into symbolic capital, meaning the prestige and recognition an individual earns in society through their economic prowess. In 1876, Marx postulated that economic capital dictated one's position in the social order, however, Bourdieu (1986), amongst other theorists, expanded on this theory to develop a more complex understanding of the determinants of social class position. He claims that it cannot be reduced to a purely economic reading of class, but that other capitals such as social and cultural also influence an individual's class position. However, while economic capital may not be the sole determinant of one's ranking in the social order, Appelrouth et al., (2012) argue that it is the foundation that facilitates and perpetuates every other form of capital. Economic capital is an essential concept in Bourdieu's Theory of Practice in which he describes it as capital which is 'immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights' (1986, p.16). Following from this, Entwistle et al., (2018) claim that a family's economic status is the most influential factor in the expectations of parents for their children, and that a child's education can be affected by their family's wealth and income levels, therefore a family's economic circumstances are hugely influential in the educational experience, achievements and employment prospects of their children. Hence, economic capital is crucial as it directly affects individuals' life chances and opportunities. It provides the means for securing education, healthcare, and other services essential for maintaining and improving an individual's social status.

2.1.2 Bourdieu's Concept of Habitus

Habitus can be defined as those aspects of culture that are

'Anchored in daily practices of individuals, groups, and societies, these include learned habits, bodily skills, styles, tastes and other non-discursive knowledge' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.66-67).

It refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, and is described as deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences. It is an essential concept when exploring social class, as it challenges ideologies such as meritocracy, contradicting the sometimes-simplified view that merit and attainment is acknowledged and

rewarded in an equitable manner. Thus, habitus provides individuals with cultural skills, connections, and resources that can be transferred into forms of value or capital. Conversely, in a middle-class dominant society, the habitus of the middle-class results in more value and merit than that of the working-class. Therefore, Bourdieu (1977) conceptualisation has provided a means of counteracting the view that everything is possible with hard work and that individuals have complete freedom to choose futures of their own making (Bathmaker, 2014). He highlights that in social class structures certain skills and dispositions hold more value and opportunity than others. Skeggs (1997) describes habitus as not only a person's individual histories and predispositions but also the collective histories and dispositions gathered from their social space. Therefore, habitus is a means of understanding how individuals construct social meaning from internalised systems and schemes acquired through lived experiences and social positions. Wacquant describes it as 'lasting dispositions, or trained capacities to think, feel and act in determinate ways, which in turn guide their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu' (2016, p.65). Consequently, the research explores the habitus the participants acquired through their working-class origins, to decipher if these dispositions and traits worked to support or hinder their journey to upward mobility.

Bourdieu applies the fundamental concept of habitus to social class differences, describing it as 'people's social conditions of existence that produce classificatory schemes that constitute the principles of their vision, their perceptions and desires' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.8). Therefore, it is important to recognise the connection between habitus and cultural capital when examining how individuals use them both to function in and move through society. Reay (1995) highlights the importance of habitus in signifying social class, using it as a method of understanding how people are shaped by social class structures, thus granting a system that allows an analysis and contextualisation of social class inequalities. Moreover, habitus can be used as a means of classifying and contextualising a person's actions and choices which are associated with their position in society, i.e., social interactions driven by social predispositions. They ultimately form a scheme of perception, conception, aspiration and action in human behaviour.

2.1.3 Bourdieu's Theory of Field

Bourdieu's notion of field is closely interwoven with the concepts of habitus and capital in his work, and Bourdieu would posit that these concepts cannot be examined or applied

separately (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The field is the analytical space ‘defined by the inter-dependence of the entities that compose a structure of positions among which there are power relations’ (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015, p.23) Therefore, Bourdieu uses field to understand social class position, and to examine how power and inequality operates and interacts in social spaces. Bourdieu (1984) describes field in a competitive sense and draws on comparisons to sports to describe the structure, portraying the field as any system of structured positions such as academia, the economy, or politics. Within this realm of competition people are defined by their positioning relative to others, and in each field, individuals acquire differing strategies to improve their position over time (Bowman, 2010). Capitals and habitus play a crucial role in these strategies, determining a person’s social position of power within their field. Wacquant (2007) proposes that this field of competition involves struggle or tension, using a central idea of a market, where capital exchanges occur to improve power positions. Thus, the theory is used to make sense of the differentiated nature of social space in contemporary societies, and the practices within them, in particular social class stratification (Bourdieu,1998). However, fields are not fixed constructs as they change and adapt to the individuals and institutions that are part of them, as well as to the other fields they engage and intersect with. He also purports that each field yields differing powers from each other with some holding stronger capitals than others as is the case when comparing the field of politics to that of education, when it comes to decision making and access to different capitals. He proposed that social fields are reasonably autonomous from each other, with their own distinct rules, boundaries, histories and dominant players. Although, he observed that the success of a person in one social field may affect their power or position in another. For example, educational success or attendance at an elite school may influence their success in the economic or occupational field, by improving opportunities for key capital acquirement such as social or financial. Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of field provides a framework for contextualising the participants’ habitus, capital and social position facilitating a deeper analysis of their mobility and social space.

2.1.4 The Interactions of Capitals, Habitus, & Field in Forming Social Class Identity

Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital, and field are deeply interconnected and present a robust framework for understanding social class identity. Habitus is influenced by social origins and background, and in consequence, it affects an individual’s interactions and interpretations of society. Habitus contributes to the reproduction of social structures as it is

shaped by social conditions and therefore can serve to perpetuate existing social norms and inequalities. Individuals from similar backgrounds often share similar habitus, which reinforces their social positions. Fundamentally, habitus acts as a bridge between individual agency and social structure, influencing how people navigate their social worlds and maintain or transform social practices (Bourdieu, 1986).

In addition, forms of capital are not just resources but also tools that individuals use to operate and position themselves within social fields. The position a person occupies in a field is determined by the volume and forms of capital they have access to. The interaction of habitus, capital, and field contributes to the reproduction of social class. Thus, those with more capital can maintain or improve their position within a field, while those with less capital may find it harder to advance. This dynamic helps perpetuate social inequalities across generations. Therefore, Bourdieu's framework shows that social class identity is not just a matter of economic status but is also deeply influenced by cultural and social factors, and the interplay between individual characteristics and the wider social structures. Bourdieu (1979) purports that tastes in art, culture, and lifestyle serve as markers of social class and power. He argues that what people consider as culturally acceptable and appropriate is influenced by their social class and education, rather than being individualistic or natural. He describes this as hierarchies of taste and social class, arguing that cultural consumption is not merely personal choice but is heavily influenced by one's social class. The appreciation of cultural tastes serves as markers that distinguish different social classes from one another. However, dominant classes possess the higher cultural capital (education, cultural knowledge, and skills) and use this capital to impose its tastes and preferences as the legitimate ones, thereby maintaining its social dominance (Bourdieu, 1984). Furthermore, he argues that in different fields such as the education system have the potential to reinforce existing social hierarchies by valuing the cultural capital of the dominant class more than others. This process helps to reproduce social class distinctions across generations.

Therefore, Bourdieu identified several markers of social class identity that go beyond objective measures of economic wealth to more subjective measures embedded in cultural and social practices, which significantly contributes to maintaining and reproducing social hierarchies. Skeggs (2004) argues that the markers of a working-class identity surpass economic measures and should be more reliant on measures of culture; holding a working-class identity comes with intrinsic relationships to different tastes, hobbies, language, patterns and a sense of community. Similarly, Rickett & Morris (2021) purports that social class is representative of a person's life experiences, family backgrounds, social networks, language,

accent and dress (quoted in Pilgrim-Brown, 2023). These markers of social class identity will be discussed in greater detail in chapter nine.

In conclusion within Bourdieu's framework, markers of social class identity include, firstly, cultural capital, in particular, education, the level and type of education one receives can significantly influence their social class identity. Higher education, particularly from prestigious institutions, is a strong marker of higher social status. In addition, familiarity with high culture, such as classical music, fine arts, and literature, distinguishes higher social classes from lower ones along with language and communication, how an individual speaks, including their vocabulary and accent, can signal their class identity. Secondly, social capital, the networks and connections an individual has access can have significant influence on their social class status. The important connections created with influential people has the potential to provide real opportunities that are not available to those with less social connectivity. Thirdly, economic capital, the number of financial resources has a direct effect on access to education, cultural activities, and social networks, contributing to social status.

2.1.5 Bourdieu, Social Class Mobility, & Habitus Clivé

In framing social class identity and its markers, Bourdieu (1977) argues that social class mobility has an adverse impact on this identity and can have a negative life-altering effect on a person's sense of belonging as they move between class systems. He claims that upwardly mobile individuals never feel a sense of belonging to the class they came from or the class they have recently joined as their habitus, capitals, field and overall sense of social space alters due to either educational, occupational or socio-economic mobility. Bourdieu (2000b) purports that habitus is 'open to the world, and therefore exposed to the world, and so capable of being conditioned by the world' (p. 134). Since the middle of the last century seminal theorists like Sorokin and Bourdieu have postulated that social class mobility has a dissociative effect on the human psyche. Bourdieu (1984) describes it as a painful and divisive experience creating a double perception of self. Sorokin echoes this view, asserting that 'social mobility puts severe strain on individuals leading to higher rates of mental diseases and neuroses' (1959, p. 519). There exists a considerable body of literature on this hypothesis with authors like Reay, Friedman, and Lareau dedicating a large amount of research to this area. Reay (2015, 2017) describes mobility as a potentially terrifying shift away from the safe and familiar, leading to a powerful desire to hold onto the working class past even as people move up the social ladder. She challenges the optimistic view of social

class mobility, arguing that it can involve a painful process of adapting to new social environments that may not fully accept or value working-class norms, values and cultures. Similarly, Friedman believes that people challenge their habitus when pursuing class mobility which ‘can cause disruption in people’s sense of ontological coherence and tensions in their generational relationships’ (2014, p.358).

One of the main themes emerging from these key sociologists is that movement of class origin to class destination creates tension, loss and disruption in the person’s life as they navigate their mobility with a sense of dislocation and isolation. Bourdieu (1998) uses emotive terms like ‘class transfuges’, ‘social limbo’ and ‘secret guilt’ (1998, p.106-107) to describe the sentiments of people that never feel acclimatised to their new positions in life. He coined the phrase *Habitus Clivé* or cleft habitus to describe this painful process of separation as upwardly mobile individuals leave a large part of their lives and generational ties behind.

These feelings of being torn come from experiencing success as failure (Reay 2015). Similarly, Berlant (2010) describes it as the ‘darker side of aspiration’s optimism, shame in both belonging and escape (p.33), while Friedman (2016) simply defines *Habitus Clivé* as anxiety brought about through class mobility. Mu et Xing (2019) claim that torn identity is a result of adverse conditions that can happen during class mobility and can ‘often elicit crisis where the immediate fit between dispositions and social structure is broken’ (p.9). However, they also maintain that this ‘crisis of “unfitness” creates an opportunity to revamp habitus’(p.9).

These twin concepts of torn identity and cleft habitus were explored in the interviews with participants when examining the dissociative effects of social class mobility on an individual.

2.1.6 A critique of Bourdieu’s Habitus, Capitals & Field

Despite Bourdieu’s prominent position in the sociological world and his widespread influence in the social sciences, his theories have been criticised as having a number of limitations. Firstly, while Bourdieu’s theory of capital provides a powerful lens for understanding social reproduction and inequality, it is often criticized for being heavily deterministic, failing to account for agency, innovation, and the possibility of social change. Furthermore, his theory holds a strong focus on how different forms of capital, in particular, cultural and social capital contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities. However, he is criticised that this perspective claims that individuals are mainly constrained by their social origins and the capital they inherit. There is limited focus in his framework on the role of

individual agency or social mobility, and the social and cultural factors that shape individuals' experiences and outcomes, which can underplay the potential for change and resistance in social structures. Critics argue that by neglecting the role of the individual, it downplays how a person can actively construct their social worlds or challenge the structures of power and capital through agentic practices.

Similarly, Bourdieu's theory of habitus provides a powerful tool for understanding how social structures shape individual dispositions, but it has faced criticisms for being fatalistic, and underplaying human agency and rational action, while having difficulty accounting for social mobility. Bourdieu is commonly criticised for this portrayal of habitus as being static, which makes social mobility, transformation, or situations where individuals adopt new behaviours or values difficult to frame. Therefore, habitus, as a concept, struggles to explain instances of social mobility, where individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds manage to succeed in fields dominated by higher social classes. Thus, critics claim that the theory is more suited for exploring continuity in social practices than for understanding instances of disruption, resistance, or transformation. However, this study explored how participants used their innovative practices and agency to change their social class trajectory, therefore, offering insights into the criticisms and weaknesses of Bourdieu's theory.

In the light of such criticisms, it was important, as a researcher, to recognise that his theory has pitfalls. Firstly, it provides a limited account on the impacts of social class mobility. Bourdieu has received criticism from a number of academics and fellow sociologists for underplaying the role of the consciousness as well as his non-discursive take on capitals and habitus which removes the consciousness and reflexivity in human action. Giddens (2008) argues that 'actors can distance themselves from their habitus by making it discursive' adding that 'discursive rules is the source of human reflexivity' (p.193). While Archer (2016) concludes that habitus is an important concept in sociological study, it is crucial that the researcher is aware of this downplay of consciousness, reflection and action on the part of the individual, and seeks an alternative or complementary theory to support Bourdieu.

Secondly, Bourdieu can be criticised for overemphasising the importance of habitus, giving greater weight to the dissociative effects of mobility. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, it is crucial to incorporate diverse theoretical frameworks and maintain reflexivity throughout the research process. This approach helps to interpret results accurately and ensures that the analysis is supported by a broad theoretical foundation. Based on the

extensive research conducted for this study, it can be concluded that social class mobility is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including educational experiences, gender, and family background. In summary, capitals and habitus are excellent theoretical tools but these concepts need a complementary theory to provide balanced research that accounts for human agency and reflexivity. By acknowledging the role of agency in class mobility, Sen can bridge the gaps that exist in Bourdieu's theory to provide a more rounded framework to support this study.

2.2 Chetty's Theory on the Impacts of Neighbourhoods on Intergenerational Mobility

Chetty has dedicated his career to public economics and how government policies targeting poverty and social inequality can be improved. In order to answer some of the biggest questions posed by the social sciences, he has turned to 'big data', which is data derived from extensive administrative information gathered by governments. According to Chetty (2019), large data sets are starting to transform the theoretical field of social science, while the advent of cheap, powerful computing allows for a new kind of research. In one of his major studies, Chetty explores the exposure effects of a neighbourhood on a child's trajectory in life. This has stemmed from previous research from the economist when he examined the declining trends in social class mobility in the USA. Chetty (2016) noted that the neighbourhood in which a child grows up has tangible causal effects. Their opportunity for upward mobility. Chetty (2016) purports that this study is important because:

First, it sheds light on the mechanisms underlying neighbourhood effects by delivering estimates of the magnitude and linear age patterns of childhood exposure effects. Secondly, it develops a scalable method to estimate neighbourhood effects in all areas even when randomised experiments are unavailable. (p.6)

Until recently, the social sciences were largely theoretical due to limited access to large datasets. Researchers relied heavily on mathematical models or qualitative data. Chetty emphasises the need for empirical tools to address crucial social issues, arguing that "political decisions would be made better if based on empirical data rather than political ideologies" (p.6). This viewpoint aligns with the suitability of Chetty's theoretical framework for analysing social class mobility, as it prioritises evidence-based analysis over ideological assumptions. Furthermore, it supports and complements the other two ideological frameworks, creating a more robust set of findings and a more balanced approach. Chetty's research on the impact of neighbourhood environments on life outcomes is highly relevant to

this study of social class mobility. By examining how neighbourhood characteristics influence intergenerational mobility, his work provides a valuable framework for understanding the experiences of individuals who grew up in disadvantaged areas of Limerick city. While also offering insights into the specific neighbourhood characteristics that can either hinder or facilitate upward mobility. Such insights into the importance of environmental influences were invaluable to the research as they informed and framed the interview questions to elucidate how the participants' place of origin shaped their future.

2.2.1 Chetty and Social Class Mobility

The objective of Chetty's study is, firstly, to use empirical evidence to argue the cause and effect of place in mobility and secondly, to measure the effects of neighbourhoods on mobility, Chetty et al (2017) analysed data from three million families. The main aim of his study was to exploit the variation in the age of the child when a family moves from a low mobility to a high mobility area. This approach is used to isolate the causal effects of neighbourhoods on the child. His findings indicate that the older a child moves to higher opportunity areas, the less effective the social and economic advantage is, and these advantages eventually drop off by the time they reach their early twenties. The key question examined was: why do some places produce better outcomes for disadvantaged children than others? To address this question Chetty investigated typical economic factors in each of the neighbourhoods, such as job growth, economic growth and the quality of the schools in these areas. The results yielded surprising outcomes, concluding that job and economic growth are not key indicators of upward mobility in an area. The study found that 'high mobility is not fundamentally about indicators of the labour market strength, as measured by variables like job growth, wage growth, or types of industry' (Chetty, 2017, p.35). The research concluded that, for children, the opportunities for intergenerational mobility are defined by the place in which they grow up, highlighting the fact that mobility is driven by the causal effects of neighbourhoods rather than heterogeneity of the people living in those places. Through his study, Chetty discovered that it is ultimately the place in which most of the childhood years are spent, that determines our long-term outcomes. Moving to a more affluent socio-economic area increases the earning potential with every year of exposure up to a person's early twenties. In fact, the research found that 'movers' outcomes converge to those of permanent residents at a rate of approximately 4% annual exposure effect, therefore over 20 years of childhood...children who move to a new area at birth will pick up roughly 80% of income improvement' (Chetty et al, 2017, p.35). Chetty drew three main conclusions from

this research study, the first being that the proportion of childhood exposure to high-opportunity areas is crucially important.

A second conclusion was that each year of exposure matters equally, and finally, children who move to a high-opportunity destination at an early age earn more as adults. These findings helped to frame this research, by providing an additional lens with which to explore the impact of the neighbourhood on the participants. It was also useful in guiding a discourse in interviews on the characteristics and effects of living in a disadvantaged area. This additional and very important perspective on the influence of neighbourhoods when living with and escaping from poverty and disadvantage granted richer data and research findings.

Furthermore, Chetty posed the question as to why some neighbourhoods produce better outcomes for disadvantaged children over others. Using the same big data, the researcher characterised the features of the neighbourhoods with higher rates of opportunity. He determined five common correlations -

1. Segregation: greater levels of racial and income segregation is associated with lower levels of mobility.
2. Income Inequality: places with fewer middle-class inhabitants have less mobility.
3. Family Structures: areas with more single parents have much lower mobility, even for children with two married parents.
4. School Quality: areas with schools enjoying higher expenditure, smaller classes and higher test scores have better mobility.
5. Social Capital: the set of connections or networks of people that individuals are linked to improve mobility. (Chetty and Hendren, 2015)

Chetty found that the neighbourhoods most conducive to upward social mobility were ones which had 'multi-representational' communities and school systems, which describes where individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, race, and gender are socialising, working, and being educated together. These remain the most defining features of neighbourhoods that afford children the greatest chance of intergenerational mobility. The neighbourhood characteristics listed above have been used in this study as data collection points and also serve to contextualise the review of the Limerick city profiles to understand structures of the social housing estates and how their characteristics compare to the correlations. Such insights into the importance of environmental influences were invaluable

to this research, as they informed and influenced the work conducted with the participants on social class mobility and the influence of their neighbourhoods.

2.2.2 Challenges of Using Chetty's Framework

Chetty's study, although extensive has obvious limitations. For example, in regard to the characteristics of neighbourhoods, he fails to identify causal effects but produces correlations to use as indicators of social class mobility. A second critique is that it contains such a large dataset that is highly information dependent so is hard to replicate in other countries. However, it does provide a broad theory to work from so other researchers can extricate his main findings and map them onto individual studies providing a framework for interview questioning and analysis of datasets. Thirdly, Chetty's study is focused solely on income-generated wealth, ignoring intergenerational wealth and accumulated resources, which can give a limited perspective on the forces that govern upward mobility. Therefore, Bourdieu's focus on intergenerational transmission of forms of capital will complement Chetty's more pragmatic, data-driven approach. Overall, Chetty's work has provided important insights into how neighbourhoods affect economic mobility, however it has faced criticism for promoting individual mobility solutions. Critics argue that a more holistic approach, which considers broader structural inequalities and local improvement strategies, could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers to social mobility. Furthermore, in regards Chetty's policy recommendations, they strongly focus on helping families move to higher-opportunity neighbourhoods to improve mobility, nonetheless, this solution offers little to address systemic problems that create inequality in the first place. Some sociologists argue that rather than attention being placed on moving individuals out of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, policy efforts should be directed toward improving those neighbourhoods by addressing poverty, improving schools, and investing in local infrastructure.

2.3 The Capability Approach – Amartya Sen

The Capability Approach provides a theoretical framework for firstly, defining an individual's well-being and secondly, a normative framework on how social and institutional arrangements must be designed to realise human parity and equity. The approach argues that the freedom to achieve well-being for all human beings is of utmost importance for a country's governance, and second, that this freedom is to be understood in terms of individual capabilities, which are real opportunities for persons to do and be what they have reason to value i.e., what Sen refers to as functionings (Robeyns 2016). The approach was developed by Amartya Sen (1992, 1999, 2005, 2009) in response to his perceived view on the short

comings in welfare and development economics as international metrics for a nation's success rates. Sen disagreed with the viewpoint that income and commodity measurements like GDP are accurate for calculating the achievements of a country, arguing that such metrics are not people centric. He maintained that a country with a high GDP does not always equate to a happy population with high standards of living for all their citizens.

He hypothesises that the diversity of human beings results in different abilities to convert resources into well-being. Sen emphasizes that different individuals may have different needs and aspirations based on their backgrounds and contexts. In understanding class mobility, this means recognising that success looks different for different people depending on their circumstances, cultural background, and personal goals. Moreover, when exploring what constitutes success in the context of class mobility there is an obligation to recognise how access to resources, education, healthcare, and social networks can be influenced by institutional structures. Therefore, Sen's framework offers a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of achievement and wellbeing, to help prevent the imposition of a definition of success restricted to economics as his theory identifies that success can take many forms.

Furthermore, equality and wellbeing should be assessed in terms of the capabilities that human beings actually possess, which depend not only on the goods and resources they own but also on the conversion factors that enable them to convert goods and resource into well-being. Consequently, Sen developed a space to measure equality using an individuals' freedoms (capabilities) to pursue and achieve activities and states of life (functionings) that they deeply value and are valuable from a wider perspective (Alkire, 2017). The central tenet of Sen's theory is that the success of a society is to be measured by the freedoms that members of that society enjoy (Sen, 1998). Moreover, the key idea of the capability approach is that society and its institutions should function to expand a person's capabilities, hence, his contribution explores social justice from the perspective of both the individual and society. He is a multi-disciplinarian, and his theory is founded in both economics and philosophy, blurring the lines between these disciplines to pursue hopeful discourse on social justice that enables global debates to develop (Dang, 2014). This combination of philosophy and economics widens the perspective on human development away from utility, focussing on activities or states of being with respect for people's agency and freedom. Sen broadens evaluative spaces of human well-being where typical economic spaces of utilities or primary goods are not the basis of evaluation.

Beyond capabilities and functionings, the theory also emphasises agency, human diversity, structural constraints, and ultimately, well-being:

Agency is the power people have for independent thought and autonomous decision making and to make choices that shape their life experiences and trajectories in an advantageous manner. Therefore, it is the ability of an individual to realise the goals that they have reason to value. Sen defines an agent as ‘someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives’ (Sen 1999, p. 19). In the Capability Approach, agency is a combination of well-being and advantage, where wellbeing can be an assessment of particular achievements of a person, and advantage is the positive freedom of a person to achieve these valued outcomes. Central to these ideals lies the important viewpoint that in discriminating between wellbeing and agency we gain ‘conceptual space for the separation between individual responsibility and social responsibility’ (Dang 2014, p. 464). Sen argues that agency is intrinsically valuable because it reflects a person’s ability to pursue goals, they have reason to value. It is also instrumentally valuable because it can lead to better outcomes, such as improving well-being (Alkire, 2008). Moreover, Sen argues that a focus on agency in human development policy emphasizes the importance of empowerment. Empowering individuals to make their own choices and act upon their values is considered crucial for improving social conditions (Frediani, 2010).

Human Diversity is one of the key theoretical concepts in the Capability Approach. Sen’s criticism of other normative approaches is often fuelled by, and based on, the claim that the full human diversity among people is insufficiently acknowledged in many other normative theories. Sen argues that individuals have different abilities to convert resources into valuable functionings due to personal, social, and environmental factors. Therefore, diversity directly impacts how an individual’s conversion factors to turn resources and commodities into real opportunities. To understand the concept of diversity, Sen uses the analogy of providing bicycles to rural villagers to illustrate the limitations of simply providing resources. If a villager has mobility problems, receiving a bicycle will not enable them to reach their destination (employment) and improve their economic situation. This highlights the importance of recognising individual needs and providing resources that are appropriate and effective for each person. This diversity of needs indicates that different individuals require different kinds and amounts of resources to achieve similar outcomes, such as good health or education. Sen argues that if governments do not consider diversity in their distribution of resources, then human development will never be equal.

Structural Constraints are institutions, policies, laws, social norms etc. which can have a profound influence on a person’s conversion factors and hence, their capabilities. Structural constraints vary depending on a person’s class, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation,

disability, and economic system in which an individual lives. For example, being born into the structural constraint of poverty can result in a person not having equal access to education therefore cannot convert their intelligence and abilities into recognised and certified qualification that can lead to employment. If a female is born into a state that restricts and limits the rights of a woman, then structural constraints will stop that females functionings and capabilities in life. Therefore, these structural constraints have a direct impact on a person's capabilities, or opportunities in life, and must be considered in the Capability Approach theories. Subsequently, individuals differ in their capacity to convert capabilities into functionings while conversion factors, such as structural or social arrangements influence their exercise of agency. There are certain groups in society whose agency is negatively affected by social arrangements. Therefore, individual agency is central to overcoming these disadvantages as freedoms are limited by the social, political, and economic opportunities available to people. Sen claims that society is responsible for the fundamentals of wellbeing for its members and must be cognisant of human diversity and potential structural constraints when designing policy and systems. He also argues that individuals are responsible for their own agency goals. Thus, the interdependency between agency and social structures is obvious, hence, it is important to give equal weight to both individual freedom and social influences when assessing the extent to which individual freedoms can counteract societal problems. Consequently, individual freedoms must be a social commitment by policy makers (Robeyns, 2008). Thus, capabilities are both an individual and structural responsibility, with the focus on the outcome of wellbeing, and can be used to assess the influences of structure and agency on the lives of the participants as they journeyed out of poverty.

2.3.1 The Capability Approach and Social Class Mobility

Nussbaum (2013) describes the capability approach as 'an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorising about basic social justice', the central question of which is 'what is each person able to do and to be (functionings)?' (Nussbaum 2013, p.18). Therefore, Sen's Capability Approach is an important framework when assessing personal achievements as it acknowledges human diversity and interpersonal variances in converting commodities into capabilities. By adopting this approach in this study, it enables the research to take into account the individual's circumstances in achieving social mobility. A comprehensive range of societal factors was assessed as well as the agency used to convert these factors into capabilities.

The Capability Approach facilitates an evaluation of the balance between agency and structure when examining how mobility operates in marginalised areas. Sen upholds the need to pay attention to the wellbeing of each individual when judging social structures and policies, and how a person navigates these for self-efficacy. This makes his framework relevant for analysing social inequality, as freedom and agency are deeply linked to the existence of social arrangements and how they function in society in their contributions to human development. Therefore, it is an acknowledgement of the different responsibilities on society and the individual, in terms of a person's achievements. He maintains that individuals should not be responsible for their opportunities (capabilities) but are responsible for what they choose to do or be (he describes this as functionings) within their opportunity set and the choice of life related to this set. Ultimately, an individual's effective freedom to choose between 'different functioning combinations they have reason to value is the relevant metric for determining whether an inequality is a matter of justice or merely a private concern' (Dang, 2014, p.467).

Therefore, this framework aligns with the objectives of this research, helping to conceptualise class mobility, and has been employed to inform the research findings in the area of complementarity between agency and structure in social class mobility and escaping poverty.

2.3.2 Critiques of the Capability Approach

The biggest critique of Sen's Capability Approach lies in the fact that the list of capabilities is endless, which makes the framework difficult to put into practical applications. Sen claims he deliberately avoids specifying a fixed list because he believes that the capabilities relevant for well-being will vary depending on cultural, social, and political contexts.

Therefore, the approach is mostly critiqued by scholars for its ambiguity and lack of definitive structures, making operationalisation of the framework too difficult. In order to address this perceived flaw in Sen's work, Martha Nussbaum, an author synonymous with CA, developed his work into a more operational theory by creating a definitive list of ten capabilities that all human beings need for development and growth. This list is central to Nussbaum's capability approach as she posits that they are the aspects of life to which capabilities relate. She asks an Aristotelian question: 'What activities characteristically performed by human beings are so central that they seem definitive of the life that is truly human?' (Nussbaum, 2000). However, Sen counter argues that by avoiding the creation of a definitive list of capabilities, it stays true to the heterogeneity of humans and allows fluidity

of approach to accommodate diversity. Sen (2004) maintains that CA is a democratic process, and it is up to the citizens that are affected by a policy or a development to decide, therefore they should be able to choose what capability is most important to them. He claims that one list cannot be applicable to all because it removes the agency of deciding on the area that is directly affecting individuals. In development and social justice research, these two semantic scholars Sen and Nussbaum, can be pitched against each other in debate. However, Robeyns (2017) argues that focusing in on only two scholars in the area of Capability, i.e. Sen and Nussbaum are erroneous. She believes that any attempt to generalise the approach into two thinkers rather than focussing on the framework itself distorts an accurate reading of the Capability Approach which is a generalisation of the work of Sen together with further developments by many others' (Robeyns 2017, p. 79-80). By generalising Sen's work rather than pitching Sen and Nussbaum against each other, research can adopt the elements of the CA which are most suited to the aims of the study. Such an approach ensures that the framework is used as Sen intended, in a manner that respects the heterogeneity of people and the diversity of participants.

Another criticism of the CA is the need for a pluralistic approach, due to the generalised nature and ambiguity of the structure of the framework. In order to apply Sen's emerging theory to concrete applications, it is necessary to combine CA with other frameworks to create a complete evaluation of a study. Sen does acknowledge these limitations and encourages a blended use of frameworks in researching social justice (Robeyns, 2017). Dang (2014) concurs and states that the framework will not provide a concrete explanation to a phenomenon but advances a lens to look at poverty, therefore, needs to be combined with other theories and resources. Therefore, concluding that the approach provides the researcher with an integral view of human needs and gives a focus to the factors that influence human development. As the research sought to explore the diversity of individualistic approaches and agency to social class mobility, while also giving consideration to structural constraints, Sen's CA was befitting. Therefore, the study did not seek a defined list of capabilities but rather an examination of freedoms. The capabilities that were developed from these freedoms provided a lens to explore the personal and social accountability in combatting poverty. Sen's approach invites the application of other theories to supplement it in order to provide a comprehensive view of mobility that includes both personal considerations and social influences that are synonymous with human development. Moreover, Sen's theory emphasises the value of developing policies and socioeconomic environments where individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds can succeed. This perspective aligns

with efforts to promote social mobility through education, job training, and other supportive measures.

2.4 Employing the Theoretical Frameworks

Bourdieu is a seminal theorist in understanding social class as his work provides a lens to examine firstly, what is the nature of class identity as well as how society and individuals recognise class differences. His work on capitals and habitus provides a framework that enables an exploration of the individual qualities that form the social class collectives and how people navigate and operate within these collectives. He allows the researcher to study the salient elements of class by understanding how society regards and delineates certain demographics into dominant ruling groups according to their cultures, tastes, accents, education, and habits. In exploring working-class identity, the Bourdieusian lens of habitus provides a method with which to study the markers of identity when questioning and examining the research findings. Secondly, Bourdieu provides useful theory to examine the nature of class differences and inequality through capitals, highlighting how the dominant classes, through economic advantage, hold the power and govern the social spaces where correct tastes, habits and cultures are asserted and maintained. He argues that these cultural and social capitals are the key sources of inequality, due to the fact that the middle class has greater access to cultural and social capital than the working class, therefore elevating itself to a dominant position in society. Bourdieu (1984) classifies this as ‘symbolic capital’ arising from a person’s social position and argues that symbolic capital is one of the main critical sources of power in society. This position of power grants legitimacy to middle-class values and opinions and allows that class to dictate acceptable ‘norms’, and anybody outside of these collective struggles to find voice and space in society and this is known as ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu, 1984). Furthermore, when individuals with high levels of symbolic capital uses it against others who have less, in order to exert power, it is known as ‘symbolic violence’. When this occurs, it reinforces the social order and what is deemed ‘acceptable’ in society. Symbolic violence can be useful to the study of social class mobility as it highlights the instances where class conflict occurs, bringing to the fore the experience of working-class individuals who struggle to find a voice and space in typically middle-class structures like education and socio-political settings. While it is also useful in identifying inequalities in society, symbolic violence shines a light on the resilience and capabilities of the oppressed.

When supplemented with Chetty's social class mobility theory, Bourdieu's capital theory provides a comprehensive understanding of socio-economic structures in social class mobility. It gives a deeper insight into the importance of capital in human development, as Chetty's study reflects the reality that for working-class individuals who wish to achieve upward mobility, factors such as social capital and diverse, mixed-class neighbourhoods, offer children the best opportunities to escape poverty and find a life of value. This complements Bourdieu's theory which explores the role of capitals in social class position and mobility, which includes place of origin and address. Chetty's work defines the cause and effect of neighbourhoods or place in social class mobility. As this study focuses on the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Limerick City, Chetty's framework was implemented to explore and compare characteristics of places that are conducive to mobility and human development.

Finally, Sen allows the research to explore social class mobility beyond the typical realms of economic symbolism and goods. His framework provides a lens to mobility that addresses the well-being of the individual and places particular importance on the diversity of human beings, which has great significance to this research as it accounts for the lived experience. By using the lens of Capability, the study explores social justice from the viewpoint of both the individual and society. This multi-disciplined approach uses both economics and philosophy to understand how social structures and governance provide individuals with access to the necessary resources in order to build a life of value and meaning to their well-being. Furthermore, Sen acknowledges the importance of agency in the development of capabilities and freedoms as well as the importance of balance between structure and agency in building success in life. Sen's research aided an analysis of the findings facilitating an examination of the 'functionings' or resources available to the participants in this study. To track these functionings to capabilities or freedoms i.e. how societal structures supported working class individuals to build a life of value and escape poverty and deprivation. Using this framework enabled an exploration into how agency is employed in the journey of upward mobility and an assessment of the impact of social structures on an individual's ability to convert functionings to capabilities.

These three theorists focus on various aspects of society and social class mobility, oftentimes finding common ground on the factors that affect class position and upward mobility. Bourdieu examines the social constructs in society i.e. social class and what defines this space, Chetty focuses on structures in society in particular neighbourhoods and their eco-systems, while Sen focuses on the individual perspective, and ultimately how structures

impact their choice in life. Combining three theorists allowed a holistic view of class mobility that incorporated multiple lenses, providing a multi-disciplinary study spanning sociology, economics and philosophy.

2.5 Additional Theoretical Influences

Although the three theorists supported the main frame of the research, in certain elements of the study it is necessary to draw on other theorists. Given the study's focus on identity, it was crucial to acknowledge that social class identity is shaped both by lived experiences and external perceptions, which significantly influence working-class expectations and aspirations. There has been a commonly identified lack of respect for working-class cultures, norms, and values amongst the dominant classes in both the research and the findings of this study, and this can be very damaging to a person's self-esteem (McNamara et al., 2011). Therefore, these negative outside perceptions on the residents of working-class communities needed to be examined beyond the theories of Bourdieu, Sen, & Chetty.

Disadvantaged groups are often attributed with negative characteristics such as laziness, helplessness or aggression, which can be used to justify and perpetuate their exclusion (Jost & Banaji, 1994, quoted in McNamara et al., 2011). Heavy overlap between social class and social roles create stereotypes about what people from certain backgrounds should be doing with their lives (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). This can be theorised as identity compatibility, where who a person is and how others perceive that person depends not only on the individual but also the social groups they belong to (Easterbrook, 2022). It is more commonly known as the labelling theory (Becker, 1963), and when it is applied to social class, it examines how individuals and groups are categorised and stigmatised based on their social and economic status. The theory suggests that the labels assigned to people from different social classes can significantly influence their self-identity and behaviour. Individuals from lower social classes are often labelled with negative stereotypes, which can lead to stigmatisation. In the McNamara et al., (2011) study on the Regeneration estates in Limerick city this stigmatisation or labelling is very evident in their findings. They claim that there are explicit negative perceptions associated with the disadvantaged areas of Limerick which was reflected in the local media reportage and confirmed the shared harmful assumptions of Regeneration areas in the city from both non-residents and residents, 'demonstrating that the distinction between disadvantaged areas and the broader city is a relevant and meaningful one' (ibid, p.251).

'SES discriminations are hard to quantify but people are deeply affected by it. Even in terms of managing their aspirations. They are afraid to step out or think, I could go on to be a professional. They always feel like they can't and that's because of this internal policing...parents telling their kids not to go and do that because they're going to be put in uncomfortable situations...that comes from generational low self-esteem that says we need to stay within this very narrow confine and we can't break beyond that' (ATD, 2023, p.42).

In the research of ATD Ireland (2023) on working class identities and SES discrimination, they found a range of distinct stereotypes or labels and discriminatory biases against these communities to include firstly, laziness, one of the most pervasive stereotypes is that people from working-class backgrounds are lazy or lack ambition. Secondly, there's a common perception that working-class individuals are less educated or less intelligent. This stereotype overlooks the systemic barriers to education that many face. Thirdly, working-class communities are often unfairly associated with higher crime rates. This can lead to increased surveillance and policing in these areas, further stigmatising residents. The fourth stereotype is that working-class people are overly dependent on social welfare with poor work ethics. This ignores the economic challenges and lack of opportunities that contribute to financial instability. Bolstering these labels is that lower SES families are often stereotyped as dysfunctional or unstable. This overlooks the strong family bonds and community support systems that commonly exist. Finally, there's a perception that working-class culture is less valuable compared to middle or upper-class cultures. This can manifest in media portrayals and social attitudes. Similar to the findings of McNamara et al., Devereux et al., (2011) argue that mass media disseminate hegemonic discourses about these communities. The portrayal of the working class in media can influence how individuals within this group view their own potential and opportunities. Their findings concluded that negative media representation of groups from Regeneration estates led to impacts on the residents emotional and material wellbeing, their relationships with non-residents are coloured with prejudice and overall lower quality of services to the communities as mortgages, taxis and house insurances become hard to obtain due to sensationalised reporting from the media. These stereotypes can have significant impacts on individuals' self-esteem and opportunities. They also contribute to broader social inequalities by reinforcing negative perceptions and justifying discriminatory practices. Compounding these issues is the fact that there is an obvious lack of legislation to mitigate for these types of discriminatory behaviours in Ireland, which gives working-class people a sense that classism is the more accepted form of discrimination. In particular, compared to race, gender or sexual orientation, as these are all protected characteristics in Ireland's Equality Act. Therefore, there is no legal protection against bias towards people in regards their social class, address, accent etc. which can allow harmful

outside perceptions to develop and foster impacting their overall sense of subjective social identity. This indicates that these types of inequalities and unfair assumptions, along with stereotyping leads to a need for resilience when seeking to break these barriers and achieve upward mobility, thus it was important to seek a theory which supported the formation of resilience in individuals facing adversity.

Resilience is commonly reported in research as one of the most important characteristics of individuals who are seeking upward mobility, thus, this study needed to attend to factors in the participants' lives which promoted resilience. In focussing on resilience, the adapted theory of Cheng & Caitling (2015) was employed, as they seek to frame and define factors as specific competencies that are necessary for the process of resilience to occur, including:

1. External support systems such as community.
2. Internal support systems such as family.
3. Personal attributes – the manifestation of resilience

This complementary framework helped identify and highlight resilient-building factors in the lives of the participants, and furthermore the role of some of the main social structures in supporting the manifestation of resilience in their upward mobility journey. Therefore, providing a lens to examine the individual as well as societal structures in exploring resilience in working class individuals. Therefore, in exploring the impacts of outside perceptions on the lived experience of working-class communities, along with the formation of resilience amongst the participants facing barriers and challenges in upward mobility, additional theorists were used to complement Bourdieu, Sen, and Chetty.

2.6 Conclusion

By combining these three theoretical frameworks with supplementary literature, this study offers novel insights into individuals' journeys of social mobility, examining class identity, neighbourhood effects, and the opportunities available to them in achieving their desired life outcomes and fulfilling their capabilities. The work of Chetty, Bourdieu and Sen allow the research to create a robust and comprehensive dataset on social class climbers, providing data that is both transferable and can inform policy and education on class mobility.

Economics, philosophy, and sociology provide a complementary foundation for this framework. While both Chetty and Sen share similar socio-economic backgrounds, it is important to acknowledge that their theoretical frameworks, though aligned in some ways,

are also shaped by their unique disciplinary perspectives. Bourdieu complements Chetty and Sen through his approach to social justice and the role of structures and social arrangements in a person's development and mobility in society. Sen can be critiqued for his ambiguity on accountability of social versus personal responsibility in achieving success, however, Bourdieu and Chetty explore in a clearly defined way the impacts of social structures on the trajectory of human development. Moreover, Hart (2019) argues that the theoretical work of Bourdieu complements Sen's capability approach by 'offering a more socially dynamic understanding of the conversion factors helping and hindering the development of capabilities' (p585).

Both Chetty and Bourdieu were used to assess and frame impacts of the macro systems on class mobility whereas Sen was employed to assess the individual or personal agency of people in their growth and escape from poverty.

Discriminated Children....

When I was ready to attend school, my mother was advised by our local clergy, that as an extremely quiet and timid child, attending the local primary school could be detrimental to my development. The school had become very rough and, in some parts, dangerous. The church used their connections, and I got accepted into a primary school in a more affluent neighbouring community. It was the eighties, and I was the only child in the class from Ballinacurra Weston. From the early days in the classroom, I was very aware of how different the teacher treated me, and my earliest memories of school were of fear and intimidation. She was abrupt all the time and unsupportive, and I knew I was considered different and unwanted. Despite being a docile and extremely shy child, I was heavily controlled and unnecessarily punished by the teacher. I distinctly remember her forbidding me to use the bathroom on many occasions. The teacher's daughter was also in my class, she continuously bullied me and damaged my property, but it went unnoticed, and I felt voiceless, my mother intervened twice when her daughter had become physical with her bullying, but again no reprimand or solution was offered.

In these extremely precious and formative years, this teacher's behaviour towards me and her discriminatory attitude had a massive impact on my confidence and self-belief, and my strongest memories of primary school are from these younger years when I worked hard to seek acceptance and a voice in my new school.



Chapter 3 - A Framework for Defining & Measuring Social Class

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the conceptualisation of social class for the purpose of this research. The chapter identifies the main metrics of social class from both an international and national perspective, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of how class stratification is defined and measured in modern society by using theories that support a grassroots approach. Social class is a multi-dimensional concept and is influenced by factors beyond income and occupation, such as education, cultural capital, and social networks. Furthermore, definitions and measures of social class can vary across different societies and cultures, thus can be challenging to frame due to the subjective nature of the key aspects of class, such as perceptions and self-placement. Therefore, by considering multiple and varied approaches, the research gained a more nuanced understanding of social class and is relevant to this study to understand the implications of class for the participants. This chapter employs a multifaceted approach to class analysis, incorporating both objective and subjective measures. It moves beyond traditional economic indicators to encompass individuals' perceptions and self-identification with their social class. This integrated framework captures not only the tangible aspects of class but also the intangible dimensions of the lived experiences, such as emotions and everyday realities associated with working-class life. By combining these perspectives, the study aimed to discover cases where individuals' self-perceptions of their social class diverged from their objective socioeconomic circumstances,

allowing a space to explore these discrepancies to better understand the impact of class on a person's sense of sociocultural belonging. Furthermore, it provided a richer understanding of the interplay between objective conditions and subjective experiences of social class and the impact it had on individuals while exposing the complexities of social mobility.

3.1 Defining & Framing Social Class

According to Wohlfarth (1997) the majority of metrics for individual and collective differences in society encompass the idea of stratification, whereby individuals are ranked in relation to the amount of valuable social 'goods' they possess e.g., occupational prestige, education or wealth. There are many different conceptual and theoretical frameworks developed to explain the differences or inequalities in societies, caused by the ownership or lack of ownership of capitals and goods. The overarching measure of this stratification is typically known as social class. In this metric, differing facets of society are clearly delineated into 'classes' which are well defined entities who are qualitatively different from each other in regard to their ownership of commodities and capitals. The standard class delineations most widely recognised in contemporary structures are the basic triad of broad divisions, upper class, middle class and working class (Weis, 2008). This stems from seminal theorists in this area like Marx, Giddens and Weber. Marx identifies social class in terms of a person's relationship to the means of production in capitalist societies, broadly divided into proletariat (working), bourgeoisie (middle) and aristocratic (upper) categories. Social class was based on the concepts of property, power, expertise or wealth, which also all relate to a person's position in relation to means of production (Giddens 1971). Weber (1978) claimed that social class was based on a person's market position which is basically how much money or wealth they have and their bargaining power to get this. Furthermore, he introduced the ideas of power and status as indicators of a person's position in society.

By using these class categories, it can help understand the different issues pertaining to social inequalities and injustices. Framing class structures into the conceptual theory of Marxism, Giddens or Weber, can help explain the variances in income, wealth and power that exist amongst these stratifications. Power in social class structures according to these key theorists can be defined as the ability to control resources, influence decision-making, and shape social norms and values. They explain that social class is determined by those who own the economic and political power in society in regards both commodities and decision-making power. Commonly, in the upper echelons of class this power is intergenerational and passed on from family to family therefore, this inheritance creates transmitted inequality. Bourdieu's

framework refers to this as the intergenerational transmission of capital. While this is widely acknowledged for economic capital (in the form of wealth), “distinctive forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities are also transmitted from one generation to the next” (Bourdieu 1986, quoted in Paccoud et al, 2019, p.511). When examining the impacts of social class to understand how prestige, power and wealth are controlled by the dominant social classes a more granular approach to the structures of class needs to be explored. Deimer et al (2012) claim that in order to conceptualise and measure aspects of social class, research must examine two key elements:

1. **Individual’s socioeconomic status**, which is an indication of a person’s position in the higher order class construct, and is based on objective measures like wealth, income, education and occupational prestige.
2. **Subjective Social Status (SSS)** which is the measure of an individual’s perceived social class position. These measures use more qualitative and subjective approaches like social and cultural capital (Liu et al, 2004, quoted in Deimer et al, 2012).

This proposed theory indicates that social class and socioeconomic status (SES) are not independent of each other, but SES is a defined characteristic of class measurement, using objective indicators to understand an individual’s class position better. Similarly, the American Psychological Association (APA) (2015) define social class as encompassing both socioeconomic status and subjective social status, suggesting that to develop a comprehensive understanding of class constructs there must be elements of objective and subjective measurements involved. This helps to build a description of how social inequality within the higher ordered class structure impacts both the physical aspects of a person’s life in regards their standard of living through access to income and resources. In addition to the psychological effects of class on their identity and how they perceive their own value in society.

3.2 A Framework for Measuring Social Class & Socioeconomic Status – An International Perspective

All Together in Dignity (ATD) is an international social justice organisation that works with the most disadvantaged and excluded families in society to tackle inequality and discrimination (Breaking Barriers Report, 2023). To define SES correctly ATD claims that it must encompass cultural, social and economic factors and is identified as being directly

related to choice and opportunity. Their approach encompasses both subjective and objective measures similar to the other theorists in this area, therefore, it provides a comprehensive lens on SES and SSS. SES is described as a more objective, crude measure of social position using distinct indicators such as wealth and educational attainment and indexes a person's position within the power hierarchy of society. They are quantifiable gauges of power, prestige, and control over resources (Krieger, Williams & Moss, 1997). Similarly, McCoy et al (2010) argue that the term "socio-economic position" is used to reflect how societies are ranked, purporting that "social stratification refers to social inequalities that may be attributed to the way a society is organised, to its socio-economic structure" (p.26). Whereas SSS is a more subjective, soft measure of social position, indicating a person's relative social standing in relation to others in society. It captures human capital, social capital and cultural capital, to produce an encompassing view of subjective social status that represents values, beliefs, spoken language, social exclusion and attitudes (Smith, 2010). Moreover, the Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) proposes that people have internalised class-related worldviews and economic cultures that prescribe certain behaviours according to their class status, such as dress, language, and etiquette i.e., Habitus. Furthermore, people strive to maintain status quo within their perceived class position (Liu, Alt & Pittsinger, 2013). This implies that a combination of both objective and subjective measures is required to get a sense of both the person and the context in society, to develop better understanding on the external and internal impacts of social class.

The APA (2015) argue that how social class is conceptualised has implications for research. Therefore, it is important in a study to apply the best suited theory and definitions to ensure the conceptualisation serves an understanding of the social inequalities in modern society, while simultaneously promoting agency and advocacy for the underrepresented in social hierarchies. The overarching point is that there is no single 'best' measure of SES or social class that will meet all needs, and researchers need to consider which elements of social class they are interested in and best practices for its measurement in a particular study (Williams, 2009). For the purpose of this research there were important variables which need to be collected from both the theoretical frameworks of SES and subjective social class by the researcher. The Deimer et al (2012) model of measuring social class, purports that there are both quantitative (SES) and qualitative (SSS) indicators that need to be analysed for the purpose of the research in class mobility. SES allows the measurement of resources in the form of income, wealth and education, and quantifies these markers not only as success but as markers of poverty and deprivation that occurs when these resources are lacking in a

person's life. This is an important marker in this study, particularly in the participant research element, individuals recall the effects of poverty in their lives and the trauma and stress it caused their families. SES measures poverty as either absolute or relative indicators. Firstly, absolute is when an individual or family is not able to secure enough resources for a basic standard of living. This absolute poverty measure in Ireland is described as 'people whose income and resources are so inadequate that it precludes them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society' (National Anti-Poverty Strategy Report, 1997 p.2). Secondly, SES acknowledges that poverty has a profound impact on an individual's well-being. It goes beyond objective measures of income to consider how individuals experience deprivation and the psychological and physical consequences of living in poverty, as well as the limitations it places on their ability to improve their social and economic standing. Indices of material deprivation can be accumulated to build indicators of overall risks linked to physiological, academic, social and behavioural outcomes for individuals (Evan & English, 2002). Again, this lens is an integral element to the study as indicators of economic and social mobility are central to the research while exploring the impacts of deprivation on the participants' academic, social and emotional outcomes.

Furthermore, this study explores social identity and the impact on an individual's sense of sociocultural belonging in their journey through social class mobility. Subjective social class status provides a framework to examine the presumed values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes to assigned social classes, and how people assign themselves to these characteristics as part of their social class identity. Deimer & Ali (2009) claim that subjective social class status are measurements "not necessarily about determining the accuracy of one's actual economic position but instead reflect one's perceived social standing in a community or group in a given socio historical context" (quoted in Deimer et al 2012, p.30). Many researchers concur that individuals can subjectively identify with the social class group of their peers or origins despite economic and social evidence that they 'should' identify with a different group (Deimer & Ali, 2009). This is referred to as a conflict with the sense of self (McLaughlin, 2024) i.e., when subjective social status from birth conflicts with current social status e.g., a person deemed to be middle-class due to markers such as occupation, income and address, but remain identifying as working-class due to their working-class origins and family.

This is reflected in this research (see chapter nine and ten) as the majority of participants' having experienced upward class mobility from working class to middle class status continue to identify as working class despite economically and socially having indicators firmly

located in the middle-class strata. Therefore, the need to carefully relate choice of measurement of SES and SSS to a study's purpose, the phenomenon being investigated, and participants' ability to respond accurately to the questions being asked is extremely important to yield the most relevant data and results from the research (Williams, 2009).

3.3 A Framework for Measuring Social Class – A National Perspective

While examining international standards and frameworks for measuring social class, it is crucial to consider how these concepts are framed and applied within the specific national context. This contextualisation is essential for conducting meaningful and relevant research at the local level. Recently, the Irish branch of ATD have carried out extensive work to define SES on a national perspective, in a bid to fight against discrimination in the area of poverty and deprivation (Breaking Barriers Report, 2023). They are widely campaigning to 'add the tenth' to the Equality Act in Ireland where the characteristic of socioeconomic status needs to be added to the protected list of characteristics amongst others like ethnicity, gender and age. 2023 study, 'Breaking Barriers,' employed a participatory research approach to explore the lived experiences of poverty and discrimination in Ireland over three years. This collaborative effort involved individuals directly affected by SES discrimination, alongside community workers, policy advocates, and academics. Through these collective discussions, the study defined key characteristics of socioeconomic status, and the discriminatory practices associated with them. The participatory approach to the research has led to a 'grassroots' definition of SES from the voices of the individuals experiencing the most exclusion and discrimination from their social status. Therefore, it is an excellent conceptual framework for this research, which focuses on social class from the lived experience. In this structure, there are measures of absolute and relative poverty combined with subjective measures of social class status. Thus, providing an overall lens in which to frame social class in the study in a relevant manner.

Socioeconomic status can be looked at as a hierarchy, there are people at the very top who have mass wealth... and there are people at the bottom that are almost disenfranchised with society, who don't own anything and by birth of not owning anything, have no stake in society (ATD, 2023, p.14).

3.3.1 Characteristics of SES from the ATD Perspective

1. **Wealth & Income/Occupation** - these include the economic factors of SES i.e., the money available for goods and services, and essential needs. It also encompasses occupation and sources of income. McCoy et al (2010) argue that occupation is a core SES indicator, and the lifeline for economic and social successes, ‘the occupational structure is viewed as the backbone of the stratification system’ (p.26). For many lower SES individuals, the characteristic of income is so low that they live in poverty. The CSO (2022) reported that 13.1% of Irish people were living below the poverty line.
2. **Social Status** - relates to how individuals are perceived in society and manifests in accent, dress, cultural consumption, etc. Social status also encompasses social and cultural capitals possessed by individuals. These are all considered to be signifiers of social class or status and can be a source of discrimination. In chapters six and eight participants describe multiple experiences of prejudice because of their accents or cultural capital. Furthermore, ATD purport that a person’s social status can dictate their economic status and vice versa.
3. **Education** - SES can be linked to the level of educational success a person has achieved. Access to education, similarly to employment can be linked to social and cultural capital and ultimately, access to upward mobility. Most participants in the ethnographic interviews for this research, equate their access to opportunity and mobility with their access to education, which in time helped create a positive life trajectory away from poverty.
4. **Address or Community** - ATD report there is a direct correlation to the perception of SES status and address in Ireland. Life experiences and status in society can be dictated by geography, ‘different communities, postcodes, types of housing and living situations can be associated with different lifestyles and access to opportunities’ (ATD, p.19). In both the digital ethnography and ethnographic interviews, participants described many incidents of address-based bias, especially in job applications (see chapters seven and nine).
5. **Family** - this characteristic is not only related to family structures such as single parent households but also the intergenerational element of social class or economic status. It is where individuals are stuck in a cycle of poverty and social exclusion passed on from one generation to the next (Chan & Goldthorpe 2007; Chetty & Hendren 2014; Erikson 2016). All interview participants in this study were third and

fourth generation social housing occupants with experience of historic poverty and deprivation in their family structures.

Therefore, for the conceptualisation of objective socioeconomic measures and subjective social class status, a combination of these key elements from the ATD framework were employed in this study i.e., occupation/income, social status, education, address, and family. As they encompass elements of objective poverty measures and the perceived measure of an individual's place in society, to explain how people internalise and understand their own social class status.

3.4 The Impacts of Poor SES Outcomes on Subjective Social Status (SSS)

Amir et al (2019) claim that SSS explains variances in society above and beyond the more objective measures of socioeconomic status. A subjective social marker is indicative of a person's position in a society and incorporates categorical labels such as poor, working class, middle class, and upper class that capture the perceived variability of a person's access and accumulation of resources and capitals. SES indicators are key indicators of both affluence and poverty and are important in measuring the objective elements of social class stratification, however, they can fail to address the important aspects of social class perceptions. It is the subjective measures of SSS which capture an individual's self-perception of his or her "place" in society, based on a variety of factors. These include human capital (occupational prestige), social capital (access to networks or communities of connected people), and cultural capital (access to valuable information and knowledge) of where they stand relative to others in society (Smith, 2010). Evans (2004) states that researchers need to 'come to grips with the ecological reality of poverty and desist relegating income and SES to unexplained confounding variables in their models of human behaviour and well-being' (p. 88).

Of the five ATD characteristics of SES, three objective measures have been explored in chapter four i.e., education, family status, and employment, with the two remaining measures from the ATD framework being subjective measures relating to class perception. First is the measure of social status itself, this is framed as 'how individuals are perceived in society' (ATD, 2023, p.19) based on their habitus and capitals. Smith (2010) purports it also measures the level of social exclusion in a person's life based on their SES. Secondly, is an individual's address or community, as ATD report in their findings there is a 'direct correlation between the perception of social status and address in Ireland' (2023, p.18). As SSS is most often used to describe 'a person's belief about his location in a status order' (Davis, 1956, p.19), it is

important to collect data on this from the lived or personal experience of social class. Which is why these two areas will be ethnographically explored and discussed in detail in chapters nine and ten, through the participants interviews and digital ethnography from social media i.e., to gain the lived experience perspective on these two areas in lieu of theory or statistics. Therefore, both the self-perceptions of social class and the class effects of address, will be explored through the lenses of the research participants and the narratives gathered from social media.

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter examined the importance of a comprehensive approach to observe social class constructs that encompasses both the objective and subjective measures. This was to develop a better understanding of how stratification occurs in society, and moreover, how people internalise and make sense of this stratification. The chapter combines the foundations of international perspectives on social class with national frameworks to create a complete picture of class and address potential limitations of using just one metric. While subjective measures can be influenced by bias and variability, objective measures are limited in capturing the personal experience of social class. Thus, by combining both, a more inclusive framework is created. Furthermore, by comparing subjective and objective measures the identification of discrepancies between individuals' perceptions of their social class and their objective circumstances were highlighted and provided insights into factors which led to torn identity in upward mobility, which will be discussed in detail in chapter nine and ten. Finally, by using both subjective and objective measures, it aided the contextualisation of findings and led to a better understanding of how social class was experienced and perceived amongst the participants in their past and current sociocultural settings.

Agency in Difficult Times....

In secondary school, a key memory of class discrimination was the end of my first year. The year group had completed summer exams and the results of which determined our ranked position in second year i.e., five groups were established framed as A to E and students were placed in the letter that reflected their common grades, A being the highest. Therefore, the grades you received reflected on the rank of class you were placed in. My results were not outstanding, but I vividly remember I had a mix of Bs and Cs with one A. However, when my report came home with my class rank, I was placed in the lowest group E, despite knowing that I justly deserved a place in the middle rank. My mother told me it was ok, but I knew she just did not understand, and I felt extremely hard done by! She allowed me to phone the school myself as she felt she could not. Parental advocacy was very limited, when you are from a working-class background operating in a predominantly middle-class system. When I called the school to confirm my second-year placement, my year-head suggested I would be more comfortable in the lower group, since that's where most of my 'friends from the area' were.

Yes, some of my friends were in that class, but the majority of my 'other' friends from more affluent areas had got a place up the ranks based on their merit not their address. I interacted with my peers from my community, but most of my friends resided outside of my estate. At that early age of twelve I understood very clearly the classist approach that was taken to my placement in the second-year groupings. I was being judged by a single lens of my address and nothing else. I felt the sense of injustice and discrimination, and furthermore, I felt compelled to continue to question the absence of meritocracy and equality in my school, and the simple fact that my results did not warrant the rank or class stream I was placed in. I eventually won the argument on logic and fact, but I consider it now in later years as a very pivotal and important argument, as my peers from my new class became very influential in my life. Therefore, if I had accepted 'my lot' I do not know if I would have been exposed to the same positive influence, the same subject choices or levels, and the same pathway to progression.



Chapter 4 - Socioeconomic Profiling of Limerick City's Regeneration Estates

4.0 Introduction

This chapter was designed to examine the four study sites from the perspective of their socioeconomic status (SES) using the key metrics of education, employment, and family status. It provides a concrete look at how the communities of Weston, Moyross, Southill, and St Mary's Park compared to both the local and national standards of SES within the realm of these four predictors of poverty. While providing a detailed description of the community or 'Field' (see 2.4) in which the interview participants grew up and this description is essential to support any exploration of how the Field interacted with the Habitus (see 2.3) of the participants. For this portion of the research Pobal's HP Deprivation Index was employed as a metric of SES, to explore the level of deprivation and poverty within the four key study sites. It compares each estate's SES position on the HP Index to their home county and the overall national averages, to develop a sense of how these areas compare in deprivation and poverty on a larger scale. Through a critical examination of existing literature, chapters three and four seek to define and situate the concept of social class, exploring its multifaceted nature and its profound impact on the lives of individuals and communities within the research context.

4.1 A Socioeconomic Profile of Limerick City

Limerick has always been a city of the haves and have nots (Female, Southside, 30s).

This section explores the socioeconomic profile of Limerick to distinguish its socioeconomic status compared to the rest of Ireland and also takes an in-depth look at the four study sites, to identify their socioeconomic position both nationally and within the county. The purpose of this exploration is for the reader to develop a sense of the lived experience in these deprived areas and to understand the spectrum of affluence and deprivation that resides across neighbouring Small Areas (SA)³ in the city. The levels of deprivation and affluence of an area in Ireland is measured according to deprivation index scores.

'The Pobal HP Deprivation Index is Ireland's primary social gradient tool, used by numerous government departments and state agencies for the identification of

³ The Pobal HP Deprivation Index is based on Small Areas (SA), the new census geography developed jointly by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (OSI) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) for the publication of the 2011 Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS). SAs are much more homogeneous in their social composition and have a uniform population size with a mean of just under 100 households (Haase & Pratschke, 2016, p.3).

geographic disadvantage, in order to target resources and services towards communities most in need' (Pobal, 2022, p.2).

While ATD Ireland provides a lens to examine social class, the HP Index provides a tool in which to measure a person's status in society. It provides a concrete way to operationalise frameworks such as ATD's and situate the theory in the lived experience. Therefore, the combination of both provides an extensive insight into the objective and subjective elements of social class in the four estates. Pobal's HP Index draws on socioeconomic information from the census relating to three domains of: demographic vitality, social class composition and labour market conditions to construct a scale which measures the affluence and deprivation across the Irish population. This index is published every five years in line with the Irish census. The domains are made up of key data points, including educational attainment, unemployment rates, and the proportion of lone parents or family status in a given Small Area. These particular data points mirror the ATD social class lens of objective measures of income, education, and family in SES metrics, therefore were employed in the study to explore objective social class or SES in the four Regeneration estates. Nearly 19,000 small areas were indexed by Pobal leading to the development of a comprehensive map of the relative affluence and disadvantage across the country. These areas score 1 to 8 on the index, 1 being extremely disadvantaged and 8 being extremely affluent. This model is underpinned by the recognised definition of deprivation which is the absence of 'essential or desirable attributes, possessions and opportunities which are considered no more than the minimum by society' (Coombes et al, 1995, cited in Pobal, 2022, p.2).

The index provides extensive insights into these small areas and allows a current socioeconomic view of the important social class indicators within the four main study sites in Limerick city. Therefore, the index serves to operationalise the ATD theory into factual data. Pobal argue that by gathering the census measures together 'we gain a rounded view of the lived experience of disadvantage beyond simply measuring income poverty' (Pobal, 2022, p.3). All four research sites scored in the 1st classification of the index; hence, all of the areas are in the extremely disadvantaged range. Limerick is deemed as having one of the most disproportionately high level of extremely disadvantaged small areas in the country (Paul Partnership, 2016).

4.1.1 Limerick City's Socioeconomic Profile in Comparison to the Rest of Ireland

Limerick City and County's population in the 2022 census stands at 209,536 which represents a faster rate of growth (7.51%) from the previous census in 2016. According to the census, Limerick City and suburbs is the second most densely populated city and suburbs in the country (after Dublin), with 4.06% of the total population. Small Areas (SA) in the city centre in particular around the Docklands and the Market area signified the strongest rates of population growth (125% to 155%). These are areas with concentrations of high migrant populations and rented accommodation. For the first time since 1981, the population of two of the four study sites of St. Mary's Park and Ballinacurra Weston stabilised in populations between 2016 and 2022 while the two larger estates of Southill and Moyross, experienced positive population growth. Conversely, between 1981 and 2016 these four estates experienced between 48% and 70% decline in population due to worsening living conditions, anti-social behaviours, criminality, and regeneration's 'clean slate' initial approach of demolishing current housing stocks in the community and relocating its residents. Regeneration began in Limerick city in 2008 and will be discussed further on in this chapter. In line with the ATD lens, the key SES indicators of Educational Attainment, Single Parent Status, and Employment levels, will be discussed in this section to develop an understanding of how Limerick is situated on the HP index in comparison to the rest of Ireland. This relates to sections: 1. Occupation/Income, 3. Education, and 5. Family Structure on the ATD framework.

4.2.1.1 Education

One of the key indicators of deprivation is educational attainment and the HP index measures two levels of educational attainment, firstly, the proportion of people in the Small Area that have only obtained primary school level education and secondly, the proportion of people who have a third level qualification. As discussed in other chapters in the study, for people experiencing poverty and deprivation, education or skill training can be the equalising factor in their lives to give them access to better opportunities, employment, and capitals including social and cultural. According to Limerick Youth Service (2022) despite Junior and Leaving Certificate retention rates increasing, Limerick City retention rates remain low amongst county and state levels. It is well documented that the outcomes for early school leavers are limited with employment opportunities tending to end up in unskilled, low paid, manual work (European Commission, 2012). They are also at higher risk of unemployment, social welfare dependency, poverty and social exclusion.

In 2022 Ireland's population with only a primary school education equated to 11.51%. In Limerick the same level of education is 11.25% slightly above the national average. However, Limerick City and County Council (2023) report that low levels of educational attainment are a characteristic of Limerick's regeneration areas i.e., the research study sites, and low educational attainment has been identified as a significant issue in these estates. They report that 60% or more of the combined adult population in these areas have lower secondary education or below as the highest level of qualification.

For third level educational attainment, 37.69% of the Irish population has a third level education, Limerick is average or above average (38.71%) on this measure. AONTAS (2020) report that amongst the barriers of access to education the geographic locations of institutions can intensify inequalities in education. If students are not located near a college or university campus then barriers become greater due to costs of travel and rent, especially with the current cost of living crisis where rent and travel costs are at the highest level in Irish history. This can suggest a correlation between the high level of third qualifications in Limerick with the geographical access that the population has to education, with the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, and TUS, amongst other Further Education Institutes offering a wide range of courses and qualifications within the city and county.

4.2.1.2 Single Parent Ratio

As outlined in Chapter 2, one of the key indicators of poor social class mobility is high levels of single parents concentrated in one area (Chetty et al., 2015). Hannan and O'Riain (1993) found a correlation between lone parenthood and socioeconomic disadvantage, with higher rates among individuals with low educational attainment and unemployment. This demographic also experiences higher rates of social isolation and psychological stress (Humphreys et al., 2011). Blackett's 2016 study on Regeneration in Limerick, reported that single parent households were consistently more likely to be at risk of poverty compared to other family compositions. In Ireland there is a single parent ratio of 18.05% which are households led by one parent only. Most of these households are female led, with the majority of single parent families being headed by mothers rather than fathers (CSO, 2023). Limerick has a single parent ratio of slightly higher than national average of 19.61%. The average rates of lone parent households with any children under 15 years is 35.5% for Limerick City and significantly lower for the County (15.2%). In the most disadvantaged communities in the city, the percentage of lone parent households with any children under 15 years is in excess of 50%. Children experiencing this intersectionality of living in

disadvantaged areas and as part of a lone parent family are at higher risk of poverty (Limerick City and County Council 2023; Byrne & Treanor 2020).

4.2.1.3 Employment Levels

Highly deprived areas are more likely to be affected by higher unemployment rates due to limited job opportunities, limited resources and infrastructure, lower educational attainment, differential social networks, discrimination, and cyclical effects of intergenerational disadvantage (Whelan et al. 2023)

Employment is a vital source that not only appropriates income but validates lives by providing people an economic and social role (Power, 1997). The UN (1997) purport that unemployment and underemployment are the world's creators of poverty. Labour is the only asset the poor can offer to help themselves out of poverty. In the HP Index employment rates are divided up based on gender and measured according to unemployment rates for both males and females. In 2022, the national rates of unemployment for males were 9.10% and for females it was 8.42%, Limerick scored comparable to the national figures with a rate of unemployment for males at 9.04% and females 8.14%. According to the CSO (2023) almost 170,100 individuals living in Limerick in 2022 were aged 15 and over and of these more than 90,600 people were at work. This was an increase of 17% from the previous 2016 census and is evidence of further economic recovery from the devastating recession of 2008. The manufacturing sector accounts for the largest number of workers in the county, at more than 12,500. Human Health and Social Work Activities was the next largest, with just over 11,500 workers followed by Wholesale and Retail Trade with more than 10,500 workers (CSO, 2023). However, there is persistent structural unemployment in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods within Limerick City. There were eighteen blackspots of unemployment identified in the 2022 census in Limerick, this is the highest level of blackspots in the country. All of these blackspots are located in the four Regeneration estates and their surrounds, with one exception in the county of Limerick. Conversely, the CSO (2023) report that the unemployment rate for the Midwest Region in 2022 was 4.3% and this is amongst the lowest rates ever recorded. Indicating persistent unemployment in the Regeneration areas.

4.2.1.4 Age Dependency Rate

The age dependency ratio is defined as the percentage ratio of dependents who are deemed as individuals younger than 15 or older than 64 (i.e., the people outside the labour market and depending on other sources of income besides employment). This important economic

indicator indicates the proportional percentage of adults of working age who can support the young and the elderly of the population with higher values indicating a greater level of age-related dependency in the population.

According to the CSO (2023), the Total Dependency Ratio for Limerick City and County (53.5) is very close to the national average (52.7) but there are differences within the City and County. The inner and outer suburban neighbourhoods of Limerick have a higher Youth Dependency Ratio (31.3) and a lower Old Age Dependency Ratio (15.7). This reflects the general structure of population living in the suburbs which are family-based households with children and young adults. The city has a mixed pattern with areas of the city having high Youth Dependency Ratios (areas around the Docks and Market with concentrations of migrant families, and lone parent households). Other parts of the city in both affluent and disadvantaged areas have high Old Age Dependency Ratios.

Overall, Limerick as a county is scoring on average across the four key SES indicators. However, there are pockets of the city, specifically the four Regeneration study sites, which are experiencing high levels of disparity across these deprivation measures.

4.2 Review of Limerick's Regeneration Estates SES Profiles

This section of the chapter will discuss the four most disadvantaged estates in Limerick city, Ballincurra Weston, Moyross, Southill, and St Mary's Park, comparing the objective measures from the HP Index of Education, Unemployment, and Single Parent Ratios to both Limerick County and national averages. The Age Dependency Rates which reflect demographic vitality appears to have levelled out, but this positive change actually reflects an ageing population and immigration rather than amelioration of age dependency in disadvantaged areas (CSO, 2023). For this reason, this statistic will not be discussed in the same detail. According to Blanc et al (2006) area level SES is best captured using population-based surveys like the census or deprivation indices such as the HP Index. Therefore, the HP Index captures the level of marginalisation these areas are experiencing based on the facts which reflect the lived experience of poverty and social exclusions for the residents of these four communities. Subjective Social Class Status will be discussed in greater detail in chapter nine and ten from the lived experience perspective.

4.2.1 Southside: Ballinacurra Weston



Figure 4.1 Ballinacurra Weston & Surrounds (Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2011).

Ballinacurra Weston is situated on the Southside of Limerick, and close to the city centre. The construction of Weston began in the late 1930s during the tenement slum clearance in the city, and continued into the 1950s, a period of Limerick Corporation's⁴ history during which they were most industrious in social housing construction. This period of extensive building was in response to the growing number of young families in the city and the demand for housing to meet their needs socially and economically. As seen in figure 4.1, Ballinacurra Weston was originally made up of Hyde Ave, Crecora Ave, Clarina Ave, Beechgrove Ave and Clarina Park. It is flanked by the Prospect Area in the map which is labelled as Hyde Road, Lenihan Ave, and Byrne Ave. On the map 'Our Lady of Lourdes' is detailed, which is located to the left of the estate, this is where the church and the community centre are located, these are the only recreation areas for the estates of Weston and Prospect.

Duggan (2009) described the building of Weston as 'another answer to the housing crisis for the city's ever-increasing families' (p.22). Ballinacurra Weston is an estate in the Limerick Metropolitan area that has experienced an increase in absolute deprivation since the last

⁴ Limerick Corporation (now known as Limerick City & County Council) was the authority responsible for local government in the city of Limerick (Limerick City & Council, 2023).

census (CSO, 2023) . Indicating that the SES measures (See Table 4.1) on the HP Index have worsened. Furthermore, since the 1980s it has encountered a consistent decline in population due to ongoing social issues of drug and gangland crime, poverty, and the demolition of housing stock during the earlier stages of Regeneration (Paul Partnership, 2016). It has had a decrease in population of approximately 30% at each census count since 2006, therefore, at intervals of five years Weston has seen continued significant drops in resident numbers with the only stabilisation of population showing in the latest census in 2022 (CSO, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2022). The starting point of this population shift in the 1980s coincides with the significant policy of the ‘Surrender Grant’ (discussed in chapter five) that encouraged individuals with access to income and eligibility for a mortgage, to surrender their local authority house in lieu of a grant to help towards the purchase of their own private property. This resulted in the exodus of employed people from Ballinacurra Weston, narrowing the social mix of residents in the area which is known as ‘residualisation’, and creating a larger concentration of unemployed or lower income employees to local authority estates.

Like many housing developments of its time, it is apparent from the physical layout of the Ballinacurra Weston housing estate that city planning was focused on building an estate that served only the practical housing of families with little thought for social development of the residents, and recreational outlets with communal spaces. Ryan (1967) criticises that while ‘town planners made ample provisions for the movement of traffic; no provision was made for the movement of children’ (p.8). The Limerick Regeneration Watch Report (2014) identifies extensive problems with the physical layout of the estate:

- “Poor accessibility of routes to key locations due to the cul-de-sac layout of the area.
 - Unattractive public realm with an overdominance of hard surfaces and rock armoury with limited soft landscaping.
 - Poorly overlooked pedestrian routes.
- Newer problems include:
- A significant amount of vacant land within the regeneration areas.
 - Several under-used and vacant housing sites, which currently detract from the overall appearance of the estate.” (p.90)

Humphreys et al., (2019), argue that Ballinacurra Weston while ‘close to the city centre and with schools and amenities nearby, lacks a village core’ (p.41) and among its limited social infrastructures are a community centre, creche, and a primary school within the community. It is an estate that has been plagued by gangland feuds with one of the primary feuding families situated in the estate at the height of drug criminality and violence in the city.

Residents of the community report that their fears circulate around traffic from robbed cars and quad bikes, drug feuds and intimidation from criminal families, firearms, and the deterioration of the estate from Regeneration demolition (Humphreys et al., 2019).

Using the Electoral Districts (EDs) that incorporate Ballinacurra Weston and its surrounds, the HP Index scores were collated and averaged to gain insight into the SES state of this area for 2022.

Percentage of Population	Ireland	Limerick	Ballinacurra Weston
Lone Parents	18.05	19.61	62.87
Primary Education Only	11.51	11.25	33.39
Third Level Education	37.69	38.71	6.89
Unemployment Rates in Males	9.1	9.04	34.89
Unemployment Rates in Females	8.42	8.14	31.36

Table 4.1 HP Index scores on lone parent rates, educational attainment and unemployment rates for Ballinacurra Weston & surrounds.

There are striking discrepancies between Ballinacurra Weston and national and county statistics on key socioeconomic factors of single parent rates, education and employment

Firstly, the lone parent rate is more than three times higher than the county and national rate. In education, individuals with primary level education only are over 22% higher than the national and county norms while, by contrast, there are almost a third fewer individuals with third level education. Lastly, unemployment levels are much higher for both male and females than the comparing averages. In 2014, a report from Limerick’s Regeneration Watch outlines the key issues that the community face with social isolation despite its advantageous geographical position within Limerick city:

Despite the study area's strategic location in the southern fringe of Limerick City Centre, it remains disconnected from its urban surroundings. The reasons why Ballinacurra Weston has failed to successfully integrate into this environment are manifold. Undoubtedly, the complex socio-economic profile of the area has prevented it from progressing and developing in accordance with neighbouring residential areas (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2014, p.88).

In agreement with this report is the data from the latest census which indicates that, despite heavy Regeneration investment, Ballinacurra Weston continues to be plagued with social issues of lower education rates, higher lone parent and unemployment rates. This signifies persistent poverty and deprivation, as these figures have shown no improvement in the last three census reports (Pobal, 2022).

4.2.2 *Southside: Southill*



Figure 4.2 Southill & Surrounds (Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2011).

The Southill estate is made up of four smaller estates of O'Malley, Keyes, Carew and Kinicora Parks and there are also two official Traveller halting sites of Clonlong and Toppins Field (see figure 4.2). The building of Southill in the 1960s, was part of the suburbanisation of Limerick, along with Moyross these were the first two social housing estates built away from the proximity of the city centre and built in large numbers of housing units. Southill had 1150 units and was at that time was the largest public housing build for Limerick Corporation with O'Malley Park being the largest of the estates and the core hub of Southill. These suburban builds coincided with an influx of multinational organisations to Limerick and a rise of industrial employment in the manufacturing industry for Limerick residents. KRUPS, a German manufacturer was located in close proximity to Southill and opened in 1964

employing a large number of local people. McCafferty (1999) claims that residents of Southill in the 1960s was made up of people moving from crowded conditions elsewhere in the city, displaced people, but primarily rural people moving to the city for increased employment opportunities e.g., the KRUPS factory which opened in Limerick in 1964 and closed in 1998. The factory employed up to 1400 at the height of its production, a large amount of them local, and 500 people lost jobs the day it closed. Despite being outside the city boundaries, Southill is identified as a city estate because of its similarity in SES conditions to other social housing areas. McCafferty (1999) argues that the city identity is reinforced by the fact ‘Southill is delimited by clearly defined boundaries on all sides, including recreational land.... industrial land and major regional roads’ (p.206) (see figure 4.2). Therefore, both socioeconomic and physical boundaries isolate the estate from more affluent neighbouring areas in their community. Southill’s geographical landscape was built in a ‘Radburn Layout’ which places housing facing onto a green space and vehicle access is via back courts to the rear of the house. However, this layout caused social problems for the residents, and Humphreys (2008) reports that the car access via cul-de-sacs at the back of the properties created problems for access for visitors, taxis, and ambulances. Furthermore, these back courts became a point of risk for security and privacy, as the cul-de-sacs were perfect hideaways for antisocial behaviour. McCafferty (1999) claimed that the underdeveloped, unlandscaped green spaces along with concrete cul-de-sacs led to grey, bleak visual topography unappealing to residents and visitors. Similar, to Ballinacurra Weston this estate was built for economic purposes rather than the social development and wellbeing of its occupiers.

Between 2006 and 2011, a number of the EDs covering Southill experienced significant population decline similar to other social housing estates. According to Midwestern Regional Report (2013) Southill’s population declined by 44.22%, the report claims much of this population decline at the time was inextricably linked to regeneration work and redevelopment activities. Paul Partnership (2016) reported that during 2011 and 2016 Southill, particularly O’Malley Park, experienced greater population decline, averaging a drop of a further 24% in residents for this period. Comparable to other social housing areas, this drop is linked to a combination of regeneration policy, deprivation, and criminality. Notably, in the 2022 census Southill experienced its first increase in population due to new builds and refurbishment central to Regeneration. Between 2016 and 2022, the two larger estates, Southill and Moyross, experienced positive population growth in this period, reporting growth in these areas between 1 and 12%.

Using the five EDs that incorporate Southill and its surrounds, the HP scores for each division was summed up and averaged for each relevant statistic of lone parent, education, and employment, to gain insight into the SES state of this area for 2022.

Percentage of Population	Ireland	Limerick	Southill
Lone Parents	18.05	19.61	61.33
Primary Education Only	11.51	11.25	36.54
Third Level Education	37.69	38.71	6.74
Unemployment Rates in Males	9.1	9.04	35.91
Unemployment Rates in Females	8.42	8.14	24.97

Table 4.2 HP Index scores on lone parent rates, educational attainment and unemployment rates for Southill & surrounds.

Comparable to Ballinacurra Weston, the ED statistics for Southill measure the same disparity in key socioeconomic ratios, i.e., higher rates of single parents are recorded with a ratio measuring over 25% higher than the national and county rate. While lower rates of education, with 25% more of the population of Southill only reporting a primary level education compared to the national average. Moreover, there are 32% less people with third level education than the national and county norm. There are also higher rates of unemployment than the county and national norms averaging nearly 27% higher in this area for males and 17% for females. Indicating persistent social issues that are conducive to poverty and deprivation.

4.2.3 Northside: Moyross



Figure 4.3 Moyross & Surrounds (Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2011)

Moyross was constructed and developed as part of Limerick urbanisation between 1973–1987, it was the largest social housing estate in Ireland. Similarly, to Southill, it was a large-scale construction project for Limerick Corporation and when completed had 1160 units consisting of many smaller individual estates. The estates like Southill are defined by underdeveloped landscapes and large open green spaces.

Moyross is unique, as a tragic incident that occurred in the estate due to anti-social behaviour and this was the catalyst for the Regeneration of Limerick Project. The estate has been strongly associated in the media with anti-social behaviour and crime and is considered one of the worst affected areas for disadvantage and deprivation (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2009). An incident that has received much media attention was the 2006 petrol bomb attack of a five-year-old and seven-year-old brother and sister, because their mother refused a lift to a gang member to Limerick’s courthouse. This event changed the course of social housing history in the city and gave rise to a subsequent decision of the government Cabinet to

commission a report and prioritise investment in Limerick from which the Regeneration project was established in 2006 (see 5.4).

The total population decreased by 7% from 4,448 in 1992 to 4,110 in 2002 and reduced again to 3,468 in 2006. From 2007 Limerick City Council began steadily depopulating the area (with funding from the Regeneration Agency) to facilitate the regeneration programme.

The 2011 population was 34.5% less than the population in 2006. This is an incredible rate of out-migration with 1,203 people having left Moyross in the five-year period between 2006 and 2011. Humphries (2019) equates this to the first years of Limerick Regeneration, when homes were demolished, and tenants were handed the opportunity to move to different parts of the city and county. By 2011 only 1,963 people resided in the northside estate, equating to a 60% drop in population in a decade (CSO, 2011). Overall, the population of all the regeneration areas is down almost 50% in 10 years (Humphries, 2019). However, like the other estates, in the 2022 census, the population of the regeneration areas of the city stabilised and Moyross, experienced positive population growth in this period. Using the six EDs that incorporate Moyross and its surrounds including Ballynanty, the HP scores were collated, summed up, and averaged to gain insight into the SES state of this area for 2022.

Percentage of Population	Ireland	Limerick	Moyross
Lone Parents	18.05	19.61	64.45
Primary Education Only	11.51	11.25	34.04
Third Level Education	37.69	38.71	7.39
Unemployment Rates in Males	9.1	9.04	31.64
Unemployment Rates in Females	8.42	8.14	27.53

Table 4.3 HP Index scores on lone parent rates, educational attainment and unemployment rates for Moyross & surrounds.

The same pattern emerges for Moyross as Ballinacurra Weston and Southill, the ED statistics measure the same disparity in key socioeconomic ratios, i.e., lower rates of education, with

23% more of the population of Southill only reporting a primary level education compared to the national average. 31% less people have a third level education. While higher rates of single parents are recorded with a ratio measuring over 45% higher than the national and county rate. There are also higher rates of unemployment than the county and national norms averaging nearly 22% higher in this area for males and over 19% for females. Indicating persistent social issues that are conducive to poverty and deprivation.

4.2.4 Northside: St Marys Park



Figure 4.4 St Marys Park & Surrounds (Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2011).

St Marys Park is the oldest of the large-scale local authority builds and began in the 1930s as a direct response to slum clearance in the city. The estate was a prototype of future estates, the original estate was built in 1935. It is the closest local authority estate to the city centre and was built on the banks of the River Shannon (see figure 4.4). It is situated on one of the most historic sites of Limerick, North of King's Island and on the divergent point of the Shannon and the Abbey Rivers. Uniquely, St Mary's Park has only one main entrance and exit, and this has led to 'the isolation of the estate, adding to many social problems which

exists in the area.... there is a paucity of social and community facilities and services' (Limerick Regeneration Agency (LRA), 2008, p171-172). The LRA also purport that due to the rivers surrounding the estate, the extensive open space the residents have access to is unfortunately low lying, therefore, subject to regular flooding.

Historically, the estate has been earmarked early for social problems, as one of the first estates to be constructed under DeValera's government with a total of 454 units being built, it was built to a substandard state due to complex funding and was targeted for the poorest in the county. Lending at this time was very expensive for the Limerick Corporation and national loan subsidies were paid on a per house basis. Therefore, constructing a greater number of houses with cheaper materials enabled Limerick Corporation to access a higher subsidy. This subsidy was then passed on to tenants through lower rents (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2009). In contrast, Janesboro (152 units), O Dwyer's Villa (90 units) and Kilalee (90 units) estates were simultaneously being built, but these houses were built to a better standard, were less crowded, and were targeted for more expensive rents. Their target audience was upper working-class individuals who could afford higher priced properties. Whereas, St Marys Park was targeted for lower working-class people, often in precarious employment or unemployed, therefore, had cheaper rents attached with lower standards, and more basic housing in more crowded conditions with less amenities. This was the first evidence of a two-tiered social class approach to local authority housing. A legacy that continues today, as Janesboro and similar estates have avoided the social issues of the four Regeneration estates and scores closer to average results on the deprivation index. Therefore, Limerick Corporation's first big social housing estate, built to solve a housing crisis and eliminate tenement living, resulted in gaps in standards of living for Limerick residents based on socioeconomic status. St. Mary's Park has scored on both the 2016 and 2022 Pobal Index as the most disadvantaged small area in the country, with some parts of the estate reporting a male unemployment rate of 70% and only 2% with any third level qualification. These are very striking statistics and indicate persistence in poverty and deprivation.

Similarly, to the other three Regeneration estates, St Mary's Park experienced depopulation and according to Paul Partnership (2016) their population declined by 37% between 2006 and 2016. The 2016 census shed further light on the contextual conditions in Limerick city, revealing change over time. While the population of Limerick city has grown by 2.1% to 58,319, there was decline recorded in the regeneration areas as depopulation continued. However, the population of the regeneration areas of the city including St. Mary's Park stabilised between 2016 and 2022. Using the four EDs that incorporate St Marys Park and its

surrounds, the HP scores were collated, summed up, and averaged to gain insight into the SES state of this area for 2022.

Percentage of Population	Ireland	Limerick	St. Mary's Park
Lone Parents	18.05	19.61	64.31
Primary Education Only	11.51	11.25	34.48
Third Level Education	37.69	38.71	5.56
Unemployment Rates in Males	9.1	9.04	37.7
Unemployment Rates in Females	8.42	8.14	29.05

Table 4.4 HP Index scores on lone parent rates, educational attainment and unemployment rates for St. Mary's Park & surrounds.

Comparable to the other three Regeneration estates, the ED stats for St Marys Park measures the same disparity in key socioeconomic ratios, i.e., lower rates of education, with nearly 23% more of the population of St Mary’s Park only reporting a primary level education compared to the national average. Over 32% less people have a third level education. While higher rates of single parents are recorded with a ratio measuring over 46% higher than the national and county rate. There are also higher rates of unemployment than the county and national norms averaging nearly 28% higher in this area for males and 21% for females. Indicating persistent social issues that are conducive to poverty and deprivation.

4.3 Conclusion of Limerick City & its Regeneration Estates Socioeconomic Profiles

In the previous chapter the ATD framework of SES was used to develop a lens to explore social class related issues, and in this chapter, the HP Deprivation Index was used as a metric of SES characteristics and how these manifested within the four key study sites in deprivation

and poverty. When exploring these objective measures of socioeconomic status within the index, there are two striking factors in Limerick city, first when Limerick's key SES statistics are measured as a whole i.e., the entire city and county, the results are equal to the national averages, indicating that the city is performing across social and economic measures in a positive manner while meeting the other counties' outcomes in a similar way. However, there is a disparity when these statistics are broken down into smaller ED areas, then SES measures show significant departures from national and county norms in a negative manner. Pobal (2023) report that despite Ireland moving in positive social and economic developments since the 2008 recession, there are pockets of the country that are experiencing worse deprivation. They refer to this as the 'widening deprivation gap' due to persistent poverty. As other facets of society improve on their SES outcomes, smaller areas like the Limerick Regeneration estates remain in the same position, thus, the gap of poverty grows bigger. Pobal purports that 'the overall improvements that have been experienced nationally have not been experienced by the most disadvantaged areas, and as a result the gap has widened' (p.5). Emphasising that relative inequality is growing in the country.

Notably, there has been abrupt population declines in the four study sites. Rates of population downturn are well in excess of what would be expected from normal demographic change, 'this trend is explained by an exodus of population from these areas, some of it linked to movement of population under the Regeneration programme' (Humphries et al, 2019, p.54).

Therefore, the question needs to be addressed as to how these four estates have become so marginalised, deprived, and removed from the county they are situated in. The next chapter examines the historic rise and fall of the estates into the 'blackspots' they have become known as in modern society.

Broken Windows....

I grew up in an estate I hated. It was a place of constant fear and intimidation; crime and social issues were deeply etched into every area of the community. While I felt safe and a sense of belonging amongst our neighbours in the 1980s, this changed dramatically in the 1990s. Many neighbours moved to private estates in more affluent areas, and were replaced with new residents who brought different dynamics to the avenue and gang activity became

the norm. Criminal activity escalated, and when a major drug gang moved into the avenue, we started to experience an increase in anti-social behaviour such as broken windows, drugs being buried in our back garden, and a mistaken identity petrol bombing on our house. I witnessed a man being attacked with a machete from my bedroom window, I was only eleven! A community should be a place of home, belonging, and safety, unfortunately, my community was the opposite. It was a harmful environment to grow up in, which fostered feelings of paranoia and mistrust. The basic human rights of safety and belonging appeared to be denied in my community.

I approached the interviews assuming that the participants would share similar emotions and experiences on their upbringing, however, I was extremely surprised by their contrasting perspectives on their communities. Despite our shared characteristics and similar life experiences, their accounts on their childhood communities differed significantly from my own. They spoke fondly of their neighbourhoods, describing them as safe spaces filled with belonging and respect. While acknowledging some negative experiences, they essentially recalled the majority of their memories to be positive. In contrast, their most harmful experiences stemmed from external factors, such as classist behaviours from people outside of their estates. This sharp contrast made me reflect on my own community and my lived experiences. Did I simply have a different perspective? Was it my parents' approach to the community and their lack of integration, or perhaps the timing, coinciding with a decline in social structures and an increase in drug-related crime? While conducting the research and the data analysis, these opposing experiences in the findings prompted me to reflect on my own childhood. Did I miss out on positive community experiences by not participating in more projects and social support systems? By remaining detached from local activities and initiatives, did my family and I miss the opportunity to develop a stronger sense of belonging and connection to something more positive than the crime and social issues that surrounded us? The majority of the participants discuss their strong links to and involvement in community projects or initiatives in their area, highlighting the importance of social support structures in disadvantaged areas. The findings indicate the value that these community groups deliver in building social capital and networks of support for their members. This raises the question of how to encourage and motivate families living in fear and intimidation to engage with these structures more and to help them eliminate their feelings of isolation in a community.



Chapter 5 The Formation of the Four Regeneration Estates in Limerick City and the Local and National Policies that have Served to Marginalise & (De) Capitalise Them.

5.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the defining social and housing policies at both local and national levels, which had a negative impact on the social and physical environments of the four study sites throughout 1930s to the present day. By exploring these policies, it provides insights into three significant developments in Limerick city's social class landscape, these are spatial segregation of the city, residualisation of the estates, and Regeneration. These three

developments proved detrimental to the communities' populations, social capital, and their physical environments. As seen in chapter two, Sen (2009) emphasises the crucial role of social connections and community networks in human development and well-being. Correspondingly, Chetty (2022) argues that at the community level, cross-class connections improve the chances of social class mobility more than any other factor. This effect appears to outweigh the influence of factors such as economic inequality, educational outcomes, and family structure. Therefore, local and national policies on community development need to focus on strategies aimed at increasing cross-class connections, such as promoting economic integration in neighbourhoods and fostering opportunities for social engagement between individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds (ibid). However, this chapter examines how political decision-making surrounding the four study sites through the decades, served to reduce all forms of cross-class connectedness and marginalise the communities even further. Moreover, the chapter explores the devastating impacts of Regeneration on the physical environment of the four areas due to dereliction and demolished houses that left pockets of greenspace throughout the estates that have become eyesores through degradation and abandonment from local authorities. The combination of these issues compounded by poor SES outcomes and Regeneration has led to further social exclusion of the individuals in these estates.

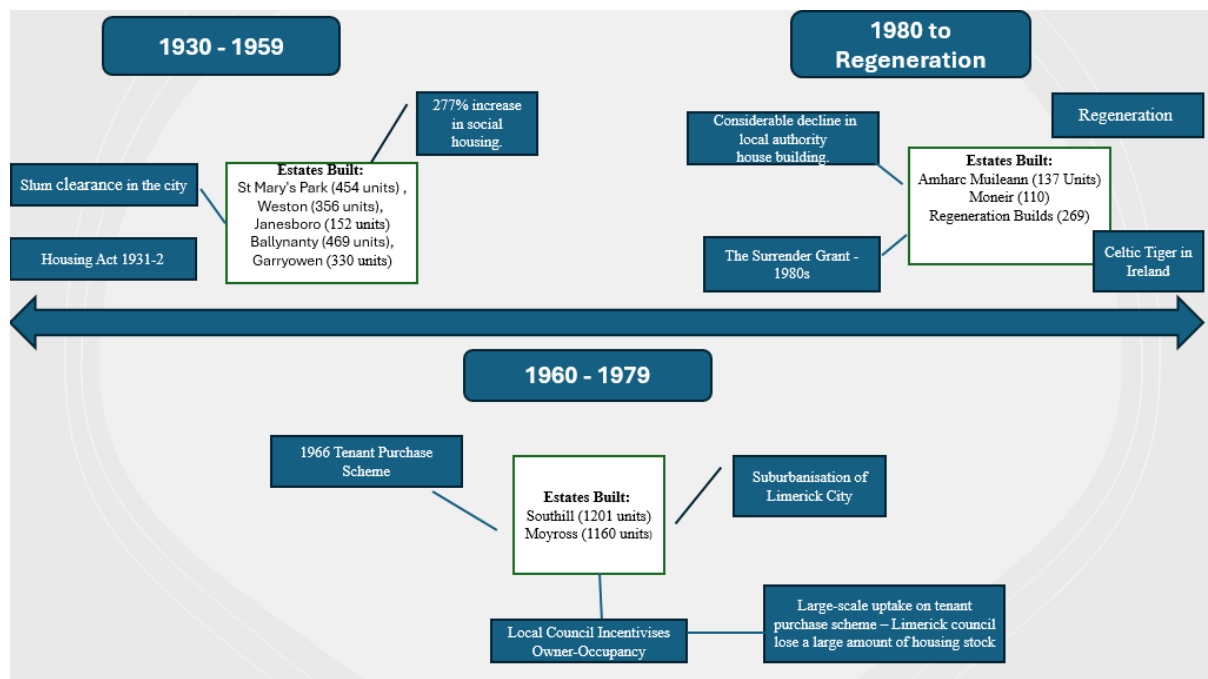


Fig 5.1 Timeline of Creation of Social Housing Estates & Related Policies

5.1 1930 to 1959 - the Beginning

In Limerick city in the 1930s the poor were housed in dangerous, overcrowded tenements or slums. Some tenement buildings were in such a state of disrepair they collapsed and left people homeless. Army tents were provided to these people, and they were placed along George's Quay in the city. Under DeValera's government a major programme of slum clearance and construction of social housing commenced as a result of the Housing Acts of 1931 and 1932, 'these acts ushered in the golden age of social housing provision in Ireland which lasted until the late 1980s' (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2008, p.472). As seen in Figure 5.1 this act created a huge surge in local authority builds, with St Mary's Park being the first large-scale social housing project built in the city to resolve the housing crisis that was in situ. Limerick Corporation (local authority, now known as Limerick City and County Council) adopted a two-tier social class approach to their council estates. They targeted the larger, more populated estates with smaller houses and lower standards of building to the unemployed and manual unskilled employees in the city (St Mary's Park). Simultaneously they built smaller estates, with larger and higher standard houses, for the upper working-class sector (Janesboro, Kilalee, O' Dwyer's Villas). Therefore, from inception St Mary's Park was classed and earmarked for the poor and stigmatisation of address was created in the 1930s by the approach to this two-tier system in social housing. Housing was provided to people based solely on their ability to pay. Thus, social mixing was stopped, and ultimately social capital was quelled by filtering homogenous groups of people with similar social problems such as unemployment and little education into one large area. Humphreys (2008) purports that the poorest of the poor were housed in St Mary's Park.

By the 1950s, Limerick Corporation was considered the most productive in Ireland with local authority builds higher than any other county. Housing schemes included Ballinacurra Weston (356 units), Ballynanty (469 units) and Garryowen (330 units). Extensive public housing equated to 41% of rental property in Limerick and was supplied by the local corporation (McCafferty, 2009). Fortunately, at this time the 'preferential rent scheme' was available for tenants availing of these properties. This scheme attempted to mitigate the two-tier housing system of the 1930s by providing houses to people based on their need rather than ability to pay. This aimed to create a greater social mix as people with differentiated jobs and sources of income were living in the same area, thus, social problems were dispersed and not concentrated in one estate 'it was designed to overcome the kinds of issues where the poor and the more affluent were spatially segregated from one another into different social housing estates' (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2008, p.473). Limerick in this era,

experienced the most dramatic housing changes in the country with Limerick Corporation builds increasing by 277% and a mix of working-class people were housed in large estates in pockets of the city.

5.2 1960 to 1989 - Era of Suburbanisation

By the 1960s, 2,044 units were completed in Limerick City, and the city boundaries were extended to acquire more land for building (McCafferty, 2009). This led to the ‘suburbanisation’ of Limerick and estates for the first time were built away from the city centre, and in the 1970s - 80s Southill (1150 units), and Moyross (1160 units) were built. This spatial distancing was a first for Limerick as both estates were situated a considerable distance from the business and retail core of the city. These new houses were considerably larger than the others and were built to a reasonably good standard. However, they were poorly planned and lacked services and amenities for their residents with no evidence of greenspace development.

The 1966 Tenant Purchase Scheme was introduced to these areas under the Housing Act, this incentivised individuals renting from Limerick Corporation to buy their homes. In the wealthier working-class estates like Janesboro and O’ Dwyer Villas, this was a very popular scheme, and renters moved to buy their homes quickly. By 1981 over 96% of social housing stock had been bought by the tenants (McCafferty, 2009). However, this was short sighted by the local authority as these well-built houses in a safe and flourishing community had been sold off to private individuals. This as a consequence led to a large-scale loss of valuable housing stock that could be used for future needs in the city. Ultimately, in the 1970s and 1980s due to the tenant purchase scheme, social housing units were being sold to tenants as fast as they were being built (McCafferty, 2011).

Within the newer estates of Southill and Moyross, despite the preferential rental scheme, these larger scale builds resulted in large scale social issues and from the beginning the estates were problematic. Limerick Corporation had created blackspots in the city where high unemployment levels, low levels of education and a lack of social amenities led to very serious difficulties for the populations of these areas (Blackett, 2016). Compounding this spatial segregation was the fact that Ireland joined the European Economic Community in the 1970s, which led to substantial restructuring of the city due to industrialisation, further changing the social geography of the city with private suburbs being built close to industrial sites such as Raheen and Castletroy (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2008). This created socioeconomic differentiation between the local authority estates and these private estates,

and the growing divide between the rich and the poor increased. Consequently, suburbanisation was a socially selective process that promoted further social exclusion, reducing class connectedness and this was aggravated by growing social issues in the city (McCafferty, 2009).

5.3 1990 to Regeneration - Residualisation of the Communities

By the 1980s, spatial segregation of the city's disadvantaged and affluent was becoming more pronounced. In particular, the socioeconomic structure of Limerick city's council estates shifted dramatically with the introduction of the 'Surrender Grant'. This grant offered social housing tenants £5000 to surrender their council houses and to use the grant towards the purchase of a private house. The target groups were working individuals and families who could afford a mortgage, the purpose of the grant was to free up social housing to alleviate the long waiting lists for homes in the city. Ironically, Limerick Corporation had created a lack of social housing stock through the tenant purchase scheme in the 1960s and 1970s. The grant proved popular; however, it proved extremely harmful to the social structures of the estates, and fed into further segregation by removing working people from the area, resulting in decreased social networks of more affluent neighbours (Power & Barnes, 2011). 'Many theoretical studies have shown how connections to more educated or affluent individuals can be valuable for transferring information, shaping aspirations and providing mentorship or job referrals' (Chetty et al., 2022, p.109). The surrender grant served to drastically reduce the opportunities for cross-class relations by removing a large percentage of educated, employed families from the areas. Bissett (2008) argues that it increased the level of unemployed people in a concentrated area and subsequently educational disadvantage, crime, and drugs increased as a result.

Unfortunately, coinciding with these political changes, the illegal drug trade had become a serious problem in Irish society by the 1980s, and this played 'a major part in contributing to the development of serious criminality, gangs, and drug feuds, compounding social problems already in existence in the estates' (Blackett, 2016, p.121). Furthermore, from the late 80s in Limerick there was a considerable decline in local authority house building and the estates of Moyross, Southill, Weston, and St Marys Park had turned into the largest clusters of the poorest people, experiencing high levels of social problems and issues. They were now considered low-demand estates with burgeoning issues of drugs, crime, unemployment and single-parent families. Intensifying these problems was the government's drive for home

ownership in the private sector and incentivising individuals to buy or build privately served to isolate these estates further in narrowing social class and spatial segregation (O’Dea, 2012). Private estates were being built in parts of the city, that also had the development of industry and were more attractive to working individuals and families. This led to increased social filtering and marginalisation of the local authority estates. Galvanising these issues was the fact that Limerick city had a disproportionately high percentage of social housing compared to other counties which meant these problems were on a larger scale than other counties of similar size (Fitzgerald, 2007).

The 2006 census indicated the degree of spatial segregation across education and occupation was higher in Limerick than any other city of similar size in Ireland (McCafferty, 2009). This segregation was based on the foundation of social class and private house ownership and has led to condensed levels of unemployment in these local housing estates. Moreover, lone parent families are significantly higher than the Irish average in Regeneration estates in Limerick city and the 2016 census revealed that the county has the third highest level of single mothers in the country representing 26% of all households in the county (One Family, 2016). In the 2022 census of the Limerick families recorded to have children, 35% of them are single parent families, of this 35% a significant 29% are female led households (CSO, 2023).

By the early 1990s the housing boom began in Ireland, and this was the beginning of a period of unprecedented economic growth known as the ‘Celtic Tiger’ (Blackett, 2016) which led to further housing inequality. Housing was now seen as a commodity or source of income rather than a home, due to increased wage levels and easy access to mortgages as a result of relaxed regulations on lending in this period (Blackett, 2016). Furthermore, national policies were put in place to incentivise individuals to invest in land or property. Policies such as: First time buyers grant (1987), Tenancy Surrender Grant (1984), Mortgage Interest Relief Scheme (1980s), Affordable Housing Scheme (1991) were the beginning of commodifying housing. Private housing estates increased and became the main source of housing as local authority building declined significantly. These combined policies further ‘residualised’ the city council estates, by filtering out working class people who could afford mortgages and encouraging them to invest in private property and land. According to Considine & Dukekew, (cited in O’Dea, 2012, p. 27) ‘residualisation is the tendency for social housing sector to cater for a larger proportion of deprived people more exclusively and further marginalises them with the stigma of living in such estates where social problems are spatially concentrated’. The schemes were very effective in creating a segregated approach to

housing and the individuals who remained in the estates by the end of the 80s/early 90s were unemployed or low-income earners. These residents could not qualify for private mortgages or government schemes to purchase. The residualisation was further reflected in the collapse of the population of local authority housing estates, and between 1981 and 1991 Southill lost a total of 69% of its residents, Moyross and Ballynanty lost 40% of its population during this time, indicative of failing housing policies since the 1970s (McCafferty, 1999). It is important to note that, Ireland is amongst the highest percentage of home tenure in the OECD countries and home ownership in this country is considered a marker of social class status (Blackett, 2016). This approach to private house building and the status private housing estates gained in Irish society, led to a further reduction of the social mix in local authority housing estates, thus reducing social capital further. These policies not only contributed to social segregation but also contributed to the rapid surge of house prices, encouraging individuals into high levels of debt and pricing others in modest paid jobs out of the sector (O’Dea, 2012).

The evidence of residualisation was obvious in the McCafferty & Canny study in 2005 where their research profiled the residents of the four estates in the city. The results highlighted the homogeneity of residents in their social characteristics. They profiled the main attributes of the local authority tenants which revealed strong commonalities amongst these renters, including:

- Higher proportion of single parent female led households.
 - 56% of the population under the age of 25.
 - Labour engagement significantly low with unemployment 5 times higher than the national average.
 - 80% of the population living below the poverty line with the rate of poverty being greater for females.
- (McCafferty & Canny, 2005).

The 2022 census and Pobal Deprivation Index data demonstrates the limited success of Regeneration efforts in these four city estates and after seventeen years, these communities continue to face significant social challenges, suggesting a lack of meaningful improvement in the socioeconomic conditions of residents. Furthermore, political decisions have served to marginalise these communities further, hindering opportunities for the development of social capital among residents. This, in turn, limits possibilities for upward mobility. Bourdieu (1984), like Chetty, emphasises the critical role of social capital in improving upward mobility. He argues that social capital, which is comprised of valuable social connections and networks, is unequally distributed across society. Individuals from privileged backgrounds

often inherit these valuable networks, providing them with significant advantages in their social and economic trajectories. This unequal distribution of social capital contributes to the perpetuation of social class inequalities. These inequalities are evident by the 1990s in the four communities as populations homogenise and decline.

5.4 Regeneration

Regeneration programmes endeavour to restore communities experiencing physical decline and social exclusion back into mainstream society, while attempting to create policies and structures aimed at addressing this marginalisation and promoting economic and social development (McGregor and McConnachie, 1995; Roberts, 2000). In the early to mid-2000s Limerick was rife with feuds between rival drug gangs and the four estates of Ballinacurra Weston, Moyross, Southill and St Mary's Park were central locations for the troubles. Twenty murders and multiple incidences of violent attacks were attributed to this feud with residents of the local authority estates bearing the brunt of the anti-social behaviour and criminality. The Moyross estate was the catalyst for the government policy on Regeneration when two innocent children were petrol bombed in their mother's car (Fitzgerald, 2007). The government knew a response was needed in Limerick to tackle the escalating crime and social exclusion being experienced by some of the poorest areas of the city. The Regeneration Plan was developed and launched in 2008, with a budget of €3 billion that was aimed at three key pillars of physical, social, and economic development for these areas (Fitzgerald 2007; Power & Barnes, 2011). Most of the money was earmarked for physical projects with a small percentage set aside for social and economic supports. This plan aimed to tackle, among other issues, poverty, social exclusion, low education levels, unemployment, and crime. The initiative brought great hope to the communities of solving of the worst social problems and isolation. Unfortunately, the ensuing severe economic recession led to the plan being altered, and in 2013, a smaller, more feasible plan of just over €300 million was promised. This became known as the Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2014).

Limerick Regeneration – Key Dates & Events

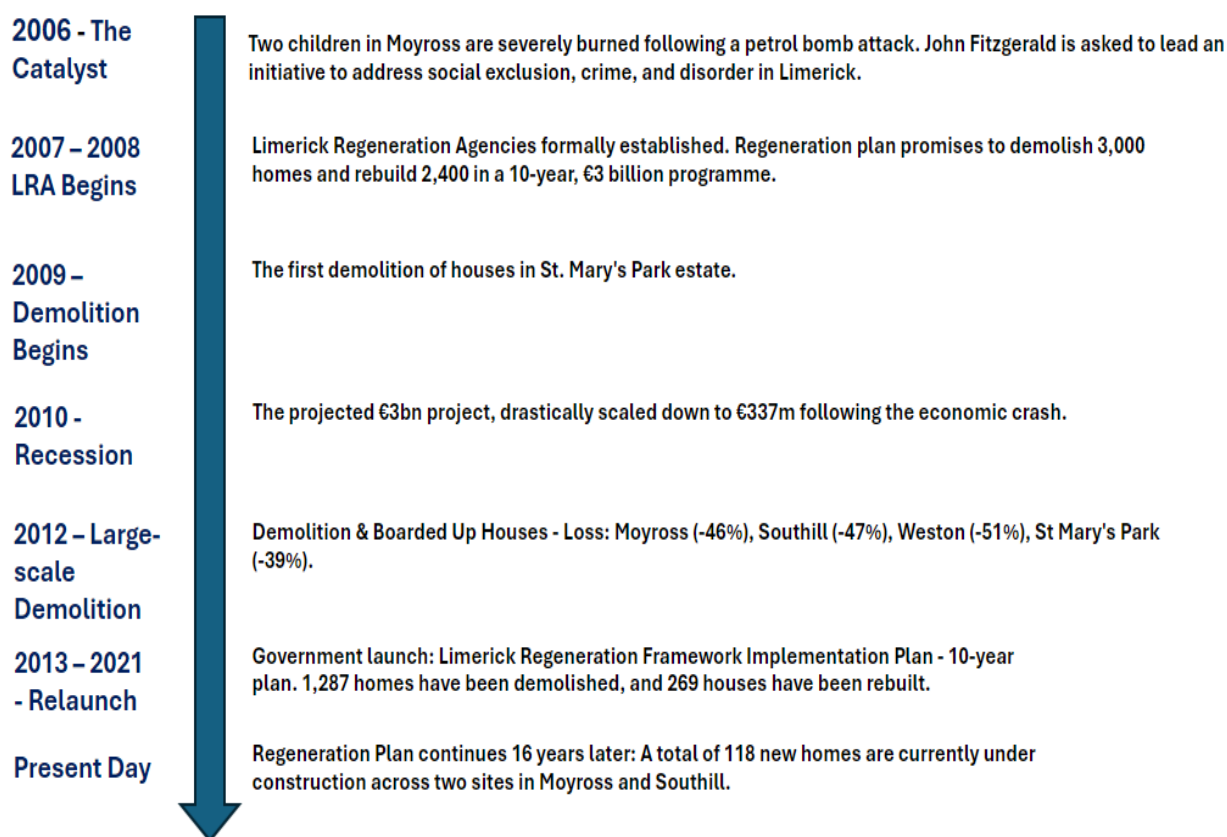


Figure 5.2 Timeline of Regeneration - Key Dates and Events.

5.4.1 The Fallout of Regeneration on the Physical Environment of the Estates

The Regeneration policy was originally designed to create:

Safe & sustainable communities where people of all ages enjoy a good quality of life, a decent home and feel a strong pride of place. Well serviced and attractive neighbourhoods will be fully integrated with the social, economic and cultural life of Limerick (Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan, 2008).

The reality was very different and economic downturn early into the project caused devastating impacts; estates became insecure and polluted, rat-infested abandoned houses led to squalor and these neighbourhoods became sources of further social exclusion (O’Dea, 2012). The ideologies of Regeneration had in reality become the exact opposite. Residents of the four estates since the start of demolition of houses by local authority, have lived in stark conditions, through house demolition and boarded up houses, the estates transformed for the worst. Southill residents interviewed by Limerick Regeneration in 2012, on their perspective on abandoned properties responded with:

They are a target at the moment as there is not a day when you will not see the fire brigade going onto the hill.

These houses are also been used for dumping and this is not right for the people who live next door and have to pay for their rubbish to be collected also you have rats.

About time eye sores are gotten rid of, boarded up houses encourages anti-social behaviour, dumping, breaking into and upsetting residents.

(Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2012, p.378)

In similar response as the Southill residents, when individuals from Moyross, St Mary's Park and Weston were asked about their living conditions in 2012 by the Limerick Regeneration Agency, responses were:

There is a major problem in many houses in Moyross and these need to be addressed as soon as possible. There are many residents living in what can only be described as inhuman conditions. I have personally witnessed mould growing on walls, ceilings & floors up to nearly an inch thick in places (Moyross Resident, Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2012, p.407).

I feel is very unfair that we had to live in a Regeneration area where the houses were being knocked all around us and damage to the roads being ignored. To finally be told that the best we can expect is for 80-year houses to be refurbished, that are built with mass concrete and almost impossible to keep warm. I would like to state clearly that I feel that we have been badly let down by the Regeneration Committee (St Mary's Park Resident, Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2012, p.392).

It's so horrible to have to look at derelict houses every day, it's depressing, the sooner they go the better (Weston Resident, Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2012, p.381).

The physical environments fell into states of degradation and neglect, by 2012 estates had lost between 40% and 50% of their 'lived-in' properties over a four-year timeline (Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2012).

From the lived experience perspective in the research, this is a policy that did a lot of damage in the interim for the four sites. It served to wipe out avenues of people who had lived in these estates for multiple generations through demolition and the boarding up of houses. Families and individuals were offered compensation of nearly €36,000 in return for their home, coupled with help to obtain a rental property. This left families in strange new communities, transitioning from property owners to renters, ultimately losing their sense of belonging and security. The sum of compensation did not provide these residents with any type of buying power in the private market. Furthermore, it removed chunks of working-class culture and history, and replaced it with a further layer of poverty, degradation, decay, and isolation in the form of empty lots, boarded up properties and unlandscaped greenspace

(Limerick Regeneration Agency, 2012). Once again Limerick political decision making resulted in social and cultural capital being damaged or eliminated for the people that remained in the estates. According to Blackett (2016) during regeneration the dispersal and relocation of many residents from Limerick's communities to other parts of the city and the county has contributed to the loss of community spirit within them. He also raised concerns about those who have become dispersed and relocated as a result of the Regeneration programme, and how they have subsequently been supported and catered for in their new communities. Bissett (2008) argues that relocated tenants in Regeneration communities experience hardships and challenges, namely 'feeling separated, isolated and estranged from the social networks they previously enjoyed' (p.12).

Originally the Regeneration plan provided for the replacement of 2,450 houses and the construction of 4,790 new ones. However, by 2021 a total of 1,287 homes had been demolished and 269 houses have been rebuilt but house building continues into 2024 with new houses becoming available to residents in Southill and Moyross this year (Limerick City and County Council, 2024). In the interim and almost two decades later, residents are left with conditions of isolated homes in the midst of derelict houses, greenspace and building sites, as can be seen in the images in Figure 5.3. Moreover, the programme has led to the decimation of social networks and community cohesion for the people who remain. It has had the worst impact of all the policies on social capital and community belonging. This will be discussed further in chapter ten and eleven.



Figure 5.3 Images of the Four Estates in 2012, in clockwise order, Moyross, Southill, St Mary's Park & Weston (Limerick Leader, 2012).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter argues that decades of political decisions have inadvertently marginalised these four communities by eroding their social capital. This erosion stemmed from policies that

facilitated the displacement of employed and educated families from these areas to more affluent and privately owned communities. This shift in demographics disrupted the social mix of residents, leading to a homogenisation of the population with higher levels of unemployment, lower educational attainment, and a greater concentration of single-parent families. As outlined in Chapter 2, social capital plays a crucial role in upward mobility. By fostering trust, cooperation, and a strong sense of belonging, it contributes to better health outcomes, lower crime rates, and improved educational attainment (Bourdieu, 1984; Sen, 2009; Chetty, 2014). However, current local and national policies are at odds with this evidence. They fail to prioritise the creation of strong social networks within communities experiencing social disadvantage and exclusion.

The key points in the estate's history that were particularly problematic were firstly, the two-tiered approach to the simultaneous building of St Mary's Park and Janesboro, stigmatising St Mary's Park from development as a lower-class community for lower-income earners. Secondly, the tenant purchase scheme that served to reduce Limerick City Council's housing stock in the most prosperous estates like Janesboro and O' Dwyer Villas further exacerbated the social divide and the availability of better-quality housing for social housing tenants. Finally, the surrender grant which could arguably be the most insidious of the policies (Power & Barnes, 2011, McCafferty, 2009, O'Dea, 2012) that served to cause the residualisation effect, where more affluent neighbours left the estates on offer of a grant to purchase their own homes in private estates. This seriously impacted the positive effects of social mixing and access to wider social capital. O'Dea (2012) argues that Limerick city housing has reverted back to tenement slum times, 'policy created to improve social housing conditions and to clear tenement slums has gone full circle and once more the state has created slum like conditions through the inhuman neglect of social property in Regeneration estates' (p.36). Exploring the impacts of Regeneration from the literature and reviewing the lived experiences, it is very obvious Regeneration to date has failed the estates. Furthermore, it has left a deeper layer of poverty not only in economic terms but in social and emotional terms for the remaining residents. The estates have been heavily impacted in regards their community networks and physical landscapes, with large derelict areas creating hubs of antisocial behaviour and increases in drug criminality. There have been no improvements in regards SES outcomes for the residents since the multimillion-euro development plan came into place in 2008, in fact Pobal (2022) report that these communities have actually got poorer with widening deprivation gaps for the residents. This illustrates that there are persistent poverty and social issues that local and national policy has failed to address.

Our Family Home is Gone.....

The avenue in which I grew up in Ballinacurra Weston was completely demolished, and all the residents were scattered to various areas of the city and county with compensation of nearly €36,000, coupled with help to obtain a rental property. I remember the day our house was demolished; it had housed three generations of my family, and it was wiped out in an afternoon. It was the last place we were all together as a family. My mother lost her home,

her neighbours, her friends, and her social networks so quickly as the avenue was demolished in a matter of days. She lived in that house since she was twelve and now in her seventies, she was moving from a city location with amenities within walking distance, to a rural location with no regular transport or shops nearby.

Moreover, she was now a renter again in her seventies, her home which was fully paid for was gone, and an unnecessary element of precarity entered into her life at this late stage. The sum of compensation did not provide my mother with any type of buying power in the private market. I watched my elderly mother, alone in a new environment surrounded by strange people. For the first time in thirty years, she was paying rent again, there were no social or emotional supports put in place for her during this traumatic event of losing the home her parents had reared her in and in turn she reared her family in. In reality a move that was forced upon her. This is one story amongst hundreds of others, a lot of her elderly friends were scattered to areas all over Limerick and two of her best friends died shortly after their move.



Chapter 6 - Methodology

I care deeply that my stories have potential to impact and improve social conditions through examining lives one at a time and encouraging voice person by person as well as through an explicit focus on social justice (Ellis, 2009, p.5).

6.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed in this study. A qualitative ethnographic approach was adopted (see 6.3), allowing for flexibility and contextual responsiveness. Recognising the value-laden nature of research and the importance of

subjective accounts, the study incorporated multiple data collection methods. Twelve ethnographic interviews formed the core data (see 6.3.1). Additionally, a digital ethnography of Twitter records from 2018-2022 provided a wider perspective on social class narratives in Ireland (see 6.3.2). This external data informed the interview questions and helped validate findings from both digital and interview data. Leveraging my insider positionality, autoethnographic data (reflections, journaling, vignettes) was collected (see 6.3.2). This approach, as described by Ellis (2004), allows for personal experience to connect the autobiographical to the cultural and social. To address potential bias, significant attention was given to reflexivity (see 6.3.4). The chapter explores the philosophical underpinnings of ethnography, including autoethnography and digital ethnography. It also discusses research design issues such as validity, reliability, transferability, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study.

6.1 Qualitative Research

Cohen and Mannion (1989) argue that quantitative research has its roots in science and involves collecting data, comparing statistics, and defining a situation in an objective manner. The quantitative approach tests a hypothesis using statistics and numbers. Creswell (2005) highlights that quantitative research typically aims to evaluate hypotheses or generalise results by measuring multiple variables. However, this study does not seek to evaluate hypotheses but rather to explore the lived experiences, social narratives, and perspectives of participants regarding social class mobility. The goal is to generate empirical data that can be used to build theory grounded in the social and cultural histories of the participants and their communities. Therefore, a qualitative approach was deemed more suitable for this research. Creswell (2005) defines qualitative research as being concerned with exploring the meanings that people attach to their lives through the study of particular groups in society, in terms of their cultures, norms and way of life. Furthermore, he identifies key features of qualitative research that support the aims of this study. He purports that qualitative research is concerned with understanding meanings people attach to their lives (digital and ethnographic interviews), moreover, the researcher plays a significant role in the data collection (autoethnography) with a focus on the process rather than the outcome. Such an approach allows a focus on complex issues from the perspective of the marginalised and is therefore the most suitable one to guide the research and analytical processes for this thesis.

6.2 The Critical Paradigm

Critical epistemology and ontology both focus on the social and political nature of knowledge and reality. Critical epistemology underlines that knowledge is not objective but is shaped by power dynamics and social contexts. While critical ontology claims that these social, political, cultural, and economic forces create inequalities and injustices that require attention. The main focus of this study is on the impacts of social structures on individuals' push and pull factors in social class mobility from a marginalised background. The critical theory paradigm supports research which seeks to emancipate marginalised communities from their race class, gender, and religion (etc.) based on flawed social systems (Asghar, 2013). Therefore, this critical strategy can be used in the fight for social justice as it gives a voice to the voiceless in society.

Specific research questions arising from this study on social class, are concerned with the political and historical context, therefore, the critical paradigm was chosen to frame the work, as critical theory challenges the status quo and strives for a balanced and democratic society (Horkheimer, 1982). The critical paradigm derives from critical theory and goes beyond positivistic and interpretive theories with the belief that research is conducted for 'the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 26). A critical approach can act as a lens to help identify oppressive structures and dominant discourses that privilege some and marginalise others (McClaren, 2005). This is a vital lens for exploring social class mobility and identifying the voices of the marginalised to highlight their perspective on class issues and hegemony. Additionally, the critical paradigm not only highlights the factors that allow powerful social class groups to dominate the repressed classes of society but also strives for equality for all members of society (Asghar, 2013). Therefore, in examining social structures and how they support or oppress the participants of this study in their journey out of poverty, it was important to cast a critical lens over these institutions rather than merely describe their roles in the participant's lives. The paradigm allows the research to actively critique and promote social change by focusing on issues such as hegemony, oppressive structures, and power imbalances, which create barriers to progression and inclusive societies. Moreover, the critical paradigm allows the voice of the oppressed to be central in the research, and as the voice of the working-class participant constitutes the main corpus of this study, it was fitting to adopt this paradigm. Thomas (1993) asserts that critical ethnography seeks to reveal the hidden realities of marginalised groups and challenge the dominant narratives to provide a more nuanced understanding of social issues. The paradigm is reported as being flexible enough to adopt any methodology that could facilitate in the betterment of an unjust social system (Asghar, 2013). It is interpreted

by various researchers differently and avoids too much specificity and is therefore accommodating by nature in comparison with other paradigms that are more methodological and less concerned with the independent nature of truth or reality of life (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Additionally, this approach is rich in theory in relation to the areas of identity, power, and education which supports the research aims of this study by facilitating a focus on complex societal structures from the perspective of the marginalised. Following on this, Cook (2004) further supports the capacity of this approach to look ‘critically at the processes of social development from the viewpoint of the obstacles they pose for human flourishing’ (p.418). Thus, the critical paradigm aligns with the philosophies underpinning qualitative research and the ethnographical approach chosen for this study. Finally, the critical paradigm demands of the researcher to be more reflective about their own role and impact as researchers. It emphasises the need of researchers to acknowledge the ethical implications of their work and furthermore, strive to conduct research that is accountable to the communities they work within.

Consequently, this study is focused firstly, on addressing the need for social change in Regeneration areas of Limerick city, secondly, using the voice of the marginalised to develop understanding on the reality of living in these communities when trying to build a life a person has reason to value, and thirdly, a strong emphasis on reflective practices to ensure the communities in the study are being represented in a fair and objective manner. Thus, the main tenets of the critical paradigm support and frame this work.

6.3 Research Methodology & Methods

As a methodology, ethnography observes people in their own environment to understand their experiences, perspectives and everyday practices. This provides an insight into a particular context, group or culture from the participants’ perspectives. Thus, ethnography is a methodology that gives a voice to the marginalised and dispossessed, and it also complements the critical paradigm as it adopts a ‘clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices....and exposes the material effects of marginalised locations’ (Fine, 1994, p.17). There were two methodologies originally considered for this study: phenomenology and ethnography. Both have similar characteristics in that ‘they are both exploratory, and both use the researcher as the data collection instrument and they both emphasise the need to take a self-conscious approach to research’ (Maggs-Rapport, 2000, p.219). However, the main difference between the two methodologies lies in the purpose. Ethnography concentrates on the individual view, or the shared views and values of a particular culture, and the researcher is concerned with the descriptions individuals provide on their cultural world and affording

them the opportunity to recount their experiences on their own terms (Sorrell & Redmond 1995). Alternatively, the purpose of phenomenology is to create a new interpretation of the lived experience with an aim to uncover concealed meaning embedded in the narratives. Maggs-Rapport (2000) argues that in phenomenological research, the researcher constructs meaning from their own understanding of the data collected. Conversely, in ethnography meaning is derived from the cultures, norms, and behaviours of the groups in society being studied. The objective of ethnography is to collect data on the everyday, 'usual' experiences, and to gather opinions on specific aspects of the social or cultural world in a bid to develop differing voices on the same lived experience. This is unlike phenomenology where the objective is to unearth the 'unusual' in the lived experience and let new information emerge from the data. Despite the similarities in both approaches their aims are very different, and so, for the purpose of this study, an ethnographical approach is better suited for gathering data on social class mobility from Limerick's Regeneration estates, as it is socio-culturally situated. Subsequently, the three key defining characteristics of ethnographical data collection are firstly *observations*, which involved observing and documenting asynchronous text, comments, and interactions of people within the Irish working-class communities, and for the purpose of this research the observations were conducted digitally using social media. Secondly, interviews which were conversations with individuals within the Limerick Regeneration communities to gather their perspectives, experiences, and understandings of social class mobility. Thirdly, fieldnotes (see appendix 11 and 12) which were detailed written accounts of the observations, experiences, and reflections throughout all stages and data gathering in the study. Furthermore, fieldnotes were also used to inform the writing of the autoethnographic vignettes, which were personalised stories told from my own perspective on social class mobility from a Limerick Regeneration community which served to support the experiences commonly shared between myself and the participants. According to Sangasubana (2011) ethnography collects data in varied methods for validity. They purport that the process is holistic and dialogic since conclusions and interpretations are formed through information and feedback from the participants in the study. Firstly, the core of the data was gathered from ethnographic interviews which were conducted in a two-stage process. These interviews recorded the participants' personal experiences of upward social class mobility, and these accounts informed the main body of the research for this study. The first interview focussed on recording their life histories while the purpose of the second interview was to facilitate member checking in order to obtain feedback from the participants on the representation of their stories in the study. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985) member checking requires that as the researchers review the data collected, participants of the

research study are part of an iterative process for analysing the data and establishing credibility within the study. It serves to mitigate for researcher bias and helps identify areas such as errors in interview transcripts and misinterpretations of participants' stories.

Secondly, these stories were supported and strengthened by digital ethnographic observations, which comprised of gathering and analysing posts from the social media platform X to obtain a broader perspective on social class issues in modern Ireland. This data was collected through observing individual posts and group interactions on X surrounding working-class experiences in this country. Digital ethnography was chosen in lieu of traditional observations, as the lived experience intended to be 'observed' had already been lived. There is no state of observation as the upward mobility has occurred, and the new lives have been established for the participants. Therefore, there was no physical 'space' for observation as the desired outcome was to record and document a life journey, which happened over a long period of time. Hence, digital research provided a societal context and was adopted to gather data on differing perspectives of the same lived experience of social class structures in Ireland. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011) argue that this virtual ethnography is an authentic approach as 'the ethnographer should experience the sociocultural perspective of the research subjects regardless of how those experiences are mediated' (p151). Hampton (2017) contends that while traditional ethnography is limited to the present moment of the ethnographer's experience, trace or digital ethnography of existing social media posts can provide important aspects of the social world to study. Therefore, digital ethnography can complement other forms of ethnographic research (Tolbert & Johnson, 2019). In this case, the digital ethnography serves to create an observatory space to complete the demands of ethnographic research.

Finally, autoethnography was conducted, through the documentation of autobiographical vignettes to support the research with my own accounts of the lived experience of upward mobility. Autoethnography, was carried out using diaries and fieldnotes as the main parts of the methodology. Reflections were then recorded and collated through notes from readings, interviews, and the recounting of memories. These were analysed in the final year of the research and the Pritard (2013) framework, which is discussed in greater detail below was applied in the construction of the vignettes to ensure validity of approach through structure and reflexivity. Nine vignettes were selected from the collection based on their relevance to the key research themes. These vignettes were strategically placed at the end of the corresponding chapters, aligning with the thematic focus of each section. This approach ensured a balance between the participants' voices and my own narrative, allowing their

stories to remain central while my personal experiences served to enhance and support the overall research findings. Ellis & Adams (2014) refer to this as an approach where the researcher's personal and reflective perspective is part of the analysis.

6.3.1 *Ethnographic Interviews*

This section outlines the process of interviewing the participants, from data collection and analysis to the recording of the findings. This method of ethnography formed the core of the study, and the following section discusses in detail, the data collection method, the transcription, data analysis, the categorisation and organisation of the data, and the writing up of the findings, with an overarching view on reflexivity and ethics.

6.3.1.1 *Data Collection of the Interviews*

In total twelve ethnographic interviews were conducted for the purpose of this study. A flexible approach was adopted for the interviewing technique, using a combination of semi-structured to unstructured formats in accordance with Creswell's (2005) recommendations in order to gather stories in the life history approach. The first round of interviews was conducted between March 2023 and July 2023. The second round of interviews conducted for the purpose of member checking, was completed between December 2023 and February 2024 to ensure all participants were satisfied that their stories were being represented in a true and meaningful manner. Consequently, interviews were transcribed and summarised in both textual and visual format for the purpose of member checking (see section 6.3.1.3) and to address any researcher bias. Visual format was structured in image maps (see appendix 4), which involved the use of small visual representations of the main points and milestones of the interview stories shared, these visuals were mapped onto a page side by side, similar to a comic strip format. These were used to record the key images that represented the most salient points of the participants' stories of social class and were created from their rich discussions and descriptions of the cultural representation of working-class Limerick which signposted their lives in their communities of origin. The images elicited from the interviews were then mapped onto this document in chronological order of the interview(see appendix 5). These images were then used in the second round of interviews with the participants both as points of discussion and to ensure by using both text and images that the retelling of their personal stories was carried out in a respectful way.

Both the theoretical framework and the findings from the digital ethnography guided the questioning strategy and approach. In advance of the interviews a list of draft questions was created to guide the approach (see appendix 2). The questions were prepared as prompts for the participants, as their life histories took precedence, and their storytelling dictated the flow and direction of the interviews. Ager (2011) purports that ethnographic relationships can enable a researcher to conduct more meaningful and useful interviews and argues that ‘encounters should take on the quality of recursive conversation, eliciting more and more detail with each exchange’ (p.204). Therefore, prior to all interviews there was an informal telephone conversation with participants to discuss the content of the information sheet and agreement form they had received via email. Research suggests that building a strong rapport and developing a relationship with the interviewees is considered important to support free-flowing conversation. Interviews were conducted around a meal, which was designed to create a relaxed context where the conversation could flow naturally. The interviewee chose the location prior to the interviews being conducted. The interviews began with a reminder of the ethics, and their right to withdraw or refuse any line of questions that they were not comfortable with. It was made clear to each participant that interviews would be recorded on a Dictaphone, transcribed using software and stored in the correct safe manner with passcodes and encryption. The interviews began with unstructured questions to allow exploratory discussions to develop (Creswell, 2005). Most interviewees did not require a lot of questions as their own life-stories naturally flowed in a very meaningful way. In some cases, without revealing personal details, a mention of another story or event told by another participant was shared to trigger memories and develop richer detail. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the data, reflexivity exercises were central to the interview process. This involved detailed field notes and reflections before, during, and after each interview to document key moments and address any potential biases that may have influenced the interaction.

6.3.1.2 Data Analysis of Interviews

The in-depth and lengthy nature of interviews generated a large amount of data, requiring a systematic approach to analysis in order to validly represent participants’ lived experiences. The purpose of analysis is to provide insider insights and perspectives into how social class mobility impacts a person’s identity, the effects of growing up in marginalised communities and the personal factors and agency individuals used to overcome this marginalisation and poverty. To analyse the ethnographic interview data, Braun & Clarke’s Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) (2022) has been employed as it offers the flexibility for both inductive and

deductive focus on meanings in the themes. The theoretical flexibility of TA allows analysis to be informed by the chosen theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu, Sen, and Chetty as discussed in chapter two, who are concerned with legitimising the lived experiences of the working class in broader socio-political structures. TA's flexibility made it an attractive choice with which to frame my research questions, which have elements of deductive and inductive approaches within its structure. A further reason for using Braun & Clarke's (2022) analytical method is due to the fact that one of their core assumptions is that researcher subjectivity is a primary tool in the process. The authors assess that 'subjectivity is not a problem to be managed or controlled, or to be gotten rid of but should be understood and treated as a resource for doing analysis' (ibid, p.8). As an insider researcher, this managing of subjectivity is of utmost importance, therefore, using an analytical tool that not only addresses bias but also sees the value in insider researcher is important in creating robust methods for data management.

Braun & Clarke (2022) advocate a five-step process for qualitative data analysis, which was used for this study. The following section outlines this process and details the specific steps that were followed while employing the technique.

The process for data explication during the analysis stage consisted of the following phases

1. Dataset Familiarisation
2. Data Coding
3. Initial Theme Generation
4. Theme Development & Review
5. Theme Refining, Defining, & Naming

Phase One: Dataset Familiarisation

First, the data was organised and prepared for analysis, and interviews were then transcribed using Microsoft Transcript Software from Office 365. Audio files, transcripts and field notes (as discussed in 6.3.1.1) were reviewed for familiarisation but also to get a 'general sense' of the overall meaning (Creswell 2014, p. 196). All interviews were listened to a second time with their transcripts to take additional notes and develop imagery or visual representations of the participant's most important aspects of their lived experiences and poignant images of working-class culture that were described during the interviews. These summaries and images were also used for the purpose of member checking, to ensure all stories were being represented in a meaningful way. This encourages active participant engagement and fosters more in-depth data through collaborative discussions (Umoquit et al.,2013). Sahakyan (2023) argues that this approach, when used as a member reflection tool makes research

‘more participatory leading to mutual learning and more collaboration between the researcher and participants and, as a result, contributing the quality of research (p.690) (See Appendix 4).

Phase Two: Data Coding

An initial coding of the interview data was conducted for deeper familiarisation and connection to the participant’s responses. NVivo software was used to help with the coding, making the data easier to catalogue and manage. Furthermore, NVivo supported the data analysis through the organisation and the storing of codes generated, the advantage of which is that it helps to keep data wieldy (Robson 2011). One hundred and twenty-nine nodes (categories or codes in NVivo) were created from line-by-line analysis of the transcripts along with the fieldnotes and observations and mainly comprised of descriptive categories which were the most relevant data related to the research questions (See Appendix 5). These were generated by reading the interview transcripts multiple times and finding meaningful statements that could be ‘tagged’ by relational relevance to the research. Braun & Clarke (2022) claim this process creates a system that differentiates between meanings, adding to the rigour of the project as this level of engagement with ‘meaning across an entire dataset ensures theme development is based on robust and detailed analytical interrogation’ (p.54). A ‘coding run’ (ibid) was conducted two further times to ensure codes were relevant and made sense, and on these ‘runs’ all the data in each code was re-read to develop a sense of accuracy and relatability to the tag or code the data had been given. Braun & Clarke (2022) suggest two reflective questions at this point to ascertain that the codes are sufficient in developing representation of the data. The first question asks whether the codes identified capture meaning in a distinct manner. The second question asks if the codes provide an indication of the researcher’s analytical perspective of the study. Both of these questions were used as guides in deciding whether to move to the next phase. This process ensures a thorough and accurate representation of the dataset to be analysed. Once these steps were completed, the codes were then refined into data subsets finalised, and collated.

Phase Three: Initial Theme Generation

At this stage, all codes along with their data subsets were printed off and placed in no particular order in a designated physical space. This space was then used to reorganise and group the codes in a more meaningful and connected manner. Codes were physically placed together based on their commonalities, connections, and relevance to the theory and research questions. Braun & Clarke (2022) describe this stage as the shift from smaller units of

meaning to bigger patterns of meaning i.e., themes. Codes were clustered to create potential themes which were related to each other or to the relevant theory. These evolving patterns form 'clusters' of information which are topics that were discussed by multiple participants. The next step involved the mapping of the clusters in order to find commonalities and links between them, and this process eventually led to the development of initial themes. To support this iterative process colour coding was used to identify the most prevalent codes in regard to the frequency of participant mentions. The codes were then segregated according to the number of mentions by each of the participants, going from those that were mentioned by all of the participants down to those mentioned by less than a quarter of them. This allowed the more important themes to take precedence and focus, and the least relevant theme in regards mentions (<25%) and deficit in their relationship to theory, were abandoned (see appendix 6).

Phase Four: Theme Development Review

The technique of drawing thematic maps by hand was used at this stage of the analysis (see appendix 7), Braun & Clarke (2022) describe these maps as visual representations that illustrate the relationships between identified themes and their subthemes within a research dataset. They recommend this as an analytical tool, as its application has three uses for researchers: it helps them in 'starting to think about provisional themes in their own right, for exploring how these themes might be related to each other and finally to start considering the overall story of analysis' (p.85). The mapping was used to classify more salient themes and their subthemes, and at this point, fifteen provisional themes were identified from the data. All relatable data was organised into distinct and relevant themes. Each theme was then placed in a mind map for the purpose of visual representation and also to explore how the themes are related to each other (see appendix 8). This mapping process reduced the number of themes from fifteen to twelve (see appendix 9), with five overarching themes emerging as commonalities were established in order to create a richer narrative, further merging and moving of data to the related overarching themes was required. Smaller, less significant codes which were determined based on their relevance to the theoretical framework, were disregarded to ensure valid and distinct themes took precedence, and boundaries were drawn around the most important pieces of data and their contents to further refine themes. The main refined themes were reshuffled to include all subsets of data from the interviews that were relevant to them and were then renamed, reprinted, reread. They were further analysed using the theoretical framework and main research questions to establish their significance

and locate their position within the study. Subsequent to this series of steps, a second set thematic maps were drawn (see appendix 10).

Phase Five: Refining, Defining & Naming

A definition or abstract of the themes was developed at this stage to assess the ability of each one to connect with each other and to tell a story of the lived experiences of social class mobility. At phase five, Braun & Clarke (2022), encourage the researcher to ask key questions around each theme to develop a central organising idea, along with the boundary, uniqueness, and contribution of each one. Member checking and visual imagery were very important steps in the process at this point. This stage also saw the completion of the second-round interviews, while data and themes were revisited and considered in conjunction with the participants in order to gain their insights and feedback. This information was used to further refine and define the themes. Established themes were both layered and inter-related while sub-themes emerged under each of the themes. However, three overarching themes became apparent when all the data was reorganised, refined and defined. They are as follows:

1. the push and pull factors of upward mobility from the main social structures of family, community and education.
2. the role of agency and key personality traits in upward mobility.
3. the impact of upward mobility on the participants sense of belonging and sociocultural identity.

All three overarching themes were defined and developed into subthemes for the purpose of organising the findings in a cohesive manner. This organisation of the data sought to address the key questions from phase four in the best way possible, i.e., the themes are clear and distinctive, they are related to each other in a consequential manner and together they tell the overall story. By organising the themes in this system, they have the ability to represent the history of the participants in a meaningful way.

6.3.1.3 Member Checking

Lincoln & Guba (1985) regard member checking as the most essential element in a study as it galvanises credibility and validity of findings. Member checking was an integral aspect of this study and involved participants verifying the content of the summarised interview transcripts (Creswell, 2012). It was a two-step process, the first of which involved the scripting of a summary of the interviews in order to ensure accuracy. Secondly, an image map was designed using the vivid imagery employed by participants in the original interviews to describe their experience of working-class life and culture. Images were

sourced from stock images that represented the most semblance to the description the participants provided. Participants spoke in a very passionate and evocative way about their life stories and journeys in the original meetings. The conversations invoked rich descriptive histories, but also strong images of life in Limerick city Regeneration estates, and detailed cultural images that warranted more than textual representation. Imagery was used to add another layer of validity and reflexivity in the recounting of their personal and unique stories. It also ensured that the member checking was more participatory and that participants were involved on a more meaningful level. During the second meeting, the personalised collage of images (see appendix 4) was shared with each of the participants. The collage represented key moments and events in their lives, prompting discussions about how these images told the story of their life's journey in an alternative but equally meaningful way. While the participant explored the collage, a summary of the interview script was read aloud and then discussed and reviewed. This was to ensure that interpretations were valid and accurate representations. The participants really engaged with the images, and at times it was quite emotional, but it provided an authentic connection when revising the interviews. The feedback from the participants for this element of member checking was incredibly positive, eliciting the following emotional responses:

'You have captured my life on one page....this is incredible' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'This is so emotional...to capture these beautiful and sometimes difficult moments of my life on this page...can I keep it?' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'Can I keep this page and show it to my mother?' (Female, Northside, 40s).

This approach created a shared space between the participants and the researcher, which was honest, emotional that was honest, emotional and authentic, while the images allowed a genuine reconnection.

Sampling

This research has very specific participants, therefore, requires purposive sampling methods, which are based on exact criteria related to the research question, instead of random selection. Thus, participants were chosen based on their potential to provide insights and perspectives on class mobility from specific geographic locations in Limerick. All participants must have origins from the four study sites in Limerick city:

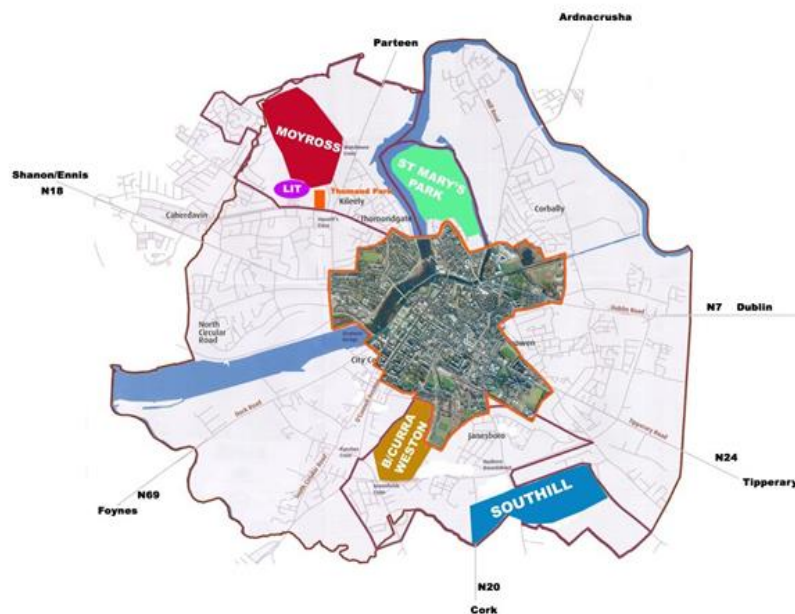


Figure 6.1 Map of Limerick from Limerick Regeneration Agency, (2012).

According to Paul Partnership (2016) St. Mary's Park, Southill, Ballinacurra Weston/Prospect, and Ballynanty/Moyross feature on the Relative Deprivation Index as some of the most disadvantaged communities in the country (see chapter four and five).

These four main target areas and their surrounds are the focus for the study and participants were chosen based on origin addresses in one of these four areas Initially as described above purposive sampling was employed in the opening stages of the interviews, however, as the interviews progressed snowball sampling was used to expand the participant group. This is a technique used in research where participants are recruited based on recommendations from

other participants. Therefore, participants in the study were selected on the basis that they are recognised to be 'information-rich' cases that have the potential to supply 'rich thick descriptions' of the experience being investigated (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). Interviews were conducted with a total of twelve participants, seven women and five men. Three participants were chosen from each of the four study sites, the equal spread ensuring equality of representation and diversity of data.

Selection of Participants for Interview

Purposive sampling was used to select the first four participants for the study (one from each community). Coyne (1996) argues that sample selection has a profound effect on the ultimate quality of the research, therefore it was important to find participants who could provide information-rich stories on their experiences of and perspectives on social class mobility. Collingridge and Gantt (2008) assert that participant selection should have clear rationale and fulfil a specific purpose related to the research question. Thus, the theoretical framework of the research served as a guide in choosing the best possible candidates for the study. As previously discussed, all participants had to have a very specific address of origin from one of the four study sites in Limerick city. Secondly, they had to meet the criteria of experiencing upward social class mobility with a subsequent move to a destination address in an area deemed to be predominantly middle-class. The last criteria for the selection of participants were the requirement that they had to use education of skill-based training to become upwardly mobile. To further refine the selection process and ensure the participant would be as beneficial as possible to the study, the age of participants was also a factor for consideration. Chetty (2017) argues that to correctly ascertain a person's new class position they must be thirty years or older to apply the socio-economic metrics of characteristics such as occupation, income, address, etc. Therefore, all participants were considered based on this minimum age requirement in order to fulfil Chetty's theory on mobility and were aged between thirty and sixty.

The target number of people involved in this study was decided based on guidelines from theory, previous ethnographic studies, and complemented the other two elements of data collection in the digital and autoethnography. Charmaz (2014) maintains that a 'small sample can produce an in-depth interview study of lasting significance' (p.108). A sample of twelve was considered to be an acceptable option as it allowed for equal representation across the four neighbourhoods but also allowed for realistic data management. The ethnographic interviews were in-depth and lasted between one and half to two hours, thus, providing large

volumes of data. The first four participants were selected because they each represented a neighbourhood of origin and had subsequently moved to a destination address deemed middle class, were within the correct age range, with class mobility being the result of education or skills training. Prior to all the interviews, meetings were arranged by phone or in person with the participants in order to build trust and a relationship with them and ensure each participant had a solid understanding of the purpose of the research, their own role and my motivations. Information sheets and consent forms were emailed to all individuals prior to interview and a printed copy was also furnished to them on the day.

Following the snowball sampling approach these four participants referred or introduced the researcher to other potential participants. All recommended participants were required to meet the inclusion criteria. In general, this approach worked extremely well, as original participants enjoyed telling their stories as well as the interview process, and were therefore, eager to advise others to participate in the study, ensuring more genuine engagement.

Negotiating Access

Access is a process. It refers to your acquisition of consent to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require, and do all of this for whatever period of time you need to satisfy your research purposes.

(Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 33)

The MIREC process made a rigorous evaluation of the research plan. The aim of this application is to familiarise the ethics committee with the research design and process, disclosing information on the research methods, participants' profiles, acknowledgement of potential risks and an assurance that ethical procedures will be adhered to minimise any of these risks or harm.

Creswell (2005) places honesty, fairness, accuracy and protection of human subjects at the centre of all research practice. Therefore, ethical considerations surrounding anonymity and confidentiality were of paramount importance to this study.

The second access issue is with the participants, as an essential characteristic of ethnography is building a strong rapport and connections, as the methodology demands prolonged relationships compared to other methodological practices. Consequently, ethnography can be viewed as complex as gaining access involves entering a field of study and establishing relationships with research participants (Leigh, 2021, p.1). Several ethnographic studies reveal that gaining access to data requires researchers to establish roles that participants can

relate to by first gaining cooperation and trust (Berg, 1998). Moreover, Harrington (2003) purports that ‘ethnographers’ own identities are among their most valuable resources for forming connections with participants’ (p.606). Acknowledging the influence of social identity on research access is crucial. As a member of the Ballinacurra Weston community, I was able to easily gain initial access to four participants. Snowball sampling was then used to expand the participant pool across the four study sites. Burgess (1991) highlights that ascribed characteristics like age, sex, social class, and ethnicity can influence access to research participants. Similarly, Harrington (2003) emphasises that ethnographers often gain better access when they share social identities with their participants. Social identity theory examines the processes through which individuals label and categorise themselves and each other. This is relevant to ethnographic practice because it shapes whether, and on what terms, participants will grant data-gathering access to researchers. Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman (2016) illustrate how, as women of colour they negotiated their identities to gain and maintain access to the field. This demonstrates how a researcher's identity and positionality influences access and rapport-building in research. My shared social identity with members of the community facilitated access to gatekeepers and fostered balanced relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

6.3.2 *Digital Ethnography*

This type of ethnography is situated in the traditions of the original methods and structures of ethnography; however, it incorporates the use of social media to explore the lived experiences of certain phenomena. Participant observation in the field is a core component of almost all approaches to ethnography. Therefore, online observation is considered an adaptation of traditional ethnographic practices to a less defined boundary of ‘space’ and the study of digital media transforms the possibilities and boundaries of fieldwork (Ryan, 2017; Burrell 2009). Hine (2000) introduced virtual ethnography as a new way of bringing ethnographic trademarks into the realm of the online culture being studied. In modern society, social media provides a site of fundamental shifts in communicative practices, genres and modes, by allowing ethnographers explore conversations, interactions, comments, and emotions online without the need for observing in physical spaces (Bouvier, 2016). Bernal (2005) claims that in cyberspace ‘location is ambiguous, and to be made socially meaningful, it must be actively constructed’ (p. 6).

A preliminary study and analysis of social media outlets and their potential for genuine data gathering indicated that X was the most suitable platform to gather legitimate information on the Irish perspectives on social class issues, as it is most commonly used for opinion sharing

via textual structures, compared with other platforms which are predominantly image or video based. In 2019, X reported that it thrives on ‘short and succinct messaging’ with a 280-sign limit in its messaging approach, its discursive devices include hashtags, retweets and the @ character. The hashtags make posts searchable, and this tool was used to find posts relating to social class issues in Ireland. This hashtag search was initially a very broad search category as a strategy to ‘catch all’ comments and conversations surrounding class in Ireland. This strategy was purposed to build a sense of general themes individuals and groups were deeming relevant on social class issues in modern Ireland and then this was eventually narrowed down based on inclusion criteria. Hashtags are described as a function of flagging a subject and as a tool that connects users who share similar emotions or stories (Zappavinga, 2011). These types of social media applications allow multi-person interaction and engagements (Hogan, 2010). X allows its users to create and share content as well as participate in networking and it is also a platform where virtual communities can be formed, and ideals and identities forged and legitimated. Forms of expression are communicated through posts, befriending and liking others, exchanging comments, and the creation and sharing of audio-visuials. In 2012, Parker described X, as the fastest and most critical tool for reaching and mobilising people, for gathering data and responding to public reactions. In the twelve years since this research was published, X has enjoyed a consistent increase in its user numbers and in 2020, the CSO recorded that there were 1.5 million subscribers in Ireland, equating to nearly 30% of our population, indicating its far-reaching potential not only nationally but internationally. There is on average 500 million tweets sent everyday worldwide. Larsson and Moe (2014) contrast X with other social media platforms, which they argue are often dominated by socio-economic elites. Unlike these platforms, X offers a more equal space where individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds can have their tweets shared and liked, regardless of their social status. This democratic nature makes X a valuable platform for working-class individuals seeking to express themselves and share their perspectives. Therefore, in seeking the opinions and perspectives on the lived experiences of social class issues in Ireland, X was an obvious choice for digital ethnographic observations. The findings and discussions are detailed in chapter 6.

6.3.2.1 Data Collection - X (formerly Twitter) Narratives

As an insider researcher, I was very aware of my potential bias and the risk of my views and perspective influencing the narrative in this study. Journaling and diary-keeping were an integral part of my journey in a bid to confront my positionality continuously throughout this

study and acknowledge any potential adverse effects on the study due to bias. Prior to conducting interviews, it was necessary to get an outsider or etic perspective on the current landscape of social class issues in Ireland. Digital or ‘nethnography’ is a portmanteau of ‘internet’ and ‘ethnography’ (Bowler, 2010) and is a style of ethnography that is easily accessible, providing readily available information that allows the researcher to observe the Irish perspectives and opinions on social class structures in the country. This element of the study examines the interactional conversations on X surrounding social class issues in Ireland. The research is based on multi-participant and asynchronous interactions on the social media platform, with a focus on how the Irish social class divisions are discursively created and perceived by a wide range of people. According to Hogan (2010) social media are digital applications that allow multi-person interaction and engagements. Individuals create and share content and participate in networking, where virtual communities can be formed and ideals and identities forged and legitimated. Forms of expression are communicated through posts, befriending and liking others, exchanging comments and the creation and sharing of audio-visuals.

Figure 6.2. focuses on data drawn from X, analysing posts from 2018 to 2022. The conversations were from public Irish-based accounts using the handles or hashtags of ‘social class’, ‘class mobility’, ‘working class’, ‘cultural capital’, ‘social capital’, ‘classless Ireland’, ‘social class Ireland’, ‘Irish class systems’, ‘class and education’, ‘class and identity’. This selection returned a total of nearly 1000 tweets which is similar to data recorded in other published studies (Bouvier, 2016). Posts included for analysis were generated by almost 400 individual X users, some accounts tweeted several messages on the same topic. Posts were selected using the inclusion criteria that they must be (1) Irish accounts, (2) relating to class-based topics only, and (3) within the designated timeframes. This resulted in 620 tweets that fulfil the study’s aim of exploring the relationship between class and identity, the language used to legitimise class inequalities and finally the opinions and personal experiences of social class issues in Ireland.

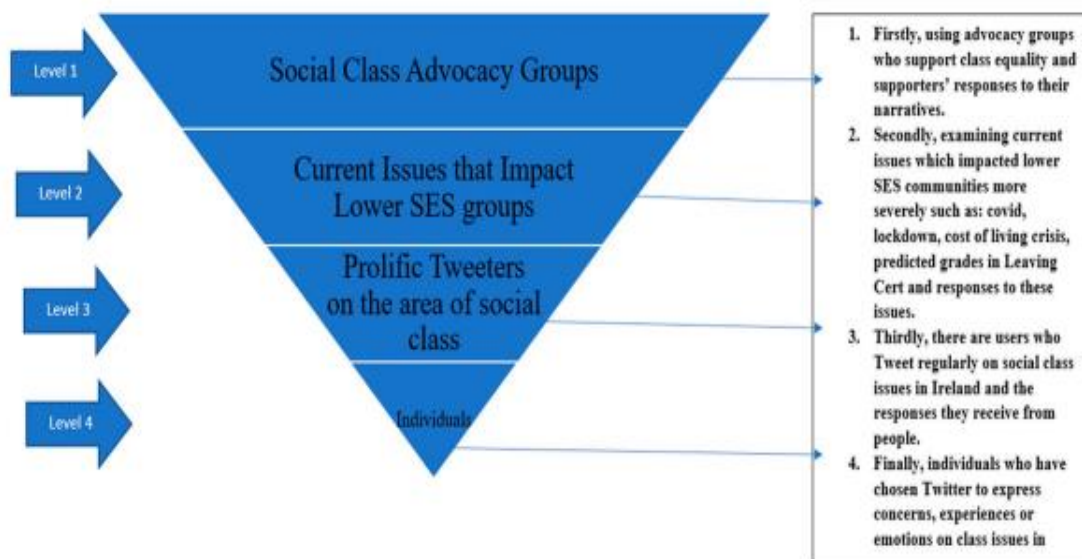


Figure 6.2 Inclusion Criteria for Social Media Search.

6.3.2.2 Data Analysis of Digital Narratives

In order to begin the process of data analysis, all 620 selected posts were then grouped thematically in line with Baxter's (2011) approach. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework was then used to analyse the posts, with the authors (2006) describing their analytical framework as being 'driven by the theoretical interest in the area' (p.84). The first stage of analysis focused on forming latent themes and identifying underlying ideas and concepts through interpretative work (Braun and Clarke (2006). This was followed by grouping common themes to form initial codes. Charmaz (2014) states that initial codes provide the researcher with tools for interrogating documents, maintaining that 'it shapes the analytic frame from which you build the analysis' (p.113). This in-depth coding ensures deep engagement and continuous interaction with the data, using the recording of fieldnotes (see appendix 11 and 12) as an integral part of the process from the beginning. According to Charmaz (2014) this provides the researcher with 'space to become actively engaged in the materials, to develop ideas and engage in critical reflexivity' (163).

Once all initial codes were extracted, they were colour coded according to repetition or points of relevance to the research topic. They were then organised into a table according to colour codes, analysed and provided with an in-vivo code, which is a term used to capture the meaning of the grouped initial codes (Charmaz 2006). These grouped codes were then reviewed further to examine connectivity and relationships to the research. The most prevalent were chosen as focused codes for potential themes,

while the remaining codes were discarded at this stage, ‘attending to focused coding through making informed choices from your initial codes can give you the skeleton of your analysis’ (Charmaz 2014, 141). As emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2006), the way in which themes were interconnected, and their overall story began to emerge at this stage of analysis. As the data was continuously edited throughout the process, further field notes were developed as a number of main, distinct themes emerged. The most relevant focused themes were extracted and drawn into a thematic table to explore further points of connectivity, all the while continuing with the practice of fieldnotes to stay in touch with the data. Such an approach is recommended by Saldana (2016) who argues that codes should be used as a prompt to evoke reflection on deeper and complex meanings and connections. When all comments were grouped in their focused themes, five categories of recurring themes relating to social class issues in Ireland emerged, which is discussed in chapter seven in greater detail.

6.3.3 *Autoethnography*

Ellis and Bochner (2003) describe autoethnography as the looking back on oneself (auto) and critically examining the ‘self and other’ interactions (ethno) with the aim of discovering and exploring the autobiographical experiences that shapes one’s research practice (graphy). It has a focus on autobiographical writing based on memories, thoughts, and emotions in a bid to understand an experience of culture (Ellis, 2004). She maintains that it is a process of emotional recall and self-questioning, with the researcher being the central focus of research analysis. Therefore, for this study autoethnography was an obvious choice as it provided a viable methodology for weaving my own embodied cultural experiences into the other ethnographic methods chosen. It allowed me to create a space where my experiences and voice were used to reinforce and bolster the data findings and analysis. Furthermore, it provided an avenue to explore the insider perspective in a reflexive lens.

Autoethnography has the same ethical challenges as other forms of research. The content requires careful adherence to ethical guidelines in order to protect the participants of the stories in the same manner the interviewees are protected, especially when the members of the autoethnographic accounts are loved ones and personal stories detailing sensitive issues are being shared. Relational ethics are heightened for autoethnographers (Ellis, 2007) and in using personal experience autoethnographers not only implicate themselves with their work, but also close, intimate others (Adams, 2006; Ethertington, 2007). A more distinct challenge for autoethnography is the acceptance of the legitimacy of the approach and its merits in research, as some disregard it as a method for being too subjective to hold weight in a study. The approach itself is relatively new to the social sciences, and thus, requires robust

structures and theoretical frames to ensure the biographical accounts used in the study are valid and support the data from the other methods in a valid and effective manner. Van Manen (2014) provides a set of guidelines for writing strong narrative pieces. He characterises autoethnographic vignettes as short and simple, descriptive of a single incident and recommends that the story should begin close to the main experience and finish on an impactful part of the story. He claims that these characteristics are ‘a set of guidelines for gathering powerful narrative material or for editing appropriate lived experiences’ (p.252). Pritard (2016) developed a structure for autoethnographic vignettes as an extension of van Manens’ with an additional focus on emotional response and reflexivity, which she describes as a structured vignette analysis. Her structure builds on van Manen’s work on autoethnography by creating a six-step approach to vignette writing, suggesting that this analytical approach allows ‘a collaborative journey between the author and the reader’ (p.2). Pritard developed this system as ‘a broad framework which future researchers could utilise in their research process’ (p.15). She states that effective biographical accounts need to have the following elements: phases, context, anecdote, emotional response, reflexivity, strategies developed, and conclusive comments on layers.

It is an effective framework for my study as it emphasises the need to address the context with the emotions of the story in a reflexive manner. As an insider researcher, every stage of the data collection process is crucial but none as much as when I am recalling my own experiences of class mobility and how it supports the other ethnographic data collected. Therefore, to write my own accounts of class, the work of both these authors were drawn upon to characterise the vignette structure (van Manen, 2014) while a structured vignette analysis was utilised (Pritard, 2016) to create a systemic approach to construct the stories. However, only the first four steps of Pritard’s six-step approach have been used for this study as the final two steps are related to actions in practice which was a feature of her own autoethnographic accounts of teaching in a developing country. This was the only adaptation made to the framework.

6.3.3.1 Autoethnographic Vignettes

In total, nine short narrative texts were produced with self-designed imagery using AI and have been organised thematically according to the research aims and emerging research themes. Moon & Strople (2021) define autoethnography as a method for reimagining our

experiences by reinterpreting them within specific cultural contexts. Therefore, this method was incorporated to enhance reflexivity, acknowledging my own positionality and how my background had potential to influence the research questions, interpretations, and findings. This transparency fosters credibility and trust by allowing readers to understand my perspective. By sharing personal experiences, I aimed to build empathy and create a more engaging and relatable narrative. Moreover, my personal experiences provided valuable insights into the social, cultural, and historical context of the study. Drawing inspiration from Moon (2021), who advocates for incorporating diverse forms of representation, such as images and multimedia, to challenge traditional text-based approaches to qualitative writing, this study employs imagery to reinforce the representations of my lived experiences within the vignettes. This approach aims to challenge dominant epistemologies in qualitative research by employing counter-narratives and art-based inquiries, as suggested by Moon & Strople (2021). Auto-ethnography is regarded as a politically conscious act in uncovering and revealing issues that would not otherwise have been made apparent using other research methods (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010). It is a research method that is crucial in representing autobiographical experiences and reflexive thoughts in a meaningful way. Pritard (2016) claims that autoethnography retrospectively and selectively indicates experiences based on membership of a culture or owning a specific cultural identity. My autoethnography reflects my experiences as a member of a working-class community in Limerick City. These biographical accounts captured my experience of working-class life together with dealing with socioeconomic poverty and social exclusion while growing up in a Regeneration estate. The accounts are complementary to both the ethnographic interviews and the digital ethnography to ensure all the research data was interconnected and linked. Vignettes were inspired by both pivotal points in my life, but also common histories shared with the participants which invoked memories, these were designed to complement the themes which were developed in the other ethnographic research methods. The following structure was employed to ensure a consistent approach to the writing of the vignettes and to strengthen their validity and reliability.

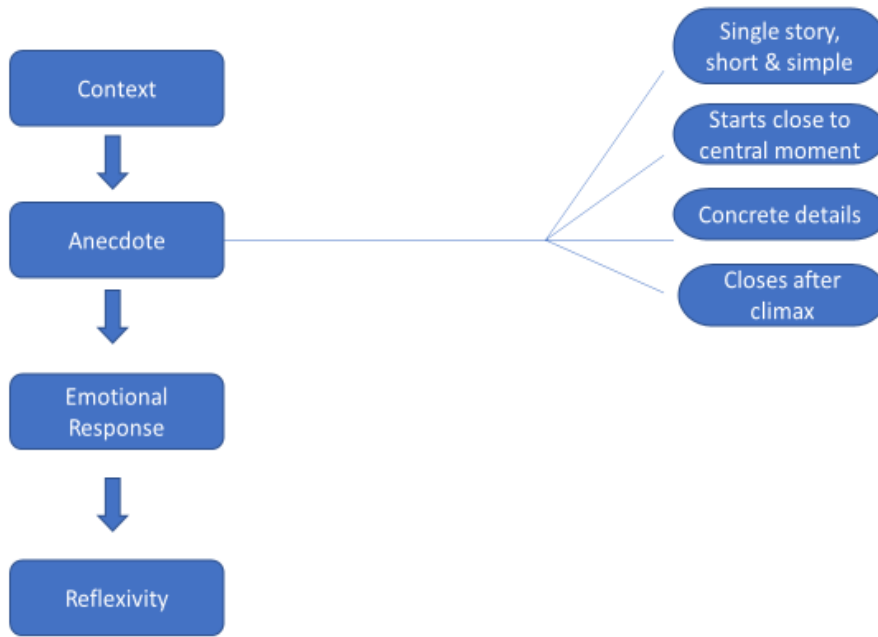


Figure 6.3 Adapted from Pritard (2016) and van Manen (2014)

6.3.4 *The Insider Researcher*

Positionality describes how your identity influences, and potentially biases your understanding of, and outlook on the world. It influences how research is conducted, its outcomes, and results (Rowe, 2014). Insider researchers have been characterised as either total insiders, where researchers share multiple identities e.g., ethnicity, class, or partial insiders who share a single identity or a few identities with a degree of distance or detachment from the community (Chavaz, 2008). Banks (1998) describes an insider as someone who has been socialised in the community and ‘endorses the values, perspective and knowledge of his or her community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate member who can speak with authority about it’ (p. 8). As I am part of the communities I researched, I would consider my position to be that of a total insider. I grew up in one of Limerick city’s Regeneration estates and have personal experience of upward class mobility. Furthermore, for the majority of my working life, I have been invested in the area of social inequality and marginalisation. This inside perspective can bring significant challenges to the research including the risk of researcher bias, managing power balances when interviewing participants as well as how to deal with any confidential information disclosed (Creswell, 2014). Mercer (2007) argues that familiarity and understanding of the culture, norms and behaviours can be advantageous to

the researcher but like Creswell, he also highlights the challenges that need to be addressed such as subjectiveness and biased assumptions. It was important to be reflexive and explicit about how my position could impact the research from the beginning. Thus, it was my responsibility as a researcher to be vigilant and aware of my assumptions and preconceptions when designing and actioning all elements of the project. McCarron (2011) argues that there are features of an ethnographical study to consider when taking this approach, such as contextualisation, multi-data sources, a small number of cases, and ethical implications.

The following actions were taken to address ‘insiderness’:

- *Reflexivity*: journaling and fieldnotes became an integral part of the study, to ensure I remained as objective as possible and represent the chosen group in a fair, transparent, and ethical manner. Reflexivity is a process where people better organise themselves, choose the best responses, test themselves and act and ‘change in the very act of responding’ (Freire, 1974, p.3). Chavaz (2008) purports that using critical reflection to navigate and negotiate insider positionality, helps to know where the self and the other begins and ends.
- *Maintaining standardised conditions and approaches to interview structures*: In the interview stages I provided detailed information in relation to the aims and objectives of the research to all participants to avoid any potential misunderstandings which could lead to conflicts. Participants were allowed to choose dates, times and locations that best suited their schedule which created a safe space for conversations. Interview structures were consistent in their approaches and methods to ensure all persons involved had similar experiences and data extracted from the interviews was both generalisable and transferable. Ethnographic interview strategies were employed; therefore, interviews were interviewee-led with very little intervention from the interviewer and no leading questions. All questions (see appendix 1) were either open ended or semi-structured, with only minimal prompts. The participant’s voice remained to the forefront, and early on in the interviews, in quite a natural and organic way, they developed a story-telling feel to them as the participants were encouraged to discuss their lives in a chronological manner and focus on formative points in their growth and development through their journey of social-class mobility. This fluid approach helped combat power relations in the interviews as the interviewee took the lead in their life stories.

- *Member Checking* (See 6.3.1.3) was employed to ensure validity in the reporting of information collected but it also invited feedback from the participants.
- *Employing multiple lenses in the research methods*; the perspective of the research participants was complemented and strengthened by the inclusion of social media narratives and the autoethnographic accounts, which created multiple lenses on social class experiences.

Van Manen (1990) highlights the importance of embracing subjectivity and realising biases when engaging with participants, ensuring their perspectives are accurately represented in the data. Therefore, through the self-awareness on the part of the interviewer, biases were continuously checked and addressed. Furthermore, in the creation of the frameworks discussed the research approach followed a consistent and transparent format in the collection and representation of the data collected.

6.4 Research Design Issues

According to Patino & Ferreira (2018) the validity of a study refers to the extent to which the results among the study participants represent true findings among similar individuals in the general population. Patton (2001) states that validity and reliability are aspects of research which qualitative researchers should be attentive to while planning a study, analysing results and considering the value of their research. However, applying criteria for measuring validity, reliability and generalisability in the qualitative paradigm can be contentious and difficult to control, compared to the quantitative paradigm. This section of the chapter will explore the structures and frameworks used to create robust research that is both valid and transferable in a generalisable manner. Patton (2002) argues that ‘absolute objectivity of the pure positivist variety is impossible to attain’ (p.93), but researchers may nonetheless believe that there are obligations for taking validity issues very seriously in the qualitative world, ensuring that practices developed in the gathering, analysing and reporting of data are done in a rigorous and structured manner. This ensures subjectivity is addressed, recording of data is fair and accurate, and robust findings are developed.

6.4.1 Validity

Internal validity is defined as the level to which the research findings represent the truth in the population studied. Therefore, internal validity is truth within the study, or the subjective

reality of the participants and external validity is truth in real life, or the extent to which you can generalise the findings to other situations, people, settings, and measures. The reality presented in this study is rooted primarily in face-to-face interviews, autoethnographic vignettes and analysis of narratives on social class on a specific social media platform. Procedures developed and employed throughout the research to ensure the correct steps were taken to observe internal validity are listed as follows:

1. Triangulation of Data - Cohen and Mannion (1986) describe triangulation as an ‘attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint’ (p.254). Due to the fact that qualitative research is susceptible to bias and misrepresentation it is vital to engage in triangulation to get the full benefit of results and provide structure to findings. Yin (2011) states that triangulation allows the researcher at least three ways of verifying a fact, this study used the *data sources* including people and media. *Methods* including digital, auto and interview-based ethnographies as well as *Theory* as it draws on relevant theoretical frameworks and concepts to substantiate the findings and the trustworthiness of the research.
2. Detailing researcher positionality to address biases and assumptions - clearly explaining my insiderness in the research at all key stages of the study. Communicating, acknowledging and addressing any biases throughout my work (as outlined earlier).
3. Debriefing with supervisors throughout the study - working with my supervisors at key milestones in the study to assess progress and address subjectivity through an independent lens.
4. Member checking - using summaries of interviews in conjunction with detailed imagery linked to the interview content, was developed and a second interview was conducted with participants to ensure that the recounting of their lived experience was being detailed in a fair and accurate manner.
5. The use of rich, thick, and meaningful descriptions within the research.

6.4.2 Reliability

Noble & Smith (2015) argue that assessing the reliability of study findings requires researchers ‘to make judgements about the ‘soundness’ of the research in relation to the application and appropriateness of the methods undertaken and the integrity of the final

conclusions' (p.1). Therefore, while validity refers to the integrity and application of the methods employed and the concern with accuracy in the findings, the assessment of reliability examines the consistency in the analytical procedures used in this study. Consistency in analysis ensures the research findings can be replicated in similar situations. Qualitative studies can prove difficult in developing strategies for reliability; however, it is possible, with Miles et al (2014) asserting that if the process of the researcher is consistent and reasonably stable over time, reliability can be achieved. Within ethnography there are specific tools that can be used to develop a research trail including, maintaining a diary to record concepts, reflexivity and research processes. crucial to this ethnographical study in order to ameliorate. Flick (2009) claims that reliability concerns can be abated by the continuous cross-checking of transcripts, notes, codes and other data collected. Therefore, detailed accounts of all stages of the research process were recorded and stored to ensure transparency and dependability.

6.4.3 Transferability

Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe transferability as the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to the contexts or settings with other respondents. Miles et al. (2014) argue that it is the written account of the research and the strength of the argument that the researcher makes that ensures that the findings will have depth and meaning to other individuals, space, and time. To establish transferability in the reporting of the data, key strategies were employed, such as:

1. A strong theoretical framework to guide the data collection as well as the organisation and reporting of the findings and to ensure broader applicability.
2. Multiple readers to create varied lenses on the data and encourage objectivity, i.e., supervisors, member checks, critical friend, chapter six was peer-reviewed for publication.
3. Adequate rich thick descriptions of the findings to create deeper meaning for the reader.
4. Use of imagery to aid understanding and visualisation of the unique cultures being explored.
5. Findings are in line with and connected to previous theory and research in this area.

6.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were extremely important as an insider researcher for both the ethnographic interviews and the digital ethnography. Approval from Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) was granted before data collection began. Close adherence to ethical considerations is crucial for this style of research and rigour, best research practice is central to the study, as participants will be sharing life stories and points in their life journey that can be painful to revisit.

The study is guided by three basic ethical principles:

1. Minimising Harm
2. Protection of Privacy
3. Respecting Autonomy

6.5.1 *Minimising Harm*

Coe et al. (2017) argue that assessments must be made on potential consequences of research and whether these consequences would, firstly, cause harm, and secondly, how harmful they would be. Ethnographers must have the ability to anticipate problems or issues that could arise particularly in the interview stage and try resolve them without causing risk to any of the participants. Relationships are key to this; by building a strong rapport with participants you can build care in managing the relationship. It was important for the research to be sensitive to the stories people revealed in the interviews, especially when they were emotional memories. I was always acutely aware of the responsibility I had towards the participants and any potential harm or consequence that could be felt by the interviewees or their communities. Therefore, the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of all participants was at the forefront of the process with their rights and interests coming first. Key considerations included interview questions and directions, a good selection of interview space and time, and convenience for all participants on their choice and terms. Informed consent was communicated and shared in an accessible manner, the right to withdraw was always shared at the beginning of the interview process, also the participants' right to choose to refuse questions they did not feel comfortable answering was reiterated. Once recording was completed, the participant and I would sit and chat for a further 5 to 10 minutes to debrief and check in with one another. We would bring the conversation to lighter points emotionally and discuss memories that we shared on our experiences growing up in council estates as I wanted to ensure we left each other in a calm and fond manner.

Member checking was carried out after the interview so that interviewees could review the transcript and image map and remove or add to any area, they felt misrepresented their story.

6.5.2 *Protection of Privacy*

A further ethical principle identified in the literature is the importance of protecting the privacy of participants. Coe et al. (2017) purport that there are three main areas of concern for researchers including:

1. Space and Information

Developing boundaries in the areas of space and information are vital in ethnographic research. In regards physical space for the interviews, settings such as homes, offices or classrooms can be off limits in observations, as they are deemed private by the interviewee. Therefore, despite holding an interview within these spaces, privacy has to be respected, unless a participant gives express permission to record information on the surroundings. There are topics that are considered private and ethically questionable and seeking data on these topics has the potential to be harmful, hence, before interviews a considerable amount of preparation and reflections were carried out to ensure that sensitive areas were not invaded with questions. For the purpose of these interviews, areas of family trauma, neglect or abuse were not addressed through questioning with participants although some participants volunteered information on this area.

2. Publishing of Information

A major ethical concern for researchers is what is made public from the data gathered in the research stage and how it will be presented in a respectful manner. The most important area for protection is the possibility of a participant being identified. To ensure this did not happen participants were anonymised and represented by a letter and number for identification, all identifying factors were redacted in the transcription of their interview. Participants were numbered and lettered according to their address of origin and their position on the interview list:

Zone A	Zone B
Participant 1 - 1a	Participant 1 - 1b
Participant 2 - 2a	Participant 2 - 2b

Participant 3 - 3a	Participant 3 - 3b
Zone C Participant 1 - 1c Participant 2 - 2c Participant 3 - 3c	Zone D Participant 1 - 1d Participant 2 - 2d Participant 3 - 3d

Table 6.4 Interview Identifiers

When reporting on the findings and analysis of the data, participants were discussed firstly using a pseudonym for their profiles, and secondly, in chapter nine and ten for their direct quotes they were described using a descriptor i.e., Female, Northside 50s. This was to keep identifying factors as unrecognisable as possible. On multiple occasions there was overlap with the descriptors due to the fact there was more than one person matching that detail; therefore, this group was alphabetised. For example, there are three females in their 40s from the Northside, so they became female, A, B, and C for differentiation purposes. Any issues around identification and privacy were readdressed during member checking to ensure all individuals felt secure in their role in the research.

3. Storage & Preservation of Data

To protect the privacy of participants, data was immediately anonymised after collection and stored in a password protected device and all folders were then encrypted. Folders were stored separately from any information gathered that could link the participants to their data recordings. In accordance with MIREC regulations data was not released to any third parties and all information was used for the purpose intended only. Names and contact details of the participants will be destroyed on completion of the study.

6.5.3 Respecting Autonomy

The most important element in respecting autonomy is the right to full disclosure, therefore all participants were provided with a comprehensive information sheet (see appendix 2) outlining the elements of the research including the purpose, intent, and objectives. This

ensured that individuals had full understanding of the study and what it entails, including the risks and benefits so that they could make an informed decision.

In addition, the right to self-determination was communicated, all participants were sent a consent form (see appendix 3), where they could independently decide to participate or not. The participants were made aware of the right to withdraw from the study at any point. It was reiterated that if they decided to withdraw from the study or avoid certain questions that there were no consequences. This ensured their autonomy both prior to and during the interview.

6.6 Limitations of the research

This research sought to capture the voice of the marginalised who experienced upward mobility in life, using the lived experiences of social class status to tell a story of hope and transgression. The study is valuable and can contribute to gaps in knowledge and policy by providing a positive view of working-class ability and resilience, therefore challenging the typical deficit language of political debate and research in the area of social class in Ireland. The majority of the research on disadvantage especially in the field of education, focuses on the school leavers and individuals who are involved in addiction and crime (Hargreaves, 2000). I aimed to reframe this mindset and focus on the positives or an asset-based approach, seeking the voice of individuals who escaped poverty, who stayed in school, who broke the cycle of addiction and crime, and sought lives of value (Sen, 1993). These stories have the potential to contribute to educational and community-based policies at both local and national level and also be sources of inspiration for young people in precarious and vulnerable situations because of their socioeconomic status in life.

There are a number of limitations:

- *The issue of representation in the ethnographic interviews* as there is limited diversity in age range of the participants. Although a gender balance was addressed, for the purpose of the interviews and to establish a relevant age that could accurately represent and speak of mobility participants had to be over the age of 30. This is in line with Chetty's social class mobility framework, which postulates that by engaging with participants aged thirty or more it is established that the estimates of mobility have stabilised by the time a person reaches this age, and accurate representation can be deduced (2017). Therefore, the study fails to capture the voice of the younger person experiencing mobility from the four key areas of Limerick city and their surrounds.

- *The geographical location of the study is limited in representation* due to the localised approach of the research. The impacts of socio-economic disadvantage are social issues throughout Ireland and many people continue to feel social exclusion because of them. However, this study only captures the voice of Limerick people from specified geographic communities.
- *Sample profile of the digital ethnography research*, a far-reaching sample of Irish people were represented, however, this group could be perceived as more advantaged of the working class, due to the fact they have access to ICT, and the knowledge and language to use a social media platform for seeking legitimisation of their class issues in Ireland. The more marginalised and isolated individuals cannot be afforded the same opportunities, therefore, could not be represented in the study.
- *The survivor bias*, which is a limitation of the study, as the research focuses solely on individuals who has successfully achieved upward social mobility. This leads to the unintentional oversight of those who despite having access to similar experiences and resources were unable to overcome the challenges and barriers associated with growing up in deprivation.

Attempts to mitigate for limitations and biases in the study were addressed by using strong interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks, and a focus on systemic factors in social class not only the individual success stories. Social, economic, and political structures were also explored to assess their ability to enable or hinder upward mobility for different socioeconomic groups.

6.7 Conclusions

In this chapter the methodological rationale and approaches have being discussed and reviewed. It has been framed as a qualitative approach, set in the critical paradigm with ethnography as the methodology, encapsulating three ethnographic methods of interviews, digital, and autoethnography. Descriptions of the design frame, sampling and participation, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study have been detailed. It has advanced a comprehensive overview of the research orientation, and explored how the methodology complements the study's aims and objectives and served to answer the

main research questions in a meaningful and in-depth manner. Ethnography as a methodology, allowed the research to be respectful to the lived experiences of the participants. The method presented the opportunity to spend time with these invaluable stories and to represent the voice of the participants in a respectful and worthwhile manner through the interviews. Compounding the research was the autoethnography method, which provided my voice to be present in the research and use my lived experiences of social class to support and strengthen the data in a structured way. Finally, the digital ethnography supported my work in exploring the contemporary views and experiences of social class in Ireland in real time. These three ethnographies were reviewed, analysed and connected for the discussions and recommendations chapters with the guide of the theoretical framework.

Chapter 7 - Digital Ethnography - Exploring the Landscape of Ireland's Social Class System

7.0 Introduction

As discussed in chapter one, the purpose of the digital ethnography strand of the project, is to cast an additional lens over some of the social class issues prevalent in modern Ireland, specifically in order to address potential bias and assumption as an insider researcher. This aspect of the methodology builds upon the ethnographic interviews and autoethnographic vignettes to galvanise the validity of the findings and create triangulation of the data.

Tashakkori & Teddle (2003) argue that in using two or more independent measures in data collection, the confidence in the findings is improved through corroboration.

It is apparent from the social media narratives collected, that class continues to have a big impact on health, education, and political outcomes due to the continued and deep-rooted inequalities in Ireland. Bourdieu's multi-layered theory of class states that economic, social,

cultural, and emotional capital resources reproduce class by creating and limiting social networks, educational opportunities, and aspirations (Reay, 2006). This part of the research examines the conversations on X (formerly Twitter) surrounding social class issues in Ireland. The research is based on multi-participant and asynchronous interactions on the social media platform and aims to provide new insights into socio-cultural discourses produced around class, as experienced by Irish people between 2018 and 2022. This chapter highlights the conversations that attempt to highlight class-inequality and discrimination in Ireland. It explores how social media is used to challenge Irish political ideologies and the social constructs of class hierarchies. The intersectionality of class power and the use of social media to gather legitimacy of class structures in Ireland will also be analysed. The X feeds or posts are analysed using the Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis (2006) producing five key themes in the results, presenting issues such as political ideologies, education, media, class identity and Irish sentiments on class. Consequently, it focuses on how the Irish social class divisions are discursively created and perceived by a wide range of people. In relation to the working-class people and communities where their voices are too often powerless due to marginalisation in the mainstream media. It is therefore not surprising that working-class individuals and social justice activists use social media platforms to highlight class issues, seeking an end to the discrimination faced by working-class people in Ireland on the basis of their social class position. Social media offers people from marginalised backgrounds a platform where they are free to voice their own narrative and express their frustrations, lack of power, and experiences of class discrimination. Social media is a form of self-representation on class issues which Bourdieu (1984) describes as an integral part of class identity. Using this form of self-representation, the study answers three research questions through the thematic analysis:

- a. What are the leading themes that X users emphasise on social class inequalities in Ireland?
- b. How do the posts articulate and call on users to empathise with the issues?
- c. How can we understand expressions on social media as an attempt to highlight social injustices in Ireland?

It is important to document these voices and perspectives as the debate in Ireland for adding social class as a protected characteristic in equality legislation builds momentum (IHREC 2023). This type of study highlights the need for class protection in the wider society, and this grass roots approach highlights the voices of the underrepresented in their discussions and debates on the wider questions surrounding Ireland's approach social equity and justice.

7.1 The Intersectionality of Social media (X) and Social Class

According to Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010) social media are digital applications that allow multi-person interaction and engagements. In 2012, X then Twitter was described as the fastest and most critical tool for reaching and mobilising people, for gathering data and responding to public reactions (Parker 2012). Parker's assessment of the social media platform still stands twelve years later as it retains its popularity and reach and sees an increase in its users year on year. X has 1.5 million subscribers in Ireland (CSO 2020), equating to nearly 30% of our population, which indicates its far-reaching potential not only nationally but internationally. Larsson and Moe (2014) noted that unlike other social media platforms which can be dominated by socio-economic elites, X is a platform on which individuals of any status can get their posts shared and liked as much as elites. Hashtags make posts searchable and Zappavigna (2011) describes hashtags as a function of flagging a subject and as a tool that connects users who share similar emotions or stories. Gillmor (2006) states that social media offers people an opportunity to share mostly unfiltered opinions and allows a greater variety of ideas and opinions to be available in the public sphere, thus providing a type of digital ethnography to produce rich descriptive data. One of the aims of this social media analysis is to discover how class-conscious the Irish are, by tracing conversations on X about class constructs. Social class remains an enduring focus of sociological inquiry. It stratifies people into hierarchical social categories and is typically based on the constructs of resources, authority, and expertise which relate to a person's position in relation to means of production (Giddens 1971). Contrastingly, for Bourdieu (1984) social class is understood to represent positions in social space and how people occupy this space is determined by their economic position within a system of production. Historically, Ireland does not have a strongly defined social class hierarchy, and the term 'social class' is rarely used in political debates. Muntaner, Lynch, and Oates (2020) argue that social class is a taboo subject in Ireland that is kept hidden, and if discussed, it is in euphemisms that hide it's the reality of its existence. This is compared to countries like the UK and mainland Europe, where class inequalities are an integral part of political debate. They make the point that in Ireland, 'when people talk about class-based injustices, they are accused of making political debates "ideological"' (Muntaner, Lynch, and Oates, 2020, p.3). Senator Lynn Ruane (2013) states that despite statistics pointing at social class issues in the country, as a society there is a failure to recognise the role class plays in accessing adequate healthcare, education and general life prospects. Therefore, despite a lack of obvious delineation or recognition of class structures, Ireland appears as divided as the UK and mainland Europe. In support of this, the analysis of the social media narratives surrounding

social class reveal that the class system is not openly discussed or acknowledged in this country. However, when Ireland is described as ‘classless’ on the media platform, individuals are quick to anger and articulate that their life experiences in this country would tell a very different tale. The reactions of working-class Irish people to an ideology of a classless country were emotive and almost Dickensian in description, indicating that social class hierarchy is a salient construct within Irish society. Bouvier (2016) purports that social media provides a site of fundamental shifts in communicative practices, genres and modalities. She argues that a study of social media and discourse needs to engage with the wider issue of power and ‘the nature of the power relations that they inhabit and how these may be influenced by shifts in the communications landscape’ (p.2). Therefore, the connection between social media as a source of empowerment in social class discussions needs to be critically examined.

7.2 Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the social media posts in an analytical way, Dean’s critical media theory is employed as a framework of inquiry into these conversations and observations. Dean provides a critical approach to digital media, examining the political implications of networked communication, which she terms as communicative capitalism and describes as:

‘A form of capitalism in which ... ideals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation are realised through expansions, intensifications and interconnections of global telecommunications’ (2010, p.4).

She hypothesises that it is the revolt of the knowledge class, fronted in a class war under the conditions of global communicative capitalism. Social media has changed communication according to Dean (2009) and she states these forms of communication are talk without response and are associated with individuals who ‘consolidate and support the most brutal inequities of controlled capitalism’ (p.4). This capital is based on circulation rather than content, where the importance of the message is incidental to the sharing of, repetition of, and reproduction of the content. Power lies in the circulation. There is intersectionality between the use of communicative capitalism through social media and social class issues. This capitalism provides voice and space for working class, who previously did not have collective strength and power in the mainstream media. From this perspective, the potential to share content on class issues and discriminations is thus extremely important in bringing underrepresented issues to the fore. The sharing of data through likes, shares or comments can help gather momentum on social class struggles and their recognition amongst Irish society. It creates an antithesis to mainstream media which is dominated by middle class and

privileged elites' rhetoric and cultures. According to Downey, Titley, and Toynbee (2014) the mainstream media is lending to the legitimisation of socio-economic stratifications that form the very foundation of a class society. Jakobssen, Lindell, and Stiernstedt (2021) find that the issue of class is invisible, downplayed, or silenced in mainstream media and journalism, which undoubtedly adds to the confusion surrounding the topic, and makes people reluctant to use categories of class to understand their own living conditions.

Furthermore, Dean offers a framework to understand the reasoning behind the rise in communicative capitalism and that is the collapse of symbolic efficiency, which is a societal rebellion against macro institutions and governance. She states that correlative to the change in communication is a change in subjectivity, 'formerly powerful markers of symbolic identity no longer organise action. As symbolic figures for politics, they have been critiqued, complicated, and pluralized' (2014, p.4). Zizek (1997) describes the decline in symbolic efficiency as a fading of a central force or institutional body of knowledge. He argues that scepticism has created despondency in governing bodies who in the past enforced ideas, values and identities, such as governments or religious organisations.

This waning symbolic efficiency leaves a gap which social media can fill as individuals seek truth and values from more local sources, beliefs and opinions and power can be achieved in the sharing and reproduction of ideas, and socio-political ideologies, and campaigns can build momentum and strength. Similarly, Bouvier (2015) proposes that this demise of central authority allows for the celebration of 'more localised identities, ideas and values as regard how esoteric they are' (p.4). Turner (2010) claims that social media has taken a 'demotic turn' where ordinary people have become a more visible and obvious part of media content, indicating that this allows those lacking in power in the traditional sense, an outlet to voice their opinions and find their identities. Social media is now blended into the fabric of daily life, furnishing new avenues for communication, new methods of maintaining, creating, or imagining cultural communities and identities and combining locally nuanced ideas, values and identities (Shi-xu 2014).

In summary, the use of Dean's theory on communicative capital and symbolic efficiency provides a framework for the examination of social media posts enabling an assessment of the ways in which individuals challenge central sources of power on class issues and middle-class ideologies that serve the dominant classes. By engaging in the empowering effect of the circulation of their content through likes, comments and shares, working-class individuals are gifted the opportunity of a global platform in which they can hope for awareness and legitimisation of their message through circulation.

7.3 Findings & Discussions

The data collection and analysis have been previously discussed in the methodologies chapter. This section will examine the five focused themes that emerged:

- (1) The Issue of Class in Irish Education –
 - (a) Reproducing Inequalities in Third Level - Capitals, Symbolic Violence & Accents
 - (b) Reproducing Inequalities at Second Level
 - (c) The Role of Educators in Social Class Reproduction
- (2) Challenging Power and Political Ideologies – The Lack of Symbolic Efficiency
- (3) Social Capital in Irish Society - The Class Divides in Ireland
- (4) Classism – The More Accepted Form of Discrimination
- (5) Legitimisation of Social Class Hierarchies in Ireland through Social Media.

7.3.1 The Issue of Social Class in Irish Education

Over 20% of the 1000 posts analysed related to people's encounters with, or perspectives on class in relation to the Irish education system. The personal accounts of individual's lived experience of classism at both second and third levels are rich and detailed, which helps to create a tapestry of information surrounding the relationship between class and education. Analysis of the posts reveals that third-level academia generates more discussions than any of the other education levels. Two of the main criticisms levelled at the sector is its inherently upper/middle class culture as well as the high barriers to access for people from working-class backgrounds. According to the Higher Education Authority (HEA 2019), access to the most selective higher education courses is heavily dominated by those from the most affluent (white Irish) families. These posts highlight that many students from working-class backgrounds only realise the extent of the class divides that exist in Ireland upon entering third-level education. Previously sheltered at lower levels of education on class divides as most students attend local primary and secondary schools with limited social mixing, third level exposes some individuals for the first time to a place in society where socio-economic backgrounds are blended in high proportions on one campus. In this setting, differences in social, cultural and economic capitals are highlighted.

7.4.1.1 Reproducing Inequalities in Third Level – Capitals, Symbolic Violence, and Accents

In relation to third-level institutions, working-class people predominantly posted their memories and experiences of exclusion and alienation due to their socio-economic background. Many perceive that elitism is celebrated in certain institutions, and without the correct social networks, college life can be a difficult path to navigate. Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller (2013) purport that middle-class university students use their capitals to maintain their advantages in college through the ‘acquisition, development, and mobilisation of their cultural, social and economic resources’ (p.94). However, working class individuals struggle to compete when their capitals and resources are limited.

‘Life’s most humiliating experiences can take place at university; classism runs through it.’

‘Third level institutions have become a manifestation of classism.’

Some posts despair at the lack of vision on the part of universities to fully address these points of exclusion. Working-class students feel the deep-rooted nature of middle-class privilege and the obstacles which can produce in progressing through college life.

‘Education policies are reproducing and keeping educational disparities.’

‘Colleges and universities need to tackle socio-economic diversity.’

‘Academia is not class friendly.’

McGarvey (2017) reasons that middle-class privilege is strongly evident across sectors of society because the characteristics of the dominant classes become more culturally pronounced than others. This is due to the fact; they use their privilege to ‘ascend to positions of influence and preside over a society that reflects their own interests’ (p.124). Research indicates that the power and space occupied by individuals in the world is reflected by key characteristics such as occupation, financial status and the networks of people they can access to gain socio-economic advantage. The currency of social class impacts on the space one occupies in their day-to-day lives, and how this currency can be exchanged for voice, respect and power. Delineation of class boundaries dictates what is considered higher currency in regards these capitals. ‘They maintain boundaries between themselves and lesser groups by delimiting the nature of tastes, legitimate middle-class, and then utilise familiarity with these cultural forms to exclude others’ (Veenstra 2007, p.16).

This has profound implications for working-class students as they struggle to find a space and voice within middle class dominated education systems, which prioritise and reflect middle-class values and capitals. McKenzie (2021) urges academia to allow working-class

academics to voice their own stories to avoid others reclassifying them. There were very interesting posts on the concept of a working-class space and voice in education, especially at third level, by individuals who described their own experience of attempting to navigate their way in academia. These discussions led to proposals that privileged academics and elites should refrain from representing and speaking for the working class in order to allow working-class students and academics the space and voice to represent themselves.

'Wouldn't it be great if we reversed the narrative and asked the more privileged to speak less and relinquish the space they already have, makes more sense than fighting for space that working class do not and may never have.'

'Do elites ever step back in academia and allow marginalised people take promotions, chair a meeting, sit on a panel or allow them to rise and occupy these spaces.'

'Working class are often the subject of analysis, the academic bourgeoisie appear threatened when they realise that we working class are more than capable to occupy this intellectual space.'

The working class are using X to challenge the hegemonic practices within educational institutions by voicing their frustrations and discontent at the lack of opportunity for career progression. They seek acceptance for the assets they can be in these institutions, asking for the unique capitals they bring to be acknowledged and appreciated rather than challenged and compared to middle/upper-class capitals. Crew (2020) echoes this view, challenging academia to further embrace working-class students and voices and to use their unique knowledge, culture and viewpoints to enrich campuses.

'Working class students and academics often live at the literal and metaphorical distance from cultural and social forms of capital. Yet they bring their own forms of capital to campuses. Higher education institutions need to recognise their capital is valuable.'

'Societal and institutional production and reproduction for working class academics.'

Other working-class academics seek to assert their value and belonging in academia and are highlighting how their strengths and characteristics only serve to improve the institutions they work in.

'My ability to speak my mind, to fight the system, to see the gaps in the structures were taught to me by the poverty I lived through. And by being given the opportunity to use

these skills in an academic sense are imperative.'

'The wealth experience of the working class has only the potential to enhance colleges and universities, their staff and the world, if given the right time, chances and support.'

Analysis of the online debates on this issue on the X platform in the Irish context, reflects the desire for a complete change of mindset on the part third-level institutions, they are asking institutions to adapt and be more open to and accepting of working-class cultures.

'College campuses need to be more open to working class, why do we need to conform, why can't campuses open up their systems to fit with us and not vice versa.'

'Third level institutions need to be more working class friendly, a shift in mindset from disadvantaged students needing to be college ready to campuses needing to be more student friendly.'

In summary, the posts highlight the demand for the world of academia to address classism and the lack of diversity by granting a space and voice to students and academics from all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, to create a more equitable experience for all students, third-level institutions need to create policies and structures that adapt to students rather than the current model which expects students to modify or hide aspects of their identity to suit the dominant culture.

A. Social and Economic Capital of Students

This theme explores micro-class differentiations, rather than discussing the macro or institutional level of symbolic violence. The posts concerning the social and economic capital of students are grouped together based on the experience of working-class people of class-disparity between themselves and their peers.

There is a greater diversity of socio-economic backgrounds in the student populations of third-level institutions in comparison to those at primary or secondary levels. This is significant for a number of students as it is the first time that they get to work alongside and socialise with individuals outside of their own class. Reay (2013) believes this gap is felt in college more because children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds are increasingly educated apart rather than together in schools that are predominantly middle or working class. The posts suggest that working-class students keenly feel the disparity between their economic positions and social capital, and that of their peers at third level. Major and Machin (2018) claim that these middle-class capitals acquired throughout life are

very marketable in both higher-education settings and career progression and can even aid social mobility more than education itself. They state that these capitals are generationally exchanged through family, community, and peer-group socialisation. In middle-class dominant sites such as colleges, this can leave working-class students feeling isolated and not relatable to their peers as their differences are magnified in third-level settings. McGarvey (2017, p.125) explains that ‘nuance gets lost in translation’ when people try to express ‘thoughts and opinions across vast gulfs in social and cultural experiences.’

‘In a class of thirty in college I was the only one with an accent and having to work part-time to support myself.’

‘In college my middle-class friends were always going out for lunch, some of their parents owned the properties they lived in near college, and they were always wearing labels. I on the other hand brought my lunch to college, went out less and had to work a lot harder to support myself.’

‘When I went to university a lot of my peers could not grasp how much I had to work to support myself, I felt judged but realistically I did not have financial parental supports, my parents were barely surviving.’

These narratives highlight some of the barriers experienced by working-class students pursuing a third-level education. Previous research has demonstrated that the high cost attached to participation in third-level education in terms of fees, student contributions, learning equipment and materials, travel costs and accommodation they can pose a significant barrier for progression (McCoy et al. 2009). Disadvantage permeates all areas of working-class students’ lives; it is complex and can alienate these students from their peers, leaving them to feel judged and looked down upon by such perceptions are not imagined discriminations: one X user shared their experience of being regarded as an outsider in their university because of their address.

‘I was asked in a Dublin University how I managed to get in there when I told a peer where I was from.’

B. Accents in Academia

According to conversations on X, accents are the strongest class characteristic and identifier that can separate and isolate working-class students and academics from their more privileged peers. Individuals discuss using digital technology like Google and YouTube to learn how to

pronounce certain words prior to speaking with middle and upper-class peers and teachers. In doing this, they can avoid discrimination and judgement by softening or altering their accents as they feel it links them to their address and social origin. A study conducted by Keane (2023) revealed that the social class markers predominantly used by individuals in her research included their physical appearance in terms of dress and accessories. However, for many working-class people, the manner in which they speak, and their accent stand out as principal indicators of their socio-economic position.

'On my first day of lectures I was called a scumbag for nothing more than my accent.'

'Sometimes the night before a presentation or event I sit on YouTube listening to the pronunciation of certain words to avoid judgement on my accent.'

'I was judged and asked how I ever made it to college by a person based only on my accent.'

As the above posts highlight, many working-class individuals are acutely aware of the effect an accent can have on the level of acceptance by peers from different backgrounds, and in the judgements, people can make on hearing an accent. Ashley et al. (2015) discuss the 2015 Social Mobility Commission Report which found that working-class candidates are often unable to gain access to elite professions despite having the relevant qualifications and skills due to informal 'poshness' tests, such as a candidate's style of speaking.

'Being asked to repeat something when you know the person heard you, but you have mispronounced it in your common accent. I see it, I feel it and it makes me feel like shit.'

'For all our progress on diversity and inclusion in education, accents can still be a huge barrier in classless Ireland.'

According to Sutton Trust (2022) accent is one of the most recognisable signs of social background. 'It can cue a listener to a speaker's ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, region, culture, or social class. For traits that are not visible, such as socio-economic status, accent is often the primary signal' (p.8). These X conversations expose the pressures working-class people feel to change accents to be accepted professionally and academically, with some loss of power and space because they are speaking less to avoid judgement. This anxiety and apprehension around speaking in front of peers has the effect of working-class people losing their voice, while also facing pressure to modify their identity and erase elements of their past. Gamsu, Donnelly and Harris (2018) state that accents are tied into uneven regional geographies of economic and cultural power, accents are used against the working class to

identify and expose them in middle-class dominated settings. Furthermore, they claim that the associations between intelligence and elite speech and accent are woven into class structures.

7.4.1.2 Reproducing Inequalities – Second Level

Cahill and O’Sullivan (2022) report that disadvantaged schools get the same level of public spending as private fee-paying schools, the latter having access to large financial funds, a grinds culture and ‘any other means that can be employed to cultivate success within a system that facilitates such inequalities of outcome’ (p.475). The Covid-19 pandemic drew attention to some obvious class disparities between fee-paying and educationally disadvantaged schools. One particular example of such inequalities was the implementation of predictive grades for the 2020 Leaving Certificate by the government, replacing the traditional Leaving Certificate points system, which could not run due to the pandemic and school closures. Therefore, in lieu of sitting the exams the education policy for these grades can be summarised as follows; the 60,000 plus students would be assigned a grade in each of their subjects of study based on four sources of data:

- Estimated marks and rankings from teachers
- Junior Cycle exam performance
- Historical national distribution of students’ results subject by subject (bell curve system used in all years for standardisation)
- Historical school data based on past Leaving Cert exam performance in schools across three previous years (DES 2020).

This last source of data caused the most upset amongst the public, as students in disadvantaged schools based on this statistic, faced potential downgrading due to educationally disadvantaged schools historically achieving lower results in state exams. Meanwhile private fee-paying schools with a tradition of higher grades would get inflationary results i.e., school profiling. A major pitfall with predicted grades was that a high-achieving student in a designated disadvantaged school now could see their results unfairly lowered due to their own socio-economic background while meritocratic ideology was ignored. In reverse, a privileged student in an elite school could potentially earn more points based on their socio-economic background rather than merit. This approach further compounded the inequalities of the Leaving Cert system. At this time in 2020, many Irish people took to X to express their grievances with predictive grades as pupils from wealthier backgrounds with access to grinds,

lower teacher–pupil ratios and result-driven structures held unfair advantage over students in disadvantaged schools. These elite schools are also very well supported by their students’ parents, who tend to have high levels of economic, social and cultural capitals.

‘Difference in fee paying schools and public schools highlight the two-tiered systems during Leaving Certificate grade predictions.’

‘These Leaving Certificate predicted grades highlight the need for lower class sizes in the public schools when comparing to private fee-paying institutions.’

‘Governments should not be providing capitation for elite schools; it furthers the divide creating a corrosive two-tiered system.’

These posts indicate a huge discontent with tax money being spent on private fee-paying schools, creating and maintaining inequality in access to education and, furthermore, a sentiment that elite schools feed into elite universities continuing the inequities within our systems.

7.4.1.3 The Role of Educators in Reproducing Class Inequalities

Research commonly claims that teachers’ perceptions are often not neutral, but class related (Reay 2006; McGillicuddy and Devine 2018) and practices such as academic selection positions learners within a hierarchy. The research findings of Dunne and Gazeley (2008) echo this, concluding that there are differences in the way that teachers ‘constructed the underachievement of middle-class and working-class pupils, and these prompted different strategies for addressing it’ (p.461). They go on to state that teachers’ expectations of pupil’s achievements were influenced by not only the pupil but the pupil’s home, and underachievement is more readily accepted by students perceived to be working class compared to middle-class learners. Illustrating the students’ perspective, Dunne and Gazeley included the personal accounts of people describing their experiences of discrimination and prejudices based on their social class and socio-economic backgrounds from teachers and lecturers throughout their educational journeys. Teaching skills that allow empathy to encourage students with disadvantage to develop aspirations, to create an accepting space, which is respectful of different cultural backgrounds need to be central in both initial teacher education policy and practice. It is important that such a policy is developed at both local and

national levels in order to mitigate against discrimination and prejudice in school settings and give the teachers the skills to support disadvantaged students. It is clear that many Irish students experienced classism by their educators as evidenced by the personal stories they shared on X, calling for better teacher training on this issue.

'Education reproduces class inequality and teachers need to be better trained in this area for empathy and understanding.'

'Teachers lack awareness on class issues, colleges and schools need to train staff in this area.'

Connolly (2021) suggests that by supporting teachers to develop a better Understanding of how they can develop their practice as educators, they can begin to recognise how the social context impacts not only on their own choices and decisions in the classroom, but on the lives of the children they encounter. People have tweeted about their own personal experience of this type of teacher prejudice, where they were made to feel like second-class citizens in school or college due to their socio-economic status. They feel that educators lack both empathy and understanding of how disadvantage impacts on their lives, especially how it impacts on their educational experience, achievements and progression.

'In college my lecturer was encouraging the class to pursue postgraduate courses, completely oblivious to the fact that this was way beyond some of our reaches socially and economically.'

'A teacher went around the class and told us all one by one at 14 years of age what would go on to achieve. The divide in her estimation was less on academic ability but more on parental income and address.'

These personal accounts are both examples of symbolic violence towards students, which according to Connolly (2021) manifests in two ways: firstly, through teacher misrecognition; and, secondly, as disadvantaged pupils often accept assigned stereotypes. Both posts highlight how working-class students are left feeling misunderstood and misguided by their educators. Ellis et al. (2016) state that without critical and reflexive teaching approaches to inequalities, Teachers will continue to reproduce and perpetuate the power and privilege imbalances that are present in their classrooms. There need to be an awareness of the micro-social processes that create the conditions in which working-class underachievement is produced. The lack of understanding and empathy on the part of teachers to their working-class students' expectations and aspirations diminishes.

7.3.2 Challenging Power and Political Ideologies - The Lack of Symbolic Efficiency

In modern society, people are choosing digital platforms to voice their lack of confidence in traditional power structures and the narratives that support them. This is central to the theory of Žižek and Dean's declining force of symbolic efficiency or central authority, where individuals and groups align and identify with local identities and values, using social platforms to express and assert this, and social media platforms can thrive in these societies. The waning symbolic efficiency in Ireland is evident by the growing voice of working-class on social media highlighting their lack of representation in Irish politics. They seek legitimisation of the struggles they experience as a working-class person, using their communicative capital as their conversations on X are liked, shared and commented on. Dean (2010) sees the 'demise of central authoritative ideas and identities' as having 'greater relevance for intercultural communication through social media' (p.5).

This bears out in the Irish context where people are increasingly using social media platforms to question the people in power in this country. This confirms Fairclough's (1993) assertion that 'texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles overpower' (p. 135). Social media users in Ireland are using these outlets to criticise a perceived shift towards neoliberalism in this country. There are increasing calls for the government to recognise and address meaningfully the challenges faced by its poor and disadvantaged citizens instead of maintaining the systemic structures that reinforce social class hierarchy.

'Corporate and neoliberal interests by our government creates poorer societies, which is the real Irish class system and the profiteers from it include government.'

From a working-class perspective, class issues and struggles are an emotive subject, so unsurprisingly, the online discourse tends to be emotive and provocative towards the government representatives as they are challenged on their attitudes towards class issues. One of the common charges levelled at our government leaders is that they are elitist and out of touch with the working class of Ireland, running the country on principles that favour the wealthy and serve to keep them in power while the divide between the rich and the poor grows.

*'***** ideology encourages class war and keeps the wealthy in power and f**k everyone else.'*

'Misguided political ideologies with austerity measures that disproportionately impact the poor.'

*‘***** and ***** ideologies are creating bigger class divides in class, it is stark, extreme and palpable.’*

These comments capture the frustration and anger directed at our political leaders for their lack of forward-thinking and action on social class issues in Ireland. People are vocal in their calls for change on social media platforms such as X, publicly calling for strategies that challenge the status quo on classism and social class mobility.

‘Impact of class and poverty in modern Ireland needs further debate and representation in political arenas.’

‘Politicians are curbing social class mobility; our class system has caused the wealth divide and neoliberal policies pursued by successive governments have incrementally increased the gap over the last forty years.’

The 2022 ERSI report, *Intergenerational Poverty in Ireland* reveals that Ireland has higher levels of economic deprivation and above average levels of childhood poverty than most of its European counterparts. Furthermore, deprivation and poverty in some of the poorest areas in Ireland remained unchanged between 2005 and 2011. With the census results between these years revealing persistent low levels of employment and educational attainment and high levels of single parent families. These are key indicators of poor social mobility. Moreover, these statistics worsened by 2022 census (see chapter four), indicating growing inequalities and persistent poverty. Despite the fact that the report highlights the importance of education as a key factor in improving childhood deprivation, there is a significant gap between the education attainment levels of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those of their wealthier peers. The ERSI report found that between 2005 and 2015, ‘only 29% of those whose financial situation was bad or very bad during childhood had subsequently achieved a tertiary level of education, compared to 58% of those whose situations had been good or very good’ (p.70). These statistics lay bare the devastating and far-reaching effects of poverty and disadvantage on the lives of children who experience it and have prompted calls for a change in how we approach this issue. Some X users blame profiteering and neo-liberal politics for the slowing-down, and in some cases the complete lack of social mobility, ultimately exposing the capitalist ideologies of our political leaders in Ireland.

‘Our political parties’ reek of capitalism and classism.’

For a lot of Irish people on X, the majority of the current cohort of Irish politicians represent entitlement and elitism. They are described as ‘out of touch’ with the daily struggles of the working class while their political ideologies and priorities do not appear to place any importance on improving the lives or prospects of those living with poverty and disadvantage.

‘A long tradition of classism has gone unchecked and undiscussed amongst Irish political leaders.’

*‘*He represents class elitism for a lot of people in Ireland.’*

*‘All *his ideologies are classist he represents the elite of the country and while *he remains in power our class system will always be an issue.’*

In 2013, Vengeer and Herman wrote that X was the fastest and most critical campaign tool for both reaching people and responding to public reactions. While they surmised this eleven years ago, little has changed since, as now X platform still holds its place as a primary site for online discussion and engagement. Furthermore, many of the 1.5 million X users in Ireland have taken to X to voice their experience of poverty within educational settings as well as their frustrations with, and distrust of the political and social systems that maintain and perpetuate poverty and disadvantage. Social media has become a useful research tool in gauging opinions that are not represented in mainstream media.

7.3.3 Social Capital Matters in Life - Class Divides in Ireland

This theme provides insight into the class divides felt by those socio-economic groups living with poverty and disadvantage. There is a strong element of ‘them vs us’ in a significant portion of Irish posts surrounding class and class issues, with conversations and interactions highlighting a two-tiered class system in Ireland. The posts reveal a belief, held by many people, especially amongst working-class communities that a ‘golden circle of privilege’ exists in Ireland. Living in a society that rewards the possession of the right social capital with progression, those lacking this capital are frustrated at how much harder they have to work to achieve any level of success.

‘Us from the estates will never be part of the golden circle, it’s time to question a system that is based on class hierarchies.’

‘Irish society has a two-tier class system, insiders and outsiders, the rich and connected, vs the poor and victimised, the parasites who bleed the state vs the tax evaders’.

Individuals on X note that the gap between the ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ of this privileged circle is so large that it is unassailable. They see the already wealthy and privileged reaping the rewards and monopolising the life-opportunities that privileged connections and inherited economic and cultural capital grants them.

‘There are insiders and outsiders in this country for years, but the only problem now is the insiders have pulled the ladder up after them making it impossible for the outsiders to gain any mobility.’

‘Tips on becoming an insider in Ireland - get the right parents, go to a private school, leverage above connections...failing to do this become a bag man or lap dog for the above people. You’ll do all their dirty work be their apologist and after years of slog you may get there.’

These posts highlight the sentiment amongst some sections of the working-class that they have to work so much harder than those born into privilege, to achieve success as they do not tend to have access to powerful connections or the capital necessary to support their journey towards upward mobility. This again raises the question regarding government policy and social class mobility for those living in poverty and disadvantage in Ireland, and whether there is a culture to support the advancement of those who cannot depend on family connections to improve their socio-economic circumstances. Discussions surrounding upward social mobility on the X platform tended to be negative, with individuals describing their painful and fruitless experiences of attempting to climb the social ladder in Ireland.

‘Social democracy is the way to make the world less unequal. It’s a shame that in Ireland it takes five generations to move into the so-called middle class.’

‘The OECD shows how social class mobility really is, it takes 150 years for children of poor families to reach the average income in Ireland.’

Other posts have expressed views on the effects of institutional and symbolic violence on the potential for social class mobility in Ireland i.e., government policy and social structures effectually prevent the upward mobility of working-class individuals. People advance despite the system, not with its help.

‘Institutional violence can prevent class mobility; authority can stop class mobility through violence.’

‘Institutional violence and classism halts social class mobility in our country.’

‘Social class barriers really impact educational choices which can lead to mobility, sadly I didn't realise that most people are so beaten down they do not know they can learn.’

7.3.4 Classism - The More Accepted Form of Discrimination

This section highlights that classism is the most tolerated prejudice in this country. Some of the arguments used to support this view is that it affects large volumes of people, and it tends to be intersectional with other forms of identity more usually associated with discrimination, such as race, gender and sexuality. Social class discrimination is under-represented and unrecognised in Ireland's socio-political landscape. This raises the question, should social class be a protected characteristic in the Equality Status Act, which prohibits discrimination on inherent characteristics such as age, gender, race and disability. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission have called for socio-economic position as an additional protected status under Irish equality legislation, which, if included, would make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of a person's social background (IHREC, 2021). People have also taken to the X platform to voice the same sentiment.

‘Social class is not a protected characteristic, protect social class by law and make its measurement mandatory.’

‘Classism is less recognised by the Irish public compared to issues like misogyny or racism.’

‘Classism is tolerated more than other bigotry actions because elitism is the greatest prejudice, exacerbating all others because rich people champion anti-racism and anti-sexism to distract from all other elitism and class inequality.’

These posts raise the salient point that when classism is not officially recognised or acknowledged as existing in the first place, then the struggle for equality becomes even harder. When classism is tolerated, as it is in Ireland, it is both daunting and difficult for working-class individuals and groups to address and challenge the discrimination they face.

If the government took the step to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of classism, it would legitimise the real grievances affecting working-class people and add weight to any campaigns seeking redress in the future. Crucially, it would also ensure that structures were put in place to prevent future exclusions and discrimination. By creating awareness, and bringing classism out of the shadows, it places pressure on our politicians to educate themselves on the devastating consequences of classism. There are long-lasting effects of classism in society which are inhibiting working-class people from realising their full potential and allowing them to create a life of value for themselves and their families.

‘Classism is worse than other types of prejudice because it is invisible’

‘Our politicians need genuine interaction, engagement and to develop sensibilities to communicate in a way that respects all classes and represents their equality issues in a real way.’

Government-led, involving the creation of structures and systems to recognise and deal-with class-based discrimination and inequality, while also passing legislation to ensure equality for all classes. Easterbrook (2021) postulates the inclusion of social class in the Equality Act would create systematic recognition of the discrimination and inequities that working class individuals experience. This inclusionary action has the potential to challenge social constructs by providing practical actions to confront discriminatory institutions built on marginalisation and exclusionary practices.

7.3.5 Legitimisation of Social Class Hierarchies in Ireland through Social Media

There is a sense of bewilderment and disbelief on the lack of acknowledgment and realisation that classism is felt by a large percentage of the Irish population in the socio-political landscape. Class ignorance is discussed at length in this platform.

‘We are a strange country in that class seems to be something the vast majority ignore or think anyone on about it is mad.’

Online discussions on this issue regularly make comparisons between the United Kingdom and Ireland on the issue of prevailing attitudes towards class issues. It is widely accepted that classism is present in both societies but there is a general acknowledgement in the UK that a class hierarchy exists while in Ireland, this is not the case.

‘Class based elitism is as bad in Ireland as it is in England, in Ireland though we pretend there is no class system.’

‘England invented the class system, but the Irish elites perfected it beyond refinement. There is no better snob than an Irish snob.’

‘Absolutely nobody speaks about the Irish class system.’

Conversations on X are reaching similar conclusions about class ignorance, perceiving that the middle class and elites have little awareness that a class-system exists and have no experience of the discrimination and real-life consequences suffered by working-class who feel the heavy burden of their class position on a daily basis.

'Oppression is one of the working class' 5 a day.'

Power and voice rest with the ruling middle class, where their values and perspectives tend to be reflected in the mainstream media. Subsequently, the middle-class lens does not often perceive a class system as they occupy a position of power and privilege within it. Therefore, the dominant culture and rhetoric portray Ireland as a classless society, where the language of meritocracy can be cleverly used to disguise inequalities.

'The people that say we don't have a class system here are always the ones from a class that has given them invisible helping hands throughout life and has never had barriers to progress, there is a class system we just use different words to describe it.'

'How do we know class exists here, for me it was a very privileged person telling me that Ireland is a classless society.'

'A Blackrock old boy just confirmed to me that there is absolutely no class system in Ireland.'

Discussions on X around class and classism in Ireland reveal working-class people are discriminated against by the institutional structures and macro-systems in Ireland. They feel a keen sense of powerlessness when it comes to accessing some of the most basic rights such as education, healthcare and housing in Ireland. It is perceived that elitism and classism are evident at the level of policymaking in these areas.

'No classism to see here? Yet the facts of unequal access to education, health, employment and quality of life suggest otherwise. When are we going to stop denying the snobbery and injustice riddled throughout our system.'

'Institutional classism in Ireland with a two-tiered health system, persistent child poverty, educational inequality, we need to move beyond populist politics and media that only talks about social class in an individual and identity context.'

'Institutional classism in Ireland is prevalent, this blatant classism is casual, insidious and a toxic mess.'

These conversations on institutional classism in Ireland again reflect Dean's theory on communicative capitalism, where the decline in symbolic efficiency leads to a dependency on localised knowledge and experience. Dean states that the 'neo liberalisation of governance where the state uses its power to maintain inequality, supporting the privilege of financial elites' (p.112) creating a demand for alternative sources of information. The lack of a broader acknowledgement of a class system and the discrimination and prejudice experienced by

individuals and communities on the basis of class in Ireland, has led to a demand for communicative capitalism. Zizek (1997) claims that the link between symbolic efficiency and growth in social media communities is due to the fact that people are searching for knowledge that was previously provided by institutions like governments.

7.4 Conclusions

This study uses the social media platform X to analyse the diverse attitudes and opinions on social class issues in Ireland, giving particular attention to the ways in which class position can impact on the life of a working-class individual. Dean's theory has been used as a lens with which to examine social media posts in order to understand how communicative capital provides working-class people with a channel of communication, enabling them to mobilise support for collective actions. Social media platforms such as X grants individuals' access to a media source that provides agency and advocacy to challenge hegemony in macrosystems. Witschge (2008) echoes this notion, arguing that social media social media outlets like X can provide grassroots, disadvantaged, and powerless people with a channel to access information and draw attention to the issues they face in order to create social justice movements. Furthermore, Adams and Roscigno (2005) propose that public forums can create collective identity for those who share similar ideologies but were previously disconnected, thus, empowering the voiceless and building communities through the sharing of experiences, opinions and values. Dean (2014) argues that the power in these forms of communication lies not in the content but in the momentum the message can build through likes, shares and comments, therefore, 'what matters is not what was said but rather that something was said' (p.6).

It is evident from the X data collected during the four-year period that classism continues to prevail in our systems, a fact highlighted by the posts made by working-class individuals which provide novel insights into their lived experience in Irish society. This research identifies the dominant themes that emerged from discussions on X as working-class people described how their social-class position impacted on their day-to-day lives. Within the context of social class in Ireland, education was a recurring topic, eliciting the strongest reactions from X users, within the five main themes emerging from the data analysis. In relation to the Irish education system, the data revealed that working-class students face issues such as elitism, inequality of access, barriers to participation and progression, in

addition to the perpetuation of symbolic violence on these students, essentially limiting their space and voice.

Overall, the themes reveal working-class individuals' isolation, discrimination, and an inherent deficit in social, cultural and economic capitals, which have impacted their perceptions of their own position in society. The social media posts call on readers to empathise with the working class on these issues by recognising and acknowledging the valuable contribution working-class culture can add to society. They highlight ways in which working-class individuals are discriminated against, unable to access the same opportunities as their peers due to their accent and address, calling Irish people to examine and address their own inherent bias and prejudices, and allow meaningful space and voice for all individuals in Ireland. This type of research highlights the importance of social media in providing unique insights into the intensity of social class issues in Ireland, by furnishing the reader with an insider view of individuals' emotions and lived experiences within Irish society.

My Love of Education....

I was born into a family of a mother and father, and three older siblings, none of which had much success in formal education. Both of my parents were avid readers, especially my father who had a love of books, mainly historical autobiographies and a dedication to weekly library visits those other men of his generation had to the pub (he liked a pint too!). He loved to explore different autobiographies, with a guilty pleasure in Hollywood and the stars that coloured his childhood, his all-time favourite being John Wayne. He instilled the same love of knowledge and reading into his children, and as the youngest I was brought on his weekly excursions to the library for many years. This is where my love of reading grew, and the distinct smell of a library still holds some of my best memories.

My siblings left school early to pursue work, it was the norm in their generation, as we span a twenty-year age difference between the four of us, I am the youngest by ten years. So, the lived experiences of my brothers and sister were different to mine. My dad died when I was 14 but he had instilled in me a love of learning and had always said to me that I had to go to college and stick at school. That sentiment stuck with me despite a rocky start with education. My mam was the pragmatic one, she saw the need for work and making ends meet, although she appreciated the merits of education, it was never top of her priorities. So, for me

education and schooling were never a long-term plan, I always went from one year to the next knowing I could stay but also knowing I could leave. Aimless and rudderless along the way, I always gravitated towards staying in school, and I feel the peers I surrounded myself with helped me gain a sense of belonging and a need to return each year to be part of that community. However, in my home community I never had that sense of belonging, growing up, my neighbourhood began to change drastically with drugs and crime becoming the norm all around me. A large majority of my neighbourhood friends became involved in gangs and criminal activity and the threat of trouble and jail was always around. Therefore, my home life was never a safe space.

I had limited options in my teens and my address always felt like a noose or anchor, there to restrain or hold me down. It is an address that comes with shame, judgement and embarrassment for an individual trying to align themselves to a life outside of that area.

There is a shame and embarrassment when you move into different class settings – we are hiding; we are lying about our home addresses – when I was in college, I lied about my address to my peers I was so embarrassed!!! Nervous someone will ask where you live where are you from! You glide over it instead!! (Reflective Journal, 20/10/20)

Thus, my chosen pathway to educational successes was a unique one within my family structure and a rare one in my community structure. However, I fell in love with education and the prospects and opportunities it afforded. I understood the emancipatory impacts education could have on a person's life and the real opportunities it can offer. I was attracted to the potential of education, and therefore, made a career of it because of how it changed my life I wanted to help others do the same. Subsequently, I became the first in my household to complete the Established Leaving Certificate and successfully pursue third level education.



Chapter 8 - Profile of Participants

8.0 Introduction

Van Manen (2011) argues that by profiling the research participants it provides social and cultural contexts to the research settings, and depth to the ethnographic narrative. It allows the readers to understand the perspectives of the participants on a better level by elevating their voices. Profiling situates and contextualises the participants' background, beliefs, and behaviours which is essential for accurate interpretation of the data collected from the interviews. Furthermore, it provides understanding on how social and cultural contexts influences the research data (Arcidiacono, Tuozzi, & Procentese, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of the descriptions allows for deeper exploration of the experiences of the participants in their journey through social class mobility, by outlining their family backgrounds, cultural influences, and significant events that shaped their habitus, behaviours, and perspectives. It also signifies the role and relevance of each participant to the study, by signposting their educational and professional trajectories which ultimately resulted in their social class mobility. In addition, the chapter allows the reader the ability to empathise with the findings and understand the unique history and lived experiences of each participant. Ellis (2007) claims that the participants' contexts are essential in ethnography, including cultural, social, and personal backgrounds, to situate the research in the participants' experiences and perspectives more deeply.

All of the data gathered for the profiles are from the perspective of the participants which was shared during the interviews. The profiles are carefully constructed to protect the anonymity of each participant by revealing to the reader enough information to connect better with the stories but avoid any identifiable information. These short stories exhibit how all of the

participants descend from multiple generations of social housing tenants and moreover, all of them were the first in their families and for some their generation to complete second level education and progress on to third level. It also gives the reader insight into the dispositions of social justice that has been enculturated into the participants in their life experiences which has manifested in their choice of careers. Each profile begins with the answer to the interview question of ‘describe yourself in one sentence’.

First, I was afraid....

8.1 Michael

Michael is a male in his fifties, he currently works in the area of social justice in Limerick city for a public sector body. He resides in a predominantly middle-class area of Limerick. Michael originates from a Regeneration estate in the southside of the city. He is third generation in his family to originate from council or social housing. He is the youngest in his family, and his parents both left school after primary school to pursue work, Michael was the first amongst his siblings to progress onto third level education and influenced some of them to do the same. However, he credits his initial connection with education to his parents who held a love for reading, current affairs, social justice and community engagement. He completed both his primary and secondary education outside of his own community and finished his education after Junior Cycle. However, he later returned via community education to adult education to complete his Leaving Certificate and eventually obtained a degree and a Masters. He acknowledges that his success in returning to education was linked to local clergy and community workers in his locality, who recognised his talent and ability in community work and encouraged him to pursue this as a potential career. Indicating that both his family and community had an integral role to play in his educational trajectory and heavily influenced his future career in community work and social justice. Michael provided a male perspective and insights into push and pull factors of his generation who experienced educational and professional success from a southside Regeneration estate. Michael’s childhood and youth spanned across the latter stages of the seventies, eighties and nineties in this southside community.

A people’s person, I love people.....

8.2 Louise

Louise is a female participant in her thirties and currently lives in a middle-class area of Limerick city. She works in education in a local Regeneration community, and has a passion for working in disadvantaged areas, while advocating for the members of these communities. Louise originates from a Regeneration community in the Southside of Limerick and is fourth generation in her family to originate from council or social housing. She is the youngest in her family, and her parents both left school after primary/early secondary school to pursue work. Louise was the first amongst her siblings to go onto third level education and influenced some of them to do the same. She started her education in the local primary school but then moved to a school in a more affluent area to complete both her senior years in primary, and secondary school in that middle-class setting. She completed the Leaving Certificate Applied⁵ and pursued Further Education.⁶ She credits her father for her early school achievements and despite wanting to leave school early, he encouraged and influenced her to remain in education and obtain a third level qualification. She obtained a level 6 accreditation and gained community employment in the southside of the city. It is here she connected with influential social capital through her employment network, who recognised her talent and potential, and supported her to pursue a degree. They also provided her with opportunities to develop her career while studying. This heavily influenced her passion for community and advocacy work. Louise provided a female perspective and insights into push and pull factors of her generation who experienced educational and professional success from a southside Regeneration estate. Louise's childhood and youth spanned across the latter stages of the eighties, nineties, and noughties in this southside community.

Understanding of people from all walks of life, down to earth....

8.3 Sinead

Sinead is a female participant in her fifties, and currently lives in a bordering county to Limerick, in a middle-class rural setting. She works in education with a focus on special and

⁵ The Leaving Certificate Applied programme is a two-year Leaving Certificate programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. The two-year programme consists of four half-year blocks called sessions. Achievement is credited in each session. Courses are offered in three main areas: Vocational Preparation; General Education; and Vocational Education (curriculumonline.ie).

⁶ Further Education and Training or FET, offers a wide variety of life-long education options to anyone over 16. FET includes apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, community and adult education as well as core literacy and numeracy services (ETBI.ie).

inclusive education, and social justice. She originates from a Regeneration estate in the southside of Limerick and is the third generation in her family to originate from council or social housing. She is a middle daughter in her family. Both of her parents left school after their primary education to pursue employment. Sinead attended school locally for both primary and secondary and pursued a traditional pathway through education, where she completed the Established Leaving Certificate.⁷ Then progressed onto Higher Education where she qualified as a teacher up to level 9, eventually pursuing a PhD in inclusive and special education. She credits her hardworking and resourceful mother for financial support throughout her education, and social networks of friends and a partner who positively influenced her decisions to attend college and progress onto postgraduate levels. Her negative interactions with teachers and school management which at times made her feel isolated and discriminated against influenced her love of special and inclusive education and her advocacy work in this area. Sinead provided a female perspective and insights into push and pull factors of her generation who experienced educational and professional success from a southside Regeneration estate. Sinead's childhood and youth spanned across the latter stages of the seventies, and eighties in this southside community before moving to a neighbouring community.

Very straight, can be grumpy, can't hide my feelings either way.....

8.4 Ben

Ben is a male participant in his thirties and works in education and sports. He resides in a middle-class setting in Limerick city. He originates from a southside Regeneration estate and is the fourth generation in his family to originate from council or social housing. He is the youngest in his family. Both of his parents left school in their junior years of secondary school to pursue employment. Ben attended both primary and secondary school outside of his community in more affluent areas. He has a keen interest in sport and after completing the Established Leaving Certificate he pursued professional sports for a few years while simultaneously starting a trade. However, after a few of years of this pursuit, he changed his interests back to education. Ben returned to education as a mature student and progressed to a

⁷ The Leaving Certificate Established is a two-year programme that aims to provide learners with a broad, balanced education while also offering some specialisation towards a particular career option. Subjects are assessed by an examination paper and by additional assessment methods at the end of the two-year programme. Performance in the examination can be used for purposes of selection into employment, and into further and higher education. (NCCA.ie)

Masters degree, being the first in his family to attend third level. He credits this interest in education to the support of a secondary school teacher who was also his coach, and his wife. Both of these people supported Ben in his return to Higher Education with the aim to become a teacher and influenced his life in a very positive manner by expanding his social networks and connectedness in this environment. Furthermore, this influence and his passion for sports has led him to a career which advocates for working-class individuals in his sport. He promotes their participation and belonging at both local and national level and developing their own sense of agency and voice in their sporting careers. Ben provided a male perspective and insights into push and pull factors of his generation who experienced educational and professional success from a southside Regeneration estate. Ben's childhood and youth spanned across the nineties and noughties in this southside community.

I am a working-class hero...

8.5 Thomas

Thomas is a male participant in his sixties and is an educator. He currently lives in another county in an affluent area of that city. He originates from a disadvantaged area in the southside of Limerick city. He is the second generation to originate from a council estate or social housing, his parents moved from a rural area in a neighbouring county and were the first amongst their family to live in a city council estate. He is the oldest in his family. His father left school after primary and his mother had part of a secondary school education and took pride in this. Thomas was the first to attend college in his family, inspiring his siblings to pursue a similar path. He attended both primary and secondary school in his local area, and pursued a traditional pathway through education, by completing the Established Leaving Certificate and continued onto Higher Education to pursue a career as a teacher. He went onto Masters level in college. Thomas attributes his success in college to his wife and the peers he met there who acted like a support network. Conversely, he also credits his drive for educational success to the discrimination and isolation he experienced at the hands of the clergy in his earlier school years. This discrimination drove his passion for education further. Sports also played a big role in his positive choices in life and expanded his social capital in an influential manner. Due to these experiences and influences, Thomas gravitated towards disadvantaged children in education and worked mainly in schools that serve these communities. Thomas continues to be an advocate for these children in both schools and sports. Thomas provided a male perspective and insights into push and pull factors of his

generation who experienced educational and professional success from a southside Regeneration estate. Thomas' childhood and youth spanned across the sixties and seventies in this southside community.

Positive and positive....

8.6 William

William is a male participant in his thirties, he currently lives in a middle-class area in Limerick city. He currently works in community support work with at risk youths. William originates from a Regeneration estate in the southside of Limerick city. He is fourth generation in his family to originate from council or social housing. He is the youngest in his family. Both of his parents left school in their early junior years of secondary school to pursue employment. He attended primary and secondary school in his local area and left school after Junior Certificate.⁸ William struggled to find the right path after leaving school and he worked in precarious employment for a time. He returned to education after a sequence of traumatic events in his life, he attended a local Further Education college. He attributes this return to college due to his love of sports and his passion for the positive impact sports and exercise can have in people's lives. His grandfather was a strong influence on his life in regards healthy lifestyle and the power of exercise for a positive outlook and mindset.

He went on to open his own business and created a large community in Limerick city based on exercise and positive mindset. He is continuing his own education and is studying for a level 8 degree. He has expanded his career into community support work and has a passion for working with children and teenagers who have dropped out of the school system in the Regeneration areas. His work is based on training and upskilling these vulnerable youths for the world of employment or Further Education. William provided a male perspective and insights into push and pull factors of his generation who experienced educational and professional success from a southside Regeneration estate. William's childhood and youth spanned across the nineties and noughties in this southside community.

⁸ The Junior Certificate is a qualification students receive once they successfully finish the Junior Cycle in post-primary school. The Junior Cycle is the national curriculum for 12–15-year-olds, at the end of which students sit exams and projects (NCCA.ie)

I love connection and I long for connection. This is who I am....still trying to fit in. I think you go through your whole life trying to fit in.

8.7 Angela

Angela is a female in her forties and currently lives in a middle-class area of Limerick suburbs. She works in education with disadvantaged communities and children. Angela originates from a Regeneration estate from the northside of Limerick city and is the second oldest in her family. Both of her parents left school in their early junior years of secondary school to pursue employment. She is the fourth generation in her family to originate from council or social housing in Limerick city. She attended both primary and secondary school outside of her community. She followed a traditional path through the education system, by completing the Established Leaving Certificate and continuing to Higher Education to obtain a degree. She contributes her early success in education to her hardworking and resourceful mother, who financially and emotionally supported her in her journey. After college she moved back to her home community, and through community programmes and services, moved into a career area that was unrelated to her degree. However, she instantly fell in love with community employment and through the social networks she created locally, she began a new journey in Further Education to train herself in this work. She attributes community support in helping her pursue a new degree in the area of education and she progressed in her career quickly in this industry, with the support of her community peers who recognised her talent and skillset. Angela's passion for education continued as she her Masters Degree and is now pursuing a PhD. Angela provided a female perspective and insights into push and pull factors of her generation who experienced educational and professional success from a northside Regeneration estate. Angela's childhood and youth spanned across the latter stages of the seventies, eighties and nineties in this northside community.

I suppose I am incredibly resilient, I probably care that little bit too much, but my life has made me who I am today.....

8.8 Ellen

Ellen is a female participant in her thirties and currently lives in a middle-class area in Limerick city. She originates from a Regeneration estate in the northside of Limerick city and is the youngest in her family. She is fourth generation in her family to originate from a council estate or social housing in Limerick city. Both of her parents left school in their early junior years of secondary school to pursue employment. She attended primary school in her local area and secondary school outside of her community. She completed the Established Leaving Certificate and after school attended a Further Education college in the city but dropped out before completing the course to pursue employment. She worked in managerial roles in retail in Limerick and then went travelling for a period of time. She accredits her best friend and boyfriend in influencing her on her return to pursue a Higher Education course to level 7. After this course she returned to her community of origin and works with vulnerable youths in the area. She continues to educate herself and is pursuing her level 8. Her passion is her home community and improving conditions for youth in the area, this passion comes from experiencing traumatic events in her neighbourhoods due to drug gangs and feud related activities. This has influenced both her educational and career choices. Ellen provided a female perspective and insights into push and pull factors of her generation who experienced educational and professional success from a northside Regeneration estate. Ellen's childhood and youth spanned across the nineties and noughties in this northside community.

As a human being I am a friendly, understanding person....enjoy reading, enjoy teaching, enjoy 90s rap.....

8.9 Alan

Alan is a male participant in his thirties and works in education. He currently lives in a middle-class area in the suburbs of Limerick and originates from a Regeneration estate in the northside of Limerick city. He is third generation in his family to originate from council or social housing in Limerick city. Alan is the oldest in the family. Both of his parents left school in their early junior years of secondary school to pursue employment. He attended

both primary school and secondary school outside of his community. He followed a traditional pathway through education by completing the Established Leaving Certificate and then attending Higher Education where he completed his degree, Masters and PhD. Alan works in education and is a published author. His passion is writing and poetry and is an advocate for working class literature and poetry where he champions a corpus of working-class literature in his modules. His passion for literature and language he credits to his parents, who encouraged and supported him at all stages of his education, his father in particular has a love for both written and spoken word and instilled in Alan this love through literature and music. He has a keen interest in community development of disadvantaged areas and is involved in multiple projects in the city surrounding this theme. This particular interest derived from experiencing traumatic events in his community of origin where he witnessed violence through drug and feuding gang related activities. Alan provided a male perspective and insights into push and pull factors of his generation who experienced educational and professional success from a northside Regeneration estate. Alan's childhood and youth spanned across the nineties and noughties in this northside community.

I am always looking for the good in people....and how to make sure everybody is included, and I always think about making everybody feel welcome...

8.10 Ciara

Ciara is a female in her forties, she lives in a neighbouring county in a middle-class rural area and works in education. She originates from a Regeneration estate in the northside of Limerick city and is the third generation in her family to originate from council or social housing. Ciara is the youngest in her family. Both of her parents left school in their early junior years of secondary school to pursue employment. She attended both primary and secondary school in the local area. She followed a traditional pathway through education by completing the Established Leaving Certificate and then attending Higher Education where she qualified with a degree in Primary Education. She loved education from a young age and attributes this interest to her grandfather, who had a love of education and arts, and instilled this in his children and grandchildren. Her parents separated and she moved with her mother to her grandparents' house in the northside Regeneration estate, therefore her grandfather had a direct and lasting impact on her life. Once qualified as a teacher, she dedicated her career to teaching in disadvantaged areas and has been an incredible advocate for these young people, schools, and estates, by not only managing a school but sitting on education boards and

lobbying government. Ciara provided a female perspective and insights into push and pull factors of her generation who experienced educational and professional success from a northside Regeneration estate. Ciara's childhood and youth spanned across the eighties and nineties in this northside community.

I am a creative educator, wearing many hats....

8.11 Grainne

Grainne is a female in her forties, she lives in a middle-class area in Limerick city and works as a teacher. She originates from a disadvantaged estate in the northside of Limerick and is third generation in her family to originate from council or social housing. She is the youngest in her family. Both of her parents left school after their primary school education to pursue employment. Grainne attended both primary and secondary school outside of her community and followed a traditional pathway through education by completing the Established Leaving Certificate. She struggled with school up to Junior cycle but credits the clergy in her school for encouraging her and nurturing her talent, along with supportive parents and sibling. She is a talented artist and went to Art college to complete her degree, she then left to attend college in another part of Ireland, where she obtained her Masters degree. While there she worked with vulnerable youth and really enjoyed the work, so on returning home she returned to Higher Education and got her postgraduate degree in education.

She is now a qualified schoolteacher and teaches in a school for disadvantaged youth. She has an interest in working with vulnerable groups and people on the margins and has been involved in many Art projects with these groups that are designed to develop their creativity and expression. Grainne used her passion for Art and education to encourage more creative engagement from people who are marginalised and often underrepresented in the arts world.

Grainne provided a female perspective and insights into push and pull factors of her generation who experienced educational and professional success from a northside Regeneration estate. Grainne's childhood and youth spanned across the eighties and nineties in this northside community.

Passionate, Hardworking & Independent....

8.12 Mary

Mary is a female in her thirties, she lives in a middle-class rural area in County Limerick and originates from a disadvantaged estate in the northside of Limerick city. She works in education and is the oldest in her family. Her father did not finish his primary education, and her mother left school after early junior years in secondary school, both of them became early school leavers to pursue education. She attended the local primary school but chose to attend secondary school outside of her community in a more affluent area. She contributes some of her longer-term education decisions to the social networks of friends she met in secondary school as they influenced her to choose Higher Education. Moreover, she credits her hardworking and resourceful mother for both financial and emotional supports in her educational journey. Mary followed a traditional pathway through education by completing the Established Leaving Certificate and then completed her degree and went travelling where she worked in a primary school, she always had an ambition to become a primary school teacher in Ireland, and on her return, she pursued this. She completed her Masters in Education and returned to her community of origin to work in the local primary school. It was important for her to work in a school that served disadvantaged communities, as she wanted to give back to her home community which she loves dearly. Mary provided a female perspective and insights into push and pull factors of her generation who experienced educational and professional success from a northside Regeneration estate. Mary's childhood and youth spanned across the nineties and noughties in this northside community.

8.13 Conclusions

Interesting observations were made upon completion of these profiles including the strength and resilience of the participants. They all come from multiple generations of social housing origins, and they broke that cycle, as they all now live in more affluent areas as homeowners.

All twelve participants’ parents did not get to complete a Junior Certificate in secondary school with most finishing up after primary school or early secondary school. Despite this educational history in their families, these participants all progressed through education to high levels of achievement and a percentage of the participants influenced other members of their families to pursue a similar path in education. Furthermore, when we compare the statistics from the HP Index of Deprivation on four of the most deprived communities in the city, in which all the participants originate from one of, their statistics defy all their communities’ results in the key areas of deprivation measures:

Percentage of Population	Ballinacurra Weston	Southill	Moyross	St. Mary's Park	Participants Statistics
Lone Parents	62.87	61.33	64.45	64.31	0%
Primary Education Only	33.39	36.54	34.04	34.48	0%
Third Level Education	6.89	6.74	7.39	5.56	100%
Unemployment Rates in Males	34.89	35.91	31.64	37.7	0%
Unemployment Rates in Females	31.36	24.97	27.53	29.05	0%

Table 8.1 HP Index of Deprivation Scores 2022, compared to the participants scores.

These results are a testament to the participants strength and resilience, and their positive engagement with social structures and agency to create a pathway out of deprivation by defying the statistics (see 10.6.2).

The simple question in the interview of ‘describe yourself in one sentence’ provided some of the most insightful data on the participants and their perspectives on life. When the sentences were placed in a collective structure, the similar characteristic of each participant becomes apparent with ideologies of care, human connection, and strength becoming obvious.

These profiles offer insights which will form part of the ethnographic approach to understanding the lived experiences of the participants in the next chapter. In each profile, there is an obvious acknowledgement of social capital from each participant both inherited and non-inherited, the participants accredited these influences in their lives to some of the

success in their education. All participants exhibit a strong moral compass on giving back to their communities through advocacy work and education, with a large percentage returning to their home communities to work.

A Strawberry Shaped Card....

The biggest divide in my identity and sense of displacement came the day I left for college; it was a strange day, and the fear of the unknown was overwhelming. My mother was not overly happy I was moving away and worried about the financial side of college and my personal safety with living away from home. She couldn't understand why I could not attend a local college, and I could not explain to her that I wanted to escape the madness of our house and community. The day I left I wrote her a card to apologise for my life choice. I felt the strain on the house resources as she was a widow at this stage, but more so the strain on

our relationship as I began a new stage of life that she could not empathise with, and did not fully understand. I filled a strawberry shaped ‘Sorry I am Leaving’ card with text, there was not an inch of paper I did not cover with writing. I wanted to reassure her that college would not change me, that I would still respect her, and the lessons she taught me in life would always trump anything I could learn in college. Unconsciously, I knew this was a step too far from my origins, I knew it would change the relationships of my family and some of the peers in my life. Myself and my mother’s relationship shifted and became strained. I lost friends from the locality who I used to speak with every day, my closest friend from my community became pregnant and we drifted apart. We exchange salutations now when we see each other now, but our lives are very different. We had the same abilities, interests, and viewpoints growing up, we shared classes, homework, friends, nights outs and dreams. She had a vision for her life, similar to my own.



Chapter 9 – The Findings

9.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings, providing insights into the participants’ experiences of growing up in working-class communities in Limerick City. It explores the role of social structures and agency in the lives of the participants in their journey through class mobility. As seen in chapter four the statistics of achieving high levels of educational attainment, accomplishing full time employment, and avoiding single parenthood are very low. The normative pathway for individuals living in the four Regeneration estates according to the statistics from the HP Index, appears to be early school leaving, early pregnancies, and

unemployment. Therefore, these findings identify the push and pull factors that interacted in the participants' lives shaping them to break that cycle of poverty and the predetermined pathway designed for them by societal structures. The participants defied the statistics to achieve upward mobility; hence, the chapter examines how social structures and agency effected real opportunities and change in their lives.

Firstly, the role of the main social structures in upward mobility was explored, i.e., education, community, and the family, examining both the push and pull factors in each structure in facilitating mobility. Push and pull factors refer to the various influences that either encourage (pull) or discourage (push) individuals from pursuing opportunities. These factors can operate at multiple levels, including individual, family, community, and institutional contexts. Therefore, the chapter maps how these factors interacted in the lives of the participants as they aimed for success and achievement in both education and careers.

Secondly, the participants' key personality traits and agency were identified in their quest for upward mobility and what unique factors about these individuals led to success where family and peers did not achieve the same levels of mobility. Finally, the notion of displaced identity in upward mobility was examined to determine *habitus clivé* or a sense of dislocation in the psyche when a person shifts between class systems. The findings suggest that all participants' experiences align with Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*, as they describe feeling caught between the middle and working classes, unable to fully identify with either. This sense of permanent liminality emerged as a result of their social mobility.

9.1 The Push & Pull Factors of Education in Upward Mobility

In understanding push and pull factors in education it can help educators, policymakers, and communities to create targeted interventions that address some of the main barriers created by disadvantage and reinforce positive influences and stimuli to attract marginalised individuals to education. Thus, by mitigating push factors and enhancing pull factors, efforts can be made to improve access to and participation in education for all individuals. It is evident in the findings that all twelve participants achieved high levels of educational success, Bourdieu (1994) describes this as institutionalised cultural capital. This type of capital is most associated with the academic success within the education system through academic qualification. It can be regarded as symbolic where value is created through a metric form of institutional certification, which can then be exchanged for employment and ultimately economic capital. Therefore, it is a formal recognition of cultural capital in the

form of credentials which provides the individual with ‘a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture’ (Bourdieu 1994, p.82).

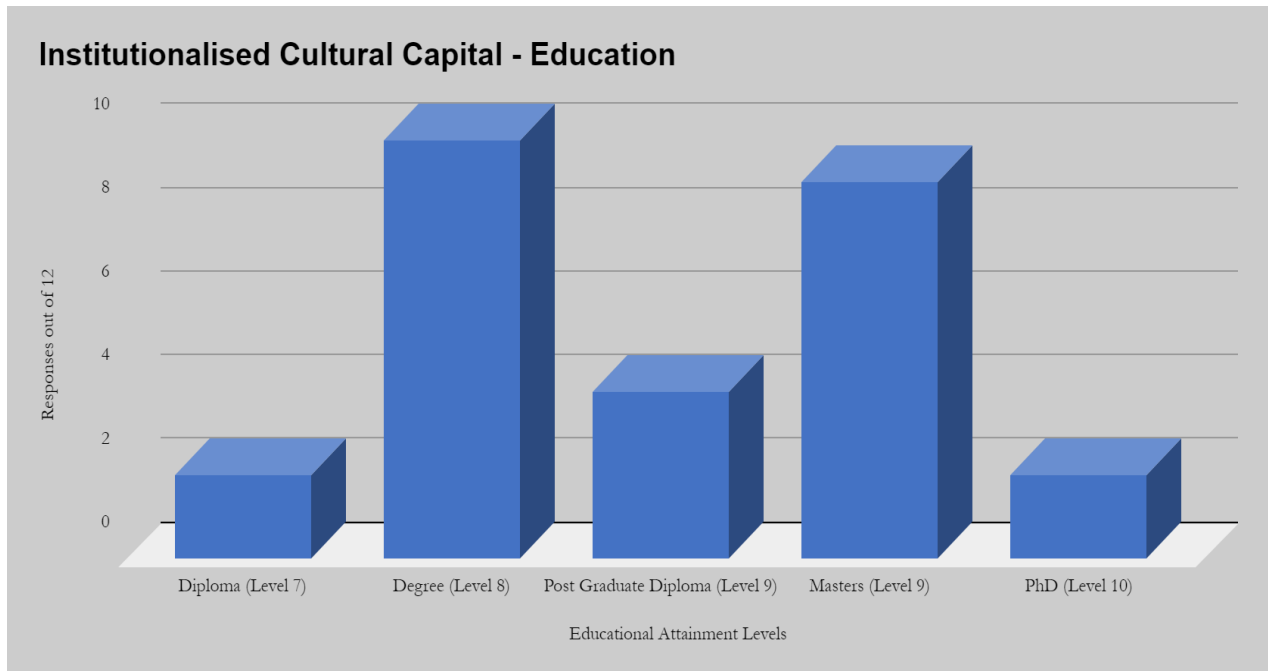


Fig 9.1 Highest Level of Credentials Achieved by Participants in Education

Figure 9.1 clearly illustrates that all the participants prioritised educational attainment in their accumulation of institutionalised cultural capital, with ten of the twelve participants obtaining a Level 8 degree, and nine of these continuing on to pursue a Master’s degree. Participants vary in their approaches to educational success and certification, over half (seven out of twelve) of them taking a traditional route in Ireland of Primary to Secondary to Third Level Higher Education Institutes. The remainder chose the non-traditional route of completing community programmes and further education courses at post-secondary level before progressing to higher education. Nine of the twelve participants completed the established Leaving Certificate which is the final set of academic-based exams in secondary school, which follows the more traditional pathway to third-level education through a points system. Only one participant opted for the alternative Leaving Certificate Applied programme, which is more portfolio and project-based with shorter modules, but also grants access to further education programmes and post-Leaving Certificate courses. The remaining two participants left school after the Junior Certificate exam in 3rd year, returning to education as adults through community education programmes and local further education colleges. Consequently, both successfully progressed onto degree programmes at level seven and level

eight. The choice of educational pathways highlights the importance of structures and supports in the traditional education system but also the community and further education systems which will be examined later in this chapter and in the discussions chapter.

The results in Figure 9.1 highlights the importance of education to the success of the participants in their professional lives, therefore it is important to acknowledge how the participants were successful in their achievement against all the odds of disadvantage. The next section will examine the push and pull factors in education for the participants.

9.1.1 The Pull Factors in Education

This section will examine the pull factors in education that attracted and retained the participants in their educational settings, helping them to succeed despite their barriers and challenges.

9.1.1.1 Family Norms & Values

Family support, in particular, parental support plays a significant role in education and can act as an important pull factor. The supports examined in this section include parental engagement with education, along with emotional and financial supports, moreover, looking at the family values and norms that acted as a motivator in educational decisions that the participants made. It looks at their immediate family but also the contributions of their extended family in education.

Parental attitude to learning and formal education was a key focus in the questioning surrounding the values, attitudes, and norms in the home regarding schooling. The following is an overview of the key responses given when asked if the participants' parents placed weight and importance on these areas of learning and education:

1. The presence of books and literature in the home, reading for pleasure and exposure to current affairs through media channels.
2. The importance of school attendance and remaining in formal education.
3. Parent's ability and instinct for advocating for the rights and needs of their children in school.
4. The importance of homework and schoolwork in the home.

Response rates are measured in agreement with the statements of importance in family homes:

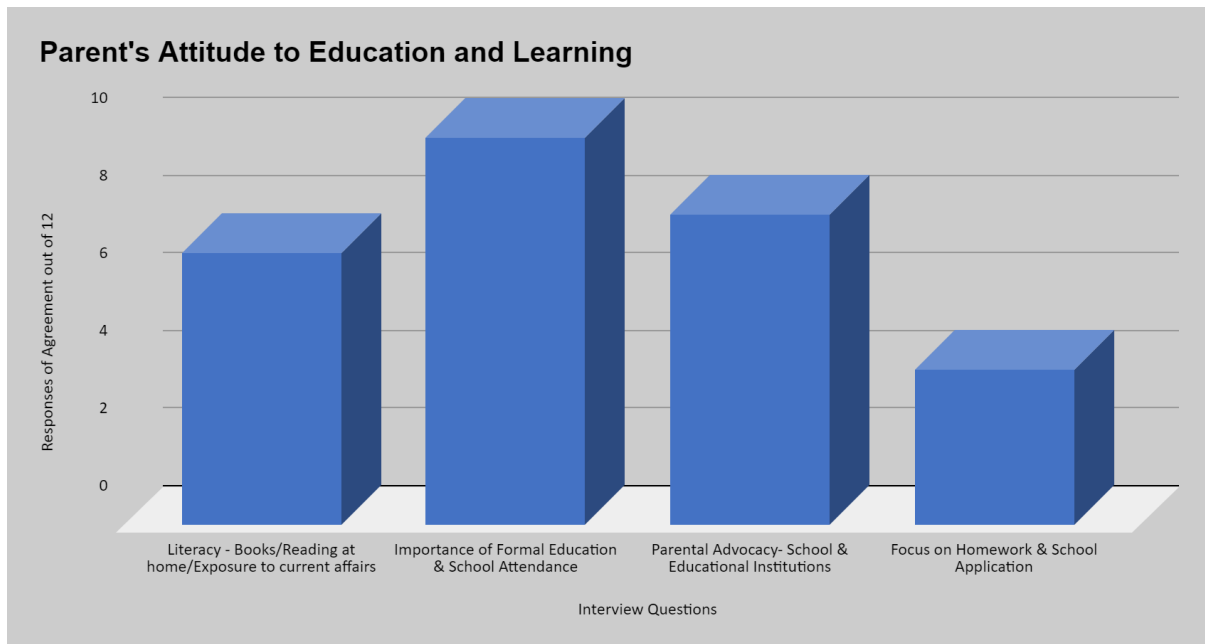


Fig. 9.2 Parental Attitude to Learning & Education

The highest result indicates that parents saw the value of formal education, with most participants reporting that their parents placed a focus on attending school daily. There was a common narrative that idleness in the home was not tolerated and structured routine in the lives of the participants was very important, and this was emphasised through school or work (if education ended early). Furthermore, two thirds of the interviewees recount stories of parental advocacy in school settings, recalling how this support was crucial at pivotal points in their school life.

*‘But my parents would have been down to the school couple of times. They actually had to fight my sisters’ corner because the school was in the wrong because they were making assumptions about the two of them. And there was a glass ceiling even back then, there was a glass ceiling for all students from *****. So, like, I remember, even in school. We didn't even get to see the Guidance Counsellor’ (Female, Southside, 50s).*

‘Some girls in my class were very bold and you would be traumatised by like their behaviour and I do remember my mom going down to school. Like when I was in 5th and 6th class in primary school like saying to the teacher, she's coming home bawling and crying like what's going on in the classroom. What's going on in the room, do something!’ (Female A, Southside, 30s).

*‘My mum, my mum actually did send my brother to ***** (local school), and he got he got a black eye very early on he was in like junior infants. I think something happened and she took*

him out and got him a new school. So, she was she was kind of good for being on the ball with education’ (Female A, Northside, 40s).

In addition, an important pull factor that most of the participants reported on was the parental expectations of financially contributing to the home from the legal age of consent to work. They were expected to have a job for not only their own upkeep but to contribute to the upkeep of the house, whether in full-time education or not. This instilled in the participants a sense of commitment to other societal structures, where routine and hard work were important. Over half of the participants report that leaving school was an option once they reached the early years of second level, however, there was an expectation that full-time education would be replaced by full-time work should they choose to leave school at this time. The majority of participants witnessed both parents engaging in employment throughout their childhood.

‘Dads primary objective was no idleness. So have a job, you know? I’m sorry. But, you know, sitting around the house all day is not going to happen so do something. Find something. That’s it’ (Male, southside, 50s).

‘And I think that’s my mother pushing us out the door. If you’re not going to education, you work. And like taught us the importance of budgeting money’ (Female, Northside, 30s).

‘But we all worked, so my parents would say absolutely. If you want to go on in education, you’ll have to save up and get money yourself, and that’s fine and and I did but it was like. It was never questioned, of course I had to do it. There was no money at home, right’ (Female, Southside, 50s).

‘There was casual work for mam in the local hotel, just functions and stuff like that, weddings. But she’d have a few extra bob to give me, she’d say ‘There’s the money for the bus to college now’, so I wouldn’t have to pay for the bus and ‘don’t tell your father’’ (Female B, Northside, 40s).

‘My dad worked, and my mom minded kids for a while. Like, I think in the 80s things were tight and and his factory wasthere was a period where they were always going on short time. So, he’d be on and off work...but they struck me as, like, very resourceful, like my mom, I could remember as a kid her sewing her trousers and stuff and making our clothes. So, when we were small even, she used to make leprechaun costumes for Shannon development.....she did a bit of sewing and different things, but they kind of had to have their side hustles, I think to keep everything rolling’ (Female A, Northside, 40s).

Extended family played a large role in the lives of the participants with aunts, uncles and cousins influencing school choices, college supports and mentoring for career pathways. Indicating the importance of this form of hereditary capital in their lives, Lareau (2003) argues that compared to the middle-class children, working-class and poor children have richer ties within their extended families.

'My cousins all went to that school they all lived out there, they all went to the school, so I always had it in my head to go there' (Going to school outside the community) (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'As a child I was very lucky and from the age of 10 to 14 years old my aunt, and uncle who was a primary school teacher, they had a mobile home in France and they used to go every summer for the holidays, so they started bringing me with their kids and then all the other Irish couples who had mobile homes there a lot of them were teachers too and I mixed with all their kids then and just kind of fell in love with the idea of teaching and just listening to people about it' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'Strangely enough like I wouldn't have gone to college I have an aunt who worked in a very very very good job ...without her there's no way we would have went to college...she was sort of generous...she actually paid for our fees at undergrad, she paid for my masters and then she paid for the 1st year of my PhD' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'When I first came out of college. and looking for an interview, then because of your address like so it was hard I like I used a different address. And then my aunt worked in an area where they could get in my CV into a school and they brought me in subbing....but I could see other people you know they had connections, you know their parents were teachers or their uncles or whatever it was' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

9.1.1.2 Social & Community Support

This area examines the roles of non-hereditary social capital, exploring the more casual connections with friends and partners, and those connections in more formalised institutional settings such as coaches and mentors. These findings examine the supportive environment which peers and role-models offered the participants when pursuing educational success. The following positive role models who acted as pull factors in education were discussed by the participants with great respect and admiration:

'My secondary school friends wanted to go to college and bits and pieces and then we all kind of wanted to go to Mary I and UL and their families were geared towards that and I kind of liked their energy and they kind of made me work for getting into college' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'I then decided to go back to college, and I don't think I would have went back if I wasn't with my girlfriend because I think she was big into education and she gave me the confidence to do it' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'I married my wife in 3rd year in college which was great because she was kind of on the ball kind of seemed to have the know to what was going on and knew how the system worked with what you needed to do to get on and knew about the grant you needed for your H.Dip' (Male, Southside, 60s).

*'But I also think it had a positive impact on me as well (being streamed into a different class than her neighbourhood friends). I know that sounds terrible....The other girls I knew from my estate were getting expelled and detention all the time. But I do think that's what changed me, and I started to go out with these girls and that kind of started my journey then of fizzling out of ***** and started to hang around in *****. Or so it was really through school, I suppose now that I'm thinking about it. I never really noticed that before. Yeah, yeah, it's nice' (Female, Northside, 30s).*

'After the degree my friends were all applying for the H dip and. And so, I was like, I should apply for the H-dip as well...I had like a first-class honour in my degree and so I got it because you needed it at 2.1 and so a lot of my friends that really wanted to be teachers didn't get it and I got it in first round offer. Ah like Jesus, I better take it so' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'Probably through my coach who would have grown up in the same estate as my dad, so the connection was there through that and then he wanted me to go to the school he taught in for Rugby' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'My rugby coach always pushed me and even going back to college he was very supportive, he made a few phone calls to try get me in and was saying of course you can do it if you apply yourself' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

9.1.1.3 Supportive Teachers

Schools that foster a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere can significantly impact disadvantaged students. This includes having caring teachers, supportive staff, and a positive school culture (Public Impact, 2018). This section will focus on the teachers who impacted the participants' lives in a positive manner and acted as a pull factor in school success. Research commonly demonstrates that the role of teachers is crucial in achieving educational equality. Furthermore, through their relational approach to students they have the ability to improve their students' retention in school and impact positively on their educational experience and achievements in a very salient way. Interviews with the participants would also support these conclusions, with seven of the twelve highlighting the positive impact of a teacher on their lives and educational journey. Brookfield (1995 quoted in Jeffers & Lillis, 2024, p.142) emphasises the importance of learners' personal accounts as sources of insights into teaching. He claims that 'personal experience is dismissed and demeaned as merely anecdotal, in other words subjective and impressionistic' (ibid). Therefore, it is important to take the first-hand experience of working-class students into account in order to gain important insights into the potential influence teachers can have in improving learners' educational prospects despite the significant barriers. While various participants gave a special mention to memorable teachers at pre-school, primary and secondary levels, for most of the participants it was a teacher at secondary school that had the biggest and most enduring influence on their lives.

'A teacher in secondary she kind of put a concrete twist on learning, she was kind of like a mother figure she was and like if you look at key people now, she took the spotlight off academics and had more project-based approach and in some way shape or form she connected with me or maybe filled the gap that I was maybe missing at that time emotionally and yeah I think without her I probably would have dropped out' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

*'I came from ***** and he came from ***** and he felt I could make something of myself, so he always pushed me and was very supportive....pushed me to apply myself'* (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'I couldn't find any grinds and he knew I couldn't afford the grinds but he said to me drop out to my house and I'd do grinds with him for an hour and half and he was the first person ever in my life that I ever got any positive affirmation or feedback from. It was the first time someone ever said to me in my life you're an intelligent person' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'The day of my Leaving Cert French she was waiting outside and she said you have to sit there and not come out until it's over I don't care if you've just written your name, you are not to leave....and I came out of the exam and she was sitting there waiting for me....she showed she believed in me....that's what young people need especially young people growing up disadvantaged they need someone who sees them and somebody who believes in them' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'If I hadn't been in her class, I wouldn't be a teacher today because she her standard of Irish teaching was amazing, and I met her recently and I said to her you are the reason I am a teacher my standard of Irish was so high. She just put up with no nonsense but yet she had high expectations for us which I think is important when you are coming from an area like that' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'I chose to be a teacher and that is a good reflection on my secondary school, that I had a good experience with my teachers and see some of the teachers that taught me were role models as well' (Male A, southside, 30s).

9.1.1.4 *Attending School Outside the Community of Origin*

Surprisingly, seven of the participants attended primary, secondary school, or both outside of their home community. This decision was based on a number of factors, such as the perception of a better standard of school in more affluent areas or the draw of sports determining the choice of school. Other participants attended schools outside their own community to be educated alongside extended family, either due to the convenience of shared school-runs, or on the basis of a good recommendation from a family member.

'So, all of my schooling was outside the local community I don't know why my parents did that' (Male, Southside, 50s).

*'My parents decided they would remove us from ***** school and put us in a different school without asking us, placing us outside our community and I think they chose that I suppose to have better support in the educational journey. And I would have seen that as a negative because we were taken out of our community now it was done with the best will in the world and they hoped for maybe better outcomes, but I would have seen it as negative'* (Female B, Southside, 30s).

*'I went into ***** a few of my cousins went there and I just always had that school in my head because of that'* (Female A, Southside, 30s).

*'So, like we went to ***** and now ***** is literally 100 metres from my house but my mother wanted ***** she felt it was a bit better and it probably was and so we walked past the door of ***** every morning...my mother tried to make the right choice in terms of reputation'* (Male B, Southside, 30s).

*'So, I did have an older cousin going to ***** and my aunt would have said oh send them there and maybe they shared drop offs and collections'* (Female B, Northside, 40s).

These parental decisions resulted in participants from an early age developing friendships outside of their communities, consequently, socialising and interacting in areas of higher socioeconomic status, experiencing life with peers from multi-representational backgrounds. All seven of the participants who experienced this, report expanding their social networks in a positive and connected manner, because of their parent's decision to send their children to a school outside the community. Most report still being friends and socialising with these peers and the formative influences they had on their lives.

*'Then in first year, I got friendly with girls, and I just did like everything with them. I got really close to them. And the three of them were from *****. And they wanted to go to college and we all kind of wanted to go to Mary I and UL and their families were geared towards that and I kind of liked that energy because it kind of made me work and they were getting grinds and stuff and I'd say to mom I need to go to grinds'* (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'And I was surrounded by a good mix of lads in secondary school some who were academic and some who weren't very academic, so like it was a rugby school, and I was in my element because it was just rugby, rugby, rugby, and the mix of boys I met had a huge impact on my life' (Male B, Southside, 30s) .

*'My best friend was from school...she was always going to go to university. Both parents were working. They had the car; they had nice bungalow and umm I had.... I got like I remember getting a tennis racket because she had a tennis racket and I wanted like a tennis racket like, because she has, I wanted to go and play racquetball with her. And, you know, I was developing notions or delusions of grandeur my family said. I remember my sister saying people described me as posh around ***** I wasn't posh, but I just wanted the same things in life my friend had'* (Female B, Northside, 40s).

9.1.2 The Push Factors in Education

Push factors in education for students are elements that drive them away from the educational system. These factors can be numerous and complex, often interrelated with broader socio-economic issues.

9.1.2.1 Economic Hardships & Financial Stress

Three quarters of the participants report that choosing higher education was a hard decision, as they knowingly incurred additional expenses on the family home. Moreover, they knew that the additional income from full-time employment after they finished secondary school would have given their families a respite from the constant money worries.

'I felt they wanted me to go to work and hand up money at home, so I felt I disappointed them by choosing university. I was told to come home in summer and work and hand up money, so my summers were spent working to contribute towards home....I never did JIs with my friends' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'Education in its very nature has always been very difficult for me because I've always had to work full time, I could never afford to press pause I would have loved to go straight into further education, but it wasn't an option' (Female, Northside, 30s).

'Good friends of mine would say they were always under terrible pressure to leave school and earn some money you know start earning they were made feel like a drain on the family like because I think a lot of it was, they had parents who were heavy drinkers and so you need money coming in at a young age' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'Before I would go back to college on Sunday nights my mother would give me the butter vouchers to go to the local shop and she used to tell me get what food or whatever I needed and bring some food back to her' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'When I first went to college there was a lot of kind of money pressures and strains at home but that's part and parcel of it' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'You had to work all the way through college anyway because my parents had nothing to give me, they hadn't a bob' (Female, Southside, 50s).

9.1.2.2 Impacts of Educational Success on Family & Peer Relationships

Furthermore, one third of the interviewees report that personal and family relationships were affected by their choice to take a different and seemingly unconventional path by pursuing

education and a professional career. They found the dynamics with family and friends from their original communities changed, and for some the relationships were irreparably broken.

'Working outside the box, the norms with regards my friends asking are going back to school? Are you mad? Are you not drinking tonight? Going to third level that was outside the norm, going to different part of Ireland that was outside the norm....so there has always been that' (Male, Southside, 50s).

'My 3 closest friends from primary school like like we just pass each other out now and they really think I'm a snob now because I know they developed a chip over the years, and we all came from the same place and things but because they went down different paths and had their kids in their 20s. They were kind of going one job from another and doing drugs and our friendship kind of disintegrated because we have nothing in common anymore' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

*'I am not friendly anymore with the girls or lads I grew up with, my age group, they say hi on the streets, but they wouldn't stop and talk. Some of the girls might be single mothers now living in ***** with a couple of kids and they say Jesus haven't you done well for yourself. You know I hope they mean well but I kind of get a little vibe that it's not all good'* (Female A, Northside, 30s).

'How I sometimes speak it can be seen as a negative in my family, like you have lost who you are like who's your one? You know what I mean? Or if I say something off the cuff which wouldn't be at all you know like I wouldn't have the most colourful vocabulary but it it could be seen as a negative with my sisters or mother and they are thinking come down off your high horse' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

'Going to college did create a gap between me and my family because none of my close friends, none of my family, none of even my extended family like I was first generation to go to university and some of feelings are like you got notions about yourself...I felt my family wanted me to go and work so I could hand up money at home so I felt I disappointed them....those college years it was a difficult relationship with my parents' (Female, Southside, 50s).

9.1.2.3 *Classism in Education*

Participants found education a difficult system to negotiate and become part of due to unfair assumptions and biases, derogatory comments, and deficits in supports to mitigate their gaps

in cultural and social capitals. The structural classism was pervasive in their lives and created unnecessary barriers to progression. The classism reported here is on a systemic level.

'You know, how rotten the system is as well as I do? It works against kids from certain backgrounds. If you don't have that frontal supporter parental encouragement, you know' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'And the the fact now that you're asking about if you were streamed, we definitely were in terms of LCA. The outcomes are like I've been to more funerals of people who were in LCA with me through either overdose or suicide or, you know, uhm, I think there was a group of 18, I think six of them have passed away or are in serious addiction at the minute' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

'You know if I see all those behaviours in the same people from more affluent areas in school or whatever or saw a lot of the same behaviours in college [drug abuse] and all those lads went on to be solicitors and teachers and accountants and stuff and so I don't know. Is it pure luck? Is this what I don't know, a class thing so but like I I don't know. I don't know' (Male, Northside, 30s).

*'There was a glass ceiling for all girls from *****. So, like, I remember, even in school. We didn't even get to see the Guidance Counsellor. No, no it was like, oh, you're there from *****. They're not going anywhere, so they don't even need it. And because I'm still close friends with all my secondary school friends who were all from *****. And we were talking about that like, the country, they'd be called out for their appointments with Guidance. And we used to be thinking, why aren't we? So, we never had any right'* (Female, Southside, 50s).

*'I remember the same Christian Brother wouldn't give me the application for university, he started ***** roaring laughing in front of the class group because he was coming in doing some sort of ***** career guidance thing. And I asked him for an application form. He said no, no, no, don't be ridiculous'* (Male, Southside, 60s).

*You know, the brothers in CBS were continuously trying to and consciously trying to terminate my education. They were continuously like like when you finish your junior cert you are done, I remember a Christian Brother calling me over and saying after the exams 'and still you feel you will be back in September?' I'll be back in September I said. Why wouldn't I be back in September? You know, so I come back in September, he pulled me out after about two or three days and took me down to the ***** Tyre Shop for an interview. I've an interview organised for you, you'll get a trade. So, I'd actually told him no, I'm not doing*

this. Had a Fight with him to walk back up to school. He actually tried to stand in the gate on the way back up and block my entrance, he said take that interview and I said no, no, no, and pushed past him' (Male, Southside, 60s).

*'These two teachers in school were very outstanding citizens of Limerick who were very well known as really outstanding, they would be the two that would say, oh, there's the kids from ***** off leashes again on the bus, the kids from ***** are late again. Those two teachers were horrible, horrible people to kids like us' (Female B, Northside, 40s).*

9.1.2.4 Class Divides Based on Address not Meritocracy

Streaming in Irish schools is more common at second level, and describes the system where students are divided into different class groups for subjects based on the school's assessment of their ability (NCCA, 2011). Students are required to sit a performance test, which in the past, typically took the form of a locally designed entrance exam that assessed a student's academic ability prior to their admission into secondary school. Smyth and McCoy's (2011) research on the issue of streaming in schools' tallies with the findings of this thesis. Over half of the participants refer to their experience of streaming in school in their interviews, describing it as a predominantly negative experience as they perceived that classes were divided on the basis of social class rather than on purely academic ability or meritocracy.

Some did, however, admit that an advantage of streaming was that their social capital was bolstered by mixing with other children from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and that in itself was a social education. Within this category one third of participants had a direct experience of classism within their school, in regards the class groupings. The experiences were negative and had a direct impact on their progression in school. They report having an acute awareness of their own academic ability compared to their peers, even from an early age. These participants developed an early understanding of social injustice and how it operates within educational institutions as a result of being overlooked for higher-academically-able classes despite their academic ability. As a result of this injustice and class discrimination, most of the participants developed the resilience and agency to advocate for themselves early on in life. One participant reporting the necessity to educate himself due to both teacher disinterest and school systems actively impeding his progress.

'So, I mean, and I suppose at the time it's like regards to where you were from. The area and stuff like that you were placed in a class group. You know what I mean? Everyone that was in

R1 or T1 or whatever like that were tagged straight away, regards to there's the dummies' (Male, Southside, 50s).

'I did fifth year, and I was in pass English and I was in pass French and I said I shouldn't be here. I could see people around me were like people that I really liked but were kind of messing. And I was like, this is not who I am. So, when I went into sixth year and I went up and I was painfully shy, I knocked on the principal's door and I said. I I I want to go back to 5th year I don't want to stay in 6th. I want to go back to the fifth year. I should be doing more honours. I was only doing 2 honours subjects the rest pass. And but she said to me, OK, I'll make it happen, but she said you have to go and knock at every one of those doors and ask the teachers to take you back in. And if you can find those teachers to take you back in, then you can go back to 5th year...and. I had to literally go and knock on these scary teachers' doors. But I got back into fifth year and I got back into classes. Honours classes, five or six honours classes' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'But like everybody from home...there was about 15 or 20 of us in the class from my neighbourhood and then ten from the more affluent areas if you want to put it that way. And then the other class was all from the most affluent area. And I don't know why that was but I never really tapped in to it as a as a young lad. Uh, but I was aware that when I walked out of school, we all walked right and everybody else walked left, which is kind of strange in some ways when you look back in it' (Male, Northside, 30s).

9.1.2.5 *Deficit of Supports in School*

Seven of the twelve participants report not having had adequate supports across a number of areas throughout the course of their schooling, such as the failure to support or recognise a special educational need or neglecting to provide information on entitlements which would have provided practical and necessary help to disadvantaged students struggling within the system. Other criticisms include the lack of any assistance with transitioning to further education as well as the absence of emotional support for issues the participants were experiencing at home. Ultimately, the participants reported that there were no structures built into the educational system to help mitigate disadvantage. As a result, their education experience was marked, for the most part, by a lack of empathy and encouragement from their educators.

'And then in second year you are moved into a streamed class and academically I would have been quite low....I was undiagnosed with either dyslexia or dyscalculia and I think that went undiagnosed and then it obviously it came to fruition in 2nd year' (Female C, Northside 40s).

*'I see the same thing where I work, they give students from ***** scholarships to go to the school and I mean I look at them and they look so out of place sometimes they look like zombies even in this day and age there's still that feeling I can really empathise with them they are just so lost in the whole system....there is no support there and then to remember there is zero support coming from anyone....no career guidance no mentoring'* (Male, Southside, 60s).

'Maybe more support could be given to people who might have been struggling at home or there were issues as a result of what happened at home and the school probably didn't get it and they were failed systematically in some ways' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'My mother was working her socks off didn't know the benefits that we would have been entitled to didn't know because she was working two jobs and just on the breadline and we probably would have been entitled to some sort of grant to go to college and we just didn't know at the time and there were no supports' (Female, Northside, 30s).

'But I think there was absolutely no support especially for education, you're minded in primary school you see and then you go to secondary with so many teachers and then there's no overall person to kind of support you, especially with older kids and schools are very removed from society and they wouldn't have known family backgrounds in secondary' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'And getting that feedback and encouragement I never got in school there was no one in school like no there were no teachers in secondary school that I would say inspired me or inspired a belief in me yeah' (Female, Southside, 50s).

9.2 The Push & Pull Factors of the Family in Upward Mobility

The family plays a crucial role in the upward mobility of disadvantaged children. Chetty et al., (2014) argue that children raised in communities with a high percentage of single-parent households are less likely to achieve both absolute and relative mobility. This suggests that the overall family environment in a community, not just individual family circumstances, can impact children's future economic success. Furthermore, the research emphasises that stable family structures contribute to higher rates of upward mobility. Therefore, it is important to

examine the push and pull factors in the family accounted for by the participants in the findings.

9.2.1 The Pull Factors in the Family

This section describes the pull factors that the participants identify within their families that promoted upward mobility and were crucial for their long-term success and well-being. The role of a family is to create a nurturing environment that can help children achieve their full potential and improve their socioeconomic status over time. Research commonly indicates that children from stable, two-parent households tend to have higher rates of upward mobility, stability and positive family norms provides a consistent support system.

9.2.1.1 Strong Family Structures & Supports

As Chetty's research indicates families with positive home environments and stable incomes can provide better resources, such as educational resources, and extracurricular activities. Ten of the twelve participants originate from traditional nuclear families, with two parents living at home with themselves and their siblings. The parents of the remaining two participants were divorced, and in both cases the siblings were split between the mother and father, and both of the participants remained with their mothers. Of the ten two-parent families, nine were households where the fathers had full-time secure employment, while the remaining father was intermittently employed due to addiction issues. The two participants who hailed from one-parent families both reveal that their mothers held up to three jobs at different points in their lives in order to make ends meet. In their early lives and influences the matriarch appeared as the strongest family and hereditary influence for all of the participants. A striking feature of the descriptions of their family and home-life as they grew up was the emphasis on the mother as the backbone of the family. The participants take pride in their mothers' excellent ability to budget and be resourceful at times when money was scarce, and children had to be fed and provided for. Most of the participants attest to the positive role their mothers played in supporting them in their educational journey in terms of both advocacy and financial support. taking on part-time jobs such as cleaning, waitressing, clothes-making, childminding, and shop work to help pay the bills and extra expenses such as grinds or school trips or activities.

'Life was it wasn't easy for my mam because he was drinking his wages and then my mom had to go out there and clean houses and things like that so that she could afford to pay for my grinds or bits and pieces like that' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'Like she'd save all year and rent a house down in Kilkee before we bought the mobile home, but we have it since I was 15, but but all of that down to her every bit of that' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'There was casual work just so functions and stuff like that, weddings. But she'd have a few extra bob to give me, she'd say 'There's the money for the bus to college now', so I wouldn't have to pay for the bus and 'don't tell your father'' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'My dad worked, and my mom minded kids for a while. Like, I think in the 80s things were tight and and his factory wasthere was a period where they were always going on short time. So, he'd be on and off work. And but they struck me as, like, very resourceful, like my mom, I could remember as a kid her sewing her trousers and stuff and making our clothes. So, when we were small even, she used to make leprechaun costumes for Shannon development.....she did a bit of sewing and different things, but they kind of had to have their side hustles, I think to keep everything rolling' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

'I did geography, and we were going to Scotland on a geography field trip. And I was working so I had some money, but I remember my mother, we had this Queen Anne chair at home an antique chair, and she took it off to a car boot sale to sell it, to give me some money towards that trip' (Female, Southside, 50s).

9.2.1.2 Positive Role Models in the Home

Having role models within the family who demonstrate hard work, perseverance, and ethical behaviour can inspire individuals to strive for success. These individuals can be a source of emotional support, encouragement, and positive reinforcement in the family structures. A portion of participants acknowledge the important role certain people in their family played in their own lives, and this influenced them to become that supportive adult for other youths growing up in disadvantaged circumstances.

The following quote comes from one of the study participants, a male in his fifties who grew up on the Southside of Limerick. He names his father as his biggest role model, describing him as a man who had a strong moral compass for social justice. He dedicated his life to socialism and was a trade union representative in employment roles throughout his life, while also demonstrating a commitment to improving his local community.

'Dad was a Union man, so he was around the whole issue of equality and non-discrimination and worker's rights and stuff like that. So, all of that has had, you know, I suppose, it just got

fed me, I suppose, regards to sort of, I suppose the moral side of life and stuff like that. You know what I mean? With family. And then I suppose that got me thinking' (Male, Southside, 50s).

'Because Dad was was also because he was a union man, he'd go to the Marine Corps General Workers Union meeting, and I would see what he'd always come back with literature and notes, and he'd show me the minutes. And how he organised the strikes and things like that. And then he was very involved in the community' (Male, Southside, 50s).

Emulating his own father's life's work in seeking social justice and equality, this participant chose a career in community welfare, dedicating his life to improving the life of others who experience poverty and marginalisation.

The next participant, a male in his thirties from the North side of the city, identifies his parents as his biggest role models in life as they instilled in him a love of the spoken word through books, music, and poetry. They emphasised the importance of the written word within the home and supported him in his school life and with his homework. Recalling the people who had the greatest influence on his education and life trajectory towards academia, he states:

*'UM number one would probably be my **father**. Uh, because at home when we were younger, he kind of had a mad obsession with Bob Dylan still does. And he'd be walking around with sort of like, quoting and things. And it was just a rhyme and the rhythm of it. And I was like, Jesus, what the hell is that? Uh, so that probably led me onto poetry and reading'* (Male, Northside, 30s).

*'The second person will probably be the **mother**, and it's probably my obsession with words as well, but she I always remember she had a word box and pushed us constantly with reading and spelling'* (Male, Northside, 30s).

This person went onto to become an English lecturer at a third level institution, with a Doctorate in English. He is widely published, having written a number of books with his poetry being recognised on a national level.

The next participant is a female in her forties from Limerick's North side, who states that education was always of great importance in her life due to the influence of a number of key people. However, her grandfather was prominent and instilled a discipline and love for learning from an early age, which influenced her life choices to become a teacher.

'Grandparents, I think my especially my grandfather. He yeah, my mum's side. He would be very adamant that we all stayed in school' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'We'd have to do our homework straight away. And when the homework was done, then out the door for a walk, he'd bring us with the dogs. We'd go for a walk up the canal bank. We'd be picking blackberries, picking mushrooms, whatever it was. Nature was very important to him. And then we just have time with our friends. So, we had a very clear structure, and I think he was key in that, and I think grandparents have a huge role to play anyway because they just have that a bit more time than parents have. And I think he definitely gave us lots and lots of time and really was insisting that we finished school and every one of us did. We all went to college, and he like he was so proud to know that' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

9.2.2 The Push Factors in the Family

This section will look at the shared negative experiences of family life in disadvantaged homes and communities, and how they interacted as push factors in the lives of the participants.

9.2.2.1 The Impacts of Poverty in the Family

Despite the majority of participants recalling that there was a strong work ethos in their families, their parents' jobs were poorly paid, with all of the parents working in unskilled or semi-skilled roles and in some cases in precarious contracts. Thus, all of the participants recount difficult times where poverty infiltrated their homes. When examining the impact of poverty on the lives of the participants, the interviewees described how growing up poor meant that there was often a struggle to afford the most basic requirements of living such as food, heat and household supplies. Special occasions that other families enjoyed and can afford, such as Christmas and birthdays could be, more often than not, stressful times in their homes. The participants recall times in their lives where their families could not afford, or struggled to buy basic necessities or commonplace comforts and treats that wealthier households take for granted.

'I mean it's appalling like I never celebrated a birthday in my life growing up you know' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'But I do remember once catching her cry like a couple of days before Christmas eve and she had no money this is one of the times I knew we were poor' (Female B, Northside 40s).

'And my mother had enough literally enough bread for the tea and the breakfast and there were 2 bananas and she was going to make banana sandwiches for us....and my brother in

front of a visitor just demanded the bananas and my mother couldn't she just could not say you cannot have them in front of the visitor....and she was so stressed because he was eating these two bananas for the tea and that was all we had until the next day til my father got paid' (Female B, Northside 40s).

'I do remember my mom would get up before us and light a fire because we didn't have central heating and when I think of that now having to get up before everyone to light a fire' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

'When my dad went on a batter for a few months life wasn't easy for my mam because he was drinking his wages. Then my mam had to go out there and clean houses and things like that so she could afford to pay for bits and pieces' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

9.2.2.2 *Family Trauma*

Five of the twelve participants account for significant trauma in their homes and the source of the events was alcoholism in their family lives. All of these refer to their fathers as having alcohol problems and most of them recall their mother being exceptionally strong and resilient in these difficult circumstances, having to work extra jobs, budget carefully and be extremely resourceful in order to feed the family and pay the bills. Their mothers not only single-handedly provided for their physical needs, but they were also the source of emotional stability and strength to their children, protecting them from the full impact of their fathers' alcohol abuse. Most of the participants acknowledge that the alcohol problems are intergenerational in the families with their fathers suffering traumatic and abusive childhoods themselves.

'My dad had a really hard background like his parents are alcoholics and things his dad was a gambler, and he was always very open about that, and they just literally let their children fend for themselves' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'Like my dad for communions and confirmations he would drink in all our life events....I remember him being drunk like I remember him being drunk for all these events and my mam the sweat would be pouring out of her trying to keep the show on the road....it gave you anxiety and you're only 12 with anxiety thinking he's going to start now and where is it going to end....we were always marked you know' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'I remember he was mad on the drink for like a week and he disappeared for two nights....his car ended up parked outside my school and he had slept in the car all night and there was

mam walking us to school and there he was asleep in the front seat of the car and everyone else was walking to school. I just think maybe that's why I always loved school and like studying because I don't want to be like this because I associated his state with no education or a good job....school was like my haven something in the back of my head was like having the fear of not getting out and that's why I loved school and studying it was an escape' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'The drink was central to everything you did and maybe that's why I haven't drank in 30 years but during a medical examine I was 35 and I was told I had the liver of a 65-year-old alcoholic but that was because I started so young....we would have robbed alcohol when we were kids....we would rob bottles of whisky and wine...so alcohol was a huge part of my life' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'My mother was a phenomenal woman she carried the whole house, and she faced horrific stuff she had to deal with a lot with my father she had to look after 6 kids, and he wasn't working and drinking. She always had food on the table....good food and we always had warm clothes we never went without' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'My father had a very poor work ethic, but my father had an awful childhood horrific childhood with abuse.....my father is very very challenging, but I still love him....my mother definitely deserved better 100% a million % she deserved so much better' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'Then my father couldn't keep a job down from drinking, so my mother left him when I was 4 and moved into my grandparents' house and my father remained in the family home and I lived with my mother, but my brother ended up living with my father that was hard we were all separated' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

9.3 The Push & Pull Factors of Community in Upward Mobility

Chetty (2017) provides a framework for examining how one's neighbourhood can influence intergenerational mobility, while also giving insights into some of the key characteristics of neighbourhoods that can encourage and aid mobility for its residents. He proposes a set of social, economic, and environmental factors which must be present in a community to positively impact the chances of individuals becoming upwardly mobile. The research concluded that, for children, the opportunities for intergenerational mobility are defined by the place in which they grow up, highlighting the fact that mobility is driven by the causal effects of neighbourhoods rather than heterogeneity of the people living in those places

(Chetty, 2017). Chetty characterised the features of the neighbourhoods with higher rates of mobility as having the following common correlations: access to quality education, stable family structures (as discussed previously), a positive community environment, access to social capital, diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, good overall health and wellbeing and effective government policies. However, he argues that neighbourhoods most conducive to upward social mobility were ones which had multi-representational communities and school systems, this is where individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, race, and gender are socialising, working, and being educated together. These remain the most defining features of neighbourhoods that afford children the greatest chance of intergenerational mobility. The next sections will compare the characteristics of Chetty's framework to the push and pull factors reported by the participants in their interviews.

9.3.1 The Pull Factors in the Community of Origin

This section will examine the positive impacts of the community and how these pull factors can significantly impact the success of disadvantaged students by providing support and opportunities that might otherwise be lacking in the home or other social structures such as education. These supportive communities create environments where disadvantaged individuals can thrive, providing them with the tools and support they need to succeed professionally and personally.

9.3.1.1 Community Involvement & Education

Chetty (2017) purports that active participation and engagement from community members, including social networks, mentorship programs, after-school activities, and community education programmes, can foster a sense of belonging and motivation which are very important in building social connectedness, skills, and positive steps in mobility. Three quarters of the participants discuss the importance of community programmes in their childhood development and growth, and also in terms of building social networks and skills. They acknowledge the importance of these schemes in building social networks and skills. The programmes discussed are across areas such as community education, play schemes, after-school clubs and summer schemes. The participants accessed education through their community from preschool through to higher education, most of them recognising the positive impacts of these schemes on their life trajectory.

'Group skills, life skills, technical skills. Recreational time out and stuff like that, so. There was nothing taxing. About it, you know what, I mean, but it was a well-structured programme, they had encouraging workers to entice you along to look for your sort of your

qualities and get you to sort of look at your qualities and enhance them' (Male, Southside, 50s).

*'But I think without A*****, right, my educational journey probably would have stopped after the level five instead of level nine' (Female B, Southside, 30s).*

*'And then every Monday she'll go to her own club, and she'll just meet the other women, and they'll do their history class....there was a Garden Club too. It was a different thing; I think now this is like the ***** Association. And it's like the P***** works with it as well but my mother would be absolutely lost without them, it's her social outing' (Female A, Southside, 30s).*

These clubs & schemes for participants were a source of after-school and/or weekend recreation and support. Some of the participants acknowledge they were designed for more vulnerable youths but recall that the sense of welcome and inclusion was felt by all.

'Once they had this club on a Saturday that all children came to, it was probably targeted, but every child went. Yeah. And it was a free club, and we went, we played games. We probably had sweets or snacks or whatever it was on a Saturday. And then there was a Sunday club' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'The community groups like after school groups and stuff like that.... There was a pool hall. And honestly, I'd say probably fit 40 people well, about 150 young ones turned up....the after-school groups and stuff would have had a huge impact. And they weren't just for, I suppose, troubled youths, or I suppose there was a little bit of a focus on getting particular children off the street. But everybody was welcome' (Female, Northside, 30s).

*'It was massive for me that as a child because the gallery is intimidating to a lot of kids. They don't they don't think it's their space and they're worried about going in and I think because of E***** I felt really comfortable' (Female A, Northside, 40s).*

For those living in the city's Southside since the 1970s to present day, Anne Curley, known locally as Curley, is both an institution and a household name, with people remembering her for her ingenuity and commitment to early years education and the cultural enrichment of children in these parishes. Her commitment to these Southside communities throughout the years, has influenced the lives of thousands of children, her kindness defined her identity as a respected force that unified many people in these areas.

'Curleys. You know, because she was always there. She was specially summertime and like summer didn't exist without Curly and the play schemes and the swimming. You had the the

local sort of clubs and dance clubs that was run by the youth clubs and stuff. The community games was such a big thing, you know, every summer you'd have the the back of of the community centre. The Community games would be gearing up for it for all summer' (Male, Southside, 50s).

'Uh play scheme was was alive and well when I was young, so it was run by I think it was actually run by Curly as well. Uh and the nuns' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

In addition to the provision of entertainment, hobbies and education, the community also provided employment for a third of the participants, giving them key starts in life.

'I went through what would have been like jobs clubs, you know where they had. Yeah. Clubs in the community. So, there was one. There was a lovely lady in there. it Was one those local employment places. But remember her literally giving me money to go up the country for interviews' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'I got an Interview for the local creche, and I got it. It was near my house. And the first day when I was walking home, I thought. Oh my God. I'm never going to get this job satisfaction from any other job... ..Community employment, yeah. So, it's job is a local employment activation scheme. Yeah. Get you off the live register' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'Summer employment....Yeah, it's like you were getting your social. You have to work somewhere, and I ended up working for the Council for three years during the summer I worked for the Roads Department and the Environmental Department. I did the summer scheme . Yeah, I was up doing well. I was walking around looking at cracks on footpaths for one. Then I was out surveying the golf course' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

9.3.1.2 *Safe and Supportive Environment*

A safe community environment where individuals feel connected to each other and secure in their home area, can enhance their sense of belonging and provide a positive social identity. According to the interviewees, there existed a strong network of neighbours who treated each other like family in the sense that they supported and looked after each other. This helped to create tightly knit communities, where there were close bonds between neighbours and a deep sense of pride in their community.

'This was the road, it kind of reared us really. Uhm, yeah, very tight. Very tight neighbours. Uh, all children were all kind of out together. It was old school' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'And we had great neighbours, really good neighbours, particularly the women and the children' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'All of us in it together' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'I suppose you see, you know, the respect for the for for the elderly people, uh we all knew the elderly people they would stop, and you talk to you....they were all real characters in. The parish' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

Participants spoke emphatically and emotively about the help and support neighbours offered each other in their little communities. Everybody was in similar positions, particularly economically, so they did their best to help each other out.

'People looked out for each other though, and some of those neighbours are still there, very few of them but still looking out for each other' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

'My mother was crying one Christmas evening and when I asked, she told me that Provident had refused the loan for her. So, she couldn't buy us toys for Christmas. But that night, one of the neighbours, this will tell you, dropped an envelope of cash in the door. Yeah. So, then my mother had an idea of who it was, but that's the kind of people we had around us, you know, they gave us a Christmas that year' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'You did see people helping each other on a daily basis, putting bread on tables or freaking helping people or whatever happens to be like buying groceries. There was a local shop, and he would give people a help out...you know you go in and people be like, I've no money til Friday. Alright, I'll give it to you til then. It was it was very sort of It'll be grand. Everybody in it together' (Male, Northside, 30s).

There is a strong sense of pride amongst the participants in their place of origin with good memories outweighing bad, and local support systems creating strong bonds between neighbours. Most participants recall having massive respect for the community and its shared spaces.

*'A brilliant. a great place to grow up. You had very supportive neighbours, you know, very supportive community and you would like to do good in the community. There were good leaders in the community there, good adults in the community. You didn't **** around like you didn't vandalise. You didn't put graffiti on place like people looked after the place. Minded the place. Took a certain pride in the place they seem to be great pride in looking after' (Male, Southside, 60s).*

'The sense of community, the sense of, I suppose, belonging with' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

'Now I'm very proud of where I come from' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'Great memories, simple community, loads of friends' (Male B, Southside, 30s).

'I suppose I absolutely loved home. I loved everything about it. Love the people, loved it as a community, and everybody knew everybody in the area' (Male A, Northside, 30s).

'Everybody was really close knit there, and there was no, like, antisocial behaviour or anything like that in our little quiet avenue' (Female, Northside, 30s).

*'You have this settled life in your community our neighbours live next door like my mom is friends with ***** who lived 2 doors down for like 46 years now. You know, she babysat us, she cooked dinner. My mother wasn't finished work I just go to her house and eat there'll be dinner there on the table'* (Female, Northside, 30s).

'I totally defend. It you know, I wouldn't allow anyone to say anything about it. I'd still be very proud of it. Very upset about the way the way society has treated it, I think it's been very neglected by government' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'They were good days when I was young....I suppose I felt very safe in the environment of my community' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

'I'm quite proud of itoverall view of it is that it was positive and my early childhood experiences were very positive' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

9.3.1.3 *Recreational & Green Spaces*

In her longitudinal study of parent on child cultivation strategies of different class groups, Lareau (2011) reported that the working-class families engaged in unstructured routines and after-school activities were not organised. Extra-curricular activities for children in this setting were limited if not non-existent and therefore they used their neighbourhoods for exploring and calling to friends while the social networks of family in the communities of origin meant children could wander from house to house with relative freedom (ibid). The findings in this study would support that, with all of the participants speaking of childhood freedoms with greenspaces and unstructured play filling their evenings and summers. Ball games featured heavily in the childhoods of all the interviewees, the most popular being kerbs, rounders and soccer. The local 'green' was the main area for congregation and most participants met with friends and family there after school. Participants note the freedom of

knocking on friends' doors inviting them out to play and the same happening in their house with friends calling to their door. Echoing Lareau's findings, the interviewees report that there were no organised playdates or designated times to play and therefore play tended to be organic in nature. Games were simple and equipment was improvised, with some participants recalling making homemade swings out of bus stops and electricity poles. It is evident that facilities and playgrounds were not accessible as they are not recorded or accounted for by most of the participants.

'But I suppose it's like just the games and the socialisation as well, I suppose. As a boy the card games every summer on the footpaths, playing knockadolly on the doors, the local sort of rivalry between the different areas, the soccer and stuff like that. And all of that you. Know, yeah. Yeah, you know with the ball... kerbs' (Male, Southside, 50s).

'Like everything was on the road, like playing the knockadolly, you know, playing 45 home free like everything was out playing like someone knocking on the door asking like are you coming out. Playing Kerbs like just with the ball on the road, whatever, playing, skipping like always our skipping ropes' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'Like with lots of games, like just tag games and freeze. You know where you throw the ball. The ball....Kerbs and there was lots of other UM, what time is it Mr. Wolf, when you were younger' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'Always hours of summer nights. But we often played hide and go seek, you basically run and hide, and somebody stands at a pole and counts. Yeah, yeah tie ropes to poles and just swing around them. Swings around trees. Yeah. Bus, stop the bus stop....but my favourite game was basically when they cut the grass, and you just used the straw to make the shape of your own house. Just plain house. We play post office, then with all the different types of leaves' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'Yeah, I remember playing elastics, curbs with basketball, all outdoor stuff. You know, we're always out playing with friends from the area. We'd all kind of congregate around certain bench in, in the area with me a core group of friends. Male and female that we would have all stuck together pretty much. Umm, pretty much outdoor swinging around the the pole swinging off trees, basketball, elastic skipping ropes. Of course, lots skipping' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

9.3.1.4 *The Positive Role of Clergy in Disadvantaged Communities*

Having access to role models can inspire individuals to strive for success. These role models can come from various fields, including education, sports, and business. For over half of the participants this came in the form of the clergy, they attest to the positive influence the Catholic Church played during their childhoods growing up in marginalised areas. They see the church as an institution that had a real and lasting influence on their development and life-opportunities by providing education, social and recreational outlets, social networks, cultural capital and skill training.

*'Sister E*****, I tell you one thing, she's a saint, you know what I mean, she so embraced me, she did. And got me involved in the whole aspect of community life and stuff like that. And she gave me tasks to do and rewarding me for those tasks. You know what I mean and stuff like that and so encouraging'* (Male, Southside, 50s).

'Some convent nuns there. They used to run, am they had a great play scheme for all the children in the area' (Female, Southside, 50s).

*'My uncle in law like came from nothing, his father was an alcoholic and only because he was bright and went away and got an education and then got into Marino. He had to, literally. he had no means, but it was Sister L***** she funded his education.... And said you can pay me back when you start teaching, you can pay me the fee just try and get into Marino, to be a teacher'* (Female A, Southside, 30s).

*'I was involved in the parish. Like the choir and stuff at ***** down through the years. And I knew the sacristan because I went to mass there. I was. Like, OK, will you put in my CV into the school for me there. So, the sacristan was like, I'll give in your CV as you are a past pupil and I got the interview and then the job'* (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'In fact, the nuns, the Salesians order were phenomenal....it was a free club, and we went, we played games....youth summer camps where we got to go and play, we got to go on day trips like to the beach....My mother wouldn't have been able to afford that for all of us to go like. I had such an amazing amazing experience with the nuns' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'I mean, I remember going up and down, doing readings, and my friends being the altar boys and we all went to mass every Saturday without fail, we'd all go to mass it was coming from school you know that you were expected to go to mass, I suppose we would be asked about the gospel on Monday, when we were back in school, but we used to enjoy going to mass' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'So, I felt at Salesians the experience was very positive. And the nuns were very good and I think in fairness to them, they did kind of live the ethos that they had because I, I feel they were very kind, generally they were strict, I think no more than anyone's primary school experience and from when I was when I was young in Salesians, the nuns realised that I could draw. So, they used to send me out to draw a lot of great early memories of being in the club room and stuff and working on various art competitions' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

9.3.2 The Push Factors in the Community of Origin

Despite participants reporting mainly positive experiences from their community of origin, there were also negative factors in communities which included a combination of economic, social, and environmental challenges. Addressing these push factors across these communities requires a comprehensive approach, including policy changes, community engagement, and targeted interventions to improve living conditions and opportunities for the residents. The next section identifies the shared push factors amongst the communities.

9.3.2.1 Outside Perceptions Shaping the Inside Lived Experience

Othering refers to the process by which certain groups are marginalised and treated as fundamentally different or inferior by those in more dominant or privileged positions. This can manifest in various ways, including social exclusion, discrimination, and systemic inequalities. Othering perpetuates stereotypes and maintains barriers to resources, education, and employment. Firstly, a common discriminatory trend that emerged was over half of the participants report experiencing class discrimination when applying for jobs, such as not progressing in job applications or interviews when they disclosed their address. As a result, participants were forced to use the addresses of family and friends who lived in more affluent communities to avoid being blacklisted by employers.

*'Especially when people are applying for jobs. Giving an address like ***** at the time was a no no. Yeah. You had to find someone, an aunt or an uncle, you know, with an address in the likes of ***** or somewhere like that because you just didn't get anywhere you want, not even brought in for the interview You were being judged straight away'* (Male, Southside, 50s).

*'I had an interview for a job in the *****. And I practically got offered the job, and then she's like, I'll just take down your details. When I told her where I was from, she, she said,*

well, actually there's no job here and said no. And so, I did apply for some of those jobs using my granny's address then after that' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'When I first came out of college and was looking for an interview and then because of your address like so I like I used a different address then my aunts worked in an area and. they could get in my CV into a school' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'Somebody really qualified from my area who couldn't get an interview for whatever job...had to use a different address. And that still that's still the way it is and people in disadvantaged areas get their backs up then. And then that creates more of a divide. You know, it's hard to know what society is that time' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'I remember we were being told if you're applying now for the part time jobs don't put down your address. Don't put down that address. Always like' (Female, Southside, 50s).

Furthermore, many of the participants note that derogatory comments based on classist attitudes tend to be more socially acceptable compared to derogatory comments based on race, gender or sexual orientation, which are not generally acceptable in the public sphere. This is perhaps unsurprising given Ireland's current legislation on equality, which prohibits discrimination across nine grounds but does not protect against discrimination on the basis of socioeconomic status. Therefore, there is no legal protection against bias towards people in regards their social class, address, accent etc. Organisations like *Add the Tenth Ireland* are campaigning to have socio-economic status recognised as the tenth ground of discrimination in Irish equality legislation (see chapter three), namely the Equal Status Act and the Employment Equality Act. The findings would support the necessity for socioeconomic status to become a protected characteristic as participants recount multiple incidents of classism in their lives. One participant explicitly stated that she always felt 'fair game' for commentary on her address and accent.

'We'll talk about discrimination and racism and gender, and all these people avoid the topic of class. People get a bit uncomfortable, hot under the collar because if you are from the different side of the tracks or if you are from the better side of town then what do you bring to say about class then. Like we want our voices heard like, but our stories and stuff like yeah are not appreciated' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

Participants share their experiences of derogatory comments and judgements from peers, extended family members, work colleagues and teachers, and it is clear from the interviews that the comments were hurtful and have remained with them throughout their lives.

'I remember as a maybe a young teenager going to my aunt's house and home and get and her referring to me on the phone to somebody as her niece from Moyross, and she'd say Moyross in a very derogative way. Yeah, and even though she was probably the aunt that I had most affection for. Yeah. I I never liked that. That always hurt a little bit, and somebody would refer to it like that' (Female B, Southside, 40s).

'I remember, there were people I know from when I was younger who would have said to my parents, your children are very well behaved considering where they come from. Thinking we're savages or something, like you know. You know you've raised them very well, haven't you? We were kids at your birthday parties and stuff like why wouldn't you behave? Why wouldn't you? There's always a clause to the compliments' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'Hate that word disadvantage. You know, I mean and how now we're smacking labels on these communities that actually puts a glass ceiling in cause we make assumptions about them because if you give something a label, we just we make these assumptions that limits them. Yeah. You know, and it's happening like' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'And then I was dropped off first. And I remember one of the young volunteers who was only about 16 basically going wow you live in a dodgy part of town like that, you know? And I'm just getting out the car, going home, bawling into my mother and father' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'You know you're a scumbag. You're a knacker because where you from, you don't have control over your address. You don't have control about where you grew up or anything like that. But those sorts of things get internalised. I think by kids, and they're said to us and then we start saying it to ourselves if that makes sense and it just becomes a sort of self-fulfilling' (Male, Southside, 30s).

*'Between a social housing estate and a private one was a lane And so you could walk up and then walk up this sort of boreen and you it was a safe route no traffic, no anything. Perfect for kids and one of the private houses blocked off the lane with a big iron construction gate. I asked a local kid what happened the lane? And the child says, uh, they blocked it off because. We're going up it and they told us the the price of their house will go down if people like me are walking past it....So you think about like someone's ***** value on the price of a house is placed over the worth of a child in a society and in a culture. So, it's no accident that children go out and say, you know, well, if I'm not good enough to walk up a lane, how good am I? Am I not good enough to work? Am I not good enough to engage in school and may not whatever, etcetera, etcetera'* (Male, Northside, 30s).

9.3.2.2 *Diminishing Safety & Community Trauma*

The participants' communities of their youths were accounted for as safe spaces with supportive neighbours and strong social networks of support. Conversely, as the gang criminality crept into the city, the four Regeneration estates were impacted in an extremely negative manner. Reports account for diminishing safety and excessive policing in the communities, changing the landscape of their youth. The majority of participants experienced the impact of the Limerick feuds in their own neighbourhoods. This feud between rival criminal gangs in the city, started in 2000 between two criminals, spreading to include several criminal families (Limerick Leader, 2008). The feud lasted nearly a decade in the city impacting both north and south side estates, mainly St Mary's Park and Weston with rival gang members situated between both, however, participants from the North side report witnessing more feud-related violence than South side participants. Interviewees witnessed murders, gun violence as well as physical fights and abuse, with some participants even losing friends to murder at the height of the feud. These witness accounts are predominantly from the younger participants, and Northside more common than Southside of the city. Most of the older participants had moved out of the Regeneration communities prior to the feuds beginning.

'In some ways and I'm really going to sound stereotypical here now but there's some truth in stereotypes as well I suppose but before the age of 12, I saw uh people murdered' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'I was growing up there in the height of the Limerick feuds and a lot of families involved with it like kids in my class that were part of those families, and it was a bit crazy' (Female, Northside, 30s).

'In the feuds it was dangerous to be with particular people during that time and there was a lot of things happening in our community like murders, stabbings and shootings and stuff like that....I hung around with a young lad a boxing champion and he was murdered' (Female, Northside, 30s).

'I remember asking could I go to my friend's funeral....because these kids are my friends so I was allowed to go and it was absolutely horrific there was the opposite side of the feud I suppose the murderers...they lined the streets like chanting at his hearse as it passed...it was crazy really, really scary' (Female, Northside, 30s).

'The estate started to change when the feuding kicked off, you start to see families get involved and involved in drugs and then friends getting involved in drugs and going down the wrong road. I would have seen kids that I knew and babysat for one particular family uhm, kind of vulnerable kids being used by people you know to break into houses and kind of start to see that element come into the estate' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

Consequently, a heavy Garda community presence accompanied the gangland murders, feuds and drug crime as authorities attempted to reinstate a sense of public order and peace in the affected communities. The Fitzgerald Report (2007) recommended increasing Garda resources in Limerick's most deprived estates, leading to the deployment of an additional 100 officers. While this measure aimed to address crime and improve community safety, some residents reported instances of Garda violence, highlighting the potential unintended consequences of such an approach. In an interview with the *Irish Mirror* in 2023, Garda Superintendent Lacey stressed the importance of the increased Garda presence in this feuding time in the Regeneration estates from a public order perspective:

It was the use of the Armed Support Unit and other specialised units in our division that were a huge part of the success. One part of it is the real high visibility in your face policing, sometimes that can be intrusive on communities but is necessary to ensure a quality of life is returned.

The Garda's description of their presence as intrusive downplays the extent to which their presence was negatively experienced by those living in the affected communities. Far from providing a sense of safety, protection and reassurance to the people living in these areas, participants describe very disturbing accounts of Garda violence, some of it committed on children. Again, the North side participants appear to have had greater exposure to Garda violence than their South side counterparts.

'I saw guards beating people up...so you are thinking they are here to save us but then you turn around and they're actually kicking the shit out of some young fellas who are only 13 or 14...they're beating up kids really' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'I also remember guards sticking guns into the back of people's heads' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'I remember a big group of armed guards who would move us by hand from every corner...we weren't doing anything wrong' (Female, Northside, 30s).

Eyerman et al (2004) describes community trauma as a collective exposure to a harrowing event that has a long-lasting negative effect on group consciousness and memory, moreover, changing their individual identities in fundamental and absolute ways. Sen (1992) purports that a necessary capability for achieving a life of value is the freedom to live in a safe environment free from violence and insecurity. However, the four Regeneration estates of Limerick city have been plagued with drug crime and violence since the early 90s. According to the Fitzgerald report (2007) the four estates of Limerick city were amongst the most deprived in the country and quality of life for the residents of these estates was extremely poor. Stevenson & McNamara (2013) report that the media had deemed the gangland crime rates so high in the estates they had become 'no-go' areas. High profile violent crimes were being used to characterise the wider population of these areas. Ballinacurra Weston and St Marys Park had become the homes of two rival gangs, but the feuding ultimately impacted all four of the estates. Additionally, as discussed in chapter three and four, all four estates have suffered at the hands of local and national policy and the Regeneration framework has served to deprive areas of safe physical and social space for many years. This level of community trauma is known as structural violence. Burtle (2013) describes structural violence as the damage that individuals, families and communities experience from the economic and social structure, social institutions, privilege and inequality that may prevent people and communities from meeting their basic needs. Post-Regeneration in Limerick city, research commonly reported diminished living conditions, inadequate housing, pollution, increased crime, and reduced infrastructure (Limerick Regeneration Watch, 2013). Muldoon et al., (2019) argue that in the aftermath of trauma, the identity is constructed through the lens of traumatic experiences, which can shape the understanding of oneself in both negative and positive way. Therefore, community trauma plays an important role in shaping the identity and can lead to negative perceptions of oneself. The CDC (2018) purport that children who experience more than three serious incidents of trauma it can negatively impact brain development and socialisation.

9.4 The Interaction of Push & Pull Factors

This section explores the interplay of push and pull factors within the family, community, and education structures, and how these structures influenced the participants' development and growth at different stages of their mobility journey. A key finding is that when one structure, such as education, exerted a push factor, another, such as family, often mitigated its impact.

This suggests that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may require multiple support systems to navigate the challenges of upward mobility. When one support system falters, another can step in to provide necessary support. Examples of this include:

1. A push factor: education systems behaving in a classist manner and lack of meritocracy evident when streaming students into class groups, a pull factor: familial advocacy or an individual sense of agency to correct the wrong.
2. A push factor: a family struggling with economic hardships, a pull factor: communities banding together to offer supports.
3. A push factor: family suffering traumatic events, a pull factor: individuals and groups in the community offering outlets and supports.
4. A push factor: outside perceptions negatively impacting the inside lived experience in the community such as labelling and classism, a pull factor: family and communities networking together to offer each other support and belonging.
5. A push factor: not fitting in with formal education systems, a pull factor: community education replacing this and offering alternative opportunities.

These interactions strongly support Bourdieu's theory of social capital, as social networks consistently emerged as a crucial factor at pivotal moments in the participants' lives. In summary, the research demonstrates that social capital served as a primary pull factor in mitigating the effects of push factors. Within the three social structures, both hereditary and non-hereditary social supports and connections were frequently cited as positive influences, helping participants build resilience against the challenges of deprivation (see 10.5.1). Moreover, important adults and role-models played integral parts in creating real opportunities to expand the participants' other capitals in a 'multiplier effect' as discussed in chapter two. In particular, education and community offering opportunities to expand the participants social networks in a very positive manner, assuaging for the lack of hereditary social capital. The main roles of these social structures in contributing to the social connectivity of the participants is explored in detail in chapter ten. In addition to the alleviating factors that the social structures offered the participants, there is strong evidence of individual agency and key personality traits which were very apparent in this journey as important elements in challenging and defying these push factors in the social structures. This is discussed in the next part of this chapter and in chapter ten in greater detail.

9.5 Key Personality Traits & Agentic Practices

The last section explored the push and pull factors of the main social structures in the lives of the participants. This section will examine the role of their own agency and key personality traits which served to enhance their chances of upward mobility by their ability to navigate the social structures to their best advantage to progress in life.

9.5.1 Resilience & Defiance

Resilience refers to the ability to recover from or adapt to adversity, stress, or significant life challenges. It encompasses traits such as perseverance, emotional regulation, problem-solving skills, and the ability to maintain a positive outlook. Boyden and Cooper (2007) argue that resilience is not built directly on distinct, measurable capital in regard to economic or objectified cultural capital, but on intangible, inherited forms of capital. Mu (2021) uses Bourdieu's framework to assess resilience in individuals, describing it as a process of socialisation which 'enculturates individuals into a system of dispositions and endows them with a set of capacities that spurs positive responses to adverse conditions' (p.29). All the participants involved in this study clearly demonstrated a high level of resilience in the early stages of their lives. In growing up disadvantaged the participants were exposed to defining events and moments in their lives that created a sense of resilience and defiance to the sometimes negative and harmful life trajectories, norms, and values most common amongst their family and community peers. However, these participants chose to not only resist but defy these predetermined pathways to create a life they had reason to value. Firstly, they displayed clear resilience to the life that was going on around them within their family and their community in terms of drugs, crime and high school dropout rates. The participants challenged the 'norms and cultures' in their community regarding these behaviours and trends, choosing instead the less popular often at times more difficult route of education and employment (see table 8.1).

'My friends were going to work while I was going to school and they were coming home with I don't know about €200 at the end of the week and I had nothing and so there was an insane drive all the time to leave school a temptation should we say' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

'I suppose the other thing everybody left school then after the vocational start that was a two-year exam in those days you went to the local tech, you could take an apprenticeship after that you didn't need an Inter-cert so most of my buddies would have left in 2nd or 3rd year of school' (Male, Southside, 50s).

'Some of them committed suicide and there's others that turned to drugs and whatever' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'Yeah, I was also introduced to drugs very early and now I didn't dabble in anything but like the three lads that I hung around with did' (Female, Northside, 30s).

The second form of resilience stems from the personal impact of poverty and classism, where participants found doors closing on them and the pathway through education and employment a difficult one due to the lack of capitals and networks. Despite these obstacles, the participants doggedly persevered, refusing to give up on their respective educational journeys.

*'Because I I felt I was continuously fighting battles to stay in ***** school particularly secondary school' (Male, Southside, 60s).*

*'It was a drive that I didn't like people telling me what I could or couldn't do from a very young age. I just was a ***** born natural born contrarian. I just couldn't stand someone saying to me that you can't' (Male, Southside, 60s).*

*'I am here because of where I grew up. I'm sitting here doing this because of where I grew up. Everything I like, I like UM....Like a lot can call it, you know, hard work...And it goes back to people saying, no, you can't do this because you're from ***** And that's why I have a PhD because at every step I've always been kind of I'd have a target. And I'm like, I get you now and I'll beat you. And that's what I've always been. And it comes from where I grew up... I think that sort of thing of like, I always feel like the underdog. So, I have to be 10 times better now and I won't just beat you I'll destroy you' (Male, Northside, 30s).*

'I felt kind of on the fringes of everything, but I think maybe I have kind of put myself there as well. I don't know maybe it suits me to be there....and maybe being on the fringes even as a child probably built those skills of resilience to feel the fear and do it anyway kind of thing' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'I learned about going into survival mode, you know, like what you have to do to survive. You appreciate the small things. You don't take anything for granted, you know. Uh. You don't expect a lot. And you, you know how to go out and earn a living....But that was instilled in me....that's important because I've passed that on to my own kids' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

9.5.2 Strong Work Ethos

The majority of participants discuss the importance of having a positive work ethos in their homes and how this inherited norm helped their own positive choices in life. They stress the importance placed by their parents on employment and earning money, mostly due to a very real sense of economic necessity, sharing the values of hard work with their children. As discussed earlier in the chapter the participants' parents modelled this ethos in their own lives.

'Yeah. Uh, so it was never an option not to work in my house growing up my dad's Both my parents worked. Uh. Well, I know well, my dad worked all the time. Uh, I think my mother came out of work to rear us at some stage . Uh, but she always worked also. So, there was never an opportunity where you couldn't where you didn't work' (Female A, Southside, 40s).

'People who struggled to survive. You got to see people who did their utmost like they worked are like I know women that worked three and four jobs in order to provide for their children. Really. Really did their very, very best, you know, cleaning jobs, takeaways at night while the husband went off to the pub and it's, you know, and. Buying their books, sending them off to school like, that's like that's to be admired. You don't you know? I mean, that's real. They're real workers in my opinion' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

'He worked really hard in the shoe factory he worked in a. Band played at all the weddings like that around. Everybody knew him. So you were like morning, noon and night he worked' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

9.5.3 A Sense of Social Justice

The participants pride themselves in their working-class values and how these transferred to their current lives. The principles instilled in them from both their homes and their communities of origin has given them strengths and capabilities they value in both their personal and professional lives to date.

'My values are....I won't judge you, not a hope of it. And if somebody walks in that door now or whatever and has an issue, I'll do all everything I can to help you. And, yeah, I suppose hard work really' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'Respect having respect for your elders was very Important that was. Kind of just ingrained in us we had. No other choice we. Knew that was the way that, yeah, we'd never throw rubbish on the ground. That was another thing, you know? Never. My grandfather taught us to have respect for everybody' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

[on being a good teacher] 'I think my background made me good at it because I could understand while not condescend or pity or feel, it was I was doing the charitable deeds you know. And and that understanding what we're where we're born into. That sense of social justice, yeah, has been the backbone and I think my background and the influence of my mother in particular made me connect really well with with those kids. It was actually about enabling them, empowering them, trying to take away as many barriers and give them every opportunity that they deserved. Just like everyone else, to be the best that they could be without some middle-class person looking down on them' (Female, Southside, 50s).

9.5.4 Realisation of Societal Class Differences – Agency in Action

Ten of the twelve participants recall key pivotal moments when they realised their social class status was different to their peers outside of their own immediate community, with the majority of these experiences occurring within a school environment. The realisation derived from moments of comparison, whether that be material wealth and possessions of others compared to their own homes, or an acute awareness that they did not possess the same cultural and social capitals as their new peer groups. This realisation arose when participants began socialising with more affluent peers, moreover, those who attended primary and secondary schools outside their community had an earlier realisation, as cross-class mixing occurred faster for these participants. Chetty (2023) argues that schools provide a unique environment where students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds can interact and form valuable connections.

'Probably moving to a middle-class primary school was my first exposure to being from a disadvantaged community, and I think, the intention from my parents was that I would go to the feeder secondary school and that you would get in early but I suppose it did really did remove me from my own surroundings and that was negative' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

'I think it was when I started going to other houses that when I started to get a sense of that, maybe my life was a little bit different. Particularly around birthday parties, and I think like I did notice her house was much larger and her garden was much larger, and I think you start to notice those things I'd say about maybe 6-7. Yeah, quite young. You start to I think you just start weighing things up in your head and you look around and you. You get a sense of maybe like the abundance of a party in somebody else's house' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

*'But I would have seen a difference in class without knowing its class. Being a child in ***** and my best friend being a child in *****. There were the differences that I saw. Well, I didn't have the language or the words to know exactly what it was, yeah, except that ohh both parents are working... And they have a microwave. Or just that they don't scream'* (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'There are just different kids like, and I remember I had the one initial training thing like, and they had their violins and their harps and they were lovely girls, but I always remember feeling like, oh whoa, totally different people to me. All kind of that's when I felt the difference when I was in secondary school' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'Definitely. There definitely was a stigma, but I think it was good that I didn't realise it until I went to secondary School' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

*'Until until the teenage years. And then everything was different. And then like, say, our estates grown up would have been deemed disadvantage. I think when I first I started it in ***** it was a very mixed school. A lot of my friends were from more affluent areas and yeah, you've been from a very closed off space until that point, then you realise the differences'* (Female, Northside, 30s).

'When I was in college...that's like when I noticed the comments, that started about like where you were from, and you were from the that side of town. And all this kind of thing. Whereas I was actually like must have just been in a bubble the whole way through school and things because I just never saw any difference in my where I came from to other people' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

'Third level? That was different. Now that's when you really knew you were different....first time coming to college I was doing an interview and I got my own way, nobody dropped me with no car, nothing. I remember walking up trying to find where I was going and did the interview and came home...other girls had their parents with them' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

These narratives indicate that at important points of the school system, a realisation of class and socio-cultural differences became apparent, creating a feeling of difference and in some cases feelings of isolation for the participants. As they progressed through to higher levels of education, their community peers dwindled in number sizes (see 9.2.2.2), making them feel these intangible, nuanced differences in lifestyles. Attending college or university is not the predetermined path for most working-class families as seen in chapter four. Bourdieu (1986)

postulates that working class families do not have the capital or habitus that equates to power, acceptance or connections in key institutions like universities, therefore is not an obvious life trajectory. Thus, making a bold decision to attend university, a first time in all of the participants households, was a marker of delineation from their families and close friends. Seven of the participants note that this was the point of change and shift in their most important relationships, and they were now 'different' to the norms and cultures surrounding them. Despite meeting SES related obstacles, and the feelings of 'outsiderness' and isolation the participants persevered with education with seven of the twelve participants progressing onto third level through a traditional route after the Established Leaving Certificate. All seven were the first in their family, if not their generation to make such a choice. In analysing the data of the participants' statistics of a traditional educational journey to third level, most attention needs to be credited to their agentic behaviour in choosing this unique option amongst their friends and family groups. The use of their key personality traits of resilience, strong work ethics and a sense of social justice were employed to develop agency in making these distinctive decisions to attend third level. In agreement (Hatt, 2007; Hernandez et al., 2021) purport that students with lower-socioeconomic status and their associated lived experiences can equip them with skills and perspectives that can help them succeed and progress in school, such as resilience, and empathy. All remaining five participants who chose different roads to their educational success through community education and eventually higher education, equally displayed agency and resilience in their journey to a life they had reason to value. Similar to their peers who took the more traditional route, they noted as their educational achievements grew, so did their difficulties with relating to their friends and family. Agency allowed the participants to take control of their learning and make difficult decisions that align with their interests and goals. In these particular areas of the interviews, their agency is evident, whereby the participants despite feeling diverse, remained in education and also some engaged in self-advocacy (see 9.2.2.4) to retain their right to space and voice in these organisations.

*'But then I found out I needed; I needed to get a minimum of four honours to get a college grant....So I spent two years fighting to get into honours classes....just again that social streaming. What I called dodgy classes like you know where you were learning nothing with teachers that didn't basically give a **** like' (Male, Southside, 60s).*

Their key personality traits facilitated this agency and helped them take control of their own destiny by challenging the normative trajectories predicted for lower SES individuals. Amongst the participants their respect for education and their accumulation of

institutionalised cultural capital is noteworthy. All twelve of them have continued their educational journey to high levels of achievement and expressed a passion for the emancipatory role education has played in providing them freedoms to a life they value.

9.6 Displaced Identity in Social Class Mobility

In the research, while gathering data on social class mobility and determining factors that improved disadvantaged individuals' chances of upward mobility in the Limerick city estates, what became apparent early in the data collection was the fact that upward mobility caused a shift in the participants sense of belonging and identity. This section will examine the findings surrounding social class identity and the impacts of upward mobility on identity, leaning on the theory of Bourdieu.

9.6.1 Social Class Identity

In social class mobility, it is important to identify how the participants frame their own sense of social class, therefore, during the interviews, participants were asked to describe their current social class status. *'How would you describe your social class status now?'* Eliciting direct answers to these questions proved challenging, as interviewees often engaged in thoughtful contemplation and introspection. All the respondents adopted a more traditional interpretation of social class, using typical objective socio-economic metrics of occupation, income and education etc. Although they could see 'on paper' they were meeting all the socio-economic characteristics that traditionally signify middle-class status, they could not align themselves with the middle class due to the disparities regarding their background, values and social norms. All the participants hold professional jobs and reside in affluent communities; however, ten of the twelve respondents continue to identify as working class, and their community of origin is still very much an integral part of their identity.

'Working class all day and so proud of it' (Male B, Southside, 30s).

'Well, I am still a working-class hero, somethings will never leave you. You know somethings you cannot move away from. I am still working-class mentality I am a working-class person' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'I am working class, and I am happy with that in my life' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'I'm not middle class not all middle class, I wouldn't want to be considered middle class I think you are where you come from. I think lots of people you know forget where they are coming from' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

While the vast majority of participants eventually identified as working class, there was some initial confusion as to the defining characteristics of both working and middle class, highlighting not only the ambiguity of class but also hinting at the fractured sense of class identity experienced by those traversing class divides. A third of the respondents identified as middle class at first, based on their education and occupation, however, after some thought, they all changed their minds, resolutely identifying as working class and firmly adhering to this.

*'Like I know that on paper you would probably describe me as middle class because I am a teacher....no.....I just hate the word class sometimes and I know I am working class, that's where I come from a working-class background, and I am proud of that. And I think that's what my blood is that is my heritage, and I think I am a proud like every young girl I am a proud city girl, I will always be from *****' (Female B, Southside, 30s)*

'In between to be honest, maybe middle class....no.....working class all day to be quite honest, like it's all my surroundings, my people, my likes, I don't own my own house but I do work very hard but I am definitely and probably always be working class and proud to be...yeah, I wouldn't like to change it or give it up' (Female, Northside, 30s).

One of the participants who shifted from identifying as middle to working class found that she fitted comfortably into neither category, but closer to working than middle class. In her attempt to locate herself on the socio-economic scale, she actually created her own category to avoid identifying as middle class, describing herself as 'upper-marginalised' – working-class background and values, with middle-class occupation and income.

'I've done very well for myself in the economic sense, and do I feel marginalised now? No, so working-middle-upper. Middle, definitely, definitely not upper anyway. Who wants to be upper? No definitely middle class. I wouldn't even say middle class actually, no because when I see middle, when I hear middle class, I get the no, no. Somewhere around upper marginalised' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

Other participants also struggled to provide straight-forward responses, hesitating to call themselves middle class, while remaining faithful to their working-class roots despite the changes in their socio-economic circumstances.

'I am working class I do genuinely, I don't consider myself middle class at all even though people will probably look on and say oh they are middle class, I'm not middle class. I am not

at all middle class, and I wouldn't want to be considered middle class. I think you are where you come from and I don't think you forget where you come from' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'Yeah, I've I've really struggled with it. I can't say the word middle-class with my name said in it. I can't because I truly don't feel it, but if you had to go into what identifies us socio-economically as class, I would be sitting in the middle and maybe ultimately that's what I wanted. I don't want to be.....and I am not mad about class definitions in anyway, but you cannot escape it' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

The remaining two participants attributed their class position to middle class based on their current socio-economic position.

'I'll have to say middle-class now because I, we have two cars in the driveway and we live in a middle-class area and yeah I always describe myself as a working class, but I know I am, my roots are working class but the life I live now is middle class' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

'Middle, I'd say our middle class now. Yeah, I would say yeah middle class we are two professionals, my husband is in finance we have a mortgage we were middle class yeah' (Female, Southside, 50s).

9.6.2 *Stuck Between Two Worlds, Belonging in Neither*

The inner class-conflict illustrated by the participants above gives strong support to Bourdieu's theory on torn identity, or *habitus clivé*. This can occur amongst individuals who have made an upwards social class leap, but feel conflicted regarding their class identity, as there can often be such large social, cultural and economic differences between their class of origin and their current socio-economic grouping. In order to explore the concept of torn identity further, the participants were asked whether upward social class mobility had an impact on their sense of identity and belonging. Most participants acknowledge their affiliation to, and the affection they still hold for their original communities. Paradoxically, the successes and gains made by the interviewees in their lives, also resulted in major personal losses too, as they lost friends and family connections as well as their sense of belonging to a community or sociocultural setting. Sixty percent of the group stated they felt a sense of being stuck between two worlds and belonging in neither.

'I mean you were struggling like you were living between two worlds, and you weren't accepted in either world, like going back home was finished for you because you've gone off to college. Then you're in college and you know people are talking about experiences like a

*small little thing, a guy telling me one day about having food in the in this freezer at home and I was like what the ****is a freezer?’ (Male, Southside, 60s).*

‘Bending into the system and blending into it in some ways I think and and yeah it has had a massive impact I suppose in opening doors, but also probably closing doors as well because as I said like I can walk down home again now and people are like who the hell are you are completely disconnected from us, like old neighbours. But I’m not part of that community anymore, but I also don’t feel part of the higher education community either-or middle-class community. So, I’m kind of between the two of them and sort of floating in between in a strange way’ (Male, Northside, 30s).

‘The day I left to go to college I remember actually crying I knew this was a new direction for me this was venturing off into a world I knew nobody down there, there was no one from my class going....maybe unconsciously that emotion was an unconscious recognition of or an awareness that this is bringing me somewhere that I wasn’t coming back from’ (Female, Southside, 50s).

*‘I never felt I really belonged in my community....like I would have been prefect at school...I would have done things right, very obedient, very obliging but you know there was a narrative there like the wild kids come from ***** I felt I was made to feel as a young person that I had notions and it was a sense of sit and fit in and I was made to feel like that’ (Female B, Northside, 40s).*

‘Your sense of belonging is more about who you are, who you are connected to, yeah your journey I suppose the places we have come from that it makes is harder to fit into some parts of society because you have had doors closed like’ (Female A, Northside, 40s).

‘So, I never felt like I belonged in college but then I never felt like I belonged at home so even all my close friends they all went straight to work so nobody in my friendship group or in my family went to college, so I was like the freak’ (Female, Southside, 50s).

To further compound the sense of personal conflict associated with upward mobility, some of the participants report feeling like a ‘fraud’, or suffering from ‘imposter syndrome’ in their new careers, communities and lives. Unlike people from higher class groups who usually report having imposter syndrome in the context of a new job or career change, the interviewees report having imposter syndrome across a range of social and professional settings. This stems from the disparity between their cultural identity and the social norms of their communities of origin with the social and cultural norms of their new communities and

associations. These disparities are apparent in a variety of ways such as accents and dress sense, which can mark them as different in their new settings, further adding to their sense of being an imposter.

'But there always was that sense of imposter syndrome yeah, I don't know if it's to do with language or education or where you were probably from, I don't know it just happens' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

'Hearing the accents and kind of you know hearing the conversations about their dads owning this business and that business and I remember saying like you know I'm not bright enough I won't be able for this you know like you had grown up that way' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'I felt at university complete imposter syndrome like these people are all brighter than me they're all better than me with professional parents, their parents know the system, they talk better, they have holidays, they've had experience and I had never been on a plane....never been on a family holiday...I was just not sophisticated...you know you've done nothing in your life except work in chippers and drink and hang out' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'When I was teaching, like I was teaching and I felt like such a fraud I was coming in in my chinos and brown shoes and I was a lecturer man....I was like a fraud on the inside I was cringing and I couldn't be myself' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'I feel like a fraud sometimes, I think I've become so distanced from who I am and who I was, I've become disconnected from who I am and I think as a young lad and all that values that I still have in me that sometimes I feel that I'm not living up to those values and using what I've kind of got for the last 10 years' (Male, Northside, 30s).

Therefore, it can be concluded that social class mobility did create a sense of torn identity or disrupted habitus, supporting Bourdieu's theory in chapter two of habitus clivé.

9.7 Conclusions

The interviews have gathered a rich, descriptive corpus of research data which has been presented in this chapter. Each story provides a privileged look into the lives of the participants and their incredible stories of growth, resilience and strength through adversity, social class barriers, and discrimination. The findings are insights into the impacts of social class from the lived experience of working-class individuals exploring both the push and pull factors in societal structures along with the participants agency and key personality traits

which impacted upward mobility. Furthermore, the research examined how push and pull factors interacted at different stages of the participants' lives, enabling them to overcome challenges and barriers associated with deprivation and disadvantage. A key finding highlighted the crucial role of multiple social structures in providing consistent support throughout an individual's journey. The research also unearthed the effects of social class mobility on their identities, and how their own sense of belonging and social space has been impacted by upward shifts along the hierarchy of social class. Bourdieu's theories on habitus *clivé* and the vital role of social capital in upward mobility have both been supported in these findings, also supporting Chetty and Sen's view of the imperative role of social networks and connections in social class mobility.

A Better Transition...

I was acutely aware of my differences from my friends outside my community, I knew my knowledge of the outside world especially in areas of culture and politics was shockingly small. I stayed quiet in a lot of conversations, but I listened, learned, and assimilated where I could. The biggest changes for me happened in transition year (TY). I was extremely fortunate that it was the first year the school introduced the programme. Twenty-four of us were chosen, my age came to my favour (the youngest students in the group were chosen first) as I was the youngest in the whole year, having started school at three. Nobody else from my area or any other council estate settings chose this programme, or maybe now reflecting on my naivety maybe they didn't get accepted. My dad had passed away two weeks prior to starting 4th year and I firmly believe the cultural enrichment TY bestowed upon me saved me from negative choices. Alcohol was readily available to me at 15, I was surrounded by it with family and friends and was already in the habit of drinking regularly. However, TY opened my mind to a wider world, and my exposure levels to different social and cultural capital increased as I had the opportunity to get involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. I had my first experience of working in the classroom on a work experience programme and with the help of the local clergy I got placed in the local school for the deaf. I instantly fell in love with teaching and found a huge joy in working with children. It would be years later before I believed I was capable enough to pursue a career in education. As much as I enjoyed the teaching experience, at 16 I had a continuous narrative in my head telling me it was a pipe dream beyond my limits. I truly believed I could never achieve such a goal. I think that is why my mother continues to introduce my profession before my name, as she shared in the belief it was beyond my limit.

TY afforded me with real opportunities for social and cultural expansions, I began to mix with a broader set of peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds and experienced arts and cultural enrichment programmes which had a long-lasting effect on my life. I believe TY set me on the right path in senior cycle, prior to TY I had contemplated leaving school after my Junior Certificate to pursue employment.



Chapter 10 – Discussions

10.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the main findings from the interviews in a bid to address and answer the research questions and furthermore assess how the digital ethnography support these findings. The chapter begins in ethnographic fashion by discussing the participants' lived experience of working-class and how they construct their social class identity from an inside perspective. In considering identity formation, the discussions then progress to the impacts of upward mobility on the sense of self and belonging for the participants, using the lens of Bourdieu's cleft habitus to assess their experiences. Employing the theoretical framework, the next section examines the role of social capital in bolstering the chances of upward mobility for the participants, subsequently, investigating their successful agentic practices in their journey out of poverty. The chapter concludes with a comparison of outside perceptions on disadvantaged communities versus the inside lived experience, to discuss the effects of stereotypes and labels on the residents of these estates. In general, the chapter will situate the work within the larger context of theory and literature, to position the study effectively in scholarly discourse and to explore aspects of the research that was both confirming and unexpected. This research is important because it draws on the lived experiences of the working class, bringing life and voice to their participation in the main social structures of the community, education, and family. It provides insights on both the societal and agentic facilitators in social class mobility and seeks commonalities of experience amongst the participants and social media narratives on factors which led to class mobility. The purpose of identifying these common experiences is to strengthen the understanding on aspects of society which serves to help upward mobility for individuals and communities.

10.1 Framing Working Class Identity in the Push & Pull Factors of the Participants' Lives

Identity emerged as a central theme in this research, particularly evident in participant accounts (see 9.6). Participants often attributed key personality traits, crucial for their upward mobility, to their family and community. This placed an emphasis in the study on understanding how participant identities are both shaped and transformed by the interplay of social class and upward mobility. It aimed to explore how participants define and qualify their social class identities, considering both objective factors and their own subjective interpretations. These measures are drawn from chapter three, focusing on the ATD perspective of working-class identity which encompasses both objective and subjective metrics.

Initially, to induce the meaning of social class identity from the interviews the participants were asked to discuss their current social class status. There was a purposeful avoidance in the questioning strategy of offering typical markers of class identity and this allowed the question to be completely unstructured and open in response. Eriksson (2013) claims that what people say and keep silent about produces meaning and value in social life. Hence, long silences were allowed for, to develop a space where individuals could advance a personalised meaning of what social class identity represents in their own life and allow them to articulate and structure their own meaning. Previous studies in social class identity have offered markers in which a person can relate to and situate themselves within, however, this approach sought a more reflective response that pushed the participant to conceptualise their own framing of class identity. Within these responses the common and shared perspective was sought to construct a lived experience view of what social class identity means to the participants. Ultimately, the majority of them would describe their current status and social identity as working-class. As explored in chapter two, Skeggs (2004) and Rickett & Morris (2021) purport that social identity markers are more than economic measures, they are cultural, relational, and represent an individual's connectedness to collective tastes, hobbies, experiences and sense of community. These markers are reflective on how the participants responded to their constructs of identity and they rationalised their working-class status using their parents' education & occupation, their communities of origin, the economic capital of their childhood, and their social and cultural capital. Furthermore, in the findings, participants describe their working-class status as a point of pride, a description earned from a collection of life experiences rather than objective statistics and a status that is fixed not transient. According to the APA (2015) social class is not just an objective categorisation, it is also an

individual's perception of their own social status and their sense of belonging to a particular group or community. Therefore, understanding the subjective experiences of the participants provides a more nuanced understanding of their framing and defining of their own SSS, and what identifiers they use to align themselves to a specific class structure e.g., what are their working-class identifiers. Chapter nine examined the main push and pull factors in the lives of the participants in their upward mobility journey, these factors significantly influenced and shaped their identities, experiences and values, as seen in the narratives surrounding challenging push factors and facilitating pull factors. Figure 10.1 maps the factors in a thematic approach.

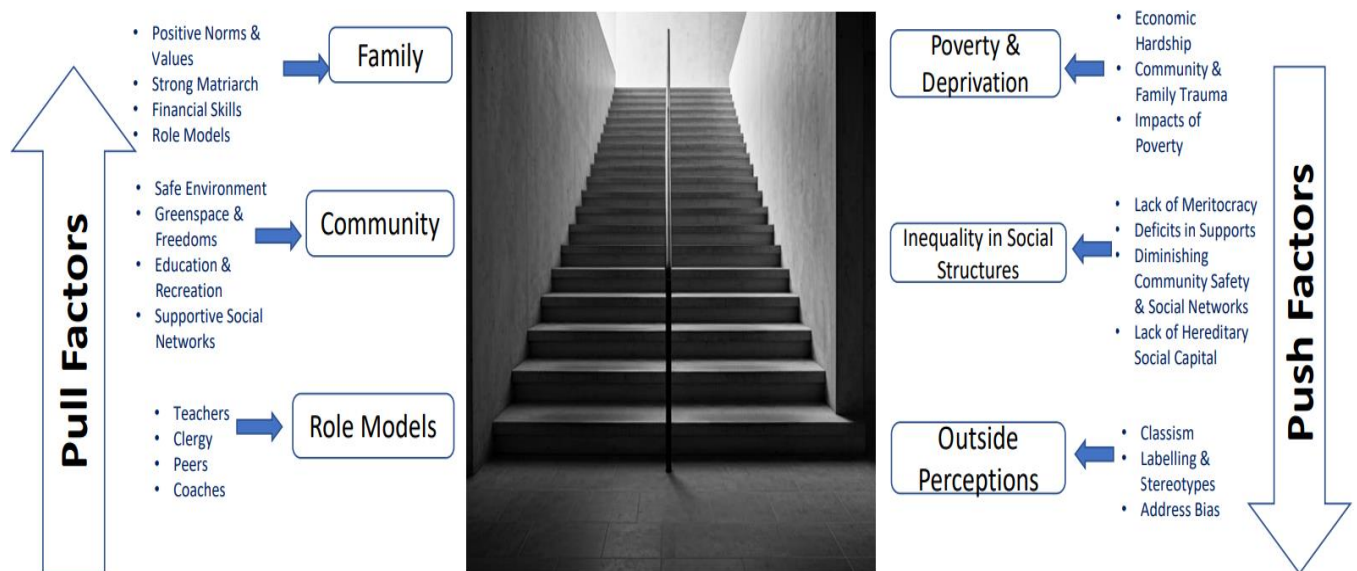


Figure 10.1 Pull Factors in Upward Mobility vs Push Factors

On examining the pull factors, or what the participant's value as positive supports systems in their upward mobility, it is apparent these factors are predominantly human or social capital. Both family and community are reported as being the strongest influence in their lives. This is a common thread in the research as all of the participants equate their social class identity rooted in their family background and community of origin. While the push factors are more systemic in their description including poverty, economic hardship, inequalities and discriminatory practices. However, it is evident that both push and pull factors have shaped the participants overall identity, when the participants describe push factors, they

simultaneously describe their formation of resilience and drive for social justice (see 9.6). When they describe pull factors, they describe opportunities and exposures to different social and cultural capitals which expanded their beliefs, values, and knowledge, which is discussed later in this chapter. Moreover, it is apparent from the findings that the participants had multiple support systems embedded in the social structures of their lives and if the systemic structures failed the participant their family or community structures supported them in a compensatory manner (see 9.5). Thus, the pull factors of family and community proved so impactful, formative, and beneficial in the lives of the participants that, despite moving away from these communities, the majority of the participants still frame their social status and sense of belonging firmly in these working-class areas.

The following life experiences are commonly accounted for the participant's working-class identity formation:

10.1.1 The strongest identifier of working-class status - how the participants situate and justify their position in the social class hierarchy

Participants were asked to describe their current social class status in chapter nine (see 9.7.1), in their responses they used both objective and subjective measures to assess their answer to this question. It is apparent in their shared responses that they acknowledge 'on paper' they would be identified as middle class, as all their objective measures of wealth, income, education, and occupation are situated in this stratum. However, all of the participants struggle to place their subjective social status in the middle-class bracket. Eventually, ten of the twelve state that they were and are working-class, with the remaining two placing themselves as middle-class but only using objective measures. The most striking measure of working-class for all of the participants was an association to their parents' education and occupations as a common marker of their current subjective social status (see 10.3.1). Thus, they relate their own working-class status as a direct product of their parents' income and occupation. This is further characterised by the inequity of access to education all of their parents experienced in the past and the impact that had on their long-term outcomes. All of the participants' parents left education very young to pursue employment, despite the majority of the participants describing their parents as being very intelligent but not getting to complete their education to any significant level due to poverty. In Ireland, between the 1950s and 1960s, 33% of children left school after primary and by the 1970s, post the introduction of free second level education in the country, this figure reduced to 21% (CSO, 2019). Therefore, the participants' parents were amongst these high statistics in the country.

'Like both my parents finished their education after primary school like my mother was born in a Magdalene laundry.... She was then reared by her grandmother. My father was severely dyslexic and just bumped off school....a really bright man. Both my parents are really, really clever people, but my father.... he hated to write....But you asked him anything, figures, statistics, memory. Brilliant' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'Uh, so my father came from a background where I suppose he would have been quite bright but never got the opportunity to to engage with education. So that was always a strong, very strong moral with his parenting' (Female A, Northside, 30s).

100% of the participants discuss the fact that leaving school early due to economic hardships was a common trait of their working-class culture and growing up poor. In chapter nine the reader gains an understanding of intergenerational poverty and the impacts it had on the parents of the participants, as their educational journeys came to a premature end.

Furthermore, the participants commonly identify poverty as the biggest obstacle in their pursuit of further education. Accordingly, all of their parent's work(ed) in manual or low-skilled employment due to this lack of education or skill training. Importantly, half of the participants note that growing up, their parents pushed education as an escape route from poverty and always communicated the value of education in providing opportunities for their children. These parents wanted to break the cycle of deprivation and saw education as the only option, knowing first-hand that low levels of educational attainment led to low paid, manual work.

'But my dad would be saying all you have is your mind like because we don't have money. We don't have anything here. We won't ever be able to pay your way out of here. We won't. We don't have it. But your mind ...you'll always have your own mind, and you know, kind of like your education. You can walk out of here out of this estate and if you have your your papers and your education behind you you will go places' (Female A, Southside, 30s).

These parental beliefs on the importance of education are reflected in the participants' own achievements in education as discussed in chapter nine. The importance of attending school (see figure 9.2) and supporting their children paid off as all the participants despite facing obstacles completed their education to very high levels. However, despite their success in the objective measurement of income or wealth, they still ground their socioeconomic status with that of their working-class parents who worked in more menial employment. Therefore, acknowledging their parents hard work and lack of education as a marker of their own social class status, is an obvious commonality amongst most of the participants in their affiliation to

a working-class status. Interestingly, a strong sense of loyalty to their origins is very apparent here, this corresponds with Reay (2021) who argues that a unique guilt exists for working-class individuals when they move to middle-class environments. She describes this as a sense of betrayal or guilt for leaving family and friends behind who remain in working-class situations. Consequently, all of the participants continue to recognise their beginnings as the core part of their current social identity, they remain loyal to where they have come from and refuse to turn their back on their working-class roots.

10.1.2 *The Strong Matriarch*

A second common identifier amongst all of the participants in framing their working-class identity, was a predominant the role of the strong mother in the home. In the interviews, the participants reflected on the economic hardships they experienced in their childhoods. They recall seeing their parents' making sacrifices by working extra jobs and forfeiting their own needs to provide for the needs of their children and generally living in survival mode. In these hardships most account for the role of the strong matriarch in their house which was an obvious theme amongst the mothers in the stories. These women drove a strong philosophy on the importance of long-term financial planning, instilling a sense of hard work to budget money and save for the future in their children. Within this ideology instant gratification is challenged and replaced with an appreciation of earnings and storing some percentage of these earnings for future needs. The participants discuss this area with reverence and respect for the skill their mothers taught them. They saw the fruits of their mothers' thriftiness when their little savings turned into opportunities like holidays, or a better pair of shoes, or the ability to pay a bill, teaching them financial literacy skills from a young age. It developed a sense of appreciation for the longer-term outcomes in their lives and allowed them value other areas of life that needed longer term investment, like education or employment. Mahesha (2023) posits that financial literacy is a crucial life skill that can empower individuals and communities to achieve greater economic independence, build financial security and break the poverty cycle. However, for many marginalised communities' access to financial education and resources remains limited (Johnson-Motoyama et al., 2021), these participants had the advantage of inheriting these vital skills from their mothers, coupled with hard work and savings, as they proudly account for carrying these values into their current lives and some participants discuss passing these values down to their children. They value and respect their mother's skills in times of economic hardship and equate strong women to not only their homes but in their communities, they recall women on their avenues always

being resourceful and helpful, and they trademark this to a signifier of their working-class heritage.

10.1.3 Limited Hereditary Social Capital - Connected by Chance not Design!

Thirdly, the importance of advantageous social networks in social class mobility was highlighted by all the participants in the interviews and also in the social media discussions, especially when growing up in working class communities. There is an obvious gap felt between the working and privileged class, in regards accessing connections to the right people. X users express this with sentiments such as:

‘There are insiders and outsiders in this country for years, but the only problem now is the insiders have pulled the ladder up after them making it impossible for the outsiders to gain any mobility.’

Pilgrim-Brown (2023) describe these facilitating networks ‘as a tool to ascend the hierarchy of dominant cultures in society’ (p.60). On social media a significant proportion of conversations surrounding social class note that there are two tiers of society in Ireland, a working class and a privileged class. The privileged class reaping the rewards and monopolising the life-opportunities that connections and inherited economic and cultural capital grants them. The posts reveal a belief, held by many people, especially amongst working-class communities that a ‘golden circle of privilege’ exists in Ireland. Living in a society that rewards the possession of the right social capital with progression, those lacking this capital are frustrated at how much harder they have to work to achieve any level of success.

In the participants interviews, both hereditary and non-hereditary social capital is discussed in a facilitating manner, individuals acknowledge the importance of the right connections in life to promote upward mobility. The majority of the participants indicated that having the right start within their homes through parental and family support was vital. However, to progress in education and occupation, non-hereditary social capital was more important to gain the right networks of people that could help with acquiring jobs and educational opportunities etc. Therefore, the working-class identifier in social capital emerges as a distinct lack of hereditary social capital, as working-class individuals report being acutely aware that their wealthier friends and peers had easier access to the networks that have the ‘multiplier effect’ i.e., connections that create a greater availability of further capitals in life such as education, employment and knowledge (see 2.1.1). Participants from working class backgrounds

obtained their social capital through extended family members, community support workers, coaches, and teachers (see 9.2.1.3). Evidently, through the research it becomes apparent that these social networks were based on chance rather than design. Working class individuals describe their ‘luck’ in meeting the right person who offered them access to an opportunity, conversely, middle class individuals are born into hereditary capital which intendedly provides social networks. The research findings indicate that the perception of a deficit in pre-designed social networks can be a subjective marker of working-class identity.

In summary, working class identity has been framed by the participants as being situated in their family backgrounds and the role of the strong female in the communities and their deficits in both economic and social capital. However, they consider their identity to be enriched by their inherited dispositions, values, and norms. There are strikingly strong connections and loyalty to their home and community of origin which serves to inform their working-class identity more than any other factors or experiences in their lives to date.

10.2 Displaced Identity in Social Class Mobility

This section explores how working-class identity and sociocultural belonging is disrupted by social class mobility. It examines whether the defining characteristics of the working-class participants as discussed in 10.2, either merged or diverged in their interactions in fields which are predominantly middle-class. Furthermore, it assesses Bourdieu’s theory of habitus *clivé* or torn identity caused by upward mobility. Crew (2022) argues that in upward mobility, individuals carry the ‘ghost’ of their working-class habitus with them into their new middle-class life. Bourdieu (1984) describes upward mobility as a painful and divisive experience creating a double perception of self. Therefore, this research sought to determine if the impacts of upward mobility on the working-class identity was indeed negative, and did it create this ‘double perception’ in an individual’s sense of self. As discussed in chapter two, Bourdieu describes this shift in identity occurring when the ‘fit between dispositions and social structure is broken’ (Mu & Zing, 2019, p.9). Rickett & Morris (2021) argue that attention needs to be paid to the ‘lived and experienced feelings of both unbelonging and emotional injuries sustained through the enactment of this labour carried out to claim rightful belonging’ (p.98). These characteristics of mobility can be clearly identified in this research. The next section will attend to the lived experience of social mobility and its outcome of ‘unbelonging’.

10.2.1 *Torn Identity – Habitus Clivé*

In chapter nine the findings to the question: ‘what is your current social class status?’ is explored in detail and as highlighted in the chapter, it was not framed in theory nor were the participants given suggestions as to what social class is, but they were allowed the complete freedom and space to construct their own answers. This approach resulted in an invaluable insight into how the participants frame their identity in social class, after experiencing upward mobility. The most striking and defining finding amongst the participants was that upward mobility did in fact serve to disrupt their sense of belonging and cause a tear in their identity across social class strata. The participants reported that as they progressed through educational and professional achievements and experienced more success, their sense of sociocultural belonging shifted as they became more embroiled in middle class settings. They claim that their working-class habitus, forms of capital, and family backgrounds were at odds with elements of their new middle-class surroundings leaving a sense of divide in their lives between both social class groups. Reay (2021) argues that disjuncture between working-class habitus and the middle-class field can cause significant emotional strain, which concurs with these findings. The participants can easily acknowledge that their objective socioeconomic measures are within the middle-class status, as they achieved more economic success in life, however, their subjective social status, especially their dispositions like accent, language, and values, loyally identify as a collective of their working-class communities. As explored in chapter three (see 3.3) Deimer et al (2009) argues that individuals can subjectively identify with the social class group of their peers or origins despite economic and social evidence that they ‘should’ identify with a different group. This is referred to as a conflict with the sense of self (McLaughlin, 2024) i.e., when subjective social status from birth conflicts with current social status. In agreement, Bourdieu (1984) reasons that upwardly mobile individuals never feel a sense of belonging to the class they came from or the class they have recently joined as their habitus, capitals, field and overall sense of social space alters due to either educational, occupational or socio-economic shift. This concludes that an individual’s self-perception of subjective social status is strongly tied to their family and community of origin. Moreover, on examination of the responses to ‘what is your social class status now?’, ten of the twelve participants refer to their social class identity as being firmly rooted in working-class status as a direct reflection on their place of origin, all ten determined that their social identity is from their families and that is resolute and unwavering in their answers. Below are the most relevant excerpts from their responses:

'Somethings will never leave you....somethings you cannot move away from' (Female, Southside, 50s)

'I think you are where you come from' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'I come from a working-class background...that's what my blood is, that is my heritage' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'Working class all day...its my surroundings, my people, my likes and probably always will be working class and proud' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

'I think you are where you come from and I don't think you forget where you come from' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

The remaining two participants who identify themselves as middle-class only refer to objective measures of wealth as defining their new social status. There were no subjective indicators of their identity linked to middle-class, with one participant using phrases like 'I will have to say middle class now' then describes her material wealth, however, immediately refers back to her 'roots' as working class. The second participant describes herself as middle class and lists all economic and objective reasons as to why but never refers to any of the subjective measures of class or any other part of her identity.

Amongst all of the participants there is strong evidence in the responses of an internal struggle, as the participants attempt to describe their social class identity. The term middle-class appears to create negative connotations or emotions for the participants and there is conflict or contradiction in most of the answers with responses including:

'I wouldn't want to be considered middle class' (Male B, 30s, Southside).

'On paper you would consider me middle class....no....I know I am working class' (Female B, 30s, Southside).

'Maybe middle class....no....working class all day to be honest' (Female A, 30s, Southside).

'When I see middle, when I hear middle-class, I get the no no' (Female, 30s, Northside).

'People will probably look on and say oh they are middle class, I am not middle class, I am not at all middle class, and I wouldn't want to be considered middle class' (Male, Southside, 50s).

'I can't say the word middle class with my name in it, I can't because I truly don't feel it but if you had to go on what identifies us socioeconomically as class I would be sitting in the middle' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

From this collection of excerpts of responses, it is evident that the participants can identify that their objective measures of social class are set in the middle-class 'people will look on', 'socioeconomically I would be sitting in the middle' indicating that outside perception of material wealth would situate them here. They recognise that their economic capital has altered as has the fields of education and occupation they operate within. However, their habitus and elements of their social and cultural capital (subjective status) are firmly identified in the working-class status. Family heritage appears to be the strongest identifier in social class identity along with their community of origin. Concurring with this Skeggs (1997) describes habitus as not only a person's individual histories and predispositions but also the collective histories and dispositions gathered from their social space. The dispositions and stories of their heritage is evidently the most important element of identity for the participants. This implies a divide in their identity as they are situating themselves across two class stratifications, with objective measures appearing in the middle-class strata and subjective measures appearing in the working-class strata. This conclusion supports Bourdieu's theory that habitus is more durable than other markers of identity during shifts in social class environments. This became evident in chapter nine when the participants describe the direct impacts of upward mobility on their sense of belonging in the world. The majority responded with negative effects, describing being 'stuck between two worlds' and on their journey to achieving success in education and employment they describe a sense of loss and displacement along the way. They used words and terms like 'struggling' 'bending and blending' 'floating' 'outside the box' to detail the new space they occupy in the social class system. Half of the participants mark their choice to go onto third level education as a point of change in their relationships with family and friends. Attending college or university is not the predetermined path for most working-class families, Bourdieu (1986) postulates that working class families do not have the capital or habitus that equates to power, acceptance or connections in key institutions like universities. Therefore, it appears that making a bold decision to attend university, a first time in all of the participants households was a marker of delineation from their families and close friends. Friedman (2014) claims that when people challenge their habitus in pursuing class mobility 'it can cause disruption in people's sense of ontological coherence and tensions in their generational relationships' (p.358). Therefore, not only is the participant's own sense of self challenged in upward mobility but also their

relationships can become negatively impacted by this shift in influence. Most of the participants share that attending third level was a point of change and shift in their most important relationships and they were now perceived as being ‘different’ to the norms and cultures surrounding them, see excerpts below:

‘Living between two worlds and you weren’t accepted in either...like going back home was finished for you because you’ve gone off to college’ (Male, Southside, 60s).

‘But I’m not part of my community anymore but I also don’t feel part of the higher education or middle-class community either’ (Males, Northside, 30s).

‘The day I left for college...there was an awareness that this is bringing me somewhere I wasn’t coming back from’ (Female, Southside, 50s).

‘Going to third level that was outside the norm’ (Male, Southside, 50s).

‘Going to college did create a gap between me and my family because none of them or my close friends went to university, not even my extended family. I was the first generation to go’ (Female B, Southside, 30s).

This decision for the participants created the greatest ‘tear’ in their identity and left them feeling fragmented from their home and community. It apparently was not an easy decision as they were among the first in their family and friend groups to choose this, it also came with economic hardships and sacrifices (see 9.2.2.1). They were left to navigate a new field of third level education and the research indicates family support was limited due to deficits in cultural capital surrounding education. Consequently, in their lives educational mobility led to fractures amongst their friends and family who remained in their community of origin and the participants describe their existence as being ‘stuck between two worlds but belonging in neither’. Bourdieu (1998) uses emotive terms like ‘class transfuges’, ‘social limbo’ and ‘secret guilt’ (1998, p.106-107) to describe the sentiments of people that never feel acclimatised to their new positions in life as they have left a large part of their lives and generational ties behind. These are feelings of being ‘torn’ that come from experiencing success as failure (Reay 2015). Ultimately, these findings concur with Bourdieu’s theory on the dissociative effects of social class mobility, as participants describe a feeling of torn identity using comparable emotive language to describe their own experiences.

Subsequently, this research draws attention to the fact that attending college or university, were pivotal points in the participants lives. These decisions led to loss and fractures not only in their own sense of self but in their relationships with family and friends as this trajectory

in education remains an unusual or unique decision for working-class people to commit to. This is reflected in the HP Index for the four Regeneration areas of Limerick, they score an average range of 6.65% continuance to third level. Thus, attending third level from the most marginalised areas of Limerick city remains at an extremely low range, signifying that Ireland's third level institutions need to become more inclusive for individuals in the lower socioeconomic status. Social structures especially third level institutes, continue with strong emphasis on middle class cultures and as seen in chapter seven, working class individuals are expected to change their identity to adapt or else end up leaving (see 7.4.1.1). Narratives in this research, challenge these organisations to become more diverse and supportive of lower socioeconomic students and academics. Furthermore, to expand their culture and environment to support and celebrate working class cultures and norms, in lieu of forcing change on students who have made very difficult decisions to attend these institutions.

10.3 The Fundamental Role of Social Capital in Facilitating Social Class Mobility

From the theoretical framework in chapter two, it can be determined that social capital is one of the most fundamental elements that needs to be present in a positive and transformative manner in the lives of working-class individuals seeking upward mobility. Chetty (2022) emphasises the essential role of social networks in shaping mobility outcomes, he argues that social connections influence career aspirations, norms and values, and provides valuable information on both educational and career opportunities. In Sen's Capability Approach, social capital plays a crucial role in contributing to individual's capabilities by providing access to networks, resources, social supports, and other important functionings (Robeyns, 2012). Therefore, social capital is productive; it allows individuals to achieve things not possible when they act alone, moreover it can make a difference between groups that possess the same level of economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1981). Research commonly claims that it is possible to grow the returns from an individual's capitals through social connections. Bourdieu defines this as the 'multiplier effect' of social capital (see 2.2.1). This effect hypothesises that 'membership of or access to the right networks provides opportunities to grow other capitals and improve career chances through access to resources embedded in a social network' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). Moreover, Putnam (2000) defines social capital as the collective value of social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other. He argues that this collective provides individuals with sense of belonging, feelings of trust and safety, values, norms and beliefs, and networks of bonding and bridging capital. Bonding capital refers to the relationships and networks within a

homogenous group, such as family or community (see fig 10.2) it reinforces exclusive identities and homogeneity and provides strong trust and support for individuals. Conversely, bridging capital is inclusive, it involves connections between diverse groups, and promotes links between people from different backgrounds, social classes, or communities such as educational institutions or places of employment. In chapter nine, the findings reveal a strong common thread of social capital amongst the participants’ pull factors in their upward mobility. All participants account for both hereditary and non-hereditary social connections affording them better opportunities and supports in life. Fig 10.2 below maps the bonding and bridging social capitals that were most commonly reported by the participants as beneficial in their pursuit of either educational or professional achievements.

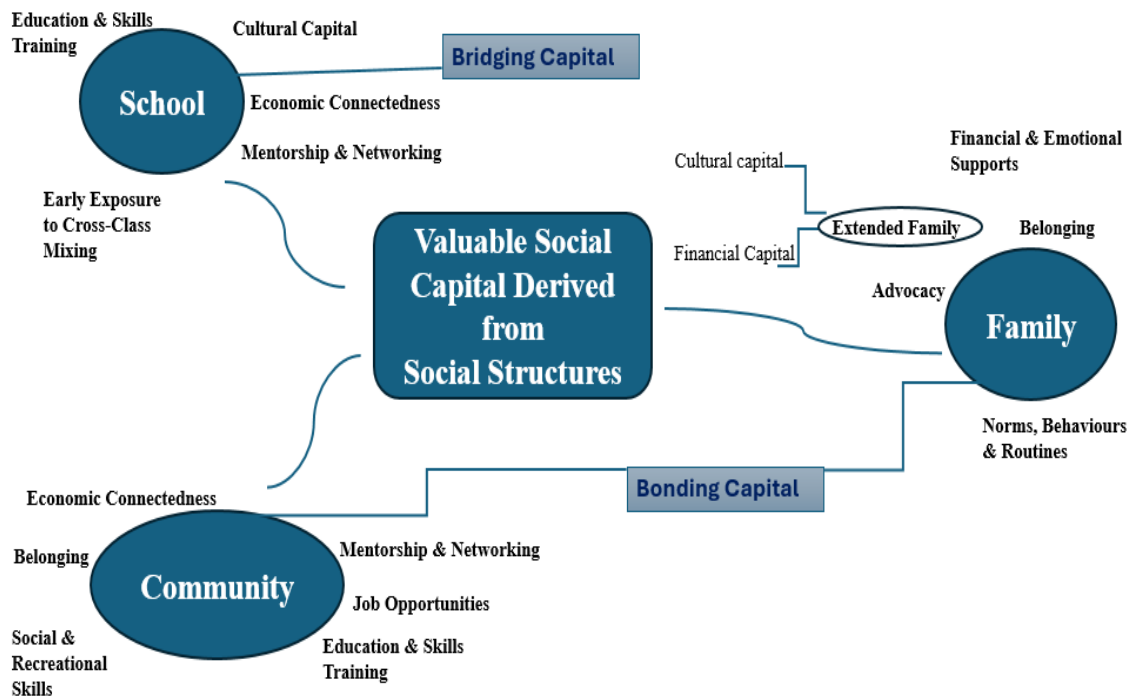


Fig 10.2 Valuable Social Capital Derived from Family, School, & Community in the Lives of the Participants

The next section will examine, firstly, the role social capital played in the participants’ upward mobility journey and secondly, the most important sources of transformative social capital for the participants within the social structures they operated within.

10.3.1 The Impacts of Education in Expanding the Social Capital of Individuals from Marginalised Communities

Chetty (2015) argues that neighbourhoods most conducive to upward mobility were ones which had multi-representational communities and school systems, i.e., where individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, race, and gender are socialising, and being educated together. These remain the most defining features of social structures that afford children the greatest chance of intergenerational mobility. In addition, Chetty et al (2022) report that cross-class relationships, or ‘economic connectedness’, are the strongest predictor of success for children with lower SES. Therefore, disadvantaged children who are exposed to socialisation with higher-income peers earn more as adults than disadvantaged children who only interact with other disadvantaged children. Furthermore, Chetty’s research claims that the younger the children are when they gain more economic connectedness, the stronger their chance of moving up the income ladder is as adults. There is a comprehensive body of evidence linking social capital to academic success and other learning outcomes. This is especially true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are lacking inherited social networks and connections, it is purported that this support and connection needed to achieve economic mobility can be supplemented by the social links they make in school. Therefore, education, according to Putnam (2000) is one of the most important determinants of social capital. This part of the research focuses on the forms of social capital in which education can supply, which is a vital factor in economic progression.

From the findings one of the main outcomes on school interactions, was the impact it had on improving the expansion of the participants’ networks and connections through their socialisation with diverse groups of peers. This can be seen in two main areas in their educational experiences, firstly it occurred for the participants when they attended schools outside the community. The findings reveal that seven of the twelve participants attended schools in more affluent areas due to parental decisions based on a variety of factors. These factors included sports, perceived standard of education being better in better neighbourhoods, and ties to extended family in other schools. This resulted in participants from an early age developing friendships outside of their communities, consequently, socialising and interacting in areas of higher socioeconomic status, and experiencing life with peers from multi-representational backgrounds. All seven participants report expanding their social networks because of their parent’s decision to send their children to a school outside the community. Most report still being friends and socialising with these peers and the

positive influence they had on their lives. These friendships have shaped the participants' hobbies and pastimes, educational journeys, and travel choices.

The second report of economic connectedness occurred in schools when a portion of the participants who were educated within their own communities were streamed into top classes with children from outside their estates (see 9.2.2.4). Four of the remaining five participants experienced the positive impacts of streaming, due to the fact that their school recognised their academic abilities and were subsequently placed in the 'top' streams in the class grouping hierarchy. They argue that this education in the top stream, resulted in a new social mix of peers from outside their communities, as they were placed in the 'higher ability' classes. Although they initially account for feelings of isolation and segregation from the peers from their community, they also recognised the positive impact it had in their lives in regards meeting and socialising with diverse socioeconomic groups and witnessing life outside of a Regeneration estate.

'You know, it sounds terrible, but all the girls in that class like were wired and didn't want to be in school... getting expelled and detention all the time...I probably would have fallen into it if I was in the environment, but I think by me being in that separate class I do think that did change me' (Female, Northside, 30s).

These cross-class experiences led to watershed moments for the participants, when they realised their own socioeconomic status was not comparable to that of the dominant classes.

*'But I would have seen a difference in class without knowing its class between. Being a child in ***** and my best friend from school being a child in *****. There were the differences that I saw. Well, I didn't have the language or the words to know exactly what it was, yeah, except that ohh both parents are working... And they have a microwave. Or just that they don't scream'* (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'I think it was when I started going to other houses that is when I started to get a sense of that maybe my life was a little bit different. Particularly around birthday parties, it was like I did notice her house is much larger and her garden is much larger, and I think you start to notice those things I'd say about maybe 6-7' (Female A, Northside, 40s).

These watershed moments occurred when their socialisation and friendships expanded beyond their community, and a perception of differences in cultural and economic capital, norms and behaviours, were realised. They purport that these experiences led to seeing

different ways of life and they gained a broader education based on the expansion of their social and cultural capital from these new networks of people. Furthermore, the participants who credit the education system in their earlier years for building a diverse group of peers and friends, conclude that the transition to third level was not as daunting as they had become accustomed to mixing with a broad range of peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Conversely, the participants who were educated in their own communities and did not get the same cultural diversity, found third level more difficult to navigate as they witnessed for the first time on a larger scale, people from higher socioeconomic status, with different forms of capital and habitus. Consequently, these participants felt more isolated and misunderstood, making it more difficult to adjust to college in the beginning. Supporting this narrative of feeling isolated and different when reaching third level are the findings from the digital ethnography (see 7.4.1), where individuals express the dismay, they felt on entering colleges and experiencing for the first time peers from more privileged backgrounds and the loneliness this experience brought into their lives as the realisation of class difference became apparent, social media excerpts:

'Education policies are reproducing and keeping educational disparities.'

'Colleges and universities need to tackle socio-economic diversity.'

It is evident from the findings, that children who were exposed to social class mixing at the lower levels of education were more prepared for the mix of social class in third level as they socialised with peers of differing socio-economic backgrounds from a young age. This indicates the importance of social capital in the school system and exposing children to heterogeneity of persons rather than homogeneity. Children need a large mix of social capital to experience and witness potentials in life. Posts from social media report that:

'Working class students and academics often live at the literal and metaphorical distance from cultural and social forms of capital'.

This distance needs to be challenged as children who receive positive interactions and connections with peers in school, tend to excel in their academic endeavour (Alfred & Addo, 2017). Therefore, it is vital that positive and diverse social influences are part of a person's life, to help them expand their own habitus and forms of capital. Regrettably, the field of intergenerational poverty often lacks strong social networks, therefore, limits an individual's access to broader connections which can provide opportunities for social or professional advancement. Alecu et al., (2022) argue that key societal institutions, particularly, the education system have the strongest ability to facilitate cross-class encounters and

interactions, resulting in membership to broader social networks. Furthermore, they claim that school systems characterised by stratification and selection can create social capital closure, where social structures serve to maintain the status quo of social inequality by closing off less privileged individuals to beneficial networks by creating private elite schools or highly segregated schools and communities e.g., DEIS. This is contradictory to Chetty's (2022) findings which strongly suggests that exposure to diverse socioeconomic groups in schools is crucial for children's long-term success, cross-class connectedness broadens children perspectives, and provides them with valuable social and cultural capital.

Thus, education plays a vital role in the lives of marginalised individuals in providing opportunities for expanding their own social support systems outside of immediate families and local community networks, aiding their social and economic connectedness. The broadening of social capital through education for the participants and exposing them to a variety of social class backgrounds is very evident in the interview data.

10.3.2 The Impacts of the Family in Expanding the Social Capital of Individuals from Marginalised Communities

The value of hereditary social capital is explored in chapter two and chapter nine, using theory and the interview findings to assess the significance of connectedness through inheritance, and moreover how the dominant classes through their intergenerational social networks can have an advantage over working-class individuals who have less connections with influential networks. Consequently, it was important to assess the findings what role hereditary social capital played in facilitating upward mobility for the participants who were at a disadvantage due to living in poverty (see 9.3). Moreover, to explore how their home networks and relations created opportunities for both economic connectedness (Chetty, 2021) and the multiplier effect (Bourdieu, 1986) while experiencing deprivation. According to Coleman (1990) family social capital is advanced by teaching children behavioural norms that enable their integration into other social structures, such as schools, employment, and the community. Hence, in this section there is an exploration of the effects hereditary capital played in helping children positively integrate into other social structures by expanding on the findings from 9.3 and discussing the type of hereditary capital that created these sources of economic connectedness for the participants.

10.3.2.1 Behavioural Norms of the Family Enabling Integration into Other Social Structures

Family is a distinct field within the broader social setting and these familial relations are seen as micro fields that contribute to the broader structures of social and cultural production,

circulation and appropriation (Bourdieu, 1977). The most striking and common factor amongst the participants in which they contributed to their future success is the emphasis their parents placed on daily routine and structure, accompanied by a strong work ethic (see 9.2 .1.1 & 9.6.2). There was a respect placed in the family home of working hard and contributing financially to the running of the house amongst all the participants from an early age. The importance of employment and earning money, stems from economic pressures and a lack of financial security which became evident in the research as a strong characteristic of the working class. This instilled in the participants a sense of resilience and positive work ethics:

'I learned about going into survival mode. You appreciate the small things. You don't take anything for granted. You don't expect a lot. And know how to go out and earn a living....But that was instilled in me....that's important because I've passed that on to my own kids' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

Most of the participants witnessed their parents work hard to provide for the children. Some parents were holding down two or three jobs to cover the cost of living, particularly this trait was seen amongst the participants who lived in a single parent home. This quality was passed down to the participants and many of them highlighted that idleness was not an option in their homes and laziness was not tolerated. Whether it was education or a job there had to be a reason to get up in the morning, to either earn money through work or to progress in education see excerpts below:

'Dads primary objective was no idleness. So have a job, you know, sitting around the house all day is not going to happen so do something. That's it' (Male, Southside 50s).

'And I think that's my mother pushing us out the door. If you're not going to education, you work. And like taught us the importance of budgeting money' (Female, Northside, 30s).

Coleman (1990) highlights the value of a strong emotional attachment to a parent in forming social capital and argues that social capital is clearly associated with the degree to which children can access, trust, and benefit from parents' human capital i.e., their skills, values, and social competence. Eight of the participants place the mother as the central control figure in the home, and being the backbone of the family in regards all financial matters. All eight of the participants share how their mothers took on extra jobs when the family were financially struggling, some working two extra jobs to cover costs of education, extra-curricular activities and general living expenses. In addition, their mothers were the individuals who were credited for not only financial support but also, emotional support and

advocates in other areas of their lives such as education. In recalling negative experiences, five of the twelve participants reveal that their mother was their protector and emotional strength in these difficulties, often shielding the children from trauma and hiding family problems from them such as a father's alcoholism.

'My mother was a phenomenal woman she carried the whole house, and she faced horrific stuff she had to deal with a lot with my father she had to look after 6 kids, and he wasn't working and drinking. She always had food on the table....good food and we always had warm clothes we never went without' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

Therefore, the mother played a second vital role in forming foundational social capital for the majority of participants along with financial planning and financial literacy, she was the strong, reliable adult for the majority of the participants, when other adults were not.

In addition, it was important in the research to examine what social norms and values the participants' working-class parents instilled in their lives to make the transition to school easier. In educational achievement and success for children, the family home needs to become an extension of the school, the undertaking of various tasks at home to engage students in school activities have increasingly become a necessity (Lareau, 2011; Mayall, 2007). The parents' attitudes to school and learning proved to be a focal point in the findings, regardless of the fact that all of the participants' parents left school early and lacked any formal educational qualifications, ten of the twelve interviewees reported that their parents placed huge emphasis on attending school every day (see 9.2). They purposefully created structure in the day to day living of the participants from a young age. Routine was very important, and the participants were never allowed an aimless existence as mentioned in the previous section. This familial ethos instilled in the participants norms and values which prioritised commitment to a social structure outside of the home, and the habitus of routine attendance in school, which ultimately was a habit that led to the future capital of institutionalised cultural capital and long-term employment.

Furthermore, half of the participants credit extended family members in creating economic connectedness and expansion of their social capital in a multiplier effect (see 9.3.1.2). Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau (2003) report that the working-class and poor parents often draw on their extended family networks for necessary assistance. In particular, childcare needs and financial needs are met through family networks. Amongst the participants stories, there are reports of strong social ties to their extended families which ultimately resulted in a 'multiplier effect' (see 2.2.1). These effects were seen in areas of both educational and

professional progression with two of the participants recording that the reason they attended schools in more affluent areas was credited to the fact their cousins also attended those schools. These leads into the theory Lareau (2003) claimed, that working-class families depend on extended families for childminding more than middle-class families, both participants stated that the choice of school was driven by the sharing of responsibilities of school drop-offs and collections, for that reason, families chose the same schools for their children. As seen in section 10.3, this decision on education had a positive effect on the participants' early exposure to wider social capital and multi-representational schools. Other participants credit their aunts and uncles for having a direct impact on their careers, with one uncle influencing his niece to become a teacher, by being a positive role-model and mentoring her. A second participant credits her aunt for creating social connections to schools she was affiliated with, to help her gain employment in teaching after graduating college. Finally, a third participant states that without the financial support of his aunt he would not have attended third level. Coleman (1990) argues that family social capital is built through positive, supportive family relationships that teach values and societal norms. Hence, it can be seen the important role of the extended family in upward mobility, by providing both financial and emotional supports to the participants and becoming genuine role-models in their lives and created links to beneficial networks for the participants resulting in attending a better school, continuing on to third-level, or a successful job application. It can be derived from this data that even if an individual's parents do not break their own cycle of poverty, if a sibling of the parent or extended family member becomes upwardly mobile it can have a wide-reaching effect on other members of the family e.g., uncle to niece, cousin to cousin.

In conclusion, the participant's hereditary social capital provided them with the norms and values that strengthened their social connections in important societal structures such as school and work.

10.3.3 The Impacts of the Community in Expanding the Social Capital of Individuals from Marginalised Communities

The majority of the participants report on the importance of non-inherited social capital in their lives, discussing how individuals outside of their family interacted with them to improve their economic connectedness and create chances for opportunity hoarding. These important connections helped the participants interact with social structures, providing them with vital opportunities for progression in the fields of education and employment. Most of the non-inherited social capital stemmed from interactions within their community, it played an

integral role in their lives. The twelve participants have collectively spent a timespan of five decades in the four Regeneration estates, as their age ranges from thirties to sixties. Despite this broad timescale, their reporting on key characteristics of the neighbourhoods was very similar, and experiences whether they were in the decades of the sixties, seventies, eighties, or nineties were comparable. Although the participants resided in marginalised communities, they speak of their communities being a great source of belonging and safety in their childhoods and into adult years. According to Putnam (2000) safety and belonging are crucial elements of social capital, which is formed through long-term relationships and community associations, is essential for societal benefits such as economic prosperity, improved health outcomes and lower crime rates. He concludes that safety and belonging in a community fosters trust and cooperation.

'I suppose I absolutely loved home. I loved everything about it. Love the people, loved it as a community, and everybody knew everybody in the area' (Males, Northside, 30s).

Furthermore, their neighbours were compared to family, front doors remained open, and children felt free to roam between the houses, and there was always somebody to call when a parent was not at home. Meals, resources, and money were shared between people who were lacking in any of those areas, and there was a sense of togetherness in their community where everybody looked out for each other like a family.

*'My mam is friends with ***** who lived 2 doors down. You know if my mother wasn't finished work, I would just go to her house and eat. There was always dinner there on the table, like in my own house'* (Female, Northside, 30s).

Therefore, despite poverty, deprivation, and a negative lens on the neighbourhoods from media and outsiders, the participants found solace and community amongst their neighbours, if was safe and offered important supports to them. In addition, the participants discuss the use of their green spaces growing up and the freedom they felt as children in these areas to grow and explore their environments, with unstructured play happening after school and the weekends. The participants recall large groups of friends gathering in the common green space to play ball games or create their own fun, for half the participants home time was indicated by the turning on of the streetlights. Their communities allowed for these freedoms to move and play freely as the participants always felt safe.

'There was loads of freedom and everybody knew everybody and people went in and out of each other's houses and everybody looked out for each other, I think, and it was very

community orientated. We just all knew each other. If you're walking down the street, you'd know everyone' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

Nine of the ten participants credit community-based programmes in adding value to their lives, these supports included education, recreation and arts, and employment opportunities.

I suppose it was a combination of things, so I'd done the summer job and then. That became full time. And they, the employers, were really, really good to me. And then a programme had started called teamwork. The course was a bit of everything regards to, you know group skills, life skills, technical skills. Recreational time out and stuff like that, so there was nothing taxing about it, but it was a well-structured programme, they had encouraging workers to entice you along and get you to sort of look at your qualities and enhance them' (Male, Southside, 50s).

Moreover, half of the participants acknowledge the role the clergy played in their communities for creating positive opportunities for the participants, these were the in areas of education, social networks, social and life skills. Three of the participants claim that the interventions and supports that the Catholic church provided, either directly or indirectly led to their success in their professional careers to date. The remaining three participants recognise the value of the church in their lives, in regards enhancing their education and skills training from a young age in a beneficial manner (see 9.4 1.4).

Therefore, their own communities provided them with opportunities to upskill, socialise and build life skills for the future, providing opportunities in further education and employment, and providing them a good start in education with access to preschools and early years youth clubs. Furthermore, afterschool programmes and summer trips provided outlets for the participants in a structured manner and kept them occupied in a positive way during school holidays.

'Summer didn't exist without any day trips to the beach, and the play schemes and the swimming. You had the local sort of clubs and dance clubs that was run by the youth clubs and stuff' (Male, Southside, 50s).

To conclude, the school, family, and community, all played pivotal roles in creating valuable social capital for the participants in their journey to achieving their capabilities as seen in Fig 10.2. The participants findings agree with the claims Chetty (2022) purports on early exposure to cross-class connectedness, as all of them experienced some form of early exposure to valuable social capital. These came in the form of social norms from their homes,

economic and cultural supports from extended family members, cross-class mixing from an early age in school, and non-inherited social capital from their communities impacting their social networks. These exposures had formative effects on the participants at different stages of their childhood and had the desired multiplier effect inasmuch that their expansion of social capital led to the expansion of cultural and economic capital through educational and professional development.

10.4 The Role of Agency in Facilitating Social Class Mobility – Exploring Key Personality Traits of the Participants

In the last section there was an acknowledgement of the social structures in the participants' lives and the contribution they made to their upward mobility journey. Hence, it is equally important to acknowledge and credit the participants' individual empowerment in social class mobility. To appreciate how they navigated the key social structures and actively challenged and defied their own fixed or predetermined pathways based on their SES circumstances to create a life they have reason to value. Therefore, this section will explore the participants' agency in their journey and how key personality traits impacted these agentic actions.

According to Sen (1999), agency refers to a person's ability to pursue goals that they value and have reason to value. Agency refers to an individual's ability to act and bring about change according to their own values and goals. Sen purports that this is distinct from merely having the freedom to choose; it is the individual actively shaping their own lives. In the context of upward mobility, agency plays a crucial role because it empowers individuals to take actions that can improve their socio-economic status. As discussed in chapter 2, agency is about having the capability to choose and pursue different functionings (actual achievements), thus enabling individuals to shape their lives according to their values (Sen, 1996). Similar to social capital, agency can have a compensatory effect on lower SES individuals, in regards the pursuit of social class mobility. One of the greatest challenges in the pursuit of upward mobility for marginalised groups in society is a 'canalised life path' (Heckhausen, 2020). In other words, the strong sense of a predetermined future when born into poverty and deprivation, this brings a loss of control and agency for individuals in these circumstances as societal structures creates barriers for movement and change. Participants in the research discuss operating in these structures that controlled a certain narrative around their communities. Media, education, and employment can create barriers to progression for these individuals on the margins, as working-class communities can be stigmatised and isolated by these institutions as seen in chapters seven and nine. Thus, it is valuable to discuss the key personality traits of the participants, to examine how those characteristics developed

into transformative agency and how these agentic factors challenged the inequalities of the structures the participants were born into. In particular, how these individuals achieved a life-course trajectory that is better than would be expected based on their socio-economic origins. According to Heckhasussen (2020) the expectation is that the individual follows the normative path for their social class. 'It takes extra agentic efforts to step out of the commonly prescribed path and enter a different path associated with higher socioeconomic background' (p.438). Sen (1996) argues that by empowering individuals to make decisions and take control of their lives, they can better navigate challenges and recover from setbacks. Three main personality traits emerged from the findings in the data, these traits shaped how the participants exercised their agency, impacting their life outcomes in a positive manner, these were resilience, social justice, and self-advocacy.

10.4.1 Resilience

As discussed in chapter two, resilience describes a process of socialisation where individuals develop a capacity to react in a positive manner to adverse conditions or challenges (Mu, 2021). It is a dynamic process highly influenced by protective factors, (Dyer, 1996). Cheng & Caitling (2015) define protective factors as the specific competencies that are necessary for the process of resilience to occur including community, family and personal attributes (see 2.11). This section will explore these areas, in particular the role of the community and the home, in supporting the strengthening of resilience amongst the participants during adversity and deprivation.

10.4.1.1 The Role of the Community in Building Resilience

Bourdieu (1977) suggests that resilience is not just an individual trait but is shaped by social structures and the resources available to individuals within their social context. Putnam (2000) claims that social capital provides individuals with important support networks which lead to a sense of belonging, provide a space of that is safe and secure, and gives individuals a sense of participation in a meaningful structure. He argues that this helps develop routine and learn accepted social behaviours. Thus, social capital builds resilience by fostering strong networks and relationships that provide support during times of need. According to Kerr (2018) social networks enable individuals and communities to support each other during crises, providing emotional, financial, and practical help. Moreover, she purports that social networks can empower individuals by providing opportunities for education, employment, and other resources that enhance resilience. In agreement with this, Aldrich, (2012) argues that strong social ties facilitate collective action, allowing individuals to work together to

address common challenges and recover more effectively. In examining the role social structures played in the lives of the participants, it can be determined that their social networks within their communities bolstered their resilient nature (see 10.3). As participants, continuously refer to feeling safe and secure in their community, with a strong sense of belonging, research commonly reports that this foundation of trust and belonging provides individuals with a sense of purpose and meaning. It provides individuals with a sense that their actions contribute to something larger than themselves which can motivate them to persevere through difficulties. Resilient individuals often have a network of relationships that help them feel less alone and more capable of facing challenges (Aldrich, 2012). Therefore, finding connection and belonging is a crucial protective factor in forming resilience, which all of the participants report finding in their communities, this informed a large part of their identity and strength.

10.4.1.2 The Role of the Home in Building Resilience

Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) demonstrate that family support also has the same protective effect for resilience as a community, and they argue that resilience can be inherited or intergenerational and is enculturated through daily routines and norms practised in the home. Amongst the participants the two most commonly reported inherited social norms linked to resilience were financial planning, directly linked to delayed gratification, and consistent daily routines with goal orientated purpose (see 10.4.2). Firstly, delayed gratification is a powerful tool for building resilience, it enhances emotional strength, self-control, and grit, all of which are essential for navigating life's challenges and achieving long-term success (Cheng & Caitling, 2021). Studies have shown that students who can delay gratification tend to perform better academically. This is because they can manage their time and stress more effectively, leading to better outcomes. The ability to delay immediate rewards fosters a mindset of persistence and determination (ibid). This personality trait manifested in the home through financial planning and budgeting, the participants discuss the respect they had towards their parent who could manage a tight budget and also save for future needs and wants. Ultimately, living the experience of delayed gratification and reaping the rewards which infiltrated into other parts of their lives such as education and occupation.

'I remember my mother. She ran the household. She managed the bills. She even bought a site for future investment. She was very visionary, always wanted better. She was really proactive and only in my later years I'd say since I had kids myself, did I realise how hard her life was and how well she did with money' (Female, Southside, 50s).

Secondly, routine, hard work, and daily purpose are fundamental in building resilience, and were very evident in all of the participants homes. A routine provides a sense of structure and develops stability, which can be important during times of stress. This predictability helps reduce anxiety and allows individuals to focus on what they can control. Bourdieu (1977) purports that habitus refers to the ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire through their life experiences, these routines and practices shape how people perceive and respond to the world around them. In 10.4.2.1, it is discussed that structured daily routines and purposeful existence surrounding employment or education was an important norm in the majority of the participants homes. Bourdieu argued that habitus contributes to social reproduction, where individuals unconsciously perpetuate the norms and values of their backgrounds. Participants grew up in homes where structure and predictability were the norm. Their daily routines at home were purposeful and achievement-driven around school or work. This sense of predictability and structure was a protective factor which helped strengthen the participant's resilience. Therefore, engaging in daily activities that align with personal values and goals gives a sense of purpose and by achieving small daily goals, a sense of accomplishment is provided, helping individuals stay committed and focused even when facing challenges.

10.4.1.3 The Manifestation of Resilience in the Lives of the Participants – Personal Attributes

Resilience was fostered in the participants lives through the internal structures of the home and the external structures of the community which developed the necessary personal attributes in their lives to face difficult situations. This resilience manifested itself in two important areas of their lives. Firstly, the participants resisted the norms and cultures of their community in their educational and professional pursuits. All of the participants indicate that pursuing education and academic opportunities, was not common amongst their peers but despite systemic obstacles, the participants displayed significant perseverance and determination (see 9.6.4). They account for most of their friends from their communities dropping out of school early, some becoming drug users, or getting pregnant young. Despite the fact that education was a difficult choice at pivotal points in their lives, which led to isolation for some of the participants (see 9.2.2.2), however, they persevered and used their social networks to both challenge and overcome personal and systemic barriers. They displayed personality traits of non-conformity and innovation.

'I don't think I knew anybody that did the Leaving Cert in my estate' (Male B, Southside, 30s)

'You know, I look at the people who were my friends back then or the same LCA group as me and the majority didn't uh complete it. Like some of those girls, have children now and the majority don't have care of their children do you know what I mean? That frightens the life out of me. That that could have been my trajectory. You know what I mean that puts the hair standing up my back like yeah' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

Secondly, they demonstrated resilience from the marginalisation of growing up in deprived communities and the subsequent impacts of poverty and classism on their lives. Participants report barriers to progression in education and employment due to discrimination, unfair assumptions and biases, and deficits in all forms of capital needed to progress in life (as seen in chapter nine). However, they adapted and used their social resilience by leaning on both inherited and non-inherited social capital to make the right connections both academically and professionally. They used their problem-solving skills, adaptability, and the ability to think critically to find solutions to the challenges posed by these socioeconomic barriers displaying strong characteristics of resilience.

'I felt I was fighting for more than just myself. You know, I was fighting to say to him, you might decide I need to do a trade because I'm from this area, that I'm not entitled to do a leaving cert but what I will show you is that I am capable of doing this you know that you're wrong about this' (Male, Southside, 60s).

Overall, the participants exposure to a strong sense of belonging and connection in their communities and positive family habitus, led to resilience in their lives at pivotal points in their upward mobility journey. They showed agency and strength of character by resisting their predetermined norms of early school leaving, single parenthood, and drug use, as seen in chapter four and nine to be common amongst the Regeneration communities.

Alternatively, they pursued a pathway in education with determination, through either a traditional or community route which led to developing their capabilities and professional success.

10.4.2 Social Justice

Sen's Capability Approach focuses on what individuals are actually able to do and be in life. His approach highlights the importance of providing people with the opportunities and freedoms necessary to pursue valuable living. Therefore, from this perspective, social justice involves ensuring that individuals have fair access to real opportunities. Sen (2009) stresses the role of human agency in achieving social justice, believing that individuals should have the ability to make choices and take actions that affect their lives and the lives of others. This

empowerment is crucial for addressing deprivation and poverty and promoting upward mobility. The sense of social justice in becoming upwardly mobile involves recognising and addressing the broader social and economic inequalities that affect a person's ability to move up the social ladder. It is how an individual cannot only impact their own life in a positive way but also help others to do the same. Sen argues that the pursuit of social justice should focus on reducing injustices rather than achieving an ideal state of perfect justice (2009). Furthermore, he stresses that social justice should be evaluated based on how well it addresses human deprivation and enhances well-being, rather than solely on economic metrics. The research findings reveal that like Sen, participants believe social justice is a matter of removing barriers and helping others achieve their own capabilities. They display traits of empathy that show a deep understanding and sensitivity to the feelings and experiences of others, especially those who are in similar marginalised situations from the Regeneration communities. Their emotional sensitivity is apparent in their discussions surrounding social justice, they react strongly to perceived injustices in their communities and advocate for equity and access of opportunities for individuals regardless of their backgrounds, see excerpts from quotes below:

'I won't judge you...I'll do everything I can to help you if you have an issue' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'I was taught to have respect for everybody' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

'I am a good teacher because I will not condescend or have pity on you...I will understand you because I was born into it' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'That sense of social justice has been the backbone to my teaching....it is actually about empowering them, trying to take away as many barriers and give them every opportunity they deserved' (Female, Southside, 50s).

The participants equate their inherited working-class values to their keen sense of social justice, and they appear deeply interconnected, with 100% of the participants choosing careers in a caring profession in education, childcare or community work. Furthermore, seven of the twelve participants are engaged in work that contributes back to their community of origin, displaying a sense of wanting to give back to their neighbourhoods and work towards creating better outcomes for the residents. The participants experience of discrimination and classism, appears to strengthen their sense of social justice as they recall the stigma and perception of others from outside their community impacting their lives in a harmful manner, see excerpts from quotes below:

'I hate that word disadvantage...smacking labels on communities actually puts a glass ceiling in....we make assumptions with labels' (Female, Southside, 50s).

'You know you're a scumbag...a knacker because of your address...those sorts of things get internalised...self-fulfilling' (Male, Northside, 30s).

'Education is a rotten system...it works against kids from certain backgrounds' (Male, Southside, 60s).

'I saw a lot of drug abuse in college but most of those lads went onto become solicitors and accountants...is it luck or a class thing?' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'You know the brothers in CBS were continuously trying to and consciously trying to end my education....they wouldn't give me an application for university....he laughed when I asked' (Male, Southside, 60s).

The treatment from others in more privileged backgrounds and from certain social structures correlates with their pursuit of social justice for their own communities in the findings. This is witnessed in their professions where they focus on community engagement and empowerment and advocacy.

'I love transferring the learning, I love encouraging my own team. I have a team of 32 people here who 80% of them are from communities like mine now working in communities who experience high disadvantage. So, it's. I suppose as cheesy as it sounds. It's about turning back to help someone else. Kind of be that key person for somebody else' (Female B, Southside, 30s).

*'I totally defend *****...I wouldn't allow anyone to say anything about it. I'd still be very proud of it. Very upset about the way society has treated it, I think it's been very neglected by government and all the promises, and it didn't happen, you know, I think it has been very let down by politicians'* (Female C, Northside, 40s).

Their connections to their communities of origin are deep rooted, and they feel their communities form a large part of their identity, this can be seen in their continued engagement with their estates and their drive to support and contribute to the lives of others from similar backgrounds.

10.4.3 Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is a direct expression of this agency, as it involves individuals asserting their rights and needs to improve their circumstances, where action is sought to expand capabilities

and opportunities. Self-advocacy is defined as communicating individual wants, needs, and rights to determine and seek supportive allies, and persistently pursue objectives (Pfeifer et al., 2021). The participants account for incidents of self-advocacy where they were empowered to take control of their lives by representing their interests and ensuring their voices were heard in important decision making in social structures such as education. An important element of Sen's Capability Approach emphasises the importance of individuals having the power to make choices and take actions that affect their lives. Self-advocacy is a direct expression of agency, as it involves individuals asserting their rights and needs to improve their circumstances, where action is sought to expand capabilities. Advocacy contributed to the lives of the participants by challenging injustices and advocating for fair treatment and equality of access in the main social structures. The next section will explore consequential moments in the participants lives where self-advocacy resulted in positive outcomes in their expansion of capabilities and opportunities, including identifying opportunities for success, a commitment to continuous learning, and networking, which are essential elements of upward mobility.

10.5.3.1 Identifying Opportunities

Self-advocacy involves actively seeking out and identifying opportunities for progression. In particular, accessing educational and/or professional opportunities, through the sharing and voicing of needs and wants that represents an individuals' values, and ambitions. The participants set specific goals towards education or employment and used their assertiveness and innovativeness to overcome barriers to progression. Interestingly, within the findings a common theme which became evident was the need for advocacy in education, and the obvious shift in outcomes for the participants when their families or themselves interrupted decisions taken by individuals in structures regarding the participant's educational trajectory.

Over half of the participants recount times in their lives when they felt isolated in the education system or mistreated by being overlooked with opportunities to progress based on their SES. Thus, themselves or their parents went to the school to represent their concerns to the relevant teacher or management. These accounts of advocacy were spoken about with passion and importance, moreover, for the participants they represented pivotal points in their educational careers. Each story led to some sort of change in their lives, indicating amongst the narratives the importance of student and parental voice in the school system, for children to feel listened to along with their parents, and their agency respected, as it provided individuals with a sense of control. Four of the participants recall times when their parents intervened and righted a situation in the school system that they perceived to be unjust and to

ensure school was a safe space for their children (see chapter 9.2.1.1). Furthermore, two of the participants who did not have direct parental support at important crossroads in their education, developed a sense of self-advocacy where they challenged limited access to opportunity and biased systems that reinforced norms and values which served to restrict their knowledge, skills and aspirations. In these accounts of poor-quality education, there is a sense of agency in championing for equality and the participants reflected on the level of resilience and bravery that was displayed by their childhood self. Both parental and self-advocacy, resulted in better outcomes in education for the participants and which ultimately resulted in a better level of educational attainment.

*'But then I found out I needed; I needed to get a minimum of four honours to get a college grant....So I spent two years fighting to get into honours classes....just again that social streaming. What I called dodgy classes like you know where you were learning nothing with teachers that didn't basically give a **** like'* (Male, Southside, 60s).

I knocked on the principal's door and I said. I I want to go back to 5th year. I should be doing more honours. I was only doing 2 honours subjects the rest pass. And but she said to me, OK, I'll make it happen, but you have to go and ask the teachers to take you back in. And if you can find those teachers to take you back in, then you can go back to 5th year...and. I had to literally go and knock on these scary teachers' doors. But I got back into fifth year and honours classes, five or six honours classes' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

These important points in the participant's school history changed their trajectory through the education system, by either moving to the correct subject level, class grouping, or receiving extra supports where needed. Correspondingly, all of the participants who recounted parental or self-advocacy remained in traditional education and continued onto third level. According to Smyth et Banks (2012) decisions about whether to progress in education are seen as reflecting on not only individual (and familial) habitus, but also the 'young people's own agency, here taken to mean the conscious process whereby students seek out information on different options and evaluate these alternatives' (p.22). Consequently, these experiences within the education system developed in the participants an appreciation of the value of advocacy and empowered them to challenge their inequality of access to education.

10.5.3.2 Continuous Learning & Skill Development

Self-advocacy has three key elements, understanding your needs, knowing what kind of support might help and communicating these needs to others (Lee, 2024). Therefore, advocating for yourself includes investing in continuous learning and skill development, to

build the right knowledge for this important skill. One of the core components of self-advocacy is the communication of one’s knowledge of self and rights (Test et al., 2005a, p. 45). To communicate better, individuals must learn social skills, specifically, communication which includes assertiveness, negotiation, articulation, persuasion, and compromise (Test et al., 2005a). These skills can be developed through a commitment to education or training. Amongst the participants their respect for education and their accumulation of institutionalised cultural capital is noteworthy, with ten of the twelve participants achieving a level eight degree, nine continuing on to a Masters and two receiving a PhD. The remaining two participants have a level seven and have committed to continuing their learning journey. Sen purports that this is an expansion of capabilities as all the participants have achieved a level of education that they value and have achieved access to lifelong learning opportunities. The participants have continued their educational journey to high levels of achievement and expressed a passion for the emancipatory role education has played in their lives in providing them freedoms to a life they value. These high achievements provided the participants with the necessary skills required to advocate for themselves. This is particularly impressive, as the statistics from the Regeneration estates show that success in educational attainment is stark when compared to the rest of the country:

Percentage of Population	Ireland	Average Percentage for the Four Regeneration Estates
Primary Education Only	11.51	34.61
Third Level Education	37.69	6.65

Table 10.1 Educational Attainment - Comparative Table of the Four Regeneration Estates in Relation to the Irish Population in 2022.

Ironically the participants challenged the structure which provided them with the right social and communicative skills to become advocates and used this education to expand their capabilities and opportunities.

10.5.3.3 Networking

In self-advocacy, building a strong social network is essential as reaching out to mentors and role-models, and connecting with colleagues and peers who can provide guidance and support is a vital part of social class mobility. Networking is a key characteristic of self-

advocacy as it builds relationships, provides access to important resources, and knowledge sharing that can support future goals (Bateman, 2021). As discussed in 10.3, the participants used their social structures of family, community, and education to build strong support networks and connections around them. In doing so, they created a support system of individuals who can offer advice, mentorship, and encouragement, which is a crucial element in self-advocacy. They also pride themselves in learning from others i.e., knowledge sharing, and discuss their role models and the positive impacts they had in their lives in (9.2.1.2), the majority of participants in fact pursued the same profession as their mentor, in a bid to have similar impacts on others. According to Chambers (2024) the correct supportive network can result in increased confidence and empowerment and assertiveness. Consequently, the participants used their networks to connect with job opportunities, educational programmes, and community resources.

In summary, the grouping of resilience, social justice, and self-advocacy are essential personality traits in forming agentic actions, especially in the context of disadvantage and the pursuit of upward mobility. A marginalised individual requires extra agentic action to disturb their predetermined life path in poverty and take control of the direction their future takes within social structures such as education and employment. Sen purports that enhancing individuals' capabilities and agency is essential for true development i.e., creating conditions where people can make meaningful choices and have the power to act on them (Crocker & Robeyns, 2012). Their key personality traits which were revealed in the findings, proved to be a powerful framework of agency and action in social class mobility amongst the participants. They developed unique coping strategies in the pursuit of their life goals, by seeking support amongst their social networks and assertively advocating for themselves. They take pride in their keen sense of social justice, and all of them followed a career choice in a caring profession. All of the participants demonstrate goal orientation and ambition in their educational journeys, with seven of the twelve, setting their sights on specific third level qualifications in secondary school. These seven used their acumen along with their social networks to achieve these goals. The remaining five, through community programmes, accelerated through further education programmes into higher education to pursue their professional careers. All twelve have shown incredible resilience and self-advocacy in adversity, while retaining a keen sense of social justice in their daily lives and professions.

10.5 Outside Perceptions vs Inside Lived Experiences

This section will examine the impacts of negative outside perceptions on the lived experience of the Regeneration communities, and working-class communities in general. As discussed in chapter two (see 2.11), McNamara et al.,(2011) argue that negative perceptions of the four Regeneration estates of Limerick city were further stigmatised by mainstream media coverage, which highlighted the extreme social problems of the communities as their social norms. Furthermore, the research also revealed obvious prejudices and biases towards people from the Regeneration estates in Limerick from individuals living in more affluent parts of the city, with distinct negative characteristics being placed upon the communities from outsiders. Participants in the research would agree with these findings, describing discrimination and bias based on their address at key points in their lives (see 9.4.2.1) These assumptions and biases can be pernicious, as they can create self-fulfilling prophecies in these individuals lives, signifying that once they are labelled with these aversive stereotypes, individuals might internalise these labels and behave in ways that conform to the expectations associated with them (Becker, 1963). The majority of participants recall points in their lives where they doubted their ability to achieve success in life based on nothing but their address and SES background.

'And I remember saying, like, you know, I'm not bright enough I won't be able for this, you know, like you had grown up that way' (Male B, Southside, 30s).

'Bit, nerve wracking, like the night before going back to education I remember saying to my wife like I actually don't think I'm able for the course' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'And like that arriving in Blackrock and just hearing conversations about parents and jobs, and it was daunting like. And I I really believe we didn't perform to our best at all because of that, and that was it, that was the factor. You know, it wasn't on rugby ability because we were as good as them' (Male A, Southside, 30s).

'You're told these things, and you internalise like, oh, right, that's obviously true. these adults from another area are saying these things about being a scumbag and a knacker...It's like I remember talking to my girlfriend about this racism and she was talking about regeneration areas and as much as regeneration areas you know perspectives or whatever needs to be changed or whatever happens to be whatever help needs to be put into them. I think what also needs to be regenerated is people from outside those communities. How they look at those communities and how their perspectives shape those communities. Because a lot of that shite that was said to us from outsiders did most damage' (Male, Northside, 30s).

*'I remember trying out for rugby, uh I was from outside the community where the club was, so it would be people saying you're a scumbag.....you won't get on here. You're not the same as us. So, then your parents internalise that and pass it on to you. And I I remember one of my friends mothers would say that like, you know, don't worry now, because you're from ***** you won't get on the A team, but just have a bit of fun. You'll be on the B or the C team'* (Male, Northside, 30s).

'First day in college in the big hall and there was 160 in my year and the lecturer introduced us all. And you know, welcomed us and said we're we're all from privileged backgrounds. You know. That none of us here are come from whatever working-class backgrounds or whatever. I remember thinking Jesus, I do like. I felt really put out day one, I felt different day one, you know, straight away' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

Devereux et al., (2011) describe this as 'spoiled identity' where outside perception has a profound negative effect on life chances and self-image for those being stereotyped. They argue that this results in demonising the excluded and the places in which they live. Hastings (2004) describes these negative perceptions as pathologising discourses, where the focus is on behavioural explanations for the area's stigmatised images and problems. The blame is placed on the individuals who are accused of possessing deviant norms and values, which represent a threat to mainstream culture and create cycles of poverty. These ideologies remove all blame from societal structures and inequalities.

Conversely, as seen in chapter two, Bourdieu's work on social class focuses extensively on how social structures and cultural practices reinforce class distinctions and perpetuate inequalities including the impacts of working-class stereotypes. He argues that stereotypes and misrepresentations of the working class serve to limit opportunities for social class mobility, as seen in the participants' stories when they questioned their own ability by internalising negative images and biases from outsider's perceptions on their own community of origin. Bourdieu's theory was explored in chapter 2, with a focus on the interplay of capital, field and habitus being discussed in the context of social class mobility. Bourdieu argues that dominant classes impose cultural norms and values which can marginalise and stigmatise the working-class. He concludes that the working-class may internalise these negative stereotypes leading to a sense of inferiority and acceptance of their social position. Furthermore, he claims the education system perpetuates these inequalities by valuing middle-class culture, and working-class habitus can be misrecognized and devalued by the dominant class in the system (see 2.5). This can lead to lower educational attainment and the closing off of real opportunities and achieving capabilities, this is very evident in the HP

Index (chapter 4) indicating a huge variance of educational attainment between residents of the Regeneration estates compared to the rest of Limerick city and county. Therefore, Bourdieu's theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how stereotypes and social structures impact the lives of working-class individuals, reinforcing social hierarchies and limiting life opportunities.

10.5.1 *Negative Perceptions from Outside the Estates*

As discussed in chapter two (see 2.11) and chapter nine (9.4.2.1), negative stereotypes or labels can have a profound effect on a person's development and subjective social status. Supporting these theoretical findings on harmful outside perceptions is the lived experience of discrimination and stereotyping the participants account for in their histories, many of them have experienced derogatory or hurtful comments based on their socioeconomic status and address. This is also evident in chapter six amongst the social media narratives. It is evident from the interviews that the derogatory comments along with negative outside perceptions of the communities were damaging, and the participants experienced interactions with people from outside their neighbourhoods that left a sense of social exclusion based on their socioeconomic status.

'You know you're called a scumbag. You don't have control about where you grew up or anything like that. But those sorts of things get internalised I think by kids, and they're said to us and then we start saying it to ourselves if that makes sense and it just becomes a sort of self-perpetuating thing' (Male, Northside, 30s).

This particular account relates to the stereotype on higher crime rates in working class areas, as scumbag according to Websters Dictionary intimates a 'contemptible or untrustworthy person'. Participants record feeling the pain of these comments and stereotyping from outsiders. Stevenson & McNamara (2013) claim that the stigmatisation of living in a disadvantaged area can be a source of stress and conclude that negative belief about the community a person lives in can be related to poorer psychological wellbeing. This was apparent in the findings, as discrimination was a large theme and all twelve participants reported feeling different because of how others treated them, with most experiencing comments on either their address, accent or both. Indicating that this form of discrimination serves to perpetuate stereotypes further, through others judging a person based on community and habitus such as accent. The working-class stereotypes of being lazy, lacking in ambition, and their cultures being less valuable (see 2.11), manifests in the participants accounts of their history in the education system. The majority found education a difficult system to negotiate and become part of due to unfair assumptions and biases, along with deficits in

supports to mitigate their gaps in cultural and social capitals. Despite positive experiences with good adults in the system, all of the participants found the school structure difficult to adjust to as a working-class student. Participants recount experiencing negative comments towards their community or a distinct lack of expectations of academic performances based on their origins from teachers at different points in their lives.

*'There was a glass ceiling for all girls from *****. So, like, I remember, even in school. We didn't even get to see the Guidance Counsellor. No, no it was like, oh, you're there from *****. They're not going anywhere, so they don't even need it'* (Female, Southside, 50s).

*'These two teachers in school were very outstanding citizens of Limerick, they would be the two that would say, oh, there's the kids from ***** off leashes again on the bus, the kids from ***** are late again. Those two teachers were horrible, horrible people to kids like us'* (Female B, Northside, 40s).

Similarly, the social media findings focus on the role of teachers in perpetuating social inequality and stereotypes, with individuals posting negative experiences surrounding classism and their educators.

'Education reproduces class inequality and teachers need to be better trained in this area for empathy and understanding'.

'Teachers lack awareness on class issues, colleges and schools need to train staff in this area'.

'A teacher went around the class and told us all one by one at 14 years of age what would go on to achieve. The divide in her estimation was less on academic ability but more on parental income and address'.

These posts describe a deficit in understanding on the impacts of disadvantage on the lives of individuals in education, and a distinct lack of empathy amongst some of the educators these individuals encountered. According to Connolly (2021) disadvantaged pupils often accept assigned stereotypes which can lead to reproduction and perpetuation of social class inequalities. This can have negative long-term effects on individuals and their relationships with the education system.

Finally, one of the most insidious points of discrimination that the participants reported upon was in the area of job applications and seeking employment. Over half of the participants report experiencing class discrimination when applying for jobs, these narratives included not progressing in job applications or interviews when they disclosed their address. As a result,

participants were forced to use the addresses of family and friends who lived in more affluent communities to avoid being blacklisted by employers.

*'I had an interview for a job in the *****. And I practically got offered the job, and then she's like, I'll just take down your details. When I told her where I was from, she, she said, well, actually there's no job here and said no. And so, I did apply for some of those jobs using my granny's address then after that'* (Female B, Northside, 40s)

This example highlights the danger of outside perceptions such as laziness and lacking in work ethics being placed on individuals from disadvantaged areas. It ignores structural and systemic problems and challenges that working-class people face when attempting to improve their life outcomes. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and appreciate that negative outside perceptions and stereotypes of disadvantaged areas creates barriers for working class people and can prevent them accessing real opportunities for upward mobility. Participants and social media narratives account for multiple incidents of discrimination and challenges in life caused by social class stereotypes, which include unfair assumptions and biases. ATD Ireland (2023) in their research on the lived experience of SES discrimination, also report similar views on barriers caused by social class stereotypes and the prejudice that can be synonymous with classist ideologies. They define this type of discriminations as 'the feeling to hide where you come from or who you are because you are afraid what people will say, what they will think' (ibid, p.8).

10.5.2 Defying & Challenging Outside Perceptions

As outlined in 9.4.2.1, marginalised communities often face harmful stereotypes related to their economic, social, and cultural circumstances. However, many participants recounted how these negative perceptions fuelled their determination to succeed, serving as motivation to overcome adversity and prove their worth. This highlights the agency of individuals within these communities who actively resist and challenge these imposed labels, striving to redefine their identities and achieve social mobility.

'Doing things that are hard but that are meaningful. And that I get nervous about and I'm like oh my God, am I going to be able, but I'm gonna feel the fear and do it anyway. Yeah, because that's how I grow. And and that's how I kind of feel that contentment. And I actually think that comes from that working class background where I grew up' (Male B, Southside, 30s).

'But I was like, I don't care. I'll just beat you all. And it was almost the way. I had to be the fastest. I had to be the best. I had to be. And I think now looking back and it's only in the last two or three years that I realised it was me internalising, maybe, and saying well, I'll prove you all wrong and I'll get you kind of a thing. And there was no malice in it. It was just like if you think I can't do it, I'll do it' (Male, Northside, 30s).

Amongst the participants' stories there is a collective narrative of defiance to these labels that were imposed upon their lives through outsiders' perceptions. They actively defied the stereotypes using their acumen, agency, and social networks to take control of their life direction, rebelling against normative pathways predetermined by their SES. Their lived experiences diverged from the typical stereotypes placed upon their social and economic status and the participants sought to contradict and interrupt these discriminatory labels. The main contradictions to outside perceptions accounted for include parental expectations and aspirations, educational attainment, strong focus on employment not social protection, teachers' aspirations and community bonds. These challenged the pathologizing narratives discussed in 10.5.1.

10.6.2.1 Parental Aspirations & Educational Attainment

As discussed in (10.2.1) and in (10.4.2), there was a strong emphasis on education and attending school amongst the participants, with half of the participants noting their parent's aspirations in higher education as an escape from poverty. The expectations and aspirations of the family proved to play a crucial role, and these supportive environments encouraged ambition amongst the participants as they strived for high levels of educational attainment. Moreover, amongst the participants it is noteworthy that even with limited resources, some parents found their own ways and means to invest in their children's education. This included taking extra jobs to finance their books, private tuition, or extracurricular activities. This improved their children's learning experiences and opportunities, and this was evident in the achievements of the participants and their respect for education, resulting in the accumulation of institutionalised cultural capital (see 10.5.3.2). This symbolises a functioning amongst the participants as they effectively used education to be and do something they value in their professional lives through their education. This contradicts the common narrative of poor parental aspirations and poor educational attainment levels. Despite the high statistics of low levels of education in the Regeneration estates (see chapter four), these participants with their family support managed to obtain impressive success in the system.

10.6.2.2 *Teacher's Aspirations*

The labelling theory (see 2.11 and 10.6) highlights how social institutions like schools play a role in reinforcing stereotypes and students from lower-income families can be unfairly labelled affecting their educational outcomes. However, in the participant findings, teachers were reported as being one of the most important factors in the school experience in challenging stereotypes and labels. Seven of the twelve participants discussed the positive aspirational role a teacher played in their lives. Teachers transcended the traditional role at points in the participants' journeys and became friends, confidantes, and created a sense of belonging and self-worth amongst the seven individuals.

'How important it is for everybody to be seen in life. We need to give children the opportunity to fall in love with us as we're working with them. And that's what I felt that I totally fell in love with my preschool teacher. That connection that... like to be able to to feel seen as a child by somebody like that carries with you like print. It leaves a print on your heart like forever. And it supports you in connecting with other people as you go through life because you have people that make a difference in a positive way' (Female B, Northside, 40s).

They became role-models and mentors for most of the seven, and they developed in the participants their strengths and skills and gave them a sense of self-belief in their own academic abilities.

'If I hadn't been in her class, I wouldn't be a teacher because she her standard of Irish teaching was amazing. So, like or like I met the teacher recently and I said to her I said, you know, you are the reason I'm a teacher' (Female C, Northside, 40s).

Ultimately, these positive experiences and aspirations appear to have had a profound and lasting impact on the lives of the participants, and these relationships served to feed their academic progression. This highlights the importance of school systems creating an institutional habitus which serves to mediate the impacts of disadvantage to promote better social equality rather than perpetuate the status quo of social class and their stereotypes (Reay et al., 2001).

Additionally, there needs to be more training in educational institutions on social class issues and how to avoid perpetuating stereotypes surrounding class to create supportive and nurturing environments for children experiencing disadvantage and poverty. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory, Mills (2008) argues that 'teachers can draw upon a variety of cultural capitals to act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction' (p. 79). In turn appreciating not only the dominant middle-class cultures and capital but also acknowledging

the value working-class students can offer in regards cultural production. Therefore, amongst the participants' positive stories of teachers, it is apparent that their relationships led to an opportunity for the participants to develop the most benefit from their education, and Harte (2019) argues that a student will reap the rewards of positive perceptions on their 'ability and performance in school, the degree to which individuals experience affiliation, recognition and sense of belonging' is vital in positive experiences in education (p.592). These teachers in the participants stories served to contradict the outside perceptions and negate SES stereotypes in their supportive and inclusive approaches.

10.6.2.3 Strong Community Bonds & Networks

According to Devereux et al., (2011) the media representations of Limerick's Regeneration areas are overwhelmingly negative, and the occurrence of high-profile violent crimes has been used to characterise the wider population. This leads to negative associations of high levels of crime and poor community support between neighbours in these estates. Similarly, Stevenson et McNamara (2013) in their study of Limerick city's Regeneration estates, found that amongst the participants who resided in both affluent and regenerated areas, explicit prejudices towards the disadvantaged estates were very evident. Their research also highlighted that the negative media coverage the estates received, served to galvanise the 'shared social evaluations of regeneration areas' and 'all participants displayed negative associations with designated disadvantaged areas of Limerick City' (p.251). There is a direct correlation between social class identity and community, and all of the participants discuss the difficulties that growing up in what is now defined as 'Regeneration Estates' had in regards how others treated them, leading to a sense of negative subjective social status. These negative stereotypes can contribute further to the marginalisation and discrimination of working-class communities. All of the participants experienced some form of discrimination based on their address, which led to sense of social exclusion from the rest of Limerick city. Although the participants discuss genuine happy memories and a sense of deep connection and safety in their communities of origin, the sense of 'disadvantage' was placed upon them by judgements from others including extended family, peers, teachers and media.

'If I think of the community and stuff like that, I always felt safe and. I suppose it it's not until you start to get to a certain age that you you have a realisation of society around you because up to then it's just your own space, your own community, your own interactions, which are your friends and that's it. And then it's like, you know, when you're getting that little bit older and stuff like that and you see how things are around you like the one negative, I suppose was, you weren't given as much a chance

I feel sometimes if you ever did get into trouble. You were treated much differently when you gave your address, with regards to, say, the Guards, and stuff like that'
(Male, Southside, 50s).

Conversely, the findings in this research challenged these misconceptions through the participants commendations on the diversity and strengths of their neighbours and community groups within the four estates. As discussed in 10.4.3, the community played an integral part in all the participants lives, with positive characteristics far outweighing the negative. They recognise and respect the important role their communities played in supporting their upward mobility. The participants account for strong community ties and meaningful engagement in their neighbourhoods. They describe a community where neighbours could depend on each other and take care of one another. Green spaces and freedom to play, which stemmed from feeling safe and connected in the community, provided the participants opportunity to develop their curiosity and discovery, unstructured play fed their imaginations and created a deep sense of happiness and fond memories. Their communities strengthened their social networks and developed key skills from early in life.

10.6 Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the findings of this research with reference to the theoretical framework. The discussions have centred on the interactions of key social structures, their associated push and pull factors, and the agency of individuals in overcoming poverty and deprivation. A crucial finding is the importance of multiple supportive social structures in the lives of disadvantaged individuals. The research revealed that when one structure presented challenges or obstacles, another often provided support and facilitated solutions, therefore acted in a complementary manner, facilitating the participant with assistance to overcome the obstacles.

Furthermore, the findings show that working-class identity is durable through upward mobility and the participants centre their sense of self and sociocultural belongings in their community of origin and their family. They have a strong sense of loyalty to their working-class roots, however, also recognise that their objective measures of SES align with a middle-class status. Ultimately, this reveals that upward mobility caused a displaced sense of identity for the participants as they share their attempts to navigate two class systems while truly feeling they belong in neither. These findings support Bourdieu's theory of *habitus clivé*.

The findings also exhibit the significance of social capital in upward mobility, in particular the need for early exposure to cross-class connectedness to aid individuals expand their social

networks in a positive and transformative manner. Importantly, school is revealed as having the strongest ability to facilitate these cross-class encounters for disadvantaged children. This is witnessed by the majority of the participants, who identify early exposure to multi-representational communities as having a positive impact on their life choices, especially in the field of education. The participants account for family and community as also bolstering their access to the right social capital. This supports all three theorists on their theory that social capital is a fundamental characteristic of upward mobility. In particular, Chetty's theory on the role of neighbourhoods in improving a child's chance for upward mobility through local connections and opportunities.

Agency appears as important as positive encounters within the social structures for the participants, strong personality traits helped the participants actively defy the push factors of social class labels and stereotypes, and challenge discrimination to navigate their way successfully through the main societal structures. This supports the theory of Sen, that agency is a key factor in successful living and that all individuals have a role to play in their mobility along with social structures. This is somewhat contradictory of Bourdieu who only focuses on the role of social structures in social equality and social change.

The study acknowledges the importance of documenting the lived experience of the residents of the most marginalised communities, as they navigated their journey out of deprivation. The research has created a platform for these important stories to be shared, and the participants' voices to be heard. These lived experiences display incredible resilience and strength in adversity to build success in education and careers, and to create a life of value. Their contributions strengthen the understanding of the conditions that need to be in place to help marginalised individuals make meaningful choices and have the power and control to act on them. In general, the findings reveal strong family values of hard work and routine, genuine connection and belonging in the community, along with exposure to relevant educational choices, together with key personality traits of resilience, advocacy, and social justice all contributed to the participants' intergenerational mobility.

The Front Door....

The college in which I completed most of my postgraduate studies is situated directly across from my old primary school. The two front doors practically align and as a child I had a prime view of the college's front door at my break times. My primary school experience was not the happiest of memories, I always felt different and somewhat of an outsider. However, I do remember looking across at the third level teacher training college in absolute awe of the institution and its students. I used to watch the girls coming from there to go on teaching practice, or in between classes, and they felt a world away from me. I admired them, their dress, their confidence, their freedoms! As a child I believed I could never achieve a place there, and those front doors despite being a couple of a hundred yards away, may as well have been on a different planet. In my child's mind I was not worthy of them. When I eventually became a student and employee of the college, despite multiple entry points on the building I always used the front door of the college, no matter where I was situated in the building. It provides a strange sense of achievement and brings peace to the little girl who looked on in wonder many years previously. I distinctly remember using the front doors for the first time in one of my working roles in the college and it felt surreal, I had access to the staff canteen and a little insight into the workings of the college. I felt like a complete fraud and my imposter syndrome was high. When inside the canteen the only people I knew while waiting for my colleagues were two ladies from my own estate, they were working there as cleaners and the paradoxes of my life came flooding back. They recognised me from years ago and we exchanged a salute, there was an invisible divide there and our common ground had become shaky. Again, I felt that pull of the past and completely fraudulent to my old self,

my mother was a cleaner in a neighbouring school, and I felt like I was disrespecting her in some strange way by not following in her footsteps.



Chapter 11 - Conclusions

11.0 Introduction

The concluding chapter synthesises key findings, draws conclusions relevant to the research questions, and outlines the study's original contributions to the field of social mobility. It explores the interplay of push and pull factors within the social structures that impacted upward mobility among individuals from severely disadvantaged communities in Limerick City. The study aimed to identify common factors that facilitated these individuals' upward mobility, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty. The research focused on four estates: Ballinacurra Weston (my birthplace and home for three generations), Southill, St. Mary's Park, and Moyross, all of which are characterised by persistent disadvantage despite the implementation of a Regeneration plan since 2007. The study collected and analysed narratives of educational and professional success and upward mobility within these challenging contexts.

While the Irish government has made efforts to mitigate the worst effects of social inequality, challenges such as low educational attainment, high unemployment, and a significant proportion of single-parent families persist. These issues contribute to a low standard of living and compound social problems for a considerable segment of the population. Existing research and government interventions often adopt a 'deficit model' focusing primarily on the problems within the most disadvantaged areas, such as those highlighted by the Limerick Regeneration Watch (2014). However, limited research has explored the successes of individuals from these communities and the factors that enabled their upward mobility. The main purpose of this research was to address this gap by focusing on narratives of success

and identifying the factors that facilitated upward mobility for residents of these estates despite significant challenges.

11.1 The Research Objectives

The Limerick Regeneration Agency (2008) maintain that extensive national media coverage of crime within disadvantaged estates in Limerick has severely damaged the city's image. Devereux et al., (2015) argue that since the 1980s, Limerick has been subjected to negative media portrayals, with a label of 'Stab City' being ascribed to the third city of Ireland.

'The blanket representation of Limerick as a place of crime, social disorder, poverty and social exclusion has continued and it has been amplified in recent years, particularly in the context of the feuds between rival drugs gangs, most of which have been played out in the city's marginalised local authority estates such as Moyross, St. Mary's Park, Southill and Ballinacurra Weston' (p.212).

The media attentions of Limerick's Regeneration areas have been overall very negative, resulting in stigmatisation and discrimination for its residents. I have personally lived this experience of social isolation along with the participants, and all ethnographic narratives tell a similar story of discrimination at the hands of social structures and individuals due to address or community of origin. Thus, this research aimed to shift the narrative surrounding these often-stigmatised communities by focusing on the lived experiences of individuals who have achieved upward mobility despite many barriers. In analysing their stories, the study sought to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on social class mobility. Furthermore, it aimed to understand the motivations and support systems that enabled the participants to overcome poverty, particularly given the limited impact of the substantial investment in Limerick's Regeneration program (CSO, 2023). By learning from their journeys, we can develop more effective systems and structures of support for future generations.

The research employed an ethnographic approach, incorporating a digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, and autoethnographic elements. This approach was uniquely situated within the four Limerick city communities, allowing for a deep understanding of the local context. A thorough analysis of the data included exploration of the social class structures in contemporary Ireland through the digital ethnography of social media users who post about social class issues. Secondly, through the participants interviews and autoethnographic vignettes, combined they created a collection of upward mobility stories from the four estates, and finally, all the data was employed to investigate main push and pull factors which influence the upward mobility journey and secondly, the markers of working-class identity, and how individuals construct this identity within the social structures they operate within. Finally, determining if social class mobility has an effect on this working-class identity and its unique attributes.

11.2 Summary of key findings and conclusions from the research in relation to the research questions

In relation to the main research question, exploring the interplay of factors influencing social mobility for the participants, the research revealed that community, family, and education played the most pivotal roles. Most evidence pointed to the fact that these three social structures were complementary to the needs of the participants and each other, i.e., if one structure failed in support, another structure acted as a supplementary support system to help the participant with challenges and obstacles.

Furthermore, the participants socialisation in these fields are shown in chapter nine to have built unique habitus, capital, and agency to help them create a life they have reason to value. This indicated that a combination of structural supports with agency is needed to achieve upward mobility. A unique theoretical blend of Chetty, Sen, and Bourdieu was employed to frame these findings and support the research in a layered and nuanced manner by combining interdisciplinary elements of sociology, philosophy, and economics.

The following section will synthesise the findings, highlighting the main conclusions in relation to the research questions concerning identity, family, education, and community. This synthesis will identify the most salient themes that emerged regarding the formation of social class identity and the role of the three social structures in upward mobility.

11.2.1 *The Class Defector - Where I Come From is More Important than Where I am Going!*

‘Transfuges de class’, or “class defectors”: people from a modest background who managed to climb the social ladder – often at the cost of a certain discrepancy, a feeling of shame’ (Ernaux, 2022).

In chapter three, the metrics of social class was explored to conceptualise its complexity and the full effects it has on individuals and societal structures, both objective and subjective measures were employed. The objective measures were the socioeconomic status of an individual, which included wealth, income, education, and occupational prestige. Whereas the subjective measures employed were more qualitative, and included address, social and cultural capital, and subjective social status markers like accent or dress sense. Bourdieu (1984) purports that upward mobility has a negative effect on these characteristics of the individual and consequently on their identity as they move between class systems. He claims that upwardly mobile individuals never feel a sense of belonging to the class they came from or the class they have recently joined as their habitus, capital, field and overall sense of social space alters due to either educational, occupational or socio-economic shifts. Crew (2022) argues that in upward mobility, individuals carry the ‘ghost’ of their working-class habitus with them into their new middle-class life. Therefore, the research sought to determine if this was the case amongst the upwardly mobile from the Limerick city Regeneration communities.

Torn identity or *Habitus Clivé*, was one of the strongest conclusions in the research, all of the participants reported feeling ‘stuck’ between two worlds divided by class systems (see 9.7.2 & 10.3). The participants used both objective and subjective metrics in their response to their own social class status without being prompted. The answers yielded a very interesting result, the majority of the participants are comfortable describing their objective, quantitative measures within the middle-class strata e.g., wealth, income, occupation; acknowledging that all of these elements of their lives fall under the metrics of middle-class. However, in their subjective measures of social and cultural capital, and their habitus, they purport that all of these remain unequivocally in the working-class strata. Moreover, they argue that their working-class metrics are stronger than their middle class and conclude that their loyalty to their working-class roots prevails over all other markers of social class. However, there is a sense of internal struggle evident in this identity, as their working-class persona tries to navigate the middle-class world they inhabit (see 9.6). Consequently, torn identity becomes observable between the middle-class objective measures and the working-class subjective

measures of social class, and the upwardly mobile appear stuck between both, defected to the 'in between'. Bourdieu (2000) advances that habitus clivé arises when a person's conditions of existence changes dramatically over time, they feel their sense of identity losing coherency and experience a sense of self torn by dislocation and internal division. This tear in identity is most evident in their relationships with their family and peers who remained in their community of origins. There is a distinct sense of loss and nostalgia when the participants discuss these relationship breakdowns (see 10.3.1) and a feeling of not being fully accepted by any of the classes, as the working-class community do not understand the journey to educational and professional success, while the middle-class do not fully understand the working-class cultures and habitus that the individuals carry with them. This leaves a sense of 'stuck between two worlds' (see 9.7.2). These findings support Bourdieu's theory and Friedman (2015) purports that this theory of habitus clivé, is an overarching concept which is useful in helping to understand how people actually experience social mobility. Thus, by using this Bourdieusian lens, the research helps with understanding how upward mobility can disrupt a person's sense of belonging and identity. The results exhibit that the parts of identity a person inherits from their family and community, remain the biggest marker of class in their life, rather than a collection of objective SES measures such as income or occupation. This strongly indicates that habitus is indeed an ingrained part of an individual, and despite a serious shift in influence, individuals will hold onto their deeper working-class identifiers, like accents, inherited values, and skills, along with their parents' occupation, and address of origin as their markers of their identity. In agreement, Stubager & Harrit (2022) argue that class consciousness or identity may be structured more by early life than by current class position. Therefore, from the results of the study, it appears that social class identity is founded in the subjective elements of life, i.e., a persons' origins, habitus, and inherited forms of capital remain their key sources of identification in the stratification of class. The tear in their persona appears to lie between the objective measures of their lives they recognise as middle-class and the subjective measures of their lives they refuse to let go of which they affiliate with working-class. In conclusion the subjective social status appears more relevant than socioeconomic status in defining a person's identity. *People are made of places. They carry with them. (Elizabeth Brewster Poem - Where I Come From)*

11.2.2 *The Important Role of a Strong Matriarch*

The field of home is one of the most important locations for the socialisation of the child, therefore, it was a principal element of exploration in the research. Tomanović (2004) claims that family acts as the cultural context of childhood and on a wider level family habitus

structures children's everyday life. Thus, to understand how participants developed the habitus and skills necessary for upward mobility, it was crucial to examine the role of family habitus. For the majority of the participants, the matriarch played the most important formative role in their lives. Ten of the twelve participants credit their mothers for teaching them skills of resilience, resourcefulness, empathy, and hard work which they link to their own success. However, the most impactful skill the matriarch taught them appears to be the skill of financial literacy and budgeting. In their own reflections, participants were so impressed with their mother's ability to take a minimal budget and make it stretch to the point they always felt secure in her ability to provide for them. Therefore, their mothers provided them a very safe space to grow and flourish, and although most were aware from a certain age that financial resources were limited, their mother carried that burden and allowed the children feel secure in their day to day living, eliminating uncertainty. The participants hold huge respect for the protection their mother offered them in regards financial struggles and traumatic experiences especially when the patriarch in the house was abusing alcohol or presenting with other problems. This created a certainty and dependability on their mother, knowing that there was always going to be food on the table and resources for school, not only did she provide for them financially, but she also protected them emotionally. Moreover, when resources were so tight she displayed sophisticated ways to budget their money, to still manage to save some money, and the ability to barter or pawn material goods for others. In this skill, they learned the advantages and opportunities of delayed gratification, which taught them that the sacrifices made in the short-term leads to longer term success, this inherited skill passed onto them as children, also fed into other areas of their lives that required sacrifices and delayed gratification like their education and areas of employment.

11.2.3 The Role of Education in Economic Connectedness

As discussed in chapter two and five, Chetty (2015) argues that neighbourhoods most conducive to upward mobility were ones which had multi-representational communities and school systems, meaning that individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, race, and gender are socialising, and being educated together. These remain the most defining features of social structures that afford children the greatest chance of intergenerational mobility.

Additionally, Chetty et al. (2022) highlight the significant impact of cross-class relationships or 'economic connectedness' on the success of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (see chapter five). Disadvantaged children who interact with higher-income

peers are more likely to achieve higher adult earnings than those who primarily associate with other disadvantaged children. Moreover, the earlier these cross-class relationships are established, the greater the potential for upward income mobility. A substantial body of research supports the link between social capital and positive academic and learning outcomes. This is especially true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are lacking inherited social networks and connections. However, the support and connections needed to achieve economic mobility can be supplemented by the social links they make in school. Therefore, education, according to (Putnam, 2000) is one of the most important determinants of social capital. From the participants findings one of the main outcomes on school interactions, was the impact the education system had on improving the expansion of their social networks and connections through their socialisation and interactions with diverse groups of peers. This can be seen in two main areas of education in the findings, firstly it occurred for participants when they attended schools outside the community and secondly, when they were streamed into top classes with children from outside their communities. The participants imply that both of these experiences led to seeing different ways of life, and they gained a broader education based on their expansion of their social and cultural capital from these new networks of people. Furthermore, participants who experienced diverse peer groups in their earlier education reported a smoother transition to third-level education. Having been accustomed to interacting with students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, they felt more comfortable navigating the diverse social environment of higher education. Conversely, participants who attended schools with limited socioeconomic diversity found the transition to third level more challenging. Lacking exposure to the multi-representational social structures described by Chetty (see 2.8), they felt isolated and misunderstood, making their initial adjustment to college more difficult. These findings support the research of Alfred and Addo (2017), which emphasises the positive impact of peer interactions and connections on academic achievement. Thus, congregating all students with similar SES backgrounds into a school system, can be detrimental to their ability to socialise with peers from diverse backgrounds. Plagens (2011) argues that social capital adheres within social structures and requires social relations and associational life to be of value as a resource. This finding highlights the importance of broadening the social networks of children living in marginalised areas and preventing their isolation from mainstream society necessitates increasing the diversity and interactions with multi-representational backgrounds of school populations through increasing opportunities for cross-class connectedness.

11.2.4 *A Healthy Sense of Community Identity & Belonging Supports Resilience & Wellbeing*

Sen (1999) argues that social justice is concerned with expanding people's freedoms or choices. This includes both basic freedoms, like adequate nutrition, and more complex ones, such as knowledge, self-respect, and community participation. He emphasises the ability to participate in community life and experience a sense of belonging and social support is particularly crucial. Sen (2010) argues that neighbourhoods and communities should provide capabilities and functionings (see 2.9) that support social and cultural factors, such as social connectivity and friendships. These factors are essential for providing individuals with the fundamental freedoms to develop and pursue their values and opportunities in life. Therefore, within the participant findings on the social structure of community it is important to assess how the community supported social connectivity and belonging.

Participants emphasised the positive role their communities played in their lives, providing opportunities for growth and personal development, contrasting this with my own experiences as detailed in the vignettes. Just as the matriarchal figure within the home provided a safe and nurturing environment, the community itself offered a comparable sense of security and support. Insofar, the neighbourhood is often described like an extension of their homes, with neighbours viewed as extended family members. All twelve participants recalled the freedoms and happy memories associated with growing up in their community, characterised by a strong sense of belonging. This perception of safety and support directly contradicts the prevailing external image of crime and violence often associated with these areas, as well as official data on antisocial behaviour. The community provided the participants with a sense of shared identity, grounding them as valued members of the neighbourhood. They recall unstructured play time, a lot of friends available to play most evenings, weekends, and summers, the communal green space in the estates were their playgrounds, despite not having access to designated play or sports areas, the participants report making their own structures to socialise within. Stevenson & McNamara (2013) in agreement with Sen, claim that positive community identity leads to increased social support and better wellbeing, which they argue is related to better resilience to cope with life's challenges. Therefore, for the participants this sense of sociocultural belonging led to improved wellbeing and resilience, allowing them valuable freedoms to be part of community life. Furthermore, the majority of the participants report that there were positive role models in their neighbourhoods through community-based projects. These social groups that were based in the areas, provided the participants with opportunities for recreation, sports,

education, and socialisation and were vital assistance for the participants in building key life skills.

Consistent with the theories of Chetty and Sen, the four communities, despite facing deprivation and poverty, fostered the participants' capabilities and freedoms. They provided a sense of belonging to a broader community, offering social connections, learning opportunities, mentorship, and networking possibilities. These factors contributed to increased resilience and higher levels of social mobility.

11.2.5 Social Class Discrimination Remains OK in Irish Culture

ATD Ireland (2023) assert that class-based discrimination is caused by a lack of understanding around the experiences of those facing poverty and exclusion, deep inequality, and government policy. Socio-economic discrimination affects access to services, employment, and exacerbates income and wealth inequalities. According to the IHREC (2024) addressing this issue is crucial for social inclusion and the realisation of fundamental rights, however, Irish law currently prevents discrimination based on nine grounds, including gender, age, disability, and race, but socio-economic status is not explicitly included. Poverty and social exclusion create barriers to equal opportunities, leading to discrimination based on socio-economic status. All participants recounted specific instances of discrimination across various life domains, including education, peer interactions, employment, and sports. This insidious discrimination permeated multiple sectors of society, leading to feelings of exclusion from mainstream education, employment, decision-making processes, and opportunities. These findings align with the social media research from X, which strongly suggests that classism is the most widely tolerated form of prejudice in the country. Arguments supporting this view often cite the intersectionality of classism with other forms of discrimination, such as race, gender, and sexuality. While Ireland legally protects against discrimination based on these characteristics, classism often remains overlooked. This suggests that social class discrimination may be under-recognised and under-addressed within the Irish socio-political landscape. The data collection from both the digital ethnography and the ethnographic interviews report that the most common points of social class discrimination are address and accent. ATD (2023) asserts that these forms of discrimination can significantly impact an individual's life trajectory, hindering their agency and aspirations, and having intergenerational consequences. Addressing these forms of discrimination is crucial for social justice. Easterbrook (2021) argues that including social class in the Equality Act

would formally acknowledge the discrimination and inequalities faced by working-class individuals. This inclusion would have the potential to challenge deeply ingrained social constructs by providing a legal framework for confronting discriminatory institutions and practices that perpetuate marginalisation and exclusion.

11.3. Implications of the Research and Recommendations

There are a number of implications and recommendations arising from this research for practice, policy and further research.

11.3.1 *Recommendation One: Recognise socio- economic status as the tenth ground of discrimination in Irish Equality Legislation.*

Drawing on the powerful first-hand narratives collected and analysed in this research the findings clearly indicate that individuals from disadvantaged communities, are still experiencing classism in their day-to-day living. Stigmatisation of address and accent are particularly prevalent in the research findings. In addition, the social media findings set out in Chapter 7 also point to a reality in which individuals in Ireland are being stigmatised due to their socioeconomic status. The findings of this research add to the growing body of research pointing to the fact that discrimination on the grounds of socioeconomic status is widespread in Ireland (See IHREC 2024). On foot of these findings the recommendation is that the Equality Act in Ireland is revised to include socioeconomic status as a protected characteristic. The Act's current framework, which excludes socioeconomic status as a protected characteristic, creates a significant legal gap for individuals facing discrimination based on their social and economic background.

11.3.2 *Recommendation Two: Conduct a comprehensive review of historical local and national policies that have impacted the social networks within these communities.*

The findings of the research provide additional evidence supporting Chetty's (2014, 2015, 2022) arguments that social capital or 'economic connectedness', which is based on friendships that transcend class strata, is associated with higher rates of economic mobility. This demonstrates the importance of creating structures that support multi-representational communities and schools. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, historical policies surrounding the development of these communities in Limerick have hindered opportunities for expanding social capital and cross-class connectedness. Therefore, it is a recommendation that a comprehensive review of historical local and national policies that have impacted the social networks within these communities be conducted. This review should critically

examine the consequences of these policies, focusing on the social, cultural, and economic losses experienced by those 'left behind'. The review should also identify key lessons learned from these experiences to inform future policy decisions.

11.3.3 Recommendation Three: Providing Imaginative Pathways for Individuals Living in Marginalised Areas to Expand Social and Cultural Capital Through Inter Community Engagement.

The research demonstrates the significant role that exposure to diverse socioeconomic groups played in enabling upward mobility for many individuals. Therefore, efforts to increase socioeconomic integration within neighbourhoods and schools are vital. Humphreys (2019) argues that revitalising these areas requires a mix of social and affordable housing to foster stronger social capital and build supportive networks within neighbourhoods. It is recommended that initiatives that create opportunities for cross-class connectedness amongst the four communities and their neighbouring more affluent areas be developed and supported. These could include events such as cultural programmes, skills-sharing workshops, or community service projects that are unique and beneficial to their shared surroundings.

11.3.4 Recommendation Four: Investment in social and cultural spaces to rebuild and repopulate strong neighbourhood networks.

The findings of the research provide additional evidence supporting Lareau's (2011) arguments that working class social capital is heavily dependent on family, extended family, and neighbours, compared to middle class people, who have large networks of inherited social and professional connections. There are many examples in the accounts provided by the participants of this research where working-class networks which were developed over long periods of time created vital infrastructure of supports in their communities. The Limerick Regeneration Plan, as discussed in Chapter 5, disrupted established community networks through dispersal and relocation. To address the resulting fragmentation, urgent measures are needed to repopulate these estates. Regeneration policy should prioritise maximising and developing existing social networks and infrastructure (Stevenson & McNamara, 2013). Therefore, it is recommended that investment in social and cultural spaces take place. This is as crucial as physical regeneration, by creating vibrant community hubs and spaces that foster networking and building community identity and places of pride. This includes revitalising abandoned green spaces into communal parks and play areas, and expanding community centres to offer recreational activities and accessible educational

programmes. Moreover, to encourage the growth of local businesses and events to support employment and job networks.

11.3.5 Recommendation Five: Providing Educational Pathways for Individuals Living in Marginalised Areas to Expand Social and Cultural Capital.

This research provides empirical evidence to support Bourdieu's (1984) contention that interacting with individuals from diverse social backgrounds is crucial for acquiring valuable cultural capital, including knowledge, skills, and social connections. To facilitate this, we must identify concrete solutions that allow children to access the intensive support offered by DEIS schools while simultaneously increasing their social interaction across socioeconomic strata. Within the Irish education sector, the implementation of the DEIS policy, while intended to address educational disparities, may inadvertently contribute to segregation by grouping children based on socioeconomic status and geographic location. However, a number of the findings of this study question some aspects of this approach. Many of the participants emphasised the importance of their school experiences outside their community in fostering economic connectedness. They attributed these experiences to broadening their values, interests, and overall worldview. Therefore, it is recommended that in order to improve access to valuable social capital we prioritise strategies for increasing social interaction across social class stratifications within existing school systems. Enhancing opportunities for upward mobility should be a central focus of education policy and legislation. Examples of activities that could foster this kind of cross-class connectedness would be inter-school activities that encourage interaction among students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This could involve participation in sports, arts, academic clubs, summer camps, and after-school projects that promote collaboration and shared experiences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. Additionally, the establishment of mentorship programmes pairing students from different backgrounds can enhance cross-class understanding and support. These initiatives would enable children to benefit from the intensive support offered by their local schools while simultaneously expanding their social and cultural capital by interacting with peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

11.3.6 Recommendation Six: Increase awareness of the Importance of Subjective measures when framing the impacts of social class and class mobility.

Participants' accounts strongly indicate that the experience of upward mobility has a divisive effect in their lives. There is an overt attachment that remains loyal to their subjective social status as working class. Participants aligned their identity with their parents' occupational and educational status, positioning themselves within the working-class strata, regardless of their own middle-class occupations and educational achievements. Additionally, their community of origin exerted a stronger influence on their social identity than their current community. This suggests that social class identity can be intergenerational. The participants also frame their class identity in their inherited skills, ethics and values, which appear enduring, and the participants remain loyal to these characteristics. Participants' access to or lack of various forms of capital, particularly during their childhood and upbringing, was a significant marker of working-class identity.

The participants believe that their origins left indelible markers of identity on them, that carries with them despite shifts and changes in their sociocultural environments, which makes moving between these environments more difficult as they describe the values, ethics, and habitus of middle class at odds with their own heritage. Participants can easily align to middle class objective measures of class including income, occupation, and family status. However, they cannot align their subjective measures such as address, accent or cultural capital to the middle. Therefore, it is recommended that given the subjective nature of social class identity, it is crucial to incorporate both objective and subjective measures when conducting research and developing policies related to social class and class mobility. Subjective measures from the research appear more enduring in a person's sense of sociocultural belonging, whereas objective measures are transient in an individual's life, therefore, not as impactful to their identity. Consequently, it is vital to have both measures in social class stratification to determine an individual's true sense of identity and belonging.

11.3.7 Recommendation Seven: Increasing Female Participation in Community-Led Financial Budgeting & Literacy Education - A Collaborative Approach.

Consistent with Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus (see 2.3), participants identified the financial literacy and budgeting skills instilled by their mothers as significant contributors to

their social and economic success. These skills, acquired through social learning processes, became ingrained habits and dispositions that shaped their lives. Their mothers emphasised the importance of hard work, delayed gratification, and long-term financial security. As outlined in Chapters 9 and 10, ten of the twelve participants viewed their mothers as strong role models who successfully managed households on limited budgets through diligence and careful planning. The participants expressed deep respect for their mothers' financial acumen, recognising its tangible impact on their own lives. This instilled a sense of resilience and future-orientation (see 10.5.1.2), positively influencing their educational and professional pursuits. Notably, in the visual representations created during member-checking (see 6.3.1.3), the calculator emerged as a common symbol, visually representing the participants' appreciation for the budgeting skills. Moreover, the participants discuss the strength and resilience of other women in their neighbourhoods and their abilities to be extremely resourceful in tough times. They recount memories of strong women holding down multiple jobs and being sources of not only financial supports but social and emotional supports in difficult times (see 9.4.1.3). This underscores the powerful role of strong female role models in disadvantaged communities, offering stability, dependability, and a nurturing environment for personal development.

Therefore, a key recommendation is to prioritise community-based financial literacy education programs led by women. Strategies should be developed to encourage local women to share their budgeting skills with other families within the community, fostering a grassroots approach, and creating a programme which is relevant, relatable, and accessible to members of the community. Collaborating with financial institutions and government agencies can enhance these programs and provide valuable support. The narrative accounts of the majority of the participants in this study identified the transmission of strong financial skills as paramount in their upward mobility. This points to the potential values of such initiatives.

For example, a collaboration with the credit unions and these communities in creating a community led finance programme. The credit unions remain an embedded and trusted institutions within these communities. Historically, they have played a crucial role in combating financial exclusion in Ireland, helping marginalised individuals avoid illegal moneylenders and fostering a savings culture, through their community-based structures (Byrne et al., 2005; 2007; Corr, 2006; Douthwaite, 1996). This makes it a strong platform

from which to develop and deliver effective community lead programs for women. This underscores the credit union's potential role in promoting responsible financial behaviour among its members and their potential to create a meaningful educational programme with their local female members.

11.4 Implication for Further Research

This study explored the perspectives of individuals from four Regeneration communities in Limerick city on their experiences of upward mobility, applying a combined theoretical framework of Bourdieu, Sen, and Chetty. The research has provided a platform for these individuals to share their experiences of living in disadvantaged communities and the factors that facilitated their escape from poverty and deprivation. While recognising its limitations, the study highlights the potential contributions of its findings and suggests avenues for future research.

The study focused on four specific social housing estates in Limerick City, which continue to face significant marginalisation and social problems. Twelve participants who had achieved upward mobility through education were selected for in-depth interviews. This ethnographic approach was complemented by a digital ethnography to assess the broader landscape of social class structures in Ireland. Additionally, autoethnographic vignettes were used to incorporate my personal experiences of living in a disadvantaged community.

While this ethnographic approach, grounded in a strong theoretical framework, provided valuable insights, it limited the study's scope to a specific demographic of Limerick city residents with a particular experience. This constrained the number of individuals who could be included in the research. Furthermore, the length and depth of ethnographic interviews limited the number of participants due to data management. Thus, it might be advantageous for future research to widen the scope of the geographic locations to capture more of the research available. To include in the future, other cities like Dublin who have experienced urban Regeneration, to compare and contrast their experiences to the residents of the Limerick city estates.

Given that the HP Index indicates persistent or worsening deprivation in the four Regeneration estates, despite efforts to address social issues, further research is warranted. This study focused on individuals who have successfully moved out of these estates; therefore, applying this research framework to interview current residents could provide valuable insights into their quality of life and the extent to which existing social structures

support their development and progress. This would create a comparative framework between past and present residents in regards access to education, community supports, and family structures, and social networks. By conducting comparative research, a broader assessment could be conducted into the impacts of societal changes and evaluate the effects of Regeneration initiatives on the four communities, as this plan represented the most significant political and sociocultural shifts in these estates to date.

11.5 Contributions & Conclusions

Research commonly argues that there is a need to challenge the dominant political and policy discourse that portrays working-class communities in a deficit model (Reay, 2001; Bertrand, 2015; Roberts, 2020). To resist these pervasive deficit narratives, we must work towards a more nuanced understanding of these communities (Smyth & McCoy, 2015; Burns, 2014). From a young age, children from socially disadvantaged communities in Ireland are exposed to deficit language about their communities and families, particularly within the education system. The Education Act of 1998 defines educational disadvantage as ‘impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools’ (p.31). However, the use of terms like ‘impediment’, ‘disadvantage’ and ‘prevent’ can be disempowering and objectifying, contributing to the construction of deficit models that portray disadvantaged individuals as different, othered, and often stigmatised (Fleming & Harford, 2021; Cahill, 2015; & Gee, 2011).

Therefore, this research aimed to challenge the prevailing narratives of disadvantage by focusing on stories of success and achievement within these communities. These narratives directly counter common outsider perceptions of working-class communities, often characterised by assumptions of laziness, reliance on social welfare, limited social networks, and a lack of parental aspirations for their children. In place of these narratives, the participant stories describe hardworking parents, in supportive communities, with hopes and aspirations for their children. The stories tell of high levels of educational and professional achievements amongst a cohort of social housing residents, who worked hard and achieved lives they have reason to value and be proud of. They broke the intergenerational cycle of poverty and continue to strive for further achievements, all while facing adversity and social class discrimination. This research aimed to contribute to the understanding of social class mobility by adopting an asset-based approach, focusing on the strengths and successes of individuals within working-class communities. By analysing the pathways to success of the

participants, this research can inform the development of more effective local and national policies. This asset-based approach diverges from the traditional deficit-based model, which primarily focuses on problems and limitations within these communities. Instead, it emphasises the identification and utilisation of existing strengths, skills, and resources within the community, as recommended by Green and Haines (2011). The research highlights the importance of fostering strong social networks and relationships to build and strengthen social capital within working-class communities. Additionally, the study emphasises the significance of community supports that provide individuals with educational opportunities, recreational spaces, and access to financial planning and literacy resources. Financial literacy and planning were crucial in enabling participants to develop the skill of delayed gratification, as discussed in section 10.2.2. This area should be a stronger focus of intervention in these communities.

Consequently, by addressing the needs and aspirations of community members, these approaches can contribute to improved wellbeing, education, and economic outcomes, enhancing overall community connectedness and belonging. Furthermore, by highlighting the strengths and resilience of communities, asset-based approaches can challenge negative stereotypes and promote positive social change.

Finally, this study has contributed to the practice of engaging individuals who have experienced marginalisation, as active research participants, empowering them to contribute to public discourse and decision-making processes affecting their lives, which yielded valuable insights.

I would like to acknowledge the achievements of the research participants and their significant contribution to enriching this research. Working with these individuals was an inspiring experience. Their resilience and determination to overcome adversity and give back to their communities, rather than becoming hardened by their experiences of marginalisation, is truly commendable.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Interview Questions

Section 1:

The interviewee will be asked to give an account of their life course. (free flowing conversation - unstructured)

Guiding questions for the early stage of their life, not all will be asked based on direction of interview:

1. What area of Limerick city did you grow up in?
2. How long did you live there?

3. Can you give examples of cultural identities that are unique to your area? (hobbies, habits, music, sport etc.)
4. What was good about your childhood community/what did you like about growing up there?
5. Were there negative aspects to growing up in this area?
6. This area is deemed disadvantaged or marginalised, what does that mean to you and how did that manifest in your home life?
7. What are the main needs for your community today do you think?
8. Did your community of origin allow you freedoms to develop a life you value? What were life choices like growing up here?

Section 2: Family Background

1. - What kind of family do you come from? Could you tell me about your parents? (introduce parents and grandparents, their highest education achieved, their jobs when respondent was at school, their origins, their present jobs) Where do they live?
2. - Could you tell me about your siblings? (how many are there, how many are younger/older, ask about their schooling, job, where they currently live) If the respondent's siblings did not study further: Why do you think they did not?
3. (It is important to elicit whether the family has ambitions)
4. Was there someone in your family or in your broader environment who was more highly skilled/educated? (not necessary a graduate but someone who stood out by e.g. having been the only one in the area that progressed through skills or education)
5. - If the family moved away from social housing: why do you think your family made that decision?
6. - Was there somebody in the family that inspired you career wise?
7. - Who encouraged your aspirations/guided your journey in the family?
8. - Had you family members who were involved/interested in your school development (helped with homework, attended PT meetings, encouraged extra/co-curricular activities)?
9. - Growing up who did your parents socialise with - people from within your community or outside - mix?

Section 3: Education

1. - What schools did you go to? About each school (primary, secondary or third level) the following questions must be asked:
2. - How did you choose your school? Did someone give you advice?
3. -What grades did you generally get?
4. -Did you have classmates from your estate? Who did you mainly make friends with (people from your area or outside, mix)?
5. -How did you feel at school? Did you experience any negative discrimination coming from the teachers or students? (supportive or hostile atmosphere)
6. -Did you have outstanding teachers who you remember fondly, or one you regularly contacted even after completing school? Would you please talk about him/her?
7. -Where did you get the idea of continuing your education?
8. -How did your family and broader environment react when they found out that you wanted to continue your studies? To what extent did your family support or reject your idea? What did your family think or expect you to be in the future? - Was there someone during your primary/secondary school years whom you considered as a role model? Could you tell me about him/her?
9. - Do you feel school allowed you to explore and develop your capabilities and aspirations to the fullest?
10. - Did you go from secondary school directly to further education? If you did not, what did you do in between?
11. -If the respondent did not go to FE directly, ask them what they did after finishing primary/secondary school.
12. - Why did you choose that course?
13. - Was there someone during your FE years whom you considered as a role model? Could you tell me about him/her? Did you have outstanding teachers who you remember fondly, or one you regularly contacted even after completing school? Would you please talk about him/her? - What difficulties did you have with completing FE? What motivations did you have to complete it?

14. - How did you feel at third level? Did you experience any negative discrimination coming from the teachers or students? (supportive or hostile atmosphere)
15. - Who did you make friends with? Did you have fellow students from similar areas in your group?
16. - Did you take part in any education/supportive programme specifically for people from disadvantaged areas? Did you receive any scholarships?

Section 4: Career

1. - What kind of workplaces have you had so far? (Elicit how the respondent got each job – e.g. by way of relations, employment programmes, etc).
2. - Were you ever involved in employment programmes in your community or receive any career support/advice?
3. - Where did you get the idea of pursuing your current job? Did it happen by sheer coincidence, or did you choose it on purpose?
4. Would you take on a job that supports people from marginalised areas (if not in this area already)? If the respondent helps disadvantaged people: What is their attitude towards you? How much do they accept you? - If the respondent does social work: where did you get the idea to do social work?
5. Do you think it is a task of successful people from disadvantaged areas to help others from their community? To what extent do you feel it a personal obligation to do something for the community?
6. - What is your relationship like with your colleagues? To what extent do you feel to 'fit in' at your workplace? Have you experienced negative discrimination or have your colleagues accepted you? Have you met any positive discrimination perhaps?
7. - Do you have colleagues from similar estates?
8. - Have you ever felt at university or at your workplace that you had to work more than others? If you have, could you please tell me about it?
9. - What does your job mean to you?
10. - To what extent do you think your family, colleagues and broader environment appreciate your work and your professional success?
11. - How satisfied are you with your present job? (how does it relate to your childhood aspirations)

Section 5: Family relationships and friendships

1. - What is your relationship like with your parents, siblings, and extended family (e.g. how often you meet)? How has your relationship with your family and broader community of origin changed since you moved to another area or job/college? (make sure to elicit whether going to college/university had any impact on the respondent's relationships)
2. - How does your family regard you and treat you (e.g. are they proud, are they distanced)? Have they expected you to become someone you did not want to or did not manage to be? If so, could you please tell me about it?
3. - Have you ever had the feeling that your family or the community do not accept you that much and keep a distance from you since you graduated?
4. - Have you had periods when you felt lonely or when you had a feeling you did not belong anywhere?
5. - In your circle of friends, are there many from your community of origin? Where did you meet your friends?
6. - Do you ever spend time in your community of origin now?

Closing questions:

Describe defining moments in your life that led you to your destination.

What do you think the things you have achieved in life can be attributed to?

What would you say if you had only one sentence to describe yourself?

What does your community of origin mean to you? To what extent do you feel you still belong to this community?

How would you describe your social class now? What relates you to this class - identifiers?

How has your daily habit, hobbies, culture changed from your childhood?

Appendix 2:



Pure Notions! An Ethnographic Study of Social Class Mobility from Limerick City's Regeneration Estates.

Participant Information Letter - Interviews

What is the project about?

The purpose of this project is to investigate what gravitates individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to the transformative effects of education or skills. The research is aimed at increasing the existing knowledge on the experiences and emotions of social and educational mobility. The study will offer an opportunity to improve insights into resilience and achievements of individuals as they have journeyed out of disadvantage and marginalisation to find a life they value. The insights will be gained through studying the main obstacles socio-economic disadvantage can present and how overcoming these obstacles impacts on a person's identity and sense of socio-cultural belonging.

Who is undertaking it?

My name is Helen Lowe, and I am a PhD student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am currently completing my study in the Department of Learning, Society and Religious Education under the supervision of Dr. Sandra Ryan. The current study will form part of my doctoral thesis.

What are the benefits of this research?

It is envisioned that the data gathered from the participants will (a) further our understanding of markers of resilience in mobility amongst individuals from areas often deemed disadvantaged, (b) benefit our understanding of push and pull factors in education for marginalised students, and (c) create a collection of life stories that young people from similar backgrounds can relate to and be inspired by. It will also generate knowledge on the effects of class mobility on a person's sense of self and belonging.

This research will benefit policy makers, schools and teachers, and community service-providers as it will broaden our understanding of the journey of mobility with its advantages and drawbacks.

What is involved for the participant?

Individual Interviews:

If you agree to participate in this process, I may ask you to take part in a one-to-one interview at a time and place that best suits you. I would like to record the interviews so as to make sure that the accounts gathered may be accurately represented. The interview should last between 50 minutes to one hour and involves your participation in a semi-structured discussion about your opinions and experiences of social class mobility. If you agree to be interviewed, you may choose not to answer some or any of the questions put to you. Also, should you prefer, the interview will not be recorded. You may be contacted after the interview for a short follow up discussion, this is just to ensure accuracy and clarity in my recording of your story and at this stage you can edit, add to, or remove any of the documented recording.

Right to withdraw?

Participation in the study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

How will the information be used and disseminated?

The information gathered in the interview or focus group will be analysed and combined with that of the other participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis.

Every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity within the thesis. Summary data only will appear in the thesis, individual participant data will not be shown. Findings may be used in research publications in summary form.

All participants will be invited to respond to a draft of the results section of the thesis. This will allow you, as a participant, to ensure that the information gathered with you has been recorded and represented accurately.

How will confidentiality be kept?

All data gathered will be stored securely and information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID will be generated for each participant, and it is this number rather than your name or other identifying factors which will be held with your data to maintain your anonymity. All information provided will only be used for the purpose of this research and research records with any names or contact details will be destroyed carefully following the completion of the project.

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact: Mary Collins, MIREC Administrator, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Telephone: 061-204980 E-mail: mirec@mic.ul.ie

What will happen to the data after the research has been completed?

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored safely for the duration of the project, anonymised research data may be held indefinitely or as required by the researcher.

Contact Details:

If at any time you have queries or issues with regard to this study, my contact details are as follows:

Name: Helen Lowe

Email: helen.lowe@mic.ul.ie

Appendix 3:



Pure Notions! An Ethnographic Study of Social Class Mobility from Limerick City's Regeneration Estates.

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

As outlined in the participant information sheet the current study will investigate the academic and professional resilience of people from inner city Limerick in negotiating their upward mobility.

The participant information letter should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the study. You may be asked to participate in a focus group and/or one to one interview.

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored in encrypted files that are password protected for the duration of the project. Anonymised research data may be held indefinitely or as required by the researcher.

Please read the following statement before signing the consent form:

- I have read and understood the participant information letter.
- I understand what the project is about, and the results will be used for.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving a reason.
- I am aware that my answers will be kept confidential.

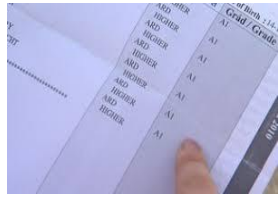
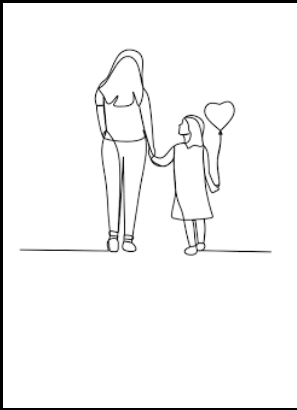
NAME:

(PRINTED)


Signature

Appendix 5:





Appendix 5:

 Name
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1st to go to college
<input type="radio"/> Accent & Vocab
<input type="radio"/> Address bias in job applications
<input type="radio"/> Advocacy work
<input type="radio"/> Ambition from classism
<input type="radio"/> anti-social behaviour
<input type="radio"/> Calling people out on classism
<input type="radio"/> Childhood freedom
<input type="radio"/> Class divides based on address in school
<input type="radio"/> Classism in communities
<input type="radio"/> Classism in education
<input type="radio"/> Classism in sports
<input type="radio"/> Clergy role in community
<input type="radio"/> Community
<input type="radio"/> Community differences
<input type="radio"/> community projects, clubs & schemes
<input type="radio"/> Community Trauma
<input type="radio"/> Cultural capital
<input type="radio"/> Derogatory terms
<input type="radio"/> Disconnected in community
<input type="radio"/> Discrimination
<input type="radio"/> Elitism in employment and college
<input type="radio"/> Freedoms & Capabilities from origin community
<input type="radio"/> Green space
<input type="radio"/> Habitus

<input type="radio"/>	Hatred for school	
<input type="radio"/>	Home life	
<input type="radio"/>	Impacts of poverty	
<input type="radio"/>	Important community figures	
<input type="radio"/>	Inspirations & Role models	
<input type="radio"/>	Intergenerational classism and poverty	
<input type="radio"/>	Internalising messages of classism	
<input type="radio"/>	lack of supports in school	
<input type="radio"/>	Middle class now	
<input type="radio"/>	Money pressures	
<input type="radio"/>	Negative media attention	
<input type="radio"/>	Neighbours with nice houses and good jobs	
<input type="radio"/>	Older sibling experienced more disadvantage	
<input type="radio"/>	One sentence to describe yourself	
<input type="radio"/>	Outsiders perspective and research	
<input type="radio"/>	Parental Aspirations	
<input type="radio"/>	Parents & Homework	
<input type="radio"/>	Parents attitude to learning & education	
<input type="radio"/>	Parents background	
<input type="radio"/>	Parents employment	
<input type="radio"/>	Physical punishment at home	
<input type="radio"/>	Primary school	
<input type="radio"/>	progressive parents	
<input type="radio"/>	Realisation of class differences as a teenager	

<input type="radio"/>	Resilience		
<input type="radio"/>	school outside the community		
<input type="radio"/>	school profiling - classism in school choice		
<input type="radio"/>	School support for disadvantaged		
<input type="radio"/>	Siblings and family relationships-education		
<input type="radio"/>	Social Capital		
<input type="radio"/>	social class mobility		
<input type="radio"/>	Space & Voice		
<input type="radio"/>	Sports		
<input type="radio"/>	Street lights on		
<input type="radio"/>	Structural Classism		
<input type="radio"/>	Torn Identity		
<input type="radio"/>	Wanting to give back to the community		
<input type="radio"/>	youngest child did not experience same disadvantage		

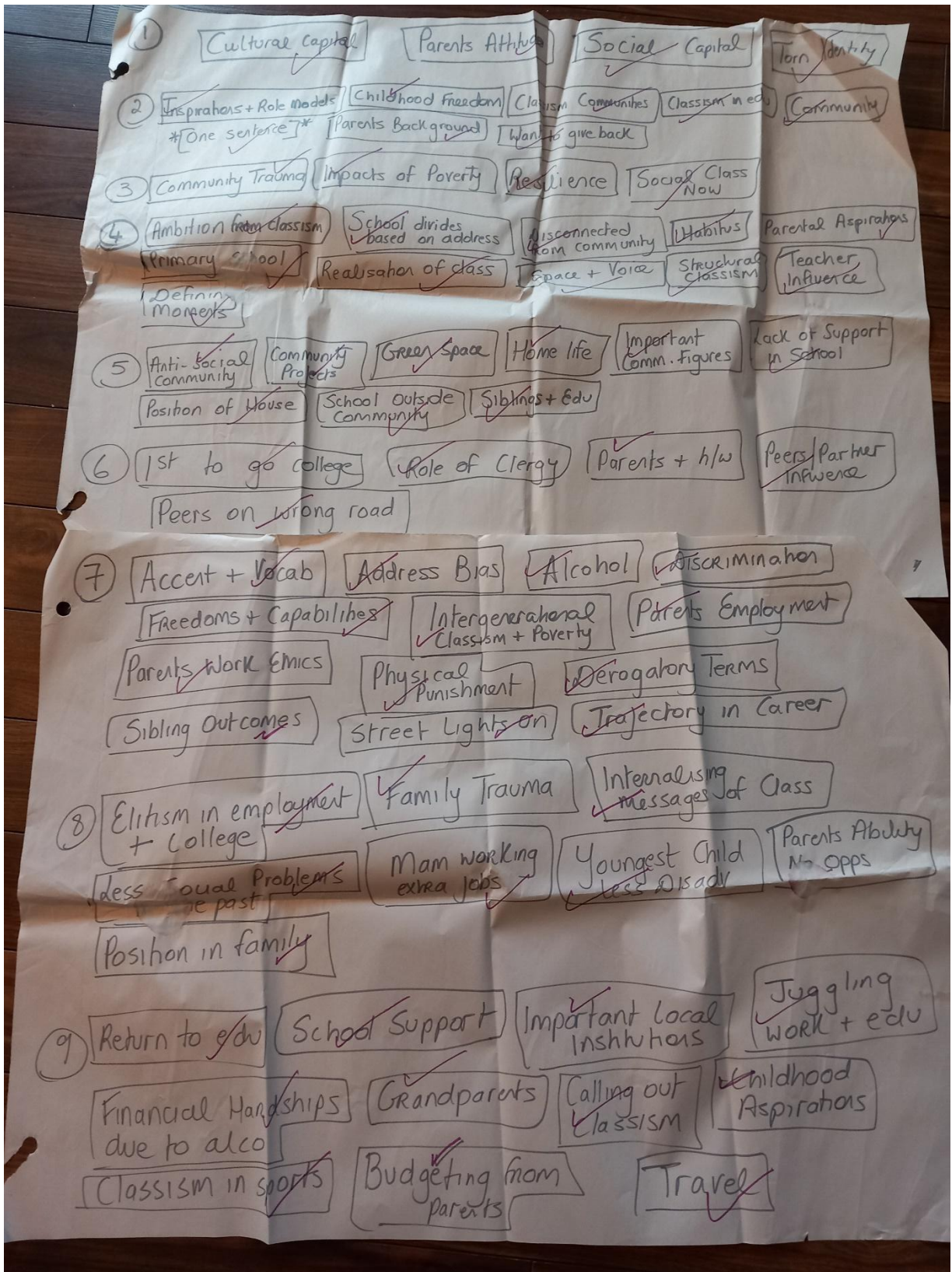
Appendix 6:

References	Codes	Percentages
7	1st to go to college	58%
5	Accent & Vocab	42%
3	accepted back in the community	25%
6	Address bias in job applications	50%
2	Advocacy work	
6	Alcoholism	50%
9	Ambition from classism	75%
4	Ambition in life	33%
8	anti-social behaviour	67%
4	Budgeting money from parents influence	33%
4	Calling people out on classism	33%
4	Championing others	33%
4	Childhood Aspirations	33%
11	Childhood freedom	92%
9	Class divides based on address in school	75%
11	Classism in communities	92%
11	Classism in education	92%
3	Classism in job choices	25%
4	Classism in sports	33%
7	Clergy role in community and schools	58%
11	Community	92%
10	Community differences	83%
8	community projects, clubs & schemes	67%
10	Community Trauma	83%
3	concrete jungles	25%
2	Council houses vs purchased houses	
12	Cultural capital	100%
6	Derogatory terms	50%
2	Disappointing parents	
9	Disconnected in community	75%
6	Discrimination	50%
2	Drug Influences	
3	educational path after school	25%
5	Elitism in employment and college	42%
5	Family Trauma	42%
2	Fearful of men because of physical punishment	
4	Financial hardships due to alcohol	33%
6	Freedoms & Capabilities from origin community	50%
2	Gambling	
2	Generational history in the area	
4	Grandparents role	33%
8	Green space	67%
9	Habitus	75%
2	Happiness and contentment in life	
3	Hatred for school	25%
8	Home life	67%
2	Impacts of local council grants to buy houses	

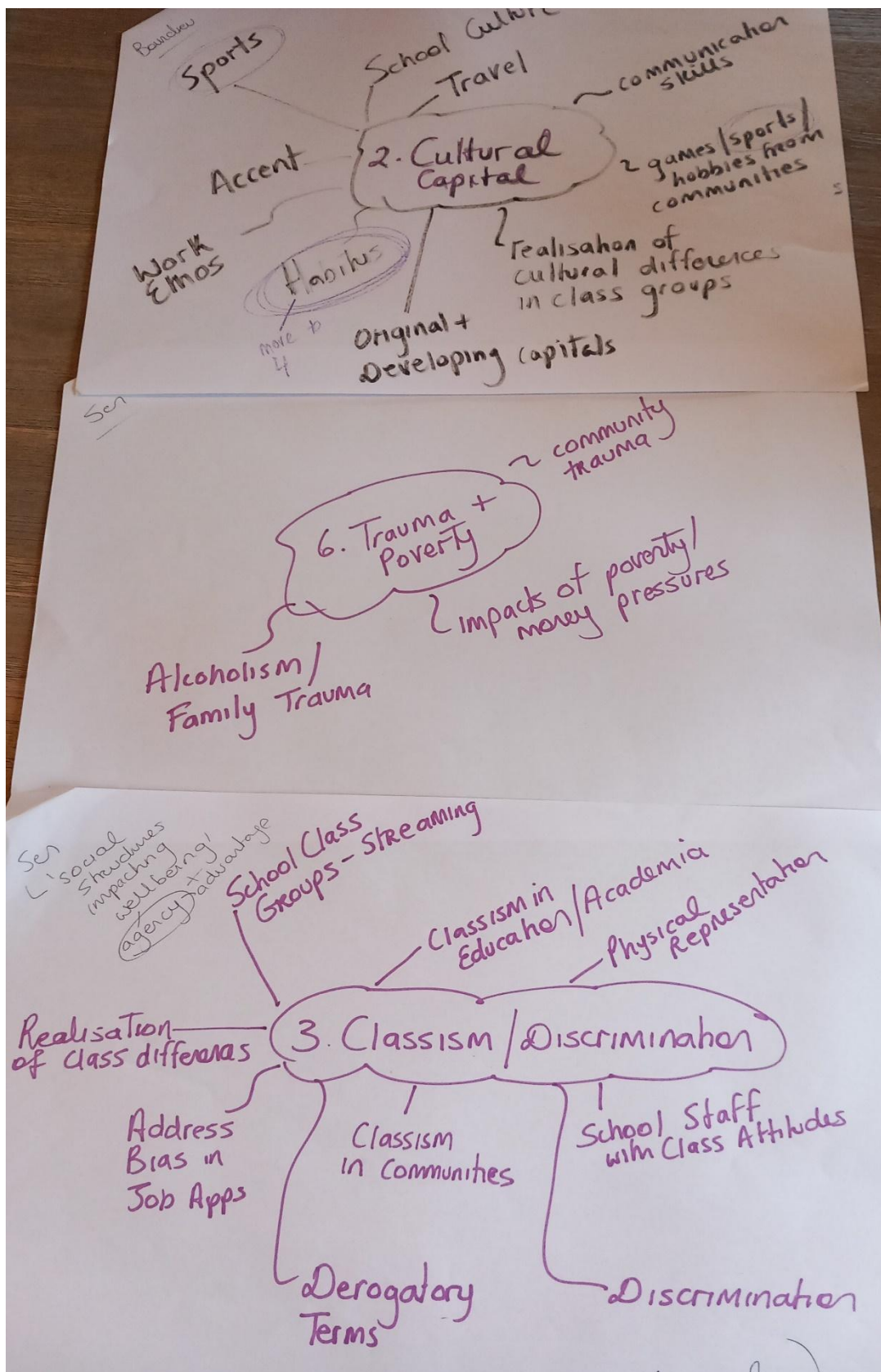
10 Impacts of poverty	83%
4 Importance of local institutions in a community	33%
4 Importance of mixed ability	33%
8 Important community figures	67%
3 Imposter syndrome	25%
10 Inspirations & Role models	83%
6 Intergenerational classism and poverty	50%
3 Intergenerational school choices in community	23%
5 Internalising messages of classism	42%
4 Juggling work and education	33%
2 Lack of community facilities	
2 Lack of support in college	
8 lack of supports in school	67%
5 Less social problems in the past	42%
5 Mam working extra jobs to pay for children's needs	42%
8 Money pressures	67%
2 Moving house at a formative age	
3 Negative media attention	25%
2 Neighbours with nice houses and good jobs	
2 No labels or working class banners	
2 Notions	
2 Older sibling experienced more disadvantage	
11 One sentence to describe yourself	92%
2 Outsiders perspective and research	
9 Parental Aspirations	75%
7 Parents & Homework	58%
12 Parents attitude to learning & education	100%
11 Parents background	92%
6 Parents employment	50%
5 Parents no access to education despite ability	42%
2 Parents support in college	
6 Parents work ethics	50%
3 Part time job	25%
2 Past generations from council estates	
7 Peer - partner influences	58%
2 Peers on same avenue doing well	
7 Peers on wrong road	58%
2 Personal impacts of working back in the community	
6 Physical punishment at home	50%
5 Position in family	42%
8 Position of house	67%
9 Primary school	75%
2 progressive parents	
2 Protective mother	
1 Provident cheques	
1 Pub as a negative place	
9 Realisation of class differences as a teenager	75%
1 repeat LC	

1	Research in the community	
10	Resilience	83%
4	returning to education	33%
1	Role of books in her life	
1	Role of fathers in the community	
1	Role of school in the community	
1	School dropout regret	
7	school outside the community	58%
2	school profiling - classism in school choice	
4	School support for disadvantaged	33%
4	secondary school	33%
1	SEN in school	
2	Sending children to your local school	
1	Sibling Influence	
5	Sibling outcomes - differences	42%
8	Siblings and family relationships-education	67%
12	Social Capital	100%
6	social class mobility	50%
10	Social class now	83%
9	Space & Voice	75%
4	Sports	33%
5	Street lights on	42%
9	Structural Classism	75%
3	support in employment for training and education	25%
9	Teacher influence	75%
9	Three defining moments or people	75%
12	Torn Identity	100%
4	Trajectory in Career	33%
3	travel	25%
11	Wanting to give back to the community	92%
4	youngest child did not experience same disadvantage	

Appendix 7:



Appendix 8: Excerpts from refined mind maps



Appendix 9:

Chpt 2 (view)

Bourdieu Identity
- systemic inequality
- fluid nature of class structure - agency
- explanation of how material resources shape - influence
- perception of class

Capital:
- Social - most power of social position
- individualistic
- reproductive
- multiplier of effect
- biggest determinant of mobility

Habitus: embodied C.C.
- deeply ingrained
- life experience
- challenges mentality
- provides cultural skills
- connects to resources
- carries history
- classifies social
- classify + contextualise
- perception, conception, experience action

Chetty - Impacts of Neighbourhoods
- Evaluates gov policies @ targeting poverty, inequality
- Neighbourhoods tangible causal effects on SCM
- intergenerational mobility driven by place rather than people
- place of spend most time determines outcomes

Neighbourhood Characteristics
- segregation, income inequality
- Family Structure - School
- social capital
- Conducive: indicators
- multi-representational communities
- school systems - diff SES background

Indicators of SCM

Sen - HD, Use of Value - Agency & Share
- hopeful discourse on social justice
- defines wellbeing + framework on social + institutional arrangements
- real opps for people to do + be what they reason to value
- diversity = diff abilities to convert resources to well being
- quality capabilities = human beings
- diversity - if govts don't consider in distribution of resources then H.D. will never be equal
- Structural Constraints = Barriers
- affect ability to convert capabilities into value
- individual Agency is central to overall success
- personal, social + environmental factors

Chpt 3 Social Class

Using class categories can help understand different sectors and social inequalities

Objective SES
- income
- education
- family
- subjective: status, capitals

Objective SES
- income
- education
- family status

Subjective Capitals
- self
- address

Social Identity
- link to SES
- Cultural Capital
- embodied + inhibition - affect
- strong sense of levels of class
- accent
- social justice

Social Capital:
- Here strong - when
- trust, ability to help others
- partner's support, trust
- connects - reaches
- ability + ability - gain

Economic Capital:
- Impacts of Poverty
- Education
- difficult to stay in edu
- pressure to perform
- work to earn money

Basic Skills
- Foundational Skills
- work to earn money

Turn Identity:
- SES
- still speaking class all day
- shift between two worlds
- impossible existence
- broken relationships

Social Identity of Subjective Social Status
Chpt 8 - Participant Findings

Consistency in results Homogeneity

Weston
- Lone Parent 63%
- Prim Ed 33%
- 2nd level 7%

Southhill
- Lone P 61%
- Prim Ed 37%
- 3rd 7%

Mayross
- Lone P 61%
- Prim 34%
- 3rd 7%

STM
- Lone P 61%
- Prim 34%
- 3rd 7%

2 tier social housing
- 30-60s
- differential rental scheme

suburbanisation
- 60s-80s
- large estates
- Tenant Purchase Scheme

Surrender of 80s - No choice
- only Tenant Purchase Scheme
- Homogeneity

Family
- Parents Attitude to Learning - books, help, attention, approval, advocacy, fees
- Home Structures: Shared - Lights on 50%, Play time - rough + ready, traditions

Social Structures
- Chpt 3 + 4
- Chetty + SCM

Community
- Community - Good Neighbours - Good supports emotionally + financially
- Strong Affiliation + Community Pride - Good resources
- diff to other neighbour

Common Education
- 13
- Activities + Hobbies
- Play + Summer Schemes
- sources of employment + progression

Attending School Outside Community
- deficit of supports
- Role Models
- Family based, clergy

Social Class Perceptions: SES
- place in society
- 'prestige' of employment
- social capital
- cultural capital

Social Capital
- Address Shyamshahan

social exclusion
- cultural capital

What is each person able to do + be?
- structural constraints

Sen - HD, Use of Value - Agency & Share
- hopeful discourse on social justice
- defines wellbeing + framework on social + institutional arrangements
- real opps for people to do + be what they reason to value
- diversity = diff abilities to convert resources to well being
- quality capabilities = human beings
- diversity - if govts don't consider in distribution of resources then H.D. will never be equal
- Structural Constraints = Barriers
- affect ability to convert capabilities into value
- individual Agency is central to overall success
- personal, social + environmental factors

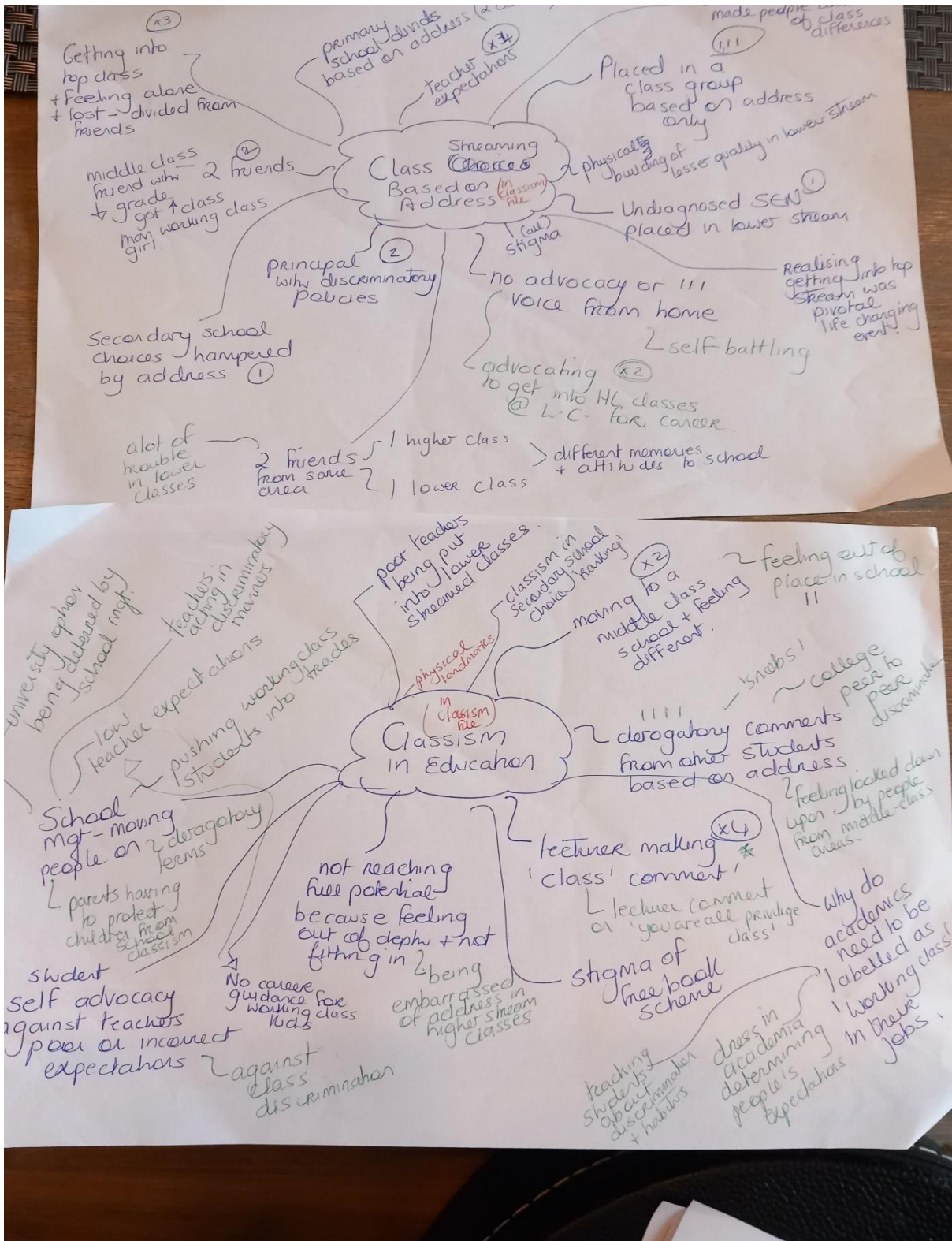
Discrimination & Equality Act?
- derogatory comments + hatred
- Classism in Education
- Streaming in Schools
- Class Divides
- Isolation/Barriers
- Classism in Employment
- Address Bias

Waters had Moment of Class
- Trauma:
- family - addiction - poverty
- community - addiction - abuse + neglect - feeding
- Police Violence

ACES - WINGS

Social Class Barriers
- Participants Intentional

Appendix 10:



Appendix 11:

Excerpts from Journals/Fieldnotes of Observations on Literature:

Lack of security for the future

Factors affecting child outcomes – bad influence from older children – low levels of parental education – poor parental mental health – concentration of problems – hostility and criticism in child parent relations – lower levels of affection and warmth.

Negative role models being normalised – no educational mentors which can lead to lost potential – no cultural capital – teenagers are disengaged/no trust – lack of diversity in educational policy – **good children falling between the gaps**

- schools need to be the centre of community and multi-purposive.
- Early exposure to right role models
- Focus on important role of mother
- Lack of male models
- School transitions
- Social segregation
- Family influence is strongest – low educational aspirations – **poor role models in terms of social mobility aspirations for children leads to normalisation of crime drugs jail and death.**
- Poor environmental ecology

Schools prove to be safe and disciplinary – active learning

Moyross their local initiatives are affecting and influencing local policies in the city*****

Need more local leadership – to help low life chances school is the gateway service!

We need social cohesion – avoid hidden communities!!!

On reading this it is obvious that our local council estates are hidden communities we are positioned away from the main points of the city we are the lost hidden children!!! So how can policies rectify this when there is so much wrong in their homes!!!

How do we change social mobility aspirations for children – by examining social mobility the impacts it has on limerick students seeking transgression and supporting them further – especially emotionally – we make role models more visual and relatable we celebrate them in the community, and we try instigate change from the inside out!! Not the outside in. Too many policy makers with no real finger on the pulse and no proper way of understanding and empathising with our communities!!! INSIDE OUT CHANGE – follow Moyross success stories – their influence on local policy – can this be emulated????

I am worrying about my bias and questioning how can I ensure rigour and partiality in my study???

What is the exact problem I am trying to understand????

There is a shame and embarrassment when you move into different class settings – we are hiding, we are lying about our home addresses – when I was in college, I lied about my address to my group I was so embarrassed!!! Nervous someone will ask where you live where are you from! You glide over it instead!!

It took me a long time and moving on to accept my background amongst my colleagues/peers where I could be comfortable to discuss it and celebrate the successes I had despite the obstacles – when I started teaching, I shared my background so much with the students from similar estates in a bid to highlight it can be done and you can achieve educational success!

We can sit at the other side of the desk!!!!!!

Am I too emotionally involved to be objective???

20/10

Do a lot of schools want these children??

Do all teachers/staff/support services want to work with these students???

Social mobility is messy and can lead to social purgatory.

21/10

Looking at potential methodology structures – methods of data collection:

Surveys – focus groups – interviews

Is there guilt towards parents when the child moves up the social ladder – does the child feel like a betrayal on the parent??? This reminds me of the card I wrote to my mother when going to college I apologised to her – why did I feel like this?? Like I was wronging her??

As we progress do we feel sorry for this as if we are hurting or insulting people in our life that aren't???

What are the Irish experiences of mobility in social class?? Is there enough research in this area situated in Ireland/Limerick??? Especially in Limerick with the disproportionate number of socio-economic problems???

Can family be the biggest inhibitor and education be the mediator???

How can education recognise the pull factor of origin and reconcile it to destination????

In social mobility literature I have read to date it appears very divisive, emotive and dichotomous.

On the spectrum – One end – a school of thought that SCM has no real or long lasting impact on the person – Goldthorpe, Houle, Chan – mainly male based, quantitative data collected to arrive at such conclusions – at the other end of the spectrum is the school of thought that moving up SCM has lasting impact on the person with social isolation – and purgatory – with theorists like Friedman, Bourdieu, Sorokin, Reay – based on qualitative data and more gender balance.

Polarised beliefs, largely emotive arguments.

With cleft habitus with temporary state of displacement then eventual **habituatio**n the resilient adjust and adapt but what about the others – are some students too unsupported to feel compelled to survive their own potential growth and evolution?????

Social mobility is much more than economics it also the person well-being – ties with friends, family and the community.

Need to consider well-being measures as well as economic/occupation/education as well when designing research.

Determinants of wellbeing – financial security – stable marriage – good health – safe, physical environment.

Social coherency!!!

Mobile trajectories!!!

Idea of **disrupted habitus** Friedman suggests that it provides a promising theoretical framework for analysing some iterations of the contemporary mobility experiences.*****

Reay seek to problematize dominant discourses of SCM

How can SCM be measured – what variables to allow for robust study and generalised findings????

Appendix 12:

Sample Fieldnotes from Interviews:

Moved at a time of regeneration in Limerick, in new neighbourhood were weary and not welcoming of them as a regeneration family. He did not immediately connect to his new

neighbourhood and spent first year plus very alone and not integrating. Identified class and cultural differences immediately between both neighbourhoods, horses, noise levels, Garda presence.

Experienced community trauma from a young age of 7 or 8 and vivid memories of violence, drug and gun crime, and Garda brutality. Expresses struggles are symptomatic of societal problems rather than individual/micro level issues.

Looking out the window - experiencing brutal scenes - big memory of watching the world with his brother through the window.

Annoyed with the negative press attention - unhappy with how the good parts of the community never make news or draw attention. Neighbours were strong influence and how they helped out and local shops allowing people to take groceries and pay another day - everybody helped everyone.

Music played a big part in his life especially 90s rappers

Mam had a big push for sports which came from her own mother, believing that children involved in sports got in less trouble as they were idle less.

Homework was the 1st focus however, and once this was done sports and play could happen, a lot of freedom in the area with green spaces used for sports and play, bike adventures and travelling to other neighbourhoods on the bikes were a big part of his childhood, which seemed somewhat carefree during these times for him.

He experienced discrimination in sports and heard a lot of negative messages about being chosen for teams based on address. He felt people internalise these negative messages and can process them in 2 ways either the fuck you way I will do it anyway and beat all expectations for me or the accepting way and take their words and sentiments to be true and believable and never achieve. He felt those that opted for the latter often ended up drug addicts in crime or dead. He took it as a fuck you I will do better than all of you. He heard a lot of derogatory negative comments growing up like knacker and scumbag and felt discriminated against in higher brow areas of the city where he was told to get out of the area regularly despite doing nothing wrong. Address bias was big for him.

He believes that most harm in areas of disadvantage comes from the outside from people's bias and discrimination, he believes these sentiments need to be the 'regenerated' ones and until this changes places like where he grows up will always be at a disadvantage because society is made this way. He believes that othering and outsiders coming in doing their

research 'on' the people is never helpful, they take what they need to progress their own careers and then they move on. He feels this is generational problem and has been present in society for 60 plus years as his mother has stories of bigotry all her life and furthermore, he has heard newer stories of the same discrimination between differing estates of late and is disheartened that this continues for the next generation (laneway access story).

Social and cultural capital with habitus is really important in both education and employment and language opens doors along with accent and content knowledge.

Its knowing how to say certain things

Values/freedoms from community - he attributes who he became and what he achieved to his community as it built in him resilience, strength, hard work ethics and compassion for others.

