‘Classed Identities in Adolescence’

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In August 2012 the two week EASP summer school was hosted at the University of Limerick. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have attended a workshop on morality headed by Professor Colin Leach and Professor Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera.
Abstract

The central argument of this thesis is that social class remains a persistent system of inequality in education, health, life chances and opportunities. Therefore class matters. But why is it that so little attention has been paid to class in the psychological literature? Three papers are presented here which draw together theoretical advances in psychological understandings of group processes and sociological understandings of the complexity of class. As western labour markets become increasingly credentialised the overarching aim is to reveal the hidden nature of privilege and disadvantage in the education context.

The first theoretical paper considers what it is that social psychology, a discipline so self-evidently interested in social context can offer to understanding class given its salience as a social category of consequence. Drawing on social identity approach the analysis considers the characteristics of class that make it difficult to conceptualise, measure and challenge. Paying particular attention to the political dimensions of class, contemporary theoretical developments and methodologies within psychology are used to highlight how class is rendered implicit rather than explicit in everyday life.

The second empirical paper suggests banal meritocratic and individualist ideologies construct class group boundaries as permeable, status relations as stable, and inequality as legitimate. This may prevent explicit identification with class. This is problematic for the social identity approach which emphasises the importance of self-categorisation and identification. People tend to distance themselves from explicit collective class categories and contemporary class cultures have become individualised and implicit. Two related studies are presented exploring adolescents self-categorisations and identification with class groups. The first cross-sectional qualitative study of (N=32) adolescents demonstrates that despite the lack of explicit identification and a language to talk about class, adolescents define themselves and others, as distinct classed groups. The second quantitative study (N=190) found adolescents had difficulty naming their social class and the strength of this identification was significantly weaker than gender or national identification but was not absent.

In the third empirical paper we seek to understand cultural and group level factors that contribute to the social class educational achievement gap and under-representation of working classed students in higher education settings. The first qualitative study of (N=32) adolescents reports on 5 focus group interviews completed in middle class and designated disadvantaged schools. Young people in disadvantaged schools evidence awareness of barriers to higher education and an interdependent model of personal agency. In contrast middle class participants see agency in educational settings as individualised and ultimately independent. Building on this study a second quantitative study of (N=199) adolescents all attending disadvantaged schools shows community identification and an interdependent model of agency are however associated with young people’s positive feelings about school.

It is argued that social identities do not, necessarily, require explicit knowledge of belonging in order to be important processes to study. We demonstrate class issues are localised by, often, parochial self and other definitions. This obscures the structural factors which perpetuate inequality and render advantage and disadvantage invisible. Finally, discussion centers on the value of a group level approach that orients to the cultural fit and compatibility of educational settings for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
DECLARATION

The substance of this thesis is the original work of the author, and due reference and acknowledgement has been made, where necessary, to the work of others. No part of this thesis has been submitted in candidature of any degree.

Sarah Jay (Candidate)
Acknowledgments

I cannot quite believe and it is with a great deal of emotion that I now add the finishing touches to this thesis, the end product of a long, at times awesome and others agonising journey. Of course none of this would have been possible without both the formal and informal supports I have received along the way and I hope I can now find the words to express my heartfelt gratitude.

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1.1. Social class and social psychology

Radical economic and social transformations have led to a heated debate about the continued existence or relevance of social class (Pakulski & Waters, 1996) however the central argument of this thesis is that social class still exists and matters. The thesis takes a socio-cultural approach to the study of class drawing on literature from sociology, mainstream social psychology and cultural psychology. Some sociologists argue that the class system has changed but has not gone away, rather it has gone underground and become hidden (Bottero, 2004). At the same time, class remains a persistent system of inequality in important outcomes and the focus here is education. Only recently a comprehensive study of Irish school leavers demonstrates the continued link between class and achievement, aspirations and progression to higher education (McCoy, Smyth, Watson, & Darmody, 2014). However research is also showing that although aware of a class structure, people do not necessarily identify and feel connected to class groups (Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2001). Given the hidden nature of class the research set out to answer the following research questions: *Does class shape secondary school pupils’ self and other definitions through categorisation processes? How does class impact on secondary pupils’ educational and occupational aspirations? Why do students’ academic and future expectations differ across groups? How do social psychological identities affect interest in higher education?*

Education is also particularly fruitful domain to explore class because on the one hand, it is seen as a site of possibility where class can be transcended (Fine & Burns, 2003). While on the other, Western labour markets are becoming increasingly credentialised which means that without education and qualifications upward mobility is extremely difficult. In
fact the link between level of qualification and grades achieved and status of employment and earning prospects are particularly strong in Ireland (Smyth & McCoy, 2011). Post second level qualifications are now considered almost vital for securing employment. Regardless of this the unequal distribution of wealth and income and associated cultural and social resources mean class identities are more often reproduced rather than transcended within the education system (Reay, 2006; Whitty, 2001).

These structural factors, the unequal distribution of material, social and cultural resources, are perhaps why class has received relatively little attention from social psychologists who seem to prefer is to leave class to sociologists (Argyle, 1994; Ostrove & Cole, 2003). Or control for class (or some variation of economic positioning) while exploring other more ‘important’ variables (Frable, 1997). This is in contrast to an intensity of research interest in other systems of inequality such as gender and race within the discipline. In light of this the first aim of the research is to investigate what it is that social psychology, a discipline so self-evidently interested in social context can offer to understanding class given its salience as a social category of consequence? I argue that the subjective lived experience of class is very relevant to the field of social psychology. It involves identity processes at the individual level, factors such as feelings and thoughts, and group level processes such as stereotyping and comparative strategies to distinguish between ‘us and them’ as well as power dynamics leading to privilege and advantage for some and disadvantage for others.

This gap in the literature on social class has generated several calls to action from psychologists (Lott & Bullock, 2001; Ostrove & Cole, 2003; W. R. Williams, 2009) and the American Psychological Association recently set up a task force to explore the consequences of poverty and published a report on socio-economic status (Saegert et al., 2007). It would also be inaccurate to suggest that there has been no psychological theorising or research on
social class and economic advantage and disadvantage. For instance, cultural psychologists are suggesting that a socio-cultural perspective is needed to understand class. They show that the individualism and independence so valued in Western culture are dependent on middle class experiences and resources (Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). Similarly choice varies in meaning depending on access to resources (Stephens et al., 2007). Social psychologists are demonstrating how rank, resources and culture make middle and working classes differ in terms of sense of control, generosity, essentialism and judgement of others (Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009, 2011; Kraus et al., 2011; Kraus, Tan, & Tannenbaum, 2013; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010; Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). Additionally there is some work on the impact of class in education in terms of; belonging (Ostrove & Long, 2007) stereotype threat (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Croizet, Desert, Dutrevis, & Leyens, 2001; Spencer & Castano, 2007) social identity (Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009) dispossession and privilege (Fine & Ruglis, 2009). Lott (2002) explores classism and calls for an examination of how by paying little attention to class psychologists and psychology colludes in this process and the exclusion of the poor.

Argyle (1994) proposes a social psychological model of the class system involving seven interrelated and familiar social psychological principles. 1) Every organisation creates a hierarchical system with ranks of different status, be that industry, church, education, medicine, sport or voluntary. 2) Like attracts like, members of different organisations are drawn to the company of others of similar status, income, authority and expertise. 3) Through spending time together these groups of similar individuals develop further similarities, speech, lifestyle and appearance. 4) These cultural similarities and conformity to class norms makes classes visible. Furthermore attitudes and behaviours towards senior, equal and junior
members of organisations generalise to strangers whose class is evidenced in the same way. 5) It tends to be the main earners position that determines the class of a family. 6) People react to everyone as a member of a class, in this way class group membership is a major source of self-esteem. 7) Class systems seem to be an inevitable feature of human society. Importantly however social distance, deference and relations between class groups are open to change.

Argyle’s (1994) model is insightful and useful for understanding why class is relevant to social psychology and how occupational status, human attraction and class culture and norms intertwine to develop and perpetuate classes. In his book *The Psychology of Social Class* he draws on sociological and psychological research from Britain, the USA and other industrial countries from the 1950’s through to the 1980’s. These, as he notes, are particular places at a particular time, since which radical economic transformations have taken place with the deindustrialisation of Western economies. As class is so closely tied to occupation this transformation in combination with intensified free-market political ideologies and discourses has led to radical social transformation, in Marx’s social psychological terms, reduced class consciousness (Bottero, 2004; Crompton, 2008; Savage, 2003). Class consciousness is complex and involves a number of components. One element is being able to name a class that one belongs to and another is identification with that class. Other important elements are particular to the working classes; being dissatisfied with the power afforded to ones group, seeing the status system as illegitimate and being willing to take collective action to challenge the status quo (Gurin, Miller, & Gurin, 1980).

**Classed identities**

In order to interrogate what social psychology can offer to the study of class the thesis will draw on the social identity approach. The social identity approach, including both social
identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a) and self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) is a mainstream meta-theoretical approach in social psychology. Social identity theory (SIT) pays particular attention to the socio-structural context of intergroup relations and self-categorisation theory (SCT) explains the malleability of contextually valid responses to identity salience. Reicher (2004) argues that identity processes are irreducibly cultural and in many ways a social identity approach is very useful to the study of class. The approach details the psychological processes which lead people to self-categorise as group members to define themselves, and through social categories see and treat others. It orients towards a group level analysis of behaviour rather than a focus on the individual, as if in isolation or in relation to other individuals, because the groups we belong to provide meaning and in certain circumstances can heavily shape and steer behaviour. SIT states that people’s sense of self, who we are, is on a continuum between an individual personal identity and self definitions in terms of group memberships, called social identities. Importantly neither level individual or social takes precedence over the other, psychological processes are context dependent, variable and flexible. Social identities are relational in that they are a sum of meaningful similarities to some and differences from others, they provide reference to shared norms, values and beliefs and are constructed as much by history as the present (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010). Importantly group dynamics and group identification facilitate or hinder a sense of compatibility, fit and ultimately belonging, which represents a ‘fundamental human motivation’ (Ostrove & Long, 2007).

The social identity approach was developed in an attempt to understand and respond to the intergroup dynamics and atrocities of the holocaust but also the social change movement’s and identity politics of the 1960’s including the class movement. Tajfel was committed to a social psychology of resistance and change and recognised that collective action is the only way for subordinated groups to challenge their position. Therefore the
social identity approach forces an orientation towards structural, ideological and contextual conditions to understand power dynamics, advantage and disadvantage. As a social psychologists also interested in social justice and change I believe there is a need to pay attention to structural issues and the legitimising myths that perpetuate inequality and suppress cognitive alternatives (Subasić, Reynolds, Reicher, & Klandermans, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979a). The social identity approach is well suited to the analysis of class in some regards and will be drawn upon here.

However the approach stipulates the crucial role of individuals ‘buy in’ or identification with social groups in identity processes and intergroup relations (Reicher et al., 2010). This is problematic in the analysis of class categories because research has shown that people are defensive, ambivalent and prefer to position themselves as ‘ordinary’ individuals rather identifying with explicit collective class categories (Savage et al., 2001). Furthermore class is a slippery, stretchy, contested and controversial topic and one that people generally avoid talking about (Sayer, 2005). This avoidance is in part due to an egalitarian discomfort with the evaluative nature of the class hierarchy and taboos surrounding discussions about money (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). And in part due to pervasive banal individualist and meritocratic, ideologies and discourses, which in combination encourage the notion that class is a defunct category and no longer relevant to the analysis of inequality in contemporary society.

Within this construction the individual is held responsible for his or her well-being (Lynch, 2006) and regulation (Walkerdine, 2003) and as a result collective politicised class identities have weakened. Therefore it is argued that the class system has changed radically but has not gone away, that although individualised, rather than collective, classes are implicitly relational and comparative (Bottero, 2004) and as such have psychological
meaning. Therefore, this investigation focuses on class as a persistent social structure and rather than class identities that people take on, it examines classed identities which position people in terms of ethical and economic value, and intergroup power relations, (advantage and disadvantage).

Individualist and meritocratic discourses and ideologies constructed by the dominant most privileged in society, implicitly suggest the class system is open, stable and legitimate. Although social mobility has all but stagnated (Gillies, 2005) it is flaunted as possible, in social identity terms group boundaries are constructed as permeable. Importantly individuals strive for positive social identities and so under these discursive conditions individuals are unlikely to identify with class groups. Some may actively dis-identify and distance themselves from a ‘spoilt’ ‘toxic’ working class identity (Skeggs, 1997). While for others a middle class identity, as the presumed default (Savage, 2003) is banal and no longer salient or considered important for self-definition (Surridge, 2007). Similar to other dominant social identities, for instance, white, heterosexual, male, able bodied, middle class identity is not salient and the associated privileged is not visible (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). Consequently the structural inequalities inherent in the capitalist system are hidden and the lack of discourse surrounding class means the economically advantaged do not critically evaluate their privileged position and the economically disadvantaged are effectively silenced (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012).

1.2. Positioning this thesis in context - income inequality

Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) argue that stratification based on social class differentiation is a chronic stressor, a physical and psychological burden that gets more pronounced and socially destructive as national income inequality rises. If we begin then by looking at the big picture, at what sociologists call ‘social facts’ (Oishi, Kesebir, & Snyder,
the detrimental effects of income inequality impact to a greater degree on those whose access to material resources positions them at the bottom of the social ladder. Furthermore income inequality undermines the objective well-being of an entire society. Evidence from cross-national comparisons shows that the more pronounced the income inequality the worse the effects are on a range of pressing contemporary social issues (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2007). Health inequalities, obesity, teenage birth rates, mental illness, homicide, hostility, racism, the proportion of the population imprisoned and deaths due to drug overdose have a tendency to increase while trust, social capital, educational performance, and social mobility invariably decrease with greater income inequality. Wilkinson & Pickett (2009) suggest that time, hope and resources spent on policies and interventions to tackle these issues in isolation may be futile if the underlying economic, political and social system is not re-thought.

Furthermore income inequality is negatively correlated with happiness ratings (Alesina, Di Tella, & MacCulloch, 2004). Alesina and colleagues (2004) found this association by examining large census type data sets, collected annually over 15 year periods in both European countries and US states. Among many questions the surveys included one question about happiness generally. Interestingly they also found striking differences between European and US groups. Although European distribution policies vary, generally European governments invest more in welfare and redistribution than US governments do. In Europe the poor and/or left leaning individual’s happiness scores decrease as income inequality increases whilst in the US these same group’s happiness scores are uncorrelated with income disparity. In the US (one of the most unequal societies) it appears to be the rich whose happiness scores decrease as inequality rises. These authors suggest the differences might be explained by a greater belief in social mobility (subsumed in the ‘American dream’) in the US than in Europe. Perhaps this belief also accounts for similar levels of intolerance towards inequality at the top of the distribution in the US and Europe but greater tolerance for
inequality at the bottom (Osberg & Smeeding, 2006). However US participants seem to be less aware of the actual levels of wealth inequality in their society than their European counterparts (Osberg & Smeeding, 2006) and dramatically underestimate the level believing the distribution to be more like Sweden’s (one of the most equitable societies) (Norton & Ariely, 2011).

To add to these findings recent psychological research shows that the degree of income disparity within a nation also impacts on relations between social groups. Stereotypes shared at the societal level and based on groups perceived socio-economic status and cooperativeness/competitiveness, become more ambivalent and corrosive with greater income inequality (Durante et al., 2013). One of the functions that stereotypes serve is the maintenance and support of the status quo because they make the system appear fair and legitimate (Tajfel, 1982). According to the stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) groups are often judged and evaluated in terms of their perceived warmth and competence. Status predicts competence whilst a cooperation/competition continuum predicts warmth and many groups are judged ambivalently. Ambivalent stereotypes help to maintain unequal distributions and mask inequality by depicting social groups in more and less socially desirable ways. Advantaged and disadvantaged groups are effectively seen as possessing opposite strengths and weaknesses and therefore as entirely deserving their social position. The rich tend to be seen as highly competent and low on warmth, they are respected but not liked, the middle classes are high on competence and warmth and therefore respected and liked. The working classes are often positioned as relatively warm but incompetent therefore not respected while welfare recipients are seen as low on both the warmth and competence dimensions, thus are neither liked nor respected (Fiske et al., 2002).
1.3. The impact of income inequality

From the brief top-down review above it can be argued that the greater income inequality is the worse it is for society’s overall well-being in terms of behaviours, happiness and relations. In terms of a bottom-up perspective the bigger the gap between rich and poor the more unequal are the opportunities and possibilities for achieving self-respect and recognition of moral worth (Sayer, 2005). The Republic of Ireland’s economic recession that began in 2008, initially reduced income inequality but this situation reversed by 2010 and the most economically vulnerable group grew from 16.5% of the population in 2008 to 30% in 2010 (Watson, Maitre, & Whelan, 2012). Moreover, there has been a dramatic rise in economic stress for this group. The number of Ireland’s in-work poor is lower than the EU average, but 16% of those whose income is below the poverty line are working and unemployment at 14.4% is higher than the EU average (Watson et al., 2012). Youth unemployment, those between the ages of 15 and 24, is of particular interest here as structural changes in the labour market have had a profound impact on the job opportunities for this age group (McCoy et al., 2014). Nationally youth unemployment is a staggering 39% and Limerick county is one of the worst effected areas at 50% (Office, Central Statistics, 2011).

Income inequality in the UK and USA has continued to increase since the 1980’s (Fürster & d’Ercole, 2005). A recent UK report suggests the number of in-work households in poverty now outstrips the number of out-of work households (Aldridge, Kenway, MacInnes, & Parekh, 2012). Poverty is operationalised as households whose income is 60% or below the median national household income. In one of the worlds most affluent countries 27% of the UK’s children currently live in poverty and 61% of those live in in-work households (Aldridge et al., 2012). The proportion if Ireland’s children living in poverty after their families income has been topped up by social welfare transfers is 19.5%. Eight percent of those experience consistent poverty, which is a combination of low income and going
without two items considered necessary for basic living requirements (Nolan, Maître, Voitchovsky, & Whelan, 2012).

Child poverty is highlighted as a particular issue because there is strong evidence that consistent lack of money has a direct causal impact on children’s development and health beyond the effects of parent attitudes and levels of education. In a systematic review of studies from the US, UK, Canada, Norway and Mexico including nature experiments, control trials and longitudinal data Cooper and Stewart (2013) conclude that money matters to children’s overall well-being. Poverty causally impacts children’s cognitive and emotional development, school achievement and engagement, health and social behaviour primarily because of parental stress and impacted mental health and to a lesser extent their restricted ability to invest in educational stimuli, nutritious food, heating etc (Cooper & Stewart, 2013). It must be noted that these effects are much larger for children whose family income is consistently low than for families higher up the income distribution experiencing a reduction in income. Qualitative research with children living in poverty has shown how difficult they find not being able to enjoy activities that their friends enjoy, such as swimming or going to the cinema. Also they protect parents by hiding their upset so as not to add to parental financial stress (Ridge, 2006). In the current era of austerity Cooper and Stewart’s (2013) report points to the need to prioritise wealth redistribution policies over, or as much as, early childhood intervention programmes as early childhood development is crucial for later health and life chances.

1.4. Income inequality and health

The cumulative indirect effects of low social class origin, low education achievement and reduced income prospects on psychological well being and physical health in adults have been well documented (Marmot, 2004; Nolan & Whelan, 1999). However, although it is the
poorest who suffer most from health inequalities, it is not just those at the bottom of the distribution who suffer. The picture is much more complex than a purely material explanation where there is a wealth cut off point above which health outcomes are equal. All societies (where data have been collected) have health inequalities which lay on a continuous gradient. A striking example of this graded continuum is shown in evidence that suggests mortality risk is lower for those with higher degrees than ordinary degrees (Marmot, 2004). Life expectancy increases with each step up the status hierarchy and importantly the more unequal the income distribution the steeper the gradients slope (Marmot, 2004; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). This evidence though points to the importance of income inequalities as social determinants of health and income as a starting point in the many often competing theoretical explanations for the persistence of health inequalities (Benzeval et al., 2014).

A recent review asking how money influences health suggests that theoretical explanations; materialist, psychosocial, behavioural are most useful when seen as interrelated (Benzeval et al., 2014). Income is one socioeconomic variable, intergenerational inheritance, parental income and debt are also economic factors which create the material and influence the social conditions people live in. These influence the physical, psychosocial and behavioural pathways which may influence health through biological changes, health in turn influences income. Standard of housing, safety of neighbourhood, access to quality amenities, are examples of physical pathways. Psychosocial pathways emphasise stress and mental health as well as the pressure of status differentiation and relative deprivation. While behavioural pathways can be health enhancing or not but all pathways are interlinked and interrelated. Context is also important. Deprivation profiles are similar in Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool for instance, but a study found significantly higher mortality rates in Glasgow particularly from drug and alcohol related deaths. It was suggested that psychosocial factors, low sense of control, self-efficacy and self-esteem were more prevalent
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in Glasgow (Marmot & Bell, 2012). Perhaps these difficult psychosocial factors intertwine with cultural norms and behavioural pathways of self-medication through drugs and alcohol.

Adolescent health inequalities have been less scrutinized than inequalities in adult and child health, however a recent comprehensive report uses data from 41 countries, including Ireland, to map health inequalities in adolescents (Currie, 2008). Most noteworthy, they find poorer self report health and lower levels of life satisfaction among adolescents from least affluent backgrounds across all countries. Being overweight or obese is more common among less affluent adolescents, as well as more television watching and less physical activity. Eating breakfast and fruit is more common among the more affluent. Risk behaviours however were less tied to affluence, smoking is generally more common among the less affluent while drinking more prevalent among more affluent adolescents (Currie, 2008). The report is more descriptive than explanatory but the interlinking pathways in adolescent health can be assumed to be similar to those of adults. This assumption is in contrast to the individual explanation put forward by a pamphlet produced by the American Psychological Society:

Seven of the 10 leading causes of death have aspects that can be modified by doing the right thing: that is, by making the right choices about our behaviour. This modified risk offers the best opportunity to prevent and control disease. We know, for example that stress, smoking, poor diet, obesity, and lack of exercise can contribute to heart disease and cancer. (American Psychological Society, 1996, p.5)

An individualised explanation for the health behaviour ‘choices’ that people make ignores both the social and material conditions of peoples lives and issues of culture and identity. A social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a) shows how individuals come to define themselves through the ingroups they belong to (S. A. Haslam & Reicher, 2006). Furthermore groups compete over those defining characteristics and advantaged groups tend
to have the power when claiming valued group characteristics (Blanton, Christie, & Dye, 2002). Disadvantaged groups may take a social creativity strategy to enhance the positive distinctiveness of their ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a) and adopt alternative attributes as ingroup defining. A series of experimental studies demonstrate that for working class ethnic minority students health promoting food and exercise were seen as representing white middle classed activities/indulgencies and unhealthy food and activities as ingroup defining (Oyserman, Fryberg, & Yoder, 2007). When their ingroup was primed the participants were more fatalistic about their health and perceived efficacy towards healthy behaviour was undermined when they were asked to think about their similarities to white middle classed students.

1.5. Income inequality and education

Similar to the evidence that higher level’s of income inequality lead to poorer health across all social classes it appears that overall achievement in education suffers also. Wilkinson and Pickett (2007) found significant negative associations between adolescents combined literacy and maths scores and income inequality. Examining data from 11 countries and across 50 US states they found the more pronounced the income inequality school performance was poorer across all social classes. If education is viewed as a means to reduce income inequality and combat poverty then equal opportunities are vital.

However with Ireland coming eleventh out of 54 countries tested, the association between social class and achievement in education is relatively high (Schütz, Ursprung, & Wölsmann, 2008). Indeed a recent large scale nation study Growing Up in Ireland, found that 9 years olds reading and maths scores were strongly related to the child’s socio-economic circumstances. Those children most likely to score in the top quintile came from higher class backgrounds, income groups and highest level of maternal education (J. Williams et al.,
2011). Results in the first state examination taken at second level, the Junior Certificate, and the final examination, the Leaving Certificate, are also related to social class background (Smyth, McCoy, Darmody, & Dunne, 2008). And despite greatly improved school completion figures since the 1980’s the likelihood of completing school with a Leaving Certificate remains associated with class background. Although four out of five school pupils now complete their schooling in Ireland, those who leave before taking the Leaving Certificate are disproportionately working class, and boys outnumber girls (Byrne & Smyth, 2010). Measures of disadvantage, neighbourhood unemployment, percentage of loan parents and the proportion of parents with low education achievement have been shown to be related to low achievement (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). And unsurprisingly disadvantaged pupils are more likely than their advantaged peers to attend poorer performing schools, while better performing schools tend to be located in areas where house prices exclude families on low incomes.

Needless to say, as elsewhere, education in Ireland is a major determinant of adult life chances. Empirical evidence shows that a Leaving Certificate is the minimum qualification requirement for acquiring employment in Ireland (Smyth & McCoy, 2009) and post-leaving certificate courses (McCoy et al., 2014). At times of labour market contraction when jobs are scarce employers also scrutinise grades achieved and the status of the school where the leaving certificate was taken (Smyth & McCoy, 2011). Therefore school leavers with no qualifications have the highest unemployment rates and graduates of higher education the lowest. Furthermore school leavers who attended working classed as opposed to mixed or middle classed schools are more likely to experience unemployment regardless of their achieved grades (McCoy et al., 2014).
The most recent longitudinal study of school leaving in Ireland shows the persistence of social class inequalities in attainment, aspirations and the choices available to school leavers (McCoy et al., 2014). Higher education, in the Irish context, includes University and Institutes of Technology. In theory 95% of Irish school leavers can pursue a higher education route as they have taken the leaving certificate (Tickner, 2013). In reality 55% of school leavers now go into higher education, an increase of 20% since 1980. However it is the upper middle classes and middle classes who have benefited most from this expansion. McCoy and colleagues (2014) found grades achieved at the junior certificate are a strong predictor in progression to higher education and the social mix of the school attended. Strikingly, while 94% of pupils from middle classed schools and 82% from mixed classed schools only 50% from working classed schools go on to higher education regardless of grades achieved (McCoy et al., 2014). These researchers cite a culture of high expectations and higher education having a ‘taken for granted’ status in higher status schools. Going to higher education is considered the cultural norm and given the highest status but working classed school leavers are much more likely to go directly into the labour market, pursue further education or an apprenticeship (McCoy et al., 2014; Tickner, 2013). Further education courses have second level status and offer one or two year post-leaving certificate vocational qualifications. The apprenticeship route offers predominantly ‘male’ occupations and has contracted in recent years with the collapse of Ireland’s construction sector (McGuinness et al., 2014).

The goals set out in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 are to increase participation of working classed students from 33% to 54% (Authority, 2008). However there is a plethora of qualitative research that shows student’s from working classed backgrounds struggle with ‘fitting in’ to higher education institutions and often face greater financial demands and time pressures than their middle classed peers (Bergerson,
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2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007). These pressures are often coupled with dilemmas between the
gains of upward mobility and the pain of leaving behind family and friends and exiting
familiar identity positions (Cole & Omari, 2003; Jones, 2003; Ostrove, 2003). Quantitative
studies show that these dilemmas are not shared by economically advantaged students whose
economic and identity considerations are aligned when they are thinking about higher
education (Jetten, Iyer, Tsivrikos, & Young, 2008). For economically disadvantaged students
however, their social class predicted their perceptions of identity compatibility before
entering and adjustment once in higher education for eight months. These identity
considerations outweighed the expected long term economic benefits of acquiring a
university degree for these working class students, suggesting that upward mobility was
considered too costly (Jetten et al., 2008).

Life transitions, such as moving from school to university, can be difficult for
anybody, in part because of the change from one identity to another. Longitudinal research
shows that identification as a university student, that sense of fitting in and belonging (over
other factors; financial obstacles and academic obstacles) functions to protect the
psychological well-being of students who are making that transition (Iyer et al., 2009). Again
however student’s class background predicted both the perceived compatibility between pre
and post transition identities and membership in multiple groups, which were two important
facilitators of student identification. Multiple group memberships are a form of social capital,
which along with financial and cultural capital, critically advantage middle class students in
the education system (Bourdieu, 1986).

1.6. The class structure

The focus so far on income inequality is important because the class structure is
different from other systems of inequality such as gender, ethnicity, ability or sexuality for
example, all of which may well intersect with class. Fundamentally, people living on low incomes are not disadvantaged because their identity or culture is devalued or because they are stigmatised per se they are first and foremost disadvantaged because their low income and related resources means they have restricted access to ways of living and being, to the practices that they and others value (Sayer, 2005). However, and as will be discussed in the next section, poverty has always been stigmatising (Warr, 2005a, 2005b). If there were not interclass agreement or shared understanding of which practices and ways of being are valued there would be no class based shame or worry over respectability (Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997). Thoughts and feelings around failure, entitlement, guilt, envy, pity, superiority and inferiority are internal responses very much linked to external social and structural processes. Furthermore, respect and shame are social emotions, and both are experienced in response to others expectations, reactions towards and treatment of us. Shame could not be used as a mechanism of social control and would not produce conformity or indeed resistance (Sayer, 2005). This is what Reay (2005) calls the ‘psychic landscape of class’ and argues that these emotions and cognitions should not be pushed to the realm of individual psychology.

Furthermore, these subjective micro-level aspects of class have been the focus of a revived interest in class in British sociology in the past decade (see: Le Roux, Rouanet, Savage, & Warde, 2008). In moving away from a purely macro-level analysis of class which places employment relations as the central driving force structuring inequality cultural class theorists recognise the integral role of cultural practices and tastes in structuring class. This understanding draws on Bourdieu’s (1984) formulation of social class which recognises the importance of economic capital but also states how the economic cannot be separated from social and cultural capital resources (Savage, Warde, & Devine, 2005). The benefit of this analysis is its attention to the convertibility and over-time accumulation of capitals that lead to systematic advantage in certain social, cultural and institutional settings and therefore the
process of class reproduction. For instance, cultural capital accumulated in the home is used by children in the field of education to do well in school, and subsequently converted into qualifications that allow for rewarding well paid work in the field of employment. So rather than seeing inequality as static this position points to the cumulative nature of advantage and disadvantage.

In order to substantiate the claim that cultural practices and tastes are inextricably linked to class Le Roux and colleagues (2008) conducted Geometric Data Analysis and Multiple Correspondent Analysis on the detailed data of 1,529 UK individuals. They were interested in both cultural practice in the domains of; music, literature, television, film, visual arts, sport and eating out and taste measured as likes and dislikes. They found a strong association between class and UK cultural tastes and practices overall but for example going to the pub has a loose relationship while watching television a much stronger one. They found a reasonable fit when mapping these practices and tastes onto three distinct classes. The professional (upper) middle class includes professionals, large managers and employers (24% of the UK’s workforce), an intermediate middle class includes business oriented lower managers (30%) and a large working class includes lower supervisors and technicians, routine and semi-routine workers (46%).

This analysis is helpful here because it identifies three distinct groupings of people which may reflect lay understandings of how the class structure is organised. A more recent and even more detailed analysis of the same question offers a much more fine grained and fragmented view of the class structure (Savage et al., 2013). This research draws on a huge data set of over 12,000 UK participants gathered in conjunction with the BBC and includes measures of economic, social and cultural capitals and practices. Although impressive in its findings and probably much closer to the fragmented ‘reality’, in the UK at least, this analysis
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offers seven distinct sociological classed categories with labels that are not in common usage. The interest of this thesis is identification and self-categorisation processes in terms of class, it is unlikely people will identify with a category they have never heard of. However these researchers do identify a relatively large group (15%) whom they label as ‘precariat’ who are economically the poorest class, who have little social capital and low scores on cultural capital and engagement. This group experience unemployment and the most insecure types of contemporary employment to a greater extent than any other group and are likely those who have benefited least from Capitalist restructuring. They are the least likely to have a third level education, for this group class very much matter.

1.7. Capitalist restructuring, poverty and stigma.

Huge social and economic transformations have occurred since the Thatcher and Regan led New Right agenda in the 1980’s which intensified free market forces and subsequently increased inequality (Hedin, Clark, Lundholm, & Malmberg, 2012). Accordingly capitalism has been restructured, moving from organised to disorganised and as a result economic growth is no longer guaranteed to trickle down to the benefit of all (Warr, 2005b). One of the consequences has been socio-spatial divisions and polarisation, reduced contact and connection between the poor and non-poor. Poverty has become concentrated in residential areas, mostly rented local authority housing which tends to be located on the margins of cities, built between the 1950’s and 1970’s to service the industry that is no longer there (Warr, 2005b). In Ireland, a policy focus on home ownership meant the number of rented local authority houses fell between 1987 and 1994 now those occupying the remaining housing stock are the most disadvantaged (Hourigan, 2011; Nolan & Whelan, 1999). The most disadvantaged experience cumulative disadvantage, coming from manual class origins and have experienced childhood poverty which in turn has a strong impact on educational
achievement and subsequent class position. The resulting effect has been a significant rise in the poverty rate, unemployment and lone-parent households in urban local authority housing.

Warr (2005b) notes how the poor and the non-poor are further divided by the privatisation of public spaces. Shopping streets have become shopping centres, and social inclusion means engaging with the flow of money, information and consumption paid for by employment gained through educational experience. Participation is possible with the means to do so, economically and socially excluding and making unwelcome those without. Poverty thus leads to increasing discomfort in public spaces, immobility and disconnection (Warr, 2005a). Furthermore, the restructuring of employment has been uneven so that the most vulnerable have experienced a dramatic decline in the availability of low and un-skilled work. Despite a continued enthusiasm for work found in working classed communities in both Mediterranean (Murad, 2002) and UK studies (MacDonald, Shildrick, Webster, & Simpson, 2005) the opportunities that are available are for ‘poor work’ which is insecure low paid and sporadic. These large scale processes of social change underpin a context of changing social class relations (Nolan & Whelan, 1999).

Despite shared aspirations, desires and valued ways of being the poor are subject to pathological representations and negative stereotypes as detached, deviant and disconnected from mainstream societal values and norms (Warr, 2005b). Such representations assume a distinctive ‘underclass’, potentially criminal and aggressive subculture among the poor. In Howarth’s terms social representations are “not a quiet thing” (2006). The world is structured by social representations, they are powerful images and categories which circulate and constitute realities that become dominant knowledge and institutionalised. Her study on school exclusion for example shows the young men experience racialised ‘underclass’ representations as “troublesome black youth” (Howarth, 2004). Similarly her work with
young people from stigmatised Brixton, London shows how the dominant representations of a dangerous, criminal community is negotiated by her participants (Howarth, 2002b). Some position themselves as outsiders and accept this view, while others see themselves as insiders and manipulate a re-presented positive understanding of the community. In this way, representations always permeate the possibilities for constructing social identities because of their location within a socially shared system of meaning (Duveen, 1996).

Shared meaning and versions of reality are reproduced through the media, social media, conversations, and stories. The media in particular has a vested interest to sensationalise and create social representations through misrepresentations in order to sell a version of reality (Deveraux, Haynes, & Power, 2011). Jovechelovitch (1996) talks about how power is always unequal when it comes to the presentations of versions of reality as some groups, those with more resources, have greater opportunity to assert their constructions than others. For instance, the popular Channel 4 portrayal of socially excluded communities largely dependent on social welfare, ‘Benefit Street’ perpetuates this representation of the poor as a deviant and detached ‘underclass’. This serves a purpose, it ‘others’ and generates a social distance between the poor and non-poor so that the poor can be blamed for the social exclusion and stigma they experience. Nolan & Whelan (1999) found a highly significant relationship between risk of poverty and social class in Ireland however they found no evidence of an urban ‘underclass’. Rather they suggest the distinctiveness experienced by public housing tenants results from shared disadvantage in terms of employment opportunities and living standards, reduced psychological well-being, heightened fatalism and lowered life satisfaction. All of which is exasperated by stigmatisation (Warr, 2005a).

This stigma can damage relations between advantaged and disadvantaged communities and within disadvantaged communities leading to social isolation, early school
leaving and subsequently impacting on health and well-being (Major & O’Brien, 2005). Recent research in Limerick city, Ireland has shown that stigma is more than negative stereotypes of the poor, it is described as an active process which breaks down trust in the providers of services meant to alleviate disadvantage (Stevenson, McNamara, & Muldoon, 2014). Furthermore a study comparing implicit and explicit evaluations of residents from disadvantaged and advantaged areas in Limerick, found the disadvantaged residents were devalued and excluded from attributes of citizenship (McNamara, Muldoon, Stevenson, & Slattery, 2011). These results were obtained from advantaged residents of the city and residents of the disadvantaged areas had internalised these prejudices. A further study however found a positive relationship between community identity and psychological well-being mediated by feelings of collective efficacy, but this relationship did not promote collective action (McNamara, Stevenson, & Muldoon, 2013). A second qualitative study showed stigmatisation, and perceived prejudice and discrimination at an institutional level and divisions within the community, undermined community residents ability to collectively work together to try to improve their situation.

Despite the important difference between class and other systems of inequality it is worth considering the vital role that shared or collective identity plays in changing policies and challenging stigmatising representations of oppressed groups. Under the right conditions, shared identity plays an important role as an antecedent of collective action (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979a). Through collective action the civil rights, feminist and more recently the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender rights and pride movements provide a springboard for collective challenge to the ongoing subordination, prejudice, discrimination and inequality lived and experienced because of ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Importantly, these movements and community projects increase awareness and debate about the structural and historical nature of inequalities. With support and
encouragement, awareness and cultural understanding can promote social creativity to challenge, resist and re-evaluate negative social representations among those whose identities and communities are stigmatised (Howarth, 2002a, 2002b). As such collective challenge can increase individual’s positive identification with their group (Branscombe, Scmitt & Harvey, 1999). But unlike these other forms of inequality, class based inequalities are generally not questioned, debated or resisted, they seem natural but in fact they have been deliberately ‘individualised out of our consciousness’ (Reay, 2005).

1.8. The Individualisation of class

The use of ideology in the deliberate individualisation of capitalist society is not a new phenomenon but has intensified with neo-liberalism since the 1980’s. Interestingly a century earlier in the 1880’s the industrial bourgeoisie were embracing classical liberalism and representative democracy which had rejected the notions of absolute monarchy, inherited privilege and state religion. Scholars of the time also recognised that to achieve capitalist hegemony and domination the bourgeoisie needed to politically incorporate and socially organise the working classes who were learning the value of co-operation and solidarity through the trade union movement (Eagleton, 1975). Ideology has been closely linked with the ideas of Marx, and is understood here as a system of political thought and meaning in the service of power. It is constructed and disseminated through symbolic forms, rhetoric, images and texts and should be studied with a critical eye on the structured social relations in which it serves (Thompson, 2013).

Under the neo-liberal agenda market ‘logic’ has replaced the welfare state in determining not just the economy but all aspects of the environments in which we live (Lynch, 2006). Citizens are no longer passive but have been redefined as ‘privatised rational consumers’ as active entrepreneurs of the self, willing and able to compete and make market-
led choices (Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010). Individualist ideologies encourage the notion of individual responsibility and freedom of choice, and mask how inequality radically shapes the ability to make important choices (Le Grand, 2006; Reay, 1996; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001) and even the cultural meaning of choice for class groups (Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). Meritocratic ideologies and indeed ideologies of success (Ichheiser, 1943) further suggest that success is an outcome of individual merit and hard work is the route to opportunity. Anybody can succeed if they work hard enough and background is portrayed as unimportant. These ideologies and discourses have become both prevalent, dominant and common sense in Western societies and discourage the understanding that class positions people as either more or less advantaged or disadvantaged within the structured system of opportunities and power relations. Ideologies of success (and failure) are myths that function to hide the discrepancies between norms of success (people who are competent and worthy deserves to be successful) and the conditions of success (which are unequal) (Ichheiser, 1943). This discrepancy makes the social order appear fair.

Prior to the late twentieth century there was a large and visible working class against which the middle classes compared and defined themselves, class was then a visible marker of social differentiation (Bourdieu, 1984). Although many people still occupy working class jobs, deindustrialisation, the demise of apprenticeships and the trade union movement meant the traditional industrial working class became less visible and therefore could no longer be used as a reference point of cultural definition (Savage, 2003). Additionally for many ‘jobs for life’ were replaced with insecurity and short term contracts with an emphasis on life-long learning and self reinvention, these shifts further broke down ‘traditional’ roles and community ties. An empty cultural space was created which Savage (2003) claims has been colonised by the middle class. Although unnamed because of individualisation rhetoric, middle classed norms and practices now define what are ‘right’ ‘valued’ and ‘appropriate’
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(Reay, 2005). Huge increases in service sector work and expanding higher education access promotes not only the possibility but the necessity of upward social mobility (Walkerdine, 2003). Therefore, anybody seen as living up to traditionally middle classed norms are considered ‘normal’ and responsible while those whose cultural practices and aspirations do not meet middle classed standards are constructed as individual failures.

1.9. Why adolescents?

The economic, institutional and cultural barriers to higher education for low income students have been well documented within the sociology of education (Reay, 2006; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009; Smyth, 2009; Smyth & McCoy, 2009). The current research aims to explore the less well understood psychological barriers and processes that influence adolescents at the time they are beginning to think about their occupational future. To date there is a failure in the literature to attend to the reciprocal processes, the influence of structure on the individual and vice versa within the individualised context described earlier. These processes are likely to be writ large during adolescence in particular.

Adolescence is a time of biological, cognitive and social change, when the young are developing a sense of identity and an extended sense of self with an increased capacity to link the present with the future. In turn, adolescents begin to evaluate the present in new ways, in search of a sense of competence and belonging. Adolescents begin to look around them, to their relative status among peers, to clues they receive from adults, and from the larger society and media for messages about who they are and what they could become (Côté, 2005). At no other developmental stage are individuals as self-conscious and concerned with reputation management as during the adolescent period. At the same time adolescence is renowned as a period of heightened experimentation and risk taking while social rewards are more important than they are to adults or children (Emler & Reicher, 1995). This
combination can be considered an adaptive process preparing the young for their future independence. However the context that young people are immersed in shapes the choices that the young are able to make.

Identity dimensions relate to aspirations, hopes and desires about what one would like to be in the future (Jetten et al., 2008). The academic aspirations of students in secondary school from across class groups do not tend to differ (Pizzolato, 2006). However, there is often a gap between working class student’s aspirations and their academic achievements (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). It is argued that aspirations are based on abstract beliefs that anything is possible when you work hard enough. On the other hand behaviour (study, time spent on homework) is underpinned by expectations and concrete understandings of reality built on the evidence reflected all around you (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000). Future possibilities are personal and allow for imaginative thinking but the pool from which possible identities spring are provided in media images and the categories made salient in the individuals’ particular socio-cultural and historical context. Students as young as seven years old have been reported to have a sense of their social position and available assets within a hierarchy of opportunities (Destin & Oyserman, 2009). Destin and Oyserman (2009) found that for low income 11 year old students a belief that college is too expensive produced a ‘closed mind set’ which reduced their academic aspirations and subsequent effort in school. However, information about financial assistance and grants for higher education created an ‘open mind set’ increasing aspirations and effort. Unfortunately information about needs based financial assistance, if provided at all, is not usually provided to low income students and parents until late in the secondary cycle by which time grades may already be suffering. In this way the choices students make across their schooling and about their future are shaped and constrained by their socio-cultural background (Gillies, 2005; Reay et al., 2001).
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Research suggests that the evaluative nature of the class system puts pressure on individual psychology which influences the ways people look at themselves and others. Moreover adolescents have been found to be more vulnerable than adults or children to reduced psychological well-being caused by perceived prejudice (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). This is especially the case if the stigma attached to an identity is considered legitimate and controllable. For example, McCullough, Muldoon and Dempster, (2009) showed that stigma, rejection and reduced self-liking were a consequence of increased body weight in eight and nine year old children but only for children from disadvantaged areas. Similarly, Archer and colleagues (2007) found that working class students’ from across racial and gender boundaries feel ‘looked down on’ in school and by society. The schools that they attend are often symbolised by images of ‘expelled waste’ (Archer et al., 2007). This drives them to seek alternative validation through dress and embodied style, but attempts at self-worth are considered oppositional, even threatening by educators effectively creating a vicious circle.

Under capitalist individualising conditions class identities are no longer ascribed but produced through consumption. This was demonstrated well in Archer and colleagues (2007) study with working classed adolescents who wore labelled clothes to demonstrate their classed position. For them ‘Nike’ symbolised who they were and where they were going, a working classed trajectory, whilst they saw university as a middle class trajectory. The breakdown of ascribed identities means traditional cultures based on class are undergoing a process of ‘destructuring’ (Côté, 2005). Côté (2005) argues that parental guidance and norms, values and beliefs have less hold or influence that they used to. Adolescents are now confronted with the obligation to plan their own future which includes crafting their values and beliefs, group memberships, leisure interests, intellectual and taste preferences and occupations. Under the individualisation process these are fundamentally identity tasks (Côté,
In an unequal society an advantaged position is more likely to lead to achieved identities that enable young adults to make the most of opportunities available, while a disadvantaged position makes those opportunities more difficult to achieve.

Simultaneously neo-liberal market policies have had a destructive effect on youth employment by shifting production from developed nations to developing nations in search of cheap labour. This makes the transition to adulthood and independence particularly challenging and prolonged for the young who have to rely more on their parents for financial assistance while parents are less able to offer normative guidance (Côté, 2005). Moreover the economy is becoming increasingly credentialised. As such, the constricting and increasingly competitive labour market has resulted in educational credentials becoming vitally important for securing employment (Goldthorpe, 2003; Smyth & McCoy, 2009, 2011). Côté, (2005) calls the resources essential for adolescent’s to cognitively understand and behaviourally negotiate a ‘successful’ transition to adulthood within the individualisation process, identity capital. Thus identity capital is necessary for adolescents to be able to avail of the opportunities available through education to facilitate satisfying well paid work in adulthood (Côté & Levine, 2002). Identity capital includes both tangible resources such as financial, social and cultural capitals and intangible psychosocial personal resources; for example an internal locus of control and self-esteem (Côté, 1997).

Both sets of resources, tangible and intangible are unevenly distributed within the class system, materially and psychologically advantaging middle classed students and disadvantaging working classed students. In terms of the intangible resources, self-esteem is consistently found to be related to socio-economic status (Twenge & Campbell, 2002). And people from working classed backgrounds have less opportunities and experiences which provide them with a sense of internal locus of control and therefore, orient more towards
contextual and situational factors than those from middle classed backgrounds (Kraus et al., 2009; Piff et al., 2010). Meanwhile an ideology of meritocracy and mobility, which Kennedy and Power (2010) suggest is particularly strong in the Irish education system, influences people to make individual as opposed to structural attributions for the causes and reproduction of social class position in education (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). Moreover, with greater responsibility placed on parents and students to make educational choices, negative educational outcomes can be blamed on bad choices.

Attribution theory (Heider, 1958) would suggest that attributions, individual or situational, are made because of a need to understand the cause of events. A large body of research has shown that there is a tendency for bias know as the fundamental attribution error, where the cause of others behaviour is attributed to individual factors while the cause for our own behaviour tends to be attributed to situational factors. Simultaneously, this absolute obsession psychologists have to look inside the individual and attribute this bias to faulty cognitive processes has been criticised for ignoring the ideological conditions and unequal structural context in which we live (Farr, 1991). In this way psychologists can be implicated in perpetuating the notion of individual responsibility while obscuring any sense of social responsibility.

Interestingly Rose (2008) highlights the discursive role that individual psychology plays in maintaining the neo-liberal illusion of the autonomous individual of choice. For example, so much choice rather than providing the promised freedom can at times be a psychological burden where people are stressed, anxious and frightened of making the ‘wrong’ choice and blame them selves for being indecisive (Côté, 2005; Walkerdine & Bansel, 2010). Furthermore, the demands of the labour market for a flexible, self-actualising, resilient work force have created the necessity for psychological supports such as counselling.
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and therapy to counter the ‘personal failings’ of the anxious and ‘indecisive’ (Walkerdine, 2003).

An equal concern is the palatability of the associated sense that we are privileging the advantaged and discriminating against the poor. In order for the advantaged to recognise this injustice and develop a sense of ‘moral outrage’ studies are pointing to the effectiveness of framing the inequality as ingroup advantage rather than outgroup disadvantage (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005). Furthermore highlighting intersections of dominant and subordinate social identities (middle classed and female, male and homosexual) appears to make others disadvantage more self-relevant (Burns, 2004; Iyer, Leach, & Pendersen, 2004). Research has also shown that the middle classes are more likely to endorse essentialist, fixed and biologically based, beliefs about categories of people while the working classes hold social constructionist views of the world (Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Mahalingam, 2003). Essentialist beliefs support notions of inherent inferiority and superiority and have been shown to predict objection to government assistance (Pehrson & Leach, 2012). Furthermore, Kraus and Keltner (2013) demonstrate that essentialist beliefs lead middle classed participants to show less support for restorative justice and rehabilitation programmes than a punitive justice system. Conversely working classed or low status participants are more likely to believe in people’s ability to transform their situation given the opportunity and support (Mahalingam, 2003). At the same time the value that is placed on individual merit, academic achievement and material success not only stigmatises the poor but can undermine the well-being of young people from affluent backgrounds (Luthar, 2003; Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). A combination of physical and emotional isolation and pursuit of perfectionism leads to excessive parental and social pressure to achieve in school and across extracurricular activities. These factors have been linked to elevated anxiety, depression and substance abuse among otherwise privileged young people (Luthar & Becker, 2002).
Mixed Methodology, Epistemology and Ontology

Cultural class theorists argue that while hierarchy may be significant in shaping our experience, life chances and health, the intricacies involved in the way it affects us are often obscure and the nature of inequality is illusive, which prevents explicit class identities from forming (Bottero, 2004). Indeed even after a semester long class-focussed intergroup dialogue course the majority of participating students still had difficulty discussing class based privileges (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012). The students found the dialogue course both fulfilling and informative but tended to conflate issues of class with issues of race, struggled with taboos and invisible discourses about class and negative stereotypes. Moreover ethnographic work shows a similar pattern of lack of class discourse with girls in a Californian high school who defined and distinguished their subgroups according to class but without explicit class language (Bettie, 2000). And working classed boys in elite schooling internalised shame about their backgrounds alone and in silence because of the lack of class based language and understanding (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003). In line with these findings the interest here is, without explicit class identities and an absence of discourse about class and taboos about money how do adolescents from more and less affluent backgrounds understand, categorise, define and talk about them selves and others?

To answer this initial question quantitative and qualitative methods are seen as both useful and appropriate, enabling the maximisation of the strengths and minimisation of the weaknesses of both (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, the approach taken here is a socio-cultural perspective. To compliment this position the ontological and epistemological assumptions made are from a middle ground contextualist perspective, positioned in between a purely constructionist (where individuals are completely free to create their own reality and conditions of existence) and purely essentialist/positivist position.
(where reality is external and fixed and individual’s actions are determined by inherent forces). A socio-cultural position understands individual characteristics and structural forces to be mutually constitutive, complimentary and interdependent. Behaviour and indeed inequality is the product of both individual attributes and structural forces which interact and circulate and should not be studied separately. The structural, material and social conditions shape individuals, who in turn shape and influence the conditions in which they live. In terms of the nature of knowledge contextualist assumptions suggest meanings and subjective ‘reality’ are socially co-constructed but are inevitably constrained and shaped by material, cultural and structural conditions. From a contextualist standpoint data analysis is subjective and partial but results are grounded in the data and hence justified (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000).

A cross-section of adolescents aged between 9 and 18 years who live and attend school in relatively affluent and relatively disadvantaged areas of Limerick city, Ireland are chosen. The implicit nature of class identities signify that both qualitative and quantitative methods are needed to capture how social class impacts on pupils’ subjective experiences of who they and others are in relation to education, their thoughts, feelings and sense of agency in the education context and their aspirations for their futures. Because of the changed nature of class awareness over the past forty years or so, qualitative methods have been the preferred method used to understand issues of class identity and the subjective experience of classed positioning in sociology as this approaches strength is in addressing exploratory ‘how’ questions. Furthermore the qualitative method is well suited to expose everyday social processes and shared discourses as they occur in social interaction, and to better understand the social construction of meaning and practice. A detailed qualitative approach is helpful in the analysis of the connection between contemporary culture and identities to look at how participants ‘do’ social identities (Howarth, 2010) such as class. Perhaps most importantly the
implicit nature of class identities means that researchers need to act like forensic investigators actively identifying and exposing the subtle and unacknowledged ‘normality’ of middle classed practices in talk (Savage, 2003).

Quantitative methods are used for triangulation in order to give a fuller picture and potentially strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the overall findings. The term triangulation stems from military and navigation and means using multiple reference points to pin down a precise location of an object (Jick, 1979). Quantitative methods tend to be positioned at the positivist/essentialist end of the epistemological and ontological spectrum and qualitative at the constructionist end. This however can be considered a false dichotomy that drives a wedge between the methods and researchers who use them (Bryman, 2012). The methods are seen as complimentary and the contextualist position straddles both. Surveys have been used in both phase two and three of the research to measure, quantify and analyse the relationships between concepts of interest.

Social class can be measured as an objective or subjective concept. An objective measure of social class using level of education, occupation and perhaps cultural and social capital is a demographic variable assigned by the researcher and is relatively straightforward (Le Roux et al., 2008). However the slippery and elusive nature of subjective social class means that its measurement is challenging and potentially unreliable. To ensure reliability the measurement of concepts needs to be consistent across time and place, this means that contextual factors are controlled and do not influence the process. Social class here seems to be socially produced through group discussion and therefore the use of quantification to measure class in phase two actually brings into question the reliability of its measurement. Social class is operationalised as community identity in phase three as this is considered a more reliable concept that is discursively available to the adolescent participants. The
strength of the quantitative approach at phase three is its ability to generate precise estimates of the degree of relationship between variables measured on previously validated scales. A criticism of the quantitative method is that the statements presented to participants can only be assumed to be interpreted in a similar way and of course the research conducted here is cross-sectional and therefore no causal inferences can be made.

The qualitative investigation requires as natural and contextualised setting as possible for adolescents to feel comfortable and able to discuss issues that adults generally do not want to talk about. In order to achieve this end focus groups held during the day in schools between participants who know each other are the favoured method of data collection. As Wilkinson (1999) states ‘focus groups tap into the ‘natural’ processes of communication, such as arguing, joking, boasting, teasing, persuasion, challenge and disagreement’ p.225. Of course the focus group itself is a social context where meaning is generated but can also be countered and argued. The unit of analysis is the group rather than the individual as meaning is understood as collectively co-constructed. The group dynamic can also facilitate distinct identities to be explicitly elaborated or subtly hinted at. Moreover by virtue of the number of participants relative to the researcher a focus group method may reduce the power imbalance between researcher and participants while giving voice and an element of control to the participants to express themes that are important to them (Wilkinson, 1999). As opposed to singular interviews a group setting may give more space for participants to challenge each other or the researcher and feel less inhibited in discussing taboos around issues such as class and money or evaluations of ‘other’ imagined more or less affluent students.

It needs to be articulated that qualitative methods are not mainstream in psychology. For instance, far more emphasis is placed on teaching quantitative methods in psychology degree programmes and a relatively small amount of qualitative work is published in
psychology journals (Marchel & Owens, 2007). However psychologists need to recognise that language and discourse are not simple reflections of the inner workings of individual rational minds. Rather language is a cultural system that comes before and outlives individuals who participate in the communal construction of subjective ‘reality’ (Gergen, 2001). Once language is used to describe and explain what exists the words used always come from a particular culture and set of social conventions.

**The researcher and the research**

Language, culture and social convention are central in the construction of subjective ‘reality’ and the production of scientific and everyday knowledge. From this perspective it follows that the social science researcher does not simply discover but is active in the co-production of knowledge. It is therefore the responsibility of the researcher to situate herself and employ reflexivity and self-reference across the research process. Accordingly it is necessary to be consciously aware of personal biases, history and experience and continuously question the interpretations made along the way.

I was born in England in the late 1960’s and grew up there with parents who had working class origins and had middle classed aspirations. I knew this because it was explicitly talked about. In the post World War II era social mobility was possible and Britain was a highly class aware society. I remember Margaret Thatcher coming to power in 1979 and being aware that she was the UK’s first female Prime Minister. But she was difficult to warm to with her overt (racism, anti-immigration, anti-welfare) lack of compassion towards the political struggle and hunger strikers in Northern Ireland. Her anti-collectivist orientation and breaking of the unions was crushing for mining and industrial communities in the north of England. Less aware of the effect of her individualising rhetoric and the inequalities generated by capitalist neo liberal free-market policies at that time, I knew as a young
woman, I did not like the political climate in the UK. I, like many others, was questioning the ethical and environmental impact of the market economy. I was also questioning the pressure to aspire, consume and climb the social ladder. I did not want to take that first step onto the property ladder without exploring other alternative and less expensive ways of creating housing and living. So I left England for the Republic of Ireland in 1989 aged 21, in a truck converted into a mobile home. I was effectively side stepping those well defined middle class aspirations, norms and ways of being and took on a new group identity, ‘new age traveller’.

Establishment intolerance and heavy handed policing meant there had been an exodus of new age travellers from the UK to the space of the west of Ireland where we were left alone by the authorities and locals. In contrast Irish travellers, who we had very positive interactions with and were highly visible at the side of the roads at that time, were heavily stigmatised and seen as a ‘threatening other’. They were experiencing explicit settlement policy to assimilate into mainstream society. With the passing of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act in 2002 specifically aimed at the ‘traveller problem’ their nomadic lifestyle became criminalised. The ongoing discrimination and blatant hostility coupled with chronic mental and physical health problems and high suicide rates that this group experience has been hard to watch. We on the other hand, like many of our contemporaries, who were not born travellers were able and willing to exit the traveller identity. Although we maintained the new age life style we re-categorised (becoming ‘blow ins’) when we bought cheap land with a ruined stone cottage. Using mainly recycled materials we built a house, grew most of our food and sent our children to school.

These two aspects of my story, growing up privileged, white, educated and middle classed in class aware England. Then leaving when Thatcher was still prime minister for an alternative way of life, are important because they inevitably shape how I approach the topic
of my research. My interest in class as a system of inequality developed when I entered university as a mature student and studied a combined degree in psychology and sociology. These disciplines taught critical thinking, to question the ideologies that are banal and taken for granted and perpetuate inequality. Furthermore, I learned that power is unequal in the market and those who are better off financially are not only privileged they are advantaged. The class system is an end result of a capitalist market economic system rather than anything natural or inevitable. I lived through the changes in the class system, the weakening of collective politicised class identities, inspired by Thatcher’s individualising business/profit oriented policies that the sociologists in the UK and across Europe were writing and debating about. Studying the outcome of these political and subsequent social and cultural changes is fascinating.

I had also lived in the Republic of Ireland, a society that had understandably rejected the class system that for so long had been imposed upon them by their English oppressors. Therefore, class is not part of Irish discourse, but ironically as Ireland is part of the wider global market economy it inevitably has structural inequalities based on a class system. Perhaps class processes are even more banal in Ireland than in the UK, perhaps privilege is less questioned and the disadvantaged even more silenced because of this near complete lack of discourse and acknowledgement of class. Or perhaps this is an English person imposing her experience and construction of reality onto the situation.

As a mature white researcher with a middle classed English accent and coming from University into schools to conduct focus groups with groups of young people I was very aware of the power imbalance between my participants and myself. Particularly as they were in school and in that setting are used to deferring to authority, they tended to see me as an authority figure. I tried to alleviate this by stressing that, although I was probably the same
age of their parents, I was a student learning how to conduct research and I needed their help, and was very interested in their opinions and experiences. I also reassured them that their teachers would not see their comments. I believe focus groups were an advantageous and less intimidating method of data collection than singular interviews because the participants soon became visibly comfortable and joked between themselves and me. At times I asked participants to pretend I was visiting Earth from Mars because some of the questions I asked had very obvious and taken for granted answers. My English accent may have helped in this regard because it explained my lack of understanding and needing more explanation around stereotypes and localised phases.

2.9. Road map:

The thesis has three phases of research and is concluded with a discussion chapter. The first phase is a cross discipline theoretical review of literature from sociology integrated with literature from social psychology. Ideas from a relatively recent cultural class paradigm developed by sociologists who draw on Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of class reproduction are integrated with the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a; Turner et al., 1987). Changes that led some theorists to claim the ‘death of class’ as a significant category for analysing inequality has inspired the development of this new class paradigm. Despite individualising discourses and claims of classlessness, this group have been exploring the subjective experience of class (Crompton, 2008; Devine & Savage, 1999; Lucey & Reay, 2002b; Reay, 1998, 2005; Savage et al., 2013; Skeggs, 1997, 2005). They suggest that classed identities are made through cultural practices, likes and dislikes, tastes and style, and crucially how people think and feel about those practices (Reay, 2005). Class from this perspective, is far deeper than inequality in wealth, classed identities are key in processes underpinning attributions of moral judgment and blame (Skeggs, 2005).
Cultural class theorists argue that contemporary collective class self-categorisations are weak, implicit even, but people still define their own identities in ways which involve relational comparisons with members of various social classes. In particular, people are sure of what they are not and talk in terms of ‘people like us’ (Reay, 1998). Such dis-identifications are the result of class processes working at both the objective and subjective levels (Reay, 2006). The social identity approach emphasises the centrality of identities in systems of inequality, highlighting the psychological consequences of belonging to multiple groups differentiated by dimensions such as wealth and power (S. A. Haslam, 2004). This perspective is a useful framework for understanding class processes and little attention has been paid to the dynamics and contradictions of classed identities in social identity research or indeed psychology (Ostrove & Cole, 2003).

In the second phase the central tenant of the social identity approach that identification is the first step of identity process is questioned. This is based on research that suggests people are defensive, embarrassed and ambivalent about their own class position and deny that class impacts on personal thoughts and feelings and people claim to be ‘ordinary’ (Savage et al., 2001). But rather than this being evidence that class no longer matters to people it is evidence that they are aware of and uncomfortable with the injustice and politics of class. Class is not and never has been a neutral classification system but one that is morally loaded (Savage et al., 2001; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 2010). Therefore, the little class based language that does exist is value laden and is associated with unfair stereotypes. The study using mixed methods is two ways of looking at how young people define and categorise themselves and others. Data is collected using a cross-sectional design with a sample of adolescents from relatively affluent and relatively disadvantaged backgrounds in Limerick city for comparisons. One study is qualitative and themes are identified in the data
in a deductive theory driven way. Additionally survey based quantitative study is employed, for triangulation, to provide a more complete picture.

The third phase of the research draws on work suggesting that although the worlds of working and middle classed people overlap the experiences, material, social and cultural recourses that are available to them provide models of agency that are qualitatively different (Snibbe & Markus, 2005). These cultural orientations are seen as aspects of middle and working classed identity content. Both groups have agency but the middle classes are psychologically advantaged because their normative orientation, an independent model of agency, that prescribes separation from others and control of context, is the type of agency that fits with the expectations of the neo-liberal agenda. Education is also an important determinant of the types cultural orientation people develop. Higher education encourages independent thought, self promotion, confidence in ones opinion and standing out and typically provides the cultural knowledge to experience the self as independent (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). For the working classes who tend not to have higher education, connection to others, fitting in and paying attention to context is the appropriate way of being and operating. This interdependent model of agency stems from aspects of working class life such as the type of work, unpredictable environments, lack of available financial safety nets and a need to rely on each other.

Drawing further on the rich qualitative data collected at the second phase, themes are identified and interpreted in an inductive bottom-up way. Triangulation is again achieved with a secondary analysis of quantitative data collected in schools all located in disadvantaged areas of Limerick city. As an independent model of agency is the presumed default for everybody (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012) this study further explores an interdependent model of agency in a working classed sample. A group level mediation model
tests the relationships between community identity, interdependence with neighbours and interdependence with friends and school integration.
Chapter 2

A Difference Denied? The Study of Social Class in Social Psychology

2.1. Overview

The argument in this chapter is that social class remains an important and significant concept for understanding both psychology and everyday behaviour, and to understand social class one must look beyond the economic to include social and cultural practices. The influential psychological metatheory, the social identity approach, is used to inform this analysis, as it attends to issues of culture and power in its conceptualisation of identity processes (Reicher, 2004). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a) pays particular attention to how socio-structural contexts, such as social class can impact on relations between class groups, whilst self-categorisation theory (Turner et al., 1987), the second pillar of the approach highlights the importance of context (in this case the political context) in determining the identities with which we engage.

The chapter also looks at why it is that so little attention has been paid to social class in social psychological literature, particularly given its evident importance as a social category of consequence in terms of understanding conflict, education and health outcomes. Psychologists and in particular social psychologists have long been interested in the racial and ethnic dynamics that underpin prejudice, school failure and health for example, yet evidence of matched interest in how socio-economic (dis)advantage impacts these variables, is less evident in the literature. First consideration is given to the challenges for psychologists studying this area, paying particular reference to the problems of conceptualising and measuring social class in psychological research. Then using a social identity approach some of the characteristics of social class – as a social category- that make
it particularly difficult to study are considered. Particular focus is paid to the political dimensions of socioeconomic (dis)advantage that make it less visible in everyday life. Specific attention is paid to how this collective category has become individualised and dominant ideology of meritocracy works against class consciousness. Key challenges for future research are outlined.

2.2. Class Continues to Matter

The argument that class continues to play a significant role in people’s lives has been hotly contested since the 1980’s as many commentators have claimed the concept is no longer relevant to the analysis of injustice and inequality (see Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2010). Fundamental social, political and cultural changes underpin this standpoint. These include for example globalisation, changed working practices and voting patterns, together with increased individualisation, which have all, arguably, weakened collective class identities. However, this chapter argues that rather than dispensing with the notion of class, a broadened and transformed account of class which extends beyond the economic to include the social and cultural is now required (Crompton, 2008; Devine & Savage, 1999; Savage, 2003). This position has gained momentum over the last decade as a consequence of evidence of the continued interrelationship between class and inequality across a range of health and educational outcomes (Archer et al., 2007; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Gillies, 2005; Lucey & Reay, 2002b).

Class continues to have a profound impact on health, educational and political outcomes because of material inequality but also because of the meanings attached to socially located identities. From a psychological perspective, Reicher (2004) argues that all identity processes are irreducibly cultural. The claims of the social identity approach are useful for researchers who believe that there is more to the psychology of the group than the sum of its
individual parts (S. A. Haslam, 2004). Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership” (p. 31). Our sense of who we are comes from our memberships in various social categories, in a comparative situation we seek out and ‘take on’ the defining stereotypes of these social identities. Similarly, drawing on Bourdieu’s (1984) multi-dimensional theory of class many studies demonstrate that it is economic, social, cultural and emotional capital resources which reproduce class by shaping and constraining social networks, educational opportunities and aspirations (Bettie, 2000; Reay, 1996, 1998, 2006, 2008, 2010; Skeggs, 1997, 2005).

Available evidence certainly substantiates the belief that class matters. We are incredibly sensitive to our social environment and there is a growing understanding of the role of social factors in determining health (Marmot, 2004). Feeling valued and appreciated in society, having access to social support and a sense of control plus perceptions of how unequal our social worlds are, are all important factors in health outcomes. So whilst the very poor suffer most from inequality, life expectancy gets shorter and most diseases become more prevalent with each descending rung of the social ladder (R. Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003), in more unequal societies health is poorer across all social classes. Similarly despite many well intentioned policies to the contrary there is growing evidence that the educational attainment gap between classes is widening (Reay, 2008). It appears that the link between class and achievement is actually strengthening as expanded access to higher education is disproportionately benefiting children from richer backgrounds and social mobility has all but stagnated (Machin & Vignoles, 2004).

Associated psychological resources are also shaped by the socio-economic group to which we belong. For instance lower levels of self-esteem and perceptions of scholastic and
athletic competence are apparent in young people from lower compared to middle socio-economic groups (Muldoon, 2000) and these psychological attributes are linked to physical health (McCullough et al., 2009). A longitudinal study with civil servants in 20 London government departments found a social class gradient for risk of anxiety and depression among both women and men. Both genders in the lowest employment grades had a significantly higher risk of poorer psychological outcomes than those in higher grades and the risk significantly decreased as employment grade increased (Griffin, Fuhrer, Stansfeld, & Marmot, 2002). Whilst these differences can be seen as the reproduction of disadvantage in terms of individual’s psychological resources, they are evidence of a link between class group membership and psychological outcomes. Class matters to our psychology.

2.3. Class as a difference denied

Despite the evident importance of social class in terms of health and educational outcomes, research has shown that even where people recognise a class structure, for example in the UK, it is seen as contentious and political. Further this class structure is viewed as occurring externally to people’s lives and as such we tend to distance ourselves from class categories (Reay, 1998; Savage et al., 2001; Skeggs, 1997). Additionally, a study of twenty one nations, which included developed ‘rich’ nations, post-communist (relatively economically unstratified) nations and one developing nation, 50,000 participants were given a choice of ten boxes in which to position themselves in terms of class. Respondents disproportionately chose to identify themselves using the mid-point (Evans & Kelley, 2004). In other words, despite very different objective socioeconomic positions as measured by income, occupation and education (signifying relative affluence through to relative poverty), this survey data indicates that people perceive themselves to be around the middle of the
social strata. Similarly in a qualitative study in Northern England Savage and colleagues (2001) found ambiguity, ambivalence and a lack of clear class identities, highlighting how people prefer to refer to themselves as ‘ordinary’.

Savage and colleagues (2001) argue that claiming ‘ordinariness’ is a strategy used to play down cultural distinction and avoid being positioned by others. Critically however, in order to identify as ‘ordinary’ relational classed thinking is required, upward and downward social comparisons are being undertaken with groups of people who are not ‘ordinary’. Perhaps because of these problems, researchers in psychology have often replaced the term class with socioeconomic status. However these studies tend to assume that the personal experience of socioeconomic position is the same for each member of a group defined by similar socio-economic background. In contrast, a study of perceived health status in the USA found that there is not a linear relationship between adolescents internalised beliefs about their familial socioeconomic position and their objective position (Goodman, Huang, Schafer-Kalkhoff, & Adler, 2007). Goodman and colleagues (2007) demonstrate intersecting race and socioeconomic position led to a tendency for African-American adolescents to perceive their socioeconomic position as better than their objective position while European-Americans understood their position as worse than their objective position would suggest. These researchers suggest that these perceptions amounted to a distinct socioeconomic identity (similar to gender or racial identity), and that orienting to this socio-economic identity facilitated more sensitive predictions.

Here then is the first evidence that existing measures of class or socioeconomic status do not capture the meanings of class in people’s lives (Savage, 2003). These findings highlight the extent to which reference group forces shape people’s perceptions of their own socio-economic or class position (Kelley & Evans, 1995). These reference group forces are
dependent on ingroup outgroup comparisons clearly postulated by social identity theory. To determine our ingroup we draw on social networks of family, friends and colleagues who tend to be similarly positioned (Kelley & Evans, 1995). Indeed segregation by class in family, friendship and occupational networks is normative (Bottero, 2004). Because of our reliance on our proximal social networks our sense of our own social position is systematically distorted. Employing a special case of the ‘availability heuristic’ (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) we all think and report that we are very similar to others (neither extraordinarily rich nor extraordinarily poor) or alternately stated that we are ‘average’ or ‘ordinary’ in terms of class position. It has further been suggested that our perceptions of imagined outgroups, extraordinarily rich or poor, tend to come from episodic references in the media, particularly television (Friedland, Rojas, & Bode, 2012). These episodic or once-off references illicit notions of individual responsibility and deserving for being rich or poor, whilst alternative themed references transmit more systematic and structural explanations. Therefore despite normative desires towards equality, our understandings of inequality, like that of our own position, are also distorted (Friedland et al., 2012).

2.4. A Social Identity Approach to understanding of Class processes?

Claims of classlessness can be seen as a political force that demands that the class system be transcended individually (rather than challenged collectively). This political position is associated with meritocratic ideological principles and a belief that social class boundaries are permeable. This belief is associated with a view that anybody can succeed if they work hard enough and that hard work is the route to status and opportunity (Walkerdine, 2003). These principles encourage the understanding that status relations are secure and legitimate because “people get what they deserve and deserve what they get” (Lucey & Reay,
Social mobility, or movement between social class strata, then is a tantalising promise based on differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, or in the language of social psychology between the ingroup and the outgroup. Ironically, distancing one’s self from explicit class categories can, in this way, be seen as a class process.

Drawing on the social identity approach, both the structure of society as well as associated ideological beliefs are central determinants of our self-definitions and these factors will determine the extent to which we attribute particular characteristics or achievements to our own or others individual or group based characteristics. Important features of social structures that impact on self-definitions include for example how permeable the boundaries between groups are, the stability and legitimacy of status relationships between the groups, the existence of cognitive alternatives to the status quo (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a), and issues of power (Reicher, 2004). In the proceeding section it is argued that the social identity approach is uniquely positioned to enable to study of social class. Features such as permeability, legitimacy of status relations and issues of power can be seen to complicate and politicise the study of social class. To date the study of social class has been hampered by the opaqueness of the terms meaning in wider society, it’s measurement as well as contention around whether class even exists. Here consideration is given to how concepts such as disidentification, identity performance and practice, and identity creativity help us to see the influence of collective forces in shaping everyday classed practice and behaviour.

Absent class identities and Individualisation of Social Class: Class inaction as collective inertia

Social identities can be seen as important resources for both coping with and challenging systems of inequality. Building on predictions made by SIT, Branscombe,
Schmitt and Harvey, (1999) developed the rejection-identification model suggesting that when injustice and prejudice are perceived as stable and pervasive this rejection from the mainstream has a direct negative effect on psychological well-being. However the rejection is suppressed by increased identification with the relevant ingroup which serves a protective function, indirectly increasing well-being. Recent research with Black Britons found that group identity reduces vulnerability (powerlessness & insecurity) to that rejection (Leach, Mosquera, Vliek, & Hirt, 2010). The rejection-identification model has received support in studies with a variety of minority groups including African-Americans (Branscombe et al., 1999) Women (Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002) Mexican-Americans (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002).

As racial and gender identities have strengthened they have facilitated these minority groups to challenge oppression, gain rights and empower themselves through collective action against a dominant or powerful majority (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). Furthermore there has been a great deal of psychological research focused on racial and gender identities over the last 25 years, evidenced in the journals dedicated specifically to these social identities such as the Journal of Black Psychology and Psychology of Women Quarterly. Collective class identities are weak and class identities have received considerably less empirical and theoretical attention than racial and gender identities in psychology generally (Frable, 1997; Ostrove & Cole, 2003).

SIT predicts that where group boundaries are perceived as impermeable and status relations are insecure and illegitimate these conditions will encourage powerless aggrieved individuals to identify as a group and act collectively (Reynolds, Oakes, Haslam, Nolan, & Dolnik, 2000). However social movements that can be considered collective responses or class action are highly contentious and often not accepted as such. For example; Media
CLASSED IDENTITIES IN ADOLESCENCE

reports of the so called ‘race riots’ in severely deprived areas of Birmingham, Brixton and Tottenham UK during the 1980’s failed to acknowledge the underlying unemployment and miserable social conditions (Van Dijk, 1989). It was perhaps politically more manageable to describe these as race issues rather than class issues, so instead the media homogenised the multi-ethnic participants and strengthened racist stereotypes of ‘criminal’ black youth. However a white participant from Bristol’s 1980 St. Paul’s ‘riot’ expressed the shared nature of the poverty, lack of jobs and problems with the police “politically we were all black” (Reicher, 1984).

Similarly, preliminary analysis of evidence gathered during the 2011 ‘riots’ in London by crowd psychologists suggest contrasting explanations to the moral undertones of the ‘nothing more than mindless criminality’ explanation suggested in the media and by politicians at the time (Reicher & Stott, 2011). Although in the areas where the riots began the collective grievance was about police racism, patterns of behaviour (destruction of symbols and property belonging to the rich) suggest that issues of class were the collective grievance in other areas of London. In a context of severe economic cuts disaffected youth who experience deprivation and discrimination as unfair and illegitimate fundamentally saw an opportunity to gain some power over the police or the rich (Reicher & Stott, 2011). However blaming ‘bad parenting’ and ‘feral youth’ coupled with the denial of class inequality can be seen as politically motivated.

Collective identity also provides psychological resources for coping with systems of inequality. Reicher and Haslam’s (2006) BBC prison study applied the social identity approach to investigate the psychological consequences of an imposed system of inequality. The participants who were assigned as prisoners were told that one or two of them could be promoted to guard status. This manipulation created permeability of group boundaries and
measures of social identity showed that during the first three days the prisoners did not internalise their group membership and focused on demonstrating their individual qualities for promotion. Once promotion was no longer possible and group boundaries became impermeable prisoners social identity began to strengthen. As this social identity strengthened the group were able to provide each other with social support and actively resist the numerous stressors they were exposed to (S. A. Haslam & Reicher, 2006). In capitalist systems it is banal meritocracy (Fine & Burns, 2003) that creates an illusion of permeable group boundaries and undermines identification with class groups.

In a social and political context where individual social mobility (permeability of class boundaries) is widely believed to be possible and has become almost compulsory (Walkerdine, 2003) it is perhaps not surprising that psychologists have paid less attention to the ‘injuries of class’ and ‘classed discrimination’. However, even where social mobility is achieved, the absence of shared class identities has a cost. White working class boys in the US who have managed to climb the academic ladder to attend an elite boy’s school evidence a lack of shared class discourse. This means they experience their background alone as painful and something to be ashamed of (Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003). In contrast African-American boys from across class groups tended to fair better because they could identify as a racial group and share collective understandings of both race and class processes. These discourses enabled them to externalise the issues they face and develop strategies to cope with their disadvantaged position. In sum, the lynchpin of class theorising argument remains – class matters. Our objective position in the social hierarchy continues to have a powerful impact on opportunities and outcomes in health, education, housing and employment (Nolan & Whelan, 1999). As is true in issues of gender and race, class also defines individual’s experience of privilege and disadvantage (Adair, 2002; Kennedy & Power, 2010).
Dis-identification as central to class processes

Reicher and Hopkins (2001) argue that social categories are theories of how the world works and reflect one's place in a system of social relations. Therefore to self-categorise in class terms is to conceptualise social reality as organised in terms of class relations (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). This not only undermines an ideological belief in individual mobility but also legitimates group value judgments. To see oneself as ‘working class’ is to take on a subordinated position with the associated possibility of being pathologised by others (Skeggs, 2010; Stevenson, McNamara, & Muldoon, 2014). To self-categorise as ‘middle class’ may suggest that cultural and economic advantage, rather than being a product of hard work, enabled achievement and may be linked with an associated sense of positive distinctiveness or even superiority (Savage et al., 2001). So for this reason we argue that identification with class categories is the exception rather than the rule. The content of class categories means it is dis-identification that often reveals class processes.

Dis-identification from explicit class categories happens in part because class boundaries are perceived as permeable and are notoriously fuzzy. Social identities are evaluated relationally and taken on, in part, simultaneously to fulfil a need to connect with similar others, and a need for distinction from dissimilar others (Brewer, 1991). The importance of distinction in identity processes can lead to defining who we are by who we are not, separation from an identity that is threatening can be as enhancing as identification with a group that is positively perceived (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Dis-identification then, or psychological distancing, is an individual mobility strategy which is more likely to occur (than group identification and a collective strategy) when group boundaries are perceived as permeable and status relations are understood as secure and legitimate.
Empirical findings support this position. So whilst people are often unable to categorise themselves in terms of social class, Reay (1998) has shown how people tend to be sure of ‘what they are not’ and define themselves by hierarchical distinctions and talk in terms of ‘people like us’. Just as social identities can protect us psychologically from adverse circumstances and enhance well-being through social support and a sense of agency (S. A. Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009) dis-identification can also protect well-being by psychologically distancing oneself from the stereotypes of a social category which are considered threatening or incongruent with our self-perceptions (Hebl & Heatherton, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Both Skeggs (1997) and Savage and colleagues (2001) demonstrate this complex defensive strategy is used by middle and working class to dis-identify explicitly. So whilst young women who come from working class backgrounds distanced themselves from the category working class because of the negative value judgments attached to this identity they certainly did not aspire to be middle class (Skeggs, 1997). Blatant middle-class disgust and ridicule of the working classes (O. Jones, 2012) was countered in the young women’s defining the middle classes as ‘ignorant’ ‘clueless’ and ‘stupid’(Skeggs, 2010).

**Classed practices: the content of social class identity**

Bourdieu (1984) highlighted the many strategies that people use to perform and display their classed distinctiveness even where they cannot or will not articulate a class membership. These strategies include for example the use of accent, consumption, taste and lifestyle as indicators of class. Social psychologists increasingly argue that moral characteristics are a key and definitive element of intergroup relations (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007) and since its inception the class system has been loaded with moral tone. The rise of neoliberal politics during the 1980’s Thatcher years in the UK and its influence worldwide has intensified the moral distinction between groups placing middle class culture
on high moral ground and pathologising working class culture (Jones, 2012; Skeggs, 2010). One key way in which classed practice is borne out then is in terms of classed notions of moral worth.

Bourdieu (1984) viewed ‘cultural capital’ as a resource which is passed between generations and expressed through knowledge, values and tastes. Therefore scholars drawing on his ideas focus on an inter-relationship of the multi dimensions, the economic, cultural and the social (Bottero, 2004; Savage, 2003). This latter approach, loosely termed the cultural class paradigm, demands an orientation to the constructive role of nebulous concepts such as values, tastes and cultural capital in social inequality (Le Roux et al., 2008). Recent research demonstrates how social class remains strongly associated with cultural practices and lifestyle patterns (Le Roux et al., 2008). Furthermore, using methods sensitive to the examination of how class is lived (and gendered and raced) cultural class theorists have succeeded in spotlighting how inequality is habitually reproduced and obscured through both economic and cultural practices (Devine & Savage, 1999; Savage et al., 2005).

Using this paradigm one can see how this conceptualisation of class as culture resonates strongly with ideas in the social identity tradition. For example, knowledge, values and tastes have parallels with the attributes that make up the concept of identity content within the social identity framework. In this way values and tastes associated with the middle-classes can come to dictate what is ‘good’ ‘valuable’ and ‘respectable’, constructions which are derived from (often dichotomous) comparisons with the working classes whose cultural and economic capital distinguishes them as ‘bad’ ‘worthless’ ‘common’ ‘dangerous’ ‘rough’ and ‘unproductive’ (Adair, 2002; Skeggs, 1997, 2005, 2010; Walkerdine, 2003). The value of all things middle class resonates strongly with ideas from within the social identity tradition on the creation and maintenance of national identities. Billig’s (1995) concept of
banal nationalism claims that within nation states, national symbols and markers form the backdrop of everyday life and the ubiquity of national markers imbues everyday life with omnipresent reminders of the nation and our place within it. Similarly in the case of class, middle class values and tastes can be seen as ideological, hinged as they are on conceptualisations of worthiness, these evaluations are used to position others within or outside the valued group (Joyce, Stevenson, & Muldoon, 2012).

Explaining differences in class practices: identity creativity and the localisation of class

A social creativity strategy occurs when group boundaries are perceived as impermeable and status relations secure. Though social class boundaries are politically constructed as permeable, often class boundaries are experienced as impermeable by the poor (Nayak, 2006). In such cases social mobility is not available and classed status quo must be accepted. Group members reject the perception of the groups ‘inferiority’, instead adopt alternate identity dimensions. Certainly there is evidence of this process at work in relation to social class. For example Archer and colleagues (2007) demonstrate that working class students in the UK from across racial and gender boundaries feel ‘looked down on’ in school and by society, often attending schools that are commonly symbolised by images of expelled waste. This drives them to seek alternative cultural validation through dress and embodied style, but these attempts at self-worth are considered oppositional, even threatening, by educators effectively creating a vicious circle.

Similarly in an ethnographic study of disadvantaged areas in Limerick city Ireland Hourigan (2011) found that the young men who engaged in criminal activity did so as a logical and rational response to their deeply socially excluded position in Irish society. With low educational attainment, no training and little chance of getting a job these young men
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focus their attention on developing the skills, accent, attitude and dress which validates and connects them among their peers. However in broader society these young men are very aware that this identity carries the (heavily classed) ‘scumbag’ stigma. Indeed increased concentration of poverty and social polarisation between the poor and non-poor (Warr, 2005a) and stigmatisation and stereotyping particularly (but not solely) of young poor males from disadvantaged neighbourhoods has been demonstrated across a range of regional settings (Hollingworth & Williams, 2009; O. Jones, 2012; McCulloch, Stewart, & Lovegreen, 2006; Nayak, 2006). Interestingly to access these stereotypes of poor young people, researchers must increasingly rely on localised and regional stereotypes. The individualisation of class has not only resulted in a lack of class consciousness and language around class but has also reinvented class prejudice at a local level.

Stigmatising stereotypes of working classed people from Limerick, Ireland (Hourigan, 2011), Edinburgh, Scotland (McCulloch et al., 2006) Newcastle, England (Nayak, 2006) in Victoria, Australia (Warr, 2005a) and even Oslo, Norway (Brattbakk & Hansen, 2004) are not only easily demonstrable but also more palatable than a sense that we are privileging the advantaged and discriminating against the poor. The stigma associated with living in extremely disadvantaged communities has been described as an active process that undermines peoples willingness to act together and reduces their trust in the providers of services meant to alleviate their situation (Stevenson et al., 2014). Thus the localisation and regionalisation of class politics can serve to make prejudice against working classed groups more acceptable and at the same time diminish collective class action.

2.5. Moving forward: A social identity model of classed identifications

It is undeniable that in the twentieth century the class system has changed but rather than societies becoming classless the class system has gone underground. The effects of class
are possibly more divisive than ever but the processes which reproduce hierarchy and inequality has become less visible and obscured in mundane everyday practices (Bottero, 2004). Importantly everyday choices and practices of the advantaged lead ultimately to the moral exclusion of the disadvantaged who are constructed as outside the boundaries of moral inclusion (Opotow, 1990). However, as Bottero (2004) notes “it is hard to storm the barricades over social cliques, snobbery, or the pushiness of middle-class mothers” (p. 996). But the denial of the socio-structural dimensions of class leaves a space where class cannot be drawn on as an explanation for inequality (Lawler, 2005). The result is internalised shame and individualised blame aimed at those who do not have access to privileging capitals and do not rise from poverty and deprivation (Adair, 2002; Gillies, 2005).

The cultural class paradigm argues that classed cultures operate below consciousness, implicitly encoded in identity, in people’s sense of their own worth, sense of entitlement and their attitudes towards others (Skeggs, 2005). They argue that a contemporary theory of class must be re-worked from traditional understandings of class identities as collective, explicit and conflictual to classed identifications which are individualised, implicit and hierarchical (Bottero, 2004). In order to examine class processes we must abandon use of class labelled self-categorisations. Social identity theorists need to consider a methodological approach to classed identifications that can encapsulate the breadth and complexity of class concepts, and measures that capture dis-identification and disclaiming.

Few can deny that power is a key variable here (Jovchelovitch, 1996). According to the social identity approach self-categorisation processes, social organisation and ideology is the basis of power (Turner, 2005). Socioeconomic groups are differentiated by power in terms of economic security, political power and opportunities through education and occupational advancement. Powerful groups tend to develop beliefs, attitudes, institutions
and ideologies consistent with their self-interest, which can draw attention away from group-based inequality (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). Groups with less power can only develop beliefs and attitudes consistent with eliminating their sub-ordination if conditions allow (Turner & Reynolds, 2003). Making these processes more visible is a key challenge for researchers interested in and motivated by social justice. Certainly our analysis suggests current understandings of class serve to benefit the better off.

Power lies in the naturalisation of class relations (Bourdieu, 1984). Class inequality is institutionalised and normalised through for example valuing middle class learned expressions of group membership. Cultural capital, such as accent, mannerism, style and dress are positioned as the valued standard upon which those with fewer or different resources are judged (Bettie, 2000; Skeggs, 2010). Yet these differences are seen as personal and individual not collective and are therefore difficult to challenge and study. To complicate this situation further a lack of class discourse renders class inequality invisible and works to maintain power relations.

The class system thus puts pressure on individual psychology which not only influences the ways people look at themselves and others but also metaperceptions; the perceptions we have of how others see us. Class is not part of political or public discourse epitomised in particular by the 'American dream' where capitalist principles of individualisation and meritocracy have seeped into the public consciousness and become ‘common sense’. Despite rising inequality and stagnated social mobility there (Friedland et al., 2012) working class identities in particular are considered a thing of the past and the vast majority of people believe social mobility is a birthright (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). However as Bettie (2000) documents in her study of class, although working and middle class girls in a Californian school do not talk about class in their boundary work between cliques they are
inadvertently doing 'classifying projects' (Skeggs, 1997). An ideology of meritocracy and mobility influences people to make individual as opposed to structural attributions for the causes and reproduction of social class position (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). To date there is a failure in the literature to attend to the reciprocal processes, the influence of structure on the individual and vice versa. Education is in ideal site to study these reciprocal processes as school is constructed as the site of possibility and mobility. Furthermore these processes are likely to writ large during educational periods where class processes are likely to constrain ‘choices’ that impact on the subsequent independence and autonomy.

The implicit nature of classed identifications means that researchers need to act like forensic investigators finding and exposing the subtle and unacknowledged ‘normality’ of class relations and classed practices in talk (Savage, 2003). As a first step innovative methods are needed to capture how class impacts on identities, thoughts and feelings about the future and understandings of social reality. Such investigation requires cross sectional comparative research with students from socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. Evidence shows that adolescents develop a sense of their social position within a hierarchy of opportunities and the ‘choices’ they make about their future are often based on and constrained by their socioeconomic background (Gillies, 2005; Jetten et al., 2008; Reay et al., 2001). Working class students have been shown to feel a sense of alienation as education becomes ‘more serious’ (Reay, 2006). Middle class students on the other hand, are more likely to feel a sense of entitlement and identity compatibility with progression to higher education (Jetten et al., 2008).

2.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, studying everyday understandings of class then is difficult for social psychologists who traditionally rely on understanding of identities that are linked to self-
definitions or categorisations. Shared assumptions can often make invisible part of a cultural background and includes an absence of class discourse and consciousness, presenting additional challenges to social psychological researchers. These difficulties however can be seen to protect ideologies that underpin class division and protect the advantaged and powerful. Importantly, class remains a powerful political force in shaping everyday behaviour and associated educational, health and social outcomes. Despite the clear evidence that class matters, these challenges associated with the study of social class means social psychological research remains limited. Social and political context can shape shifting identity meanings and associated identity performance. A political ideology that stresses socio-economic status as contingent on individual merit together with the rise of discourse around classless societies has made the very notion of class controversial. By driving class off the political agenda, the injuries of class can go un-noticed. Acknowledging that class matters is a crucial first step for the benefits of parity and equity for rich and poor alike.
Chapter 3
Doing class in a ‘classless society’: Adolescents self-categorisation and social identification in relation to class

3.1. Overview

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a) posits that when social group memberships are internalised people are motivated to perceive these social identities positively. With a particular focus on disempowered groups, it highlights the spatial, structural and contextual conditions that determine the strategies individuals will use in order to cope with or challenge a devalued group membership (Durrheim & Dixon, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979a). Dis-identification and psychological distancing are the predicted strategy under conditions which construct group boundaries as permeable and status relations as secure and legitimate. Fine and Burns (2003) draw on Billig's (1995) concept of ‘banal nationalism’ to suggest that ‘banal meritocracy’ is an ideology that floats unnoticed in the air to naturalise class based inequality through claims that ‘hard work breeds success’. These claims and the value placed on individual responsibility and self-reliance encourage the understanding that “people get what they deserve and deserve what they get” (Lucey & Reay, 2002, p. 264). In Capitalist systems, which thrive on inequality, banal meritocratic and individualist ideologies construct group boundaries as permeable and status relations as they should be (Ichheiser, 1943). This may act to prevent assumption of class identities generally and even amongst the most disadvantaged, who benefit least from these claims. The issue here is that the structural classed nature of inequality is hidden from view, and blame and shame can be attributed to individuals for lacking aspirations and for not working hard enough.
The social identity framework provides the link between sociological systems and structures on the one hand and individual psychological processes on the other (Tajfel, 1982). Reicher (2004) argues that the link is through culture. Tajfel (1982) defined social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership” (p2; emphasis ours;). Accordingly, the process of social categorisation (knowing) and social identification (internalisation/emotional and cognitive investment) with a group are seen as the necessary first steps of the social identity process. Therefore, psychologists place an emphasis on both self-categorisation and self-identification as a group member in order to understand the experience and consequences of that membership (Reicher et al., 2010).

Despite the value of the concepts self-categorisation and social identification in progressing understanding of social identities such as gender, racial and national groups, class identity processes have presented challenges to those working within the social identity tradition. Sociological research in the UK has shown that people tend to distance themselves from explicit class categories and appear to be more comfortable in naming the categories upon which they differentiate themselves (“I know I am not upper class”) (Reay, 1998; Savage et al., 2001; Skeggs, 1997). Class groups then are commonly employed as external reference points upon which to navigate (Savage et al., 2001), rather than groups people invest in or identify with.

Drawing on contemporary understandings of class, that sees economic resources and cultural practices as intertwined, researchers have demonstrated complex defensive strategies used by people when they are explicitly asked about class identification. Feminists writers have shown that women who would be classified as working class on a census, deny and dis-identify from explicit working class categories (Skeggs, 1997). Savage and his colleagues (2001) cross sectional qualitative Northern English study, found that two thirds of their
sample of 178, self categorised as working or middle class or both. Although a minority of men in particular, were proud to identify as professional or working class, for the majority of the sample class meant ambiguity, ambivalence and defensiveness. Collective identifications were weak and people preferred to refer to themselves as ‘ordinary individuals’. In short, contemporary class cultures have become individualised. Being ‘ordinary’ suggests identification with collective class groups challenges people’s ideological sense of authenticity, individuality and desire for 'freedom' from the restraints of their social background (Savage et al., 2001).

Discourse plays a dual role in obscuring the class structure. On the one hand there is a lack of class discourse and taboos surrounding discussions about money (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012) while on the other hand, dominant discourse naturalises and legitimises the status of the most privileged by making their position unremarkable (Bourdieu, 1977). Furthermore, labour patterns in capitalist economies have largely been transformed over the past decades by deindustrialisation, globalisation, and growth in the service sector which have contributed to the decline of ‘good’ working class jobs (Crompton, 2008). A cultural space has been left in the wake of changed working class labour patterns and political practices. This space has been filled by the middle class identity as the ‘particular universal’ (Savage, 2003). As a result everyday practices which are understood as middle class define what is ‘respectable’ ‘normal’ and ‘valued’ (Lawler, 2005). These implicit middle class norms contribute to a stigmatising working class deficit model (Reay & Ball, 1997).

Importantly however, Savage et al., (2001) argue that in order to identify as ordinary upward and downward comparisons are being employed to assess groups who are not considered ‘ordinary’. I argue that these comparison and distinction processes are fundamentally, if implicitly, group level classed self-definitions based on the characteristics, norms, values and beliefs of relevant classed groups. This is not unusual as the definition of
an ingroup is often constructed on the cultural definition of an outgroup (Reicher, 2004). Research with adolescents in the schooling context demonstrates that although never explicitly named, class is used in the construction and ‘othering’ of subgroups (Hollingworth & Williams, 2009) and as ‘classifying projects’ in group boundary work (Bettie, 2000). Because access to the means; the cultural, financial, social and psychological resources, to achieve valued practices and ways of living remains highly unequal, class remains important (Sayer, 2005). Class is used as a device to construct individualised classed identities but confidence and reflexivity differs according to available resources. Additionally, this individualised thinking is in fact a group norm ironically stemming from collective beliefs and values about an individualist ideology (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002).

Savage et al’s., (2001) qualitative study found that although people recognise a hierarchical class structure, it is seen as a politically loaded system that occurs externally to their lives, hence their defensiveness. Quantitative work has demonstrated a similar scenario at play so even when people’s objective economic and cultural recourses position them very differently; they have little subjective awareness of this difference. Kelley and Evans (1995) argue that reference group forces shape people’s perceptions of their social position. Their survey data indicates that people consistently prefer to position themselves around the middle of the social strata. A twenty one-nation study including developed ‘rich’ nations, post-communist (relatively economically unstratified) nations and one developing nation, drawing on data from over 50,000 participants, shows that when presented with a continuum respondents position themselves at the centre of the strata (Evans & Kelley, 2004). These reference groups are based on social networks of family, friends and colleagues who tend to be similarly positioned, and again upward and downward glances confirm that there are always groups of people who are better off and groups who are worse off.

Self-categorisation theory argues that contextual and structural factors determine
self-definitions that are meaningful and salient (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). But Kelley and Evan’s (1995) findings prompt questions about those factors that are acting to render class privilege and disadvantage invisible. We suggest that micro level factors such as connections to family and friends with whom we share classed culture, the prevalence of socio-spatial class divisions in educational, residential and occupational settings, are an element obscuring both class privilege and disadvantage (Bottero, 2004). We also hypothesise that strategic claims about the meritocratic nature of Western society are a second important contextual factor (Gillies, 2005; Lawler, 2005; Walkerdine, 2003). This dominant meritocratic discourse reduces the visibility of privilege and disadvantage, and any claims to the contrary appear to be both political and contentious.

3.2. The Present Research

Two related studies are presented that seek to explore young people’s self-categorisation and identification related to social class. Ostrove and Cole (2003) argue that education is the ideal context for psychologists to explore and ”break the silence” (p.847) around class. Educational settings are where the belief in classless society’s manifests, as they are constructed as mobility ramps and sites of possibility. In reality schools are where the young are confronted with the dynamics and contradictions of class, possibly for the first time. The reality is, middle class pupils have an advantage over their working class peers not only because they are equipped with economic and social recourses but also cultural capital that matches and is valued in school or college, from the outset (Bourdieu, 1984).

As a result of changes in the class system (Savage, 2003) one of the most basic issues for those interested in exploring class issues is finding appropriate questions and methods to make class issues visible. Research shows clearly that individuals dis-identify with class categories and that this dis-identification occurs, in part, because of a desire for autonomy.
and freedom, also to insert distance from moralised and negative value judgments associated with working class identities (N. Haslam & Loughnan, 2012; Skeggs, 1997). Therefore, in the first study we employ a qualitative approach and interview young people in school settings to discuss issues of advantage and disadvantage. We theoretically sampled a cross section of educational institutions including those perceived as high status; those designated as disadvantaged as well as particularly disadvantaged young people previously excluded from school and now in second chance education. Our focus group interviews facilitated access to available class discourses as well as normative and shared understandings of privilege and disadvantage in each group.

In the second study, young people are asked directly, using a survey tool, to categorise themselves in terms of social class. The strength of their identification with their class group is also assessed. For comparative purposes, young people’s categorisation and identification with their gender and nationality is considered. The lack of class discourse together with the invisibility of class issues leads us to predict that, even in a city where class boundaries are readily apparent, contentious and considered a pressing challenge (McCafferty, 2011), self-categorisation along class lines is more difficult for adolescents than gender and/or national categorisation. Further we predict that strength of identification with class is lower than identification with gender and national groups.

Study 3.1

3.3. Method

Participants

Five focus group interviews formed the basis of the current study. Thirty two white Irish adolescents (18 females and 14 males) from our target group of 15 to 18 year old pupils enrolled in 2 second level schools and 1 second chance education centre participated in our study. Limerick is a highly class segregated city (McCafferty, 2011) therefore for cross-
sectional comparative purposes participants were recruited on the basis of the area in which they attend school or education centre. For the sake of anonymity the names of areas and schools have been changed. One school – here referred to as Waterside – was in a relatively affluent area and populated by predominantly ‘middle class’ pupils ($N = 14$), one school – here referred to as Newport – was situated on a border between a relatively affluent area – Gorteen – and disadvantaged areas – Ballincross and Riverwell – and attended by both ‘middle’ and ‘working class’ pupils ($N = 12$) and the second chance education centre was in a large corporation housing estate – Ballincross – attended by ‘working class’ pupils ($N = 6$).

Procedure
Focus groups were chosen as the method of investigation to facilitate a less intimidating and more open forum for discussion, for adolescents, than singular interviews. Additionally group discussion facilitates disagreement, interruption and countering through which participants can express norms thought of as (in)appropriate for interaction in the one-to-one interview context (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010).

Participants were selected by the school principal or education centre co-ordinator and parental/guardian consent was obtained on an opt-out basis, whereby parents/guardians returned forms only if they did not wish their child to take part in the study. On a pre-arranged day, focus groups discussions took place around a table in a meeting room within the school or education centre, with between 6 and 8 participants. A microphone was placed in the middle of the table and participants were asked to introduce themselves to aid distinguishing individual voices from the tape, but reassured that names would not be used to ensure anonymity. Participants were also reassured that the research was not for the school or education centre and that the principal or co-ordinator would not hear the taped conversation. The discussion was orientated towards comparison between participant’s school/education
centre and the students who attend other schools in Limerick. Discussion progressed to the purpose of education, aspirations and expectations towards higher education and their occupational futures. The focus groups lasted forty minutes, the length of a lesson.

**Analytic method**

All discussions were taped and transcribed verbatim, including identification of pauses greater than a second (.). The transcripts were analysed using deductive theoretical thematic discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the focus on the participants' construction of themselves and others, and that these constructions are socially produced in discourse, thematic DA is considered apt for present purposes. Particular attention was paid to language and discourse but the analytic tools specific to discourse analysis were not used. First the data were read carefully by the first author to identify instances where it was evident that either the self or others were being constructed in group terms. Instances evidencing, for example, normative construction of behaviour, us-them relations, sense of shared values or community, similarity and difference were coded for subsequent analysis. The entire data corpus were analysed for patterns occurring and codes were grouped according to patterns of meaning. After this process, extracts to be included or excluded from subsequent analysis were reviewed by both authors. This led to a final set of 41 extracts from the interviews where within each extract there was an instance of one form of ‘group talk’. Discussion of issues not directly relevant to our analysis was not included in our analysis- this included for example lively discussions around parental versus personal expectations. These extracts were then assembled together to form different categories of group talk. Three key themes directly relevant to this study were identified and now outlined. These are

1) Doing class in a classless society

2) Shared understanding – group level processes
3) Intergroup threat

3.4. Analysis

Theme 1: Doing class in a ‘classless society’

The participants never used the word class to categorise others or themselves. Despite this lack of language however, patterns in the data suggested the participants defined themselves and were defined by others as members of distinct classed groups. They tended to draw on available classed discourse such as rough, scumbags, dossers, posh, hippies and snobs to construct and talk about their understandings of difference.

Middle Class (Waterside)

Classed processes became ‘hot’ and were revealed quickly when the prestigious reputation of Waterside school and area were discussed. Spontaneous social categorisation became accessible and fitting, but occurred in nuanced ways via the classed area in which schools are located and the student body comes from. In both focus groups in Waterside participants used ‘rough area’ strategically to categorise, compare and define who they were not, against a negative stereotype of working-class students as unwilling and disruptive. They believed that school reputation matters for a (middle classed) student’s future because in a less prestigious school where academic achievement is not considered the cultural norm, their goal of academic achievement would be stunted. This shared understanding was used in turn to locate the reputation and status of schools generally in a classed community with shared attitudes and values amongst a student body largely assumed to be homogenous.

Extract 1 Focus Group 2 Waterside

1.Int: so what makes one school a bad school and one school a good school?

2.F: The area around it, if it’s a rough area is probably usually bad a worse
CLASSED IDENTITIES IN ADOLESCENCE

3. school
4.C: The attitude like the students have towards
5.A: Education
6.C: School yeah education and going to school
7.Int: yeah, and that would make a difference to say one of you guys going in
8. there, do you think it would impact on how well you would do?
9.E: Yeah
10.B: Yeah
11.F: Yeah a bit
12.E: Because the students like some if they’re in a disadvantaged area they
13. wouldn’t be like willing to learn and stuff so
14.B: They would disrupt you
15.E: Yeah they like would be messing in class and then you wouldn’t be able
16. to get through the curriculum and you can’t revise everything at the end

Negative stereotyping (lines 13-16) was used to position working classed students as unwilling and disruptive in contrast to students in Waterside as hard working and serious about learning. The anxiety explicitly expressed in extract 1 points to the centrality of academic success in middle classed values and the ‘symbolic threat’ (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) associated with unwilling or disruptive working class students. Prejudice and negative stereotyping of all working classed students was so completely normative in this context that it did not stimulate any correcting or embarrassment of the kind that might be expected if the minority under discussion was for example another national, racial or religious group. This is consistent with Haslam and Loughnan (2012) who found that the taboos that inhibit racist or sexist expressions do not apply when class-based prejudice is vocalised.


Extract 2 Focus Group 1 Waterside

1.C: Like most people in the school, aren’t from a rough area so everybody
2. works well
3.Int: Yeah
4.D: Except some people, they mess and that, dyaknow if a teacher’s not able
5. to control and they don’t, can’t teach as well as they, if there was no
6. messers

In extract 2 (line 1) we see evidence that the definition of the ingroup (everybody works well) is based on the characteristics of the outgroup (from a rough area). This extract is included because it was interesting that the same threat that generated anxiety evident in extract 1 (focus group 2) when a less prestigious school was imagined was not evident here in extract 2. There are ‘messers’ in their own school, however here teachers seemed to be held to account rather than the values and beliefs of the students (lines 7-9).

Mixed Class

Participants in Newport articulated knowledge that their school has a stigmatised reputation. Again class processes became salient when the reputation of the school was being discussed but were more implicitly implied in this context where the participants were from mixed class backgrounds than in Waterside where the student body were more homogenous. The reputation was attributed to a misconception that because of its official designation as a disadvantaged school, the entire student body are (working-class) unwilling learners (here referred to as dossers). Furthermore these participants expressed anxiety that they would be disadvantaged in the labour market because of the stigma of their school’s negative reputation. As a consequence there was a tendency for participants to distance themselves from the school.
Extract 3 Focus Group 5 Newport

1. Int: do you think this school has a good reputation? (3 secs)
2. F: no
3. E: yeah
4. C: they say it’s a pure doss school down here, well not like a prison, but like
dyouknow, everyone who goes here we would say it’s terrible
5. Int: right ok, so what’s that about?
6. C: I don’t know, I don’t know why people do what they do
7. Int: ok so do you think it makes a difference for a pupil’s future then, the reputation
8. of the school?
9. D: yeah like, because if say you were applying for a job and you say I went to
10. Newport they’d be like “ah sure Newport is a shit hole I’m not taking them”
11. Int: ok, how does that affect you pupils here?
12. D: you just won’t get the job you can’t do nothing
13. Int: yeah, ok, what about if you do really well in your leaving cert?
14. D: I don’t know I suppose like they’d have already formed an opinion on you, so it
15. won’t even matter what your results are

Participant C expressed the metaperception that (because of its disadvantaged status) their school is classed and judged at a group level with the entire student body measured via the stereotype of unwilling students (line 4, they say it’s a pure doss school down here). However, she was either unable or unwilling to explain why this negative judgment occurs (line 7). Again participant D expressed the metaperception that their school is judged negatively (line 12) and sadly her perception was that no matter how hard they work and how
well they do, the stigma will put potential employers off (lines 17-18). (Available research bears this out, McNamara et al., 2011). The metaperception literature shows that members of stigmatised groups are likely to feel they will be judged through the stereotypes associated with their group at a group level (Frey & Tropp, 2006) but also at the individual level (Méndez, Gómez, & Tropp, 2007). Rather than resist or challenge this negative stigmatised identity the majority of the participants coped by dis-identifying with the school (line 5).

Theme 2: Shared understanding – group level processes

The second theme identified in the data corpus was related to shared understanding based on norms, values and beliefs which give meaning to social psychological groups. Tajfel (1979) highlighted how in intergroup contexts out-groups tend to be homogenised and defined stereotypically in terms of shared values and beliefs. SCT extended this by adding the prediction that in-groups are also homogenised through a process of self-categorisation and inclusion of the self within the group. In this way individuals self-stereotype and see themselves as interchangeable with other in-group members (Turner, 1987). In the following extracts we see both in-group and out-group homogenisation.

**Middle class**

In Waterside a ‘good’ school was equated with a ‘good’ education or one that will facilitate achievement, and visa versa: a ‘bad’ school with a ‘bad’ education. A good education was highly valued and very important to these participants and was one that will facilitate their shared goals and aspirations. In this educational context it was these common values that were the basis of their shared group membership.

**Extract 5 Focus Group 1 Waterside**

1. Int: yep and that works well, ok that’s great um, so there’s maybe a

2. particular type of student that comes to this school?
In extract 2 above these participants were sure of who they were not (not from a ‘rough’ area) here in extract 5 however we see that self-categorisation happened but was more nuanced, tentative and less confident (line 5 ‘I spose’). Participant A highlights the sub-group cultures that differentiate the student body at a lower level of abstraction while depersonalisation occurs at a higher more inclusive level of abstraction in terms of shared aspirations (lines 6-7 we all like the same thing). Again without the language to talk about class the in-group was defined in terms of the area in which their school is located and the students come from (line 5). Having already established that they do not come from a disadvantaged area these participants perception of what meaningfully (in the school context) unites the population of their neighbourhoods is not advantage and affluence but their shared aspirations and the value they place on achievement in education.

**Working class**

The participants attending the second chance education centre had all attended Newport school and had rejected or been excluded before completing their education. Just before the
following extract they had been talking about their current more positive learning experience which brought up comparisons with the negative experience they had had in Newport. This comparison made the way class played out for them ‘hot’ and their classed identities salient.

**Extract 6 Focus Group 3 2nd chance**

1. F: and the teachers aren’t looking down on you 
2. Int: yeah, so did you get the feeling that the teachers were looking down on 
3. you 
4. F: in Newport yeah 
5. D: yeah 
6. F: cos I was from Ballincross 
7. D: yeah you’re from Ballincross like they just 
8. F: and Riverwell 
9. E: They’ve a school in Ballincross and they think that …… 
10. D: loads of people think that, like my aunt was, went there years ago and 
11. she said the same thing 
12. C: yeah 

Again we see evidence of shared understanding but this time these participants felt an understanding was projected onto them by teachers which positioned and categorized them as ‘worthless’. Unlike the tentative self categorization seen in extract 5 these participants were in no doubt that it was the working classed community that they come from that underpinned these negative evaluations (line 6). Participant F’s expansion of the group (line 8) to include another working class community which is also part of the school catchments area shows that the felt devaluation was not particular to their community per se but about working class values and culture generally. Furthermore they demonstrated that this feeling of being homogenized and judged negatively was a shared experience and enduring across generations.
(line 10-11) invoking the view of participant D’s aunt to corroborate this sense of shared understanding.

**Theme 3: Intergroup Threat.**

Intergroup threat occurs when one group’s characteristics, values or actions oppose the goals or well-being of another group. Threat has been formulated as realistic or symbolic (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) or social identity threats (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 2001).

**Middle Class**

Although undoubtedly structurally advantaged by attending one of the ‘best’ schools in Limerick, having private tuition after school and possessing the cultural capital that was both projecting them towards and will ease their transition into third level education participants in Waterside also saw themselves as active agents of their class reproduction. When the interviewer introduced the idea of positive discrimination programmes (HEAR: Higher Education Access Route) which enable disadvantaged students to access third level education and how fair they considered this there was very little awareness of their privilege or the barriers faced by disadvantaged students.

**Extract 7 Focus Group 1 Waterside**

1. C: But like what if somebody here was the exact same like academically as  
2. somebody in that school and the other person didn’t have to work as hard  
3. as the person here  
4. H: Yeah its unfair then  
5. C: That would be unfair  
6. H: Yeah because a person here has to work hard to get their points and then  
7. people in another school don’t, they would sort of be expecting to get  
8. that er pass
In extract 7 we see quite clearly that these participants construct middle classed students as positively distinct from working class students because they work hard (lines 2, 6, 9 & 13). On this basis the idea of positive discrimination seems to stimulate both a realistic or social identity threat (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 2001; Stephan & Renfro, 2002), a threat to their high status position which they are working hard to maintain. If disadvantaged students do not have to work as hard for highly sought after third level places they will be unfairly advantaged in the competition. As such the positive discrimination (HEAR) is seen as a group threat. The values and actions of the disadvantaged group undermine the group ambitions of these middle class students (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). The lack of class discourse means they do not recognise their own advantage or appreciate that disadvantage is a structural issue rather than individuals lacking aspirations. Thus HEAR is constructed as making access to university easier for the disadvantaged group and paradoxically the
argument is made that even if students are disadvantaged they should not be treated differently in terms of access to educational resources (line 16).

**Working class**

Without irony in the following extract participants in second chance education were describing how they felt the teachers in their previous school had unjustly treated them differently from their middle classed peers.

**Extract 8 Focus Group 3 2nd chance**

1. D: yeah you’re from Ballincross like and you get the blame, like say there was 2. someone from somewhere else like 3. F: Gorteen 4. D: Gorteen, and say we were there and there was a group from Gorteen they 5. would take their side over our side 6. E: because they’re all posh and they’re all hippies 7. D: but they’re not really like they’re 8. Int: but they’re not at all? 9. D: no 10. B: they’re all hippies 11. E: they’re trouble makers like and we get the blame 12. D: they are like, they just blame us cos…..

Again we see that area is used to construct the group boundaries between working classed (line 1, Ballincross) and middle classed students (line 3, Gorteen). This extract demonstrates clearly a group level understanding (line 4) and how these participants felt their classed identities were used by teachers and pupils to clump and position them not only as worthless but also as trouble makers. Participant E used classed discourse ‘posh’ (line 6) to explain the
intergroup distinction and unjust differential treatment by teachers. ‘Hippies’ is also a subgroup label used by working classed adolescents to define middle classed adolescents (Hollingworth & Williams, 2009). However participant D’s denial suggests she is denying the threatening evaluative nature of their classed positioning, posh may mean better off but not better or beyond making ‘trouble’ (line 11). This threat was also articulated in extract 3 leading to potential disadvantage in the labour market and extract 7 with access routes into third level courses constructed as unfair advantage rather than alleviating disadvantage. In this context their student identities were classed by others and were not a source of enhancement but a source of threat and stigmatisation.

3.5. Discussion

This study shows that class was talked about in nuanced ways through geography; students were categorised according to where they live and go to school. It was found that class became salient very quickly but without the word ‘class’ the participants used classed discourse available to construct categories and imply meaning. However in order to examine class processes, the use of class self-categorisation was relinquished and examination focused on how class played out in context, in young people’s experiences and construction of their own and others identities in education. Bourdieu (1989) talked about social class operating as distinct social space and that often urban areas, Limerick city is a good example, are divided in such a way that social class is in the overlap of social space and geographical space.

In line with previous work (Savage et al., 2001) the middle classed students were very sure of who they were not and unsurprisingly used the stereotype of working classed students as a reference to justify the status of their school and the school status system generally. Without a common label they were less sure of whom they were but categorised and defined themselves in terms of their shared aspirations and values. The participants in the designated
disadvantaged school felt categorised and defined externally as lazy because of the stigma attached to their schools reputation, regardless of their background. The working classed participants were in no doubt about how they were categorised, evaluated and defined as a homogenous low status group of trouble makers. This negatively valued identity was imposed on them in school where they were judged against the middle classed standard. This changed once in second chance education where their learning experience was much more positive and their classed identities a source of enhancement rather than threat.

Class is there in our data, classed evaluative processes happened but without the word class, it is not explicitly available for discussion. Sociologists working under the loosely named ‘cultural class paradigm’ (Savage, 2003) argue that class operates below consciousness, implicitly encoded in cultural identity, in people’s sense of their own worth, sense of entitlement and their attitudes towards others (Skeggs, 2005). They argue that a contemporary analysis of class must understand class not as an explicit collective identity but as classed identifications which are individualised, implicit and hierarchical (Bottero, 2004). From a social psychological perspective however we found evidence of collective, of shared understandings, intergroup stereotyping and some evidence of intergroup threat. Therefore the individualised aspect does not mean a lack of collective; it means the collective is implicit and ideologically hidden through banal meritocratic and individualist ideologies. The more a person considers their judgements and behaviour to be individual and free from social forces, the more they are acting in accordance with group norms which value freedom from social forces (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). This argument suggests that rather than class operating below consciousness, it is nebulous, banal and taken for granted. In order to test this suggestion further a survey tool was employed in the second study.

Study 3.2

3.6. Method
Participants

Participants were 200 students; 150 second level students and 50 third level psychology students with ages ranging between 15 and 29 years (\(M = 17.39, \ SD = 1.53\)). The second level students were a convenience sample who attended the first day of our University’s open days on 12th and 13th October 2012. Across the two days 8,000 students from 130 schools attended, representing a complete spectrum of social class backgrounds. The third level participants completed the questionnaire online as part of their course requirements and received course credit. Ten of the questionnaires completed by second level students were spoiled and excluded from further analysis leaving 190 participants in total (59 male and 128 female, 3 participants did not state their gender). The majority of the sample self-identified as Irish (87.5%).

Measures

The brief questionnaire was divided into three sections. Participants were asked to write/type their answer to the first question in each section: Please state your 1. gender (2. nationality, 3. social class). Participants then responded to the same three ingroup identification statements in each section adapted from Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade and Williams, (1986) ingroup identification scale. For example items such as ‘I am a person who see’s myself as belonging to the gender (/national/class) group’ were used with a five point response scale (0= Never, 1= Seldom, 2= Sometimes, 3= Often, 4= Very Often). Internal consistency was demonstrated by acceptable Cronbach’s alpha coefficients; gender identification .69, national identification .84 and class identification .85.

Procedure

Second level students were approached in groups and asked if they would be willing to
complete a paper and pencil questionnaire. Participants were assured their answers would be confidential, that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. The questionnaire took approximately five minutes and was completed by individuals in groups of four to eight. Participants had no problems completing the gender and nationality sections but many participants referred to the first author when they came to the question about social class seeking clarity as to the meaning of the question. Instead of answering directly the first author asked “what do you think the question means?” which tended to prompt discussion among the group and a consensus as to which class they thought they all were.

3.7. Results

Frequencies

Three participants did not state their gender and 2 did not state their nationality. Table 1 shows the frequencies and labels that students applied to themselves when stating their social class. Fourteen (7.4 %) self-identified as normal or average and 27 (14.2 %) did not state their class, 10 (20%) of the third level students stated their class but included a question mark (?) after it.

Table 1.

Frequencies and self-categorisations for social class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper/wealthy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal/average</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A One-Way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to compare scores on ingroup identification for gender, national and social class identifications. As predicted there was a significant difference in strength of identification between groups, Wilks Lambda = .62, $F (2,162) = 48.31, p < .01$, multivariate partial eta squared = .374. Post Hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test showed the mean score for social class identification to be significantly lower than the mean score for gender identification and national identification and no significant difference between gender and national identification. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics.

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics for strength of identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>.645</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8. Discussion

The results confirmed the predictions that social class would be a more difficult category to name than both gender and national identity. Talk about class is not part of public or private discourse in Ireland (Share, Tovey, & Corcoran, 2007). This was reflected here in the number of participants who had difficulty in explicitly naming a class group and sought clarity as to the meaning of the word ‘class’ from the first author. However, most participants were aware of a class structure because they were able to eventually self-label, but only after discussion with their peers. Additionally, it was hypothesised that strength of class
CLASSED IDENTITIES IN ADOLESCENCE

identification would be significantly lower than both gender and national identification. However the mean score for class identification was not negligible it was just under the middle of the response scale (seldom/sometimes). This suggests that in this context, participants felt an investment in this identity.

According to self-categorisation theory category salience depends on category accessibility and comparative and normative fit. Identification, the extent to which a group is valued and self-involving will determine category accessibility. If accessible a category is invoked if the relevant differences between groups are considered greater than the differences within (comparative fit) and if those differences meet the expectations of the perceiver (normative fit) (Haslam, 2004). From a social identity perspective the evidence of internalised class identification found here suggests that although the participants struggled to self-label initially talking among their group facilitated the social production of the category. They decided together which category they all belonged to and were then able to confidently self-label. Consideration need to be given to the fact that the data were collected in the university context which as a relatively elite institution and has the air of privilege. Furthermore on the University open day there were many groups of students from different areas of Limerick to draw comparisons between. These factors combined inevitably made class a salient category and this would impact on its meaningfulness to these participants. These findings suggest that when prompted, for the majority of the participants (over 70%) class does impact on how they self-define and act in the world. However their struggle to self-label initially may, in part, explain why class is under studied in psychology.

This begs the question, if class is not a category that springs to mind easily or confidently can class be a social identity? The findings in study one suggest that even without explicit naming there is evidence of intergroup phenomena, in doing difference through classed discourse, shared ingroup values, group level understanding and an element of
intergroup threat. There is also evidence of social categorisation and distinction from ‘other’. These processes require an internalised social identity (S. A. Haslam, 2004). Although they did not demonstrate identification with named class groups, in the school context our respondents student identities were classed and they attributed differential value to people according to the area in which they lived. Clearly then there were group based processes at work, but these were built on micro-level neighbourhood cultural practices heavily based in class based spatial divisions rather than psychological identities.

Social identity theory highlights the structural conditions that make dis-identification and psychological distancing from a social category a likely strategy; if group members believe in a meritocratic system, where group boundaries are considered permeable and status relations secure and legitimate (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Reicher and Hopkins (2001) social reality and self categories have a complex interrelationship; self-categories are theories about how the world works based on social reality. Class identities are not taken up because social reality is constructed via dominant discourse (or lack of discourse) which naturalises status relations, in this case built on socio-economic-status, and makes them secure and unquestionable. However evidence was found of classed processes despite the lack of class identification. A traditional quantitative social identity approach is ill equipped to explore these phenomena with its emphasis on self-categorisation and identification. Capturing these processes requires an analysis of micro-level divisive processes such as discourse and embodied spatial practices such as ‘choice’ of schools (Dixon, Tredoux, & Clack, 2005).

These results suggest that social identities do not necessarily require explicit knowledge of belonging; classed identities are culturally framed and may not be available to self-definition. This does not mean that they are not important processes to study. The implicit nature of classed identifications however means that quantitative decontextualised
measurement of this identification is inappropriate and perhaps untrustworthy. Qualitative research methods conducted in contexts where class is salient and matters have proven far more fruitful. This is not to suggest that there are not limitations to this study. First, a relatively small sample of young people was employed and second, the schools accessed were at the extreme ends of the school status hierarchy in Limerick city. Despite these limitations the findings add to the available national evidence (J. Williams et al., 2011) that class continues to operate within classrooms, reflecting the unequal access to resources outside them.

Strikingly, a recent, large scale, study undertaken in Ireland shows that by the age of nine children’s differing reading and maths abilities were best predicted by mother’s level of education (J. Williams et al., 2011). As such there is continued evidence that children’s access to educational capital, which is shaped by financial, social and cultural resources, either advantages or disadvantages them in the education system. The negative stereotypes of working classed students prevalent in this data are shared and enduring cultural representations. Meritocratic ideology was evident in the thinking of the advantaged young people in particular. These notions suggest that differences in achievement in education are a result of individual values and attitudes towards education and working hard. In the mixed class school students from middle and working class backgrounds felt the stigma of their schools negative reputation coming from the wider community outside, how they experienced this stigma inside the school however differed. In the school context the negative evaluation by teachers, peers and the wider community was reported to make the working classed student’s educational experience difficult. School environments were a poor fit for these students and sometimes were perceived as threatening. Self-categorisation theory emphasises the variability of self-definitions according to context, once in the second chance education context these participants were no longer being measured against middle classed standards,
they were gaining confidence and enjoying learning.

Cultural class theorists highlight how class is reproduced through the interconnection of cultural practices and economic resources routinely passed via the family. Class based material conditions shape and constrain aspirations, opportunities and choices within an invisible framework (Reay & Ball, 1997). At the same time the class structure has been individualised and is therefore not available for universal discussion. This leaves a linguistic space where class is absent from talk and yet reintroduced via the backdoor (Savage et al., 2001). Our data demonstrated that in Limerick the parochial nature of social categorisations serves a political purpose, it localises issues rather than highlighting the need to address the system that creates inequality.
Chapter 4

Social Class and Models of Agency: Independent and Interdependent as Educational (Dis)advantage

4.1. Overview

Despite many well intentioned policies to tackle educational inequality and the attainment gap between classes, class remains a persistent structural force which shapes and predicts achievement outcomes. This is true in the UK (Reay, 2006) in the USA (Sirin, 2005) in Canada (Lehmann, 2009) and in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) (J. Williams et al., 2011). Recent national evidence in RoI shows that by the age of nine a child’s reading and math’s ability is related to their socio-economic circumstances (J. Williams et al., 2011). Furthermore those who do not complete their schooling are disproportionately working class (Byrne & Smyth, 2010).

Broadly speaking, the material conditions of social class contexts do not determine outcomes, they do however influence action that is likely to become normative and appropriate (Stephens et al., 2007). Middle classed experience and resources, bring with them critical objective advantages; financial, social and cultural capital largely acquired through third level education (Bourdieu, 1986). These resources may promote hidden psychological advantages, encouraging a sense of power, entitlement, control over situations and context and thus a sense of independence from social constraints (Kraus, Rheinschmidt, & Piff, 2012; Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). On the other hand, the resources and opportunities available in working classed contexts tend not to promote social separation but interconnection and reliance upon others. Stephens and colleagues (2012) propose that the working classes tend to operate through an interdependent model of agency, where it is
normative and appropriate to respond to the expectations and influence of others and the context and to adjust and fit it. In contrast the middle classes behave in terms of an independent model of agency, separate from context, where preferences and goals are freely chosen, with a focus on influencing and standing out from others (Snibbe & Markus, 2005).

Importantly, neither is more effective, natural or normal (Markus & Kitayama, 2010) and neither is inherent in individual psychology, they are sociocultural orientations shaped by available resources and experiences within sociocultural contexts (Stephens et al., 2012). However as neo-liberal individualising agenda dominates society and its institutions (Lynch, 2006) independent agency may be the presumed standard for everybody. The present chapter aims to explore these suggested different models of agency as potential psychological advantages and disadvantages for young people in second level educational contexts. A particularly fruitful domain to examine these processes is education, first because education is viewed as the site where class background can be overcome and second the labour market is becoming increasingly credentialised.

4.2. Education, agency and social class

In order to understand how social class shapes models of agency, attention needs to be paid to the material, social and cultural resources that are accessible in different class contexts. For instance, the positive resource potential of social relationships, often termed social capital, is available in both working and middle classed contexts. However the types of social capital available in working and middle classed contexts tends to be different (E. Humphreys, 2011). Bonding social capital is close connections between similar individuals and homogenous groups and is prevalent in working classed contexts. As its name suggests, it acts like social glue enabling reciprocal helping and community embeddedness. But bonding is distinct from bridging social capital. The latter is loose connections and networks between
diverse individuals and heterogeneous groups which bolster mobility and opportunity, common in middle classed contexts (Warr, 2005b). Importantly, such resources impact on how people are able to act, and how over time this understanding becomes valued, appropriate and normative and part of classed identity content.

Individual mobility is often the motivation offered for continuing commitment to education. For working classed students this means exiting their class background and entering middle classed identity (Lehmann, 2009) which may feel like relinquishing their social bonds. This is something which they and their parents may feel conflicted about (Thomson, Henderson, & Holland, 2003). Qualitative and ethnographic research consistently highlights the structural objective financial, social and cultural ‘capital disadvantages’ experienced by first generation working classed students in higher educational settings (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008; Lehmann, 2009; Reay et al., 2009, 2001).

This work also highlights pain and discomfort ‘the hidden injuries of class’ working classed students feel, particularly in more elite institutions, as they leave their familiar identity. Quantitative longitudinal research supports these findings. Middle classed students felt before entering higher education, and experienced once there, identity compatibility in the progression to higher education (Jetten et al., 2008). The more compatible their identity the more they identified as a university student and the greater their sense that university would lead to individual mobility. This compatibility was not experienced by working classed students. Another longitudinal study found middle classed students, unlike working classed students possessed this perception of compatibility and had multiple group memberships, capital resources protecting them from the reduced well-being experienced as a result of transitioning to higher education (Iyer et al., 2009). The contention here is that
aspects of working classed identity may well represent a cultural orientation that can heighten an uneasiness or incompatability with higher educational contexts.

Walkerdine (2003) suggests the archetypal middle classed persona is an individualised (neo-liberal) subject. Brought up in relatively affluent material and social conditions middle classed children tend to be socialised to believe they are unique and their opinion is valuable. They may choose what to eat, who to play with, what activities they like for example. They are taught the world is a safe place (Kusserow, 2012). Given such opportunities these children develop confidence, a sense that they have influence and control and can focus on their goals (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). Here we hypothesise that this leads to development of norms of independence which fosters a sense of security, ownership and entitlement to ‘pave your own path’ and education is the bridge to get there.

In contrast, growing up with restricted material resources with few financial safety nets and less predictable environments working classed children learn the value of compromise. They are socialised to understand that the world does not revolve around them. Parents focus on toughening their children because the world is potentially dangerous and uncertain (Kusserow, 2012). Because choices and influence are constrained by external factors they must pay attention to the situation and others intentions and emotions to achieve their own goals (Kraus, Rheinschmidt, et al., 2012; Stephens, Markus, et al., 2012). For this reason we hypothesize that this working class group are more likely to develop views that centre on interdependence.

The point is, differing resources and sociocultural contexts support differing models of agency and understandings of normatively appropriate action of self and others (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). And some evidence for these distinct models of agency can be found in a recent body of experimental research. It demonstrates working classed participants
are more socially engaged, more reliant on others for their desired outcomes and more empathetic and aware of others in their environment than middle classed participants (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010; Kraus et al., 2009; Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012; Piff et al., 2010).

Similarly cultural capital appears to differ by class context. Cultural capital encompasses the experience, practices and tastes as well as academic ability and language skills (Lareau & Weininger, 2003) that are valued in the education context. Middle classed parents’ are able to transmit cultural capital gained through their own higher level of education and expect and influence their children’s transition towards higher education. Despite their aspirations working classed parents are less able to influence their children’s education trajectories, or intervene in their schooling because they have not had access to the cultural capital mobilised by middle classes (Bourdieu, 1986). This cultural capital is associated empirically with class differences in achievement outcomes (Scherger & Savage, 2010).

4.3. The Present Research

Economic uncertainty and increasing competition in constricting job markets (Beck, 1992; Côté, 2005) mean academic and vocational qualifications have become progressively more valuable, if not a compulsory requirement for gaining employment (Goldthorpe, 2003). Thus in order to compete globally by producing ‘smart’ labour forces, Western nations’ are expanding their higher education sectors to accommodate students from traditionally under represented groups. This is viewed as central to Western nation’s strategy for economic growth. In Ireland, where the current studies were undertaken, the goals set out in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 are on the one hand an acknowledgment of continuing inequality, and on the other, a proposal to increase
participation of those who are at present under represented in third level education. Similar to other EU nations, figures from 2004 show participation rates of 100 percent of school leavers from the upper middle classes, 65 percent from the lower middle classes and up to 33 percent from the working classes. The participation target for this latter group is 54 percent (Authority, 2008). The intention then is to move the higher education sector from an elite to a mainstream trajectory.

Given this policy agenda and continuing problems with school completion and progression to third level education for working classed students, our interest is in exploring the possibility that different models of agency and individualist ideology may be at play for working and middle classed second level students as they engage with the education system and think about their futures.

This chapter presents two studies using mixed methods. In order to investigate the complexities of the individualisation process and independence and interdependence in the first study we use a qualitative design with a cross section of school pupils from relatively advantaged areas and disadvantaged areas of Limerick city, Ireland. Our second quantitative study builds on the first to examine the role of interdependent models of agency on Integration at school in a sample of children attending designated disadvantage schools in the same city.

Study 4.1

4.4. Method

Participants

Five focus group interviews formed the basis of the current study. Thirty two adolescents (18 females and 14 males) from our target group of 15 to 18 year old pupils
enrolled in 2 second level schools and 1 second chance education centre participated in our study. Limerick is a highly class segregated city (McCafferty, 2011) therefore for cross-sectional comparative purposes participants were recruited on the basis of the area in which they attend school or education centre. For the sake of anonymity the names of areas and schools have been changed. One school – here referred to as Waterside – was in a relatively affluent area and populated by predominantly ‘middle class’ pupils (N = 14), one school – here referred to as Newport – was situated on a border between a relatively affluent area – and disadvantaged areas – and attended by both ‘middle’ and ‘working class’ pupils (N = 12) and the second chance education centre was in a disadvantaged area – attended by ‘working class’ pupils (N = 6). Participants in second chance education had not thrived in school and had either left as soon as they were legally able to or been excluded. However in their new learning environment they had developed confidence in their abilities. The disadvantaged area that the working class participants come from experiences significant patterns of early school leaving, welfare dependency is much higher than average (83%) and unemployment is as high as 53% (McCafferty, 2011). The working classed participant’s reported their parents had completed primary and some secondary school while the majority of the middle classed participant’s reported that their parents had completed third level education.

Procedure

Focus groups were chosen as the method of investigation to facilitate a less intimidating and more open forum for discussion, for adolescents, than one-to-one interviews. Additionally group discussion facilitates disagreement, interruption and countering through which participants can express norms thought of as (in)appropriate for interaction in the one-to-one interview context (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010).

Participants were selected by the school principal or education centre co-ordinator and
parental/guardian consent was obtained on an opt-out basis. On a pre-arranged day, focus groups discussions took place around a table in a meeting room within the school or education centre, with between 6 and 8 participants. A microphone was placed in the middle of the table and participants were asked to introduce themselves to aid distinguishing individual voices from the tape, but reassured that names would not be used to ensure anonymity. Participants were also reassured that the research was not for the school or education centre and that the principal or co-ordinator would not hear the taped conversation.

The discussion was orientated towards the purpose of education, aspirations and expectations towards higher education and their occupational futures. The focus groups lasted forty minutes, the length of a lesson.

Analytic method

All discussions were taped and transcribed verbatim, including identification of pauses greater than a second (.). The transcripts were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First the data were read carefully by the first author and coded for instances where individualising discourses, agency and choice were discussed or evident. Codes were grouped according to patterns of meaning, for example, choice motivating aspirations, instances of normative constructions of behaviour, individualised independent orientations, interdependent orientations, shared values or community were grouped for subsequent analysis. After this process, these patterns were reviewed by both authors and extract to be included and excluded were reviewed buy both authors. This led to a final set of 38 extracts from the interviews where within each extract there was an instance of one form of ‘individualising discourse’ and ‘agentic talk’. Discussion of issues not directly relevant to our analysis was not included in our analysis. The relevant extracts were then assembled together to form different categories of agentic talk. Four key themes directly
relevant to this study were identified and now outlined. These are, looking through different lenses, no alternative, a bridge or a bond and parental influence.

4.5. Analysis

Theme 1: Looking through different lenses

Middle classed

There was evidence of individualised discourses in the middle classed participant’s discussions in the belief that the education system is meritocratic and therefore individual effort and determination are the keys to University for everybody. Only one participant highlighted structural barriers for less privileged students.

Extract 1 Focus Group 1 Waterside

1. Int: Um, do you think, um that all the students of your kind of age group at
2. your stage in schooling have the same chances of going to university?
3. D: No
4. E: They do have the chance but they
5. D: No
6. E: It’s if they want to work and
7. H: It really depends on your own determination
8. E: Yeah, yea
9. H: If you want to really go far then you’ll sort of try harder
10. D: Yeah but it depends if you can afford it
11. A: Yeah
12. H: Yeah but there are scholarships as well the point is if a person
13. D: Yeah but you have to be so academic
14. H: But if a person really wants to be successful they wouldn’t sit back and
15. just do nothing

For most of the middle classed participants the path through the education system was such a clear one that obstacles for students without the financial and cultural capital resources that they possess were not given serious consideration, except by one participant. They have been persuaded, and appeared motivated, by individualising discourses that access to higher education is about personal choice to work hard and be determined (line 6, 7, 9). Participant D attempted a counter argument highlighting financial barriers (line 10) but this concern was dismissed because, there are ‘scholarships’ (line 12). Participant D then suggested individual personality factors as potential obstacles, you have to be so ‘academic’ (line 13). These students see themselves as independent agents making a choice to put in the effort and determination to do well in school (see extract 8) therefore they can take the moral high ground when viewing others through the same lens (line 15). What is not said but implied is that to not do well is also freely chosen.

**Working classed**

Universities retain their elite status despite the expansion of the higher education sector to include a wider diversity of students from under represented groups. This perception seeped into some of the working classed participant’s understandings of the cost of university making this option too distant in both an objective and psychological sense.

**Extract 2 Focus Group 3 Second chance**

1. Int: what kind of pupils do you think go to LIT (Limerick Institute of Technology)?
Initially here classed discourse, (posh ones, line 3, 4) is used to define and distinguish the type of student who goes to LIT. However when LIT is compared with UL we can see that the university is placed in another league - beyond their reach. Structural barriers are alluded to in the perception that financial capital and academic ability are needed to secure a university place (line 7, 8). This is not unjustified as social class remains the best predictor of achievement in Ireland (J. Williams et al., 2011). Nonetheless the demographic profile of the student body in university and institutes of technology are not wholly different (Higher
Education Authority, 2008) and the registration fees are the same. But the perception remains universities are for the privileged and we can see that in the understanding that UL is a ‘big fancy place and LIT is thrown together’ (line 15). Psychologically and emotionally then these respondents do not feel compatibility between their working classed identity and the university context. Practically the university is too far away (line 9). LIT is situated within walking distance of these participant’s neighbourhood while UL is the other side of the city, 4.2 miles or 6.76 km away. Reay and colleagues (2001) found similar geographical constraints among working classed students in their UK study of higher education choice. Even a few stops on the tube constrained the choices of their participants, likewise here a few stops on the bus is making the university a non-choice.

**Theme 2: No alternative**

**Middle classed**

Having choice, freedom and control in the future were the central concerns of the middle classed participants and they saw education as the principle route for ensuring those concerns would be met. Specifically ‘good’ jobs would ensure future middle classed position and as such they saw no alternative to doing well at school and going on to third level.

**Extract 3 Focus Group 1 Waterside**

1. H: Like what other alternative is there? Like let’s say you don’t get a good
2.  education and you don’t get a job then what do you do?
3.  Int: yeah
4.  G: The dole and that’s about it
5.  D: No but like
An independent model of agency is running through the concerns of this group and perhaps emphasised by the understanding that in Ireland’s current economic climate lack of credentials is presumed and presented as inevitably leading to unemployment (the dole and that’s about it, line 4). Employment (working out for yourself, line 9) would give a sense of achievement (line 11) and freedom (line 22) rather than restriction (line 20), while unemployment would decrease responsibility (line 13) and increase feelings of being controlled (line 14). Autonomy, freedom and control are central to the middle classed
psychological experience of independence (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012) and here all presented as important. Furthermore, securing a good job (line 15) would enable the agency, freedom and control to choose the house and type of lifestyle they want rather than one that is dictated by necessity and circumstance i.e. state benefits. Unemployment would mean less material resources but beyond this the middle classed psychological experience would not be available to them. A fear of downward mobility means the choice to go to college is a non-choice (Ball, Davies, David, & Reay, 2002) there is no alternative for them, because they desire choice in the future.

**Working Classed**

The participants in second chance education were as aware as their middle classed peers of the necessity to acquire post leaving certificate credentials for future employment.

**Extract 5 Focus Group 3 Second chance**

1. Int: what do you think college is going to give you?
2. F: edumaction
3. E: a good education, get a good job
4. (…)
5. F: you need a job
6. Int: you need a job, so do you want to get a job?
7. A: oh definitely
8. E: I’d love one
9. B: oh yeah
10. D: I’d love a job
11. C: I want a job
12. F: I don’t want to be sitting on the dole, because if you’re sitting on the
These participants were as keen to avoid the dole queue in their futures as their middle classed peers (lines 5,7,8,9,10,11). However their fears and concerns around exclusion from the labour market and unemployment largely stemmed from being unoccupied and doing nothing (line 12, 20, 21, 22). Additionally this could potentially lead to other less ‘purposeful’ ways of spending time (‘other things’ line 13) or worse, trouble (line 23). A good education and credentials then meant the opportunity to go out and work ‘anywhere’ (line 15) and taking the first job (line 16) rather than being in the privileged position to aspire to the job of choice. There are undoubtedly parallels between the groups, again these participants are fearful of downward mobility, getting into trouble, and are also motivated to avoid negative outcomes. These participants however live in a context of significant cumulative disadvantage, a situation which has been shown to generate strong feelings of fatalism (or lack of control) (Nolan & Whelan, 1999). Autonomy, control, freedom and
independence then are less available to the working classed psychological experience and therefore are not presented here as immediate concerns.

Theme 3: A bridge or a bond

Middle classed

In the subsequent extract, the role of education as central to financial security is clearly evident as is the willingness of these young people to follow work opportunities within Ireland and overseas if necessary.

Extract 6 Focus Group 2 Waterside

1. A: I’d like to be a vet or pharmacy because like my neighbours they’re 2. Pharmacist’s and like they’ve a jaguar and stuff …laughter.. yeah it’d 3. be a nice job 4. Int: it looks pretty lucrative? 5. A: Yeah, and apparently there’s like pharmaceutical jobs in Ireland and 6. stuff so 7. Int: right, is that a consideration? 8. A: yeah 9. Int: Is it a consideration for all of you? the thought of 10. E: Not really 11. Int: maybe trying to get something that keeps you in the country? 12. E: Not necessarily 13. A: It’s not about keeping in the country it just like I want to be able to have 14. a job when I come out of college, like my brother he was going to do
architect but then he changed to doing law because there’s no like jobs
for architects anymore because they’re not building anymore so he kind of like changed his mind because he wanted to get a good job

Drawing on available knowledge from family (line 14) and neighbours (line 1), and the broader labour market (line 5) the concern presented here was to choose a degree course now that would guarantee a career in the future. The focus and priority was career - being able to secure desired and lucrative employment ideally in Ireland (line 5) or beyond (line 12). Given this priority education was seen as a bridge towards ‘paving their own paths’ (line 13, 14) and if necessary away from family, community and even nation.

**Working Classed**

In order for working classed participants to progress to further education they would first have to complete their second level education by progressing and taking the leaving certificate. This was causing some concern because it meant that they would have to leave their current centre, which was situated within their community, to attend another second chance education centre a few miles away in the city centre.

**Extract 7 Focus Group 3 Second chance**

1. D: yeah we already have our junior cert done
2. F: we just want to better ourselves
3. E: I don’t really, it don’t bother me like
4. C: don’t bother me either
5. Int: what about the leaving cert?
6. D: see half of us won’t even end up doing it because we don’t want to go
At the beginning of the extract we can see tension between notions of mobility and bettering themselves via education (line 2) and rejecting that as desirable (lines 3 & 4). For most of the participants leaving the boundaries, bonds and familiarity of their community was seen as threatening (line 12) and a potential barrier to their progression through education (line 2). The focus here was on the situation and people in it (line 9) rather than their own future prospects. The leaving certificate is presented as desired and important (line 15) but not prioritised over the safety of knowing the people they will study beside (‘outsiders’, line 17). These participants focus on contextual factors and ‘fitting in’ is in line with an interdependent model of agency.
Theme 4: Parental influence

Middle classed

The middle classed participants were aware that having parents and family members who had been to university was making their progression easier because of the (cultural capital) knowledge and advice available.

Extract 8 Focus Group 1 Waterside

1. H: They would probably make suggestions like if you consider going to college your parents or whoever might probably make suggestions
2. Int: yeah
3. C: Or like if your bother or sister did something like in college they might say you could do it too
4. D: Or you would want to do it too
5. A: Family is the most important influence I think as well, you wanna do well for your parent’s sake
6. (…)
7. Int: do you think then that you are under pressure from your parents?
8. A: Yeah, I do
9. C: Yeah
10. D: I don’t
11. Int: I don’t mean that in a negative way, just kind of that there is a pressure to kind of achieve
12. B: No
13. D: No, like they encourage
Although we can see in the above extract participant A is feeling pressure to fulfil her parent’s expectations (lines 8 & 11) most of the participants were not feeling pressure but encouragement (line 17). They were aware their parents want them to do well (line 19) but it is for them selves, they are independent agents and do not want to let themselves down (line 29). The expectations and influence of parents to achieve in school and go to college had been internalised and taken on by participants fostering an independent self determined expectation of them selves. Du Bois-Reymond (1998, cited in (Ball et al., 2002) calls the trajectory of the middle classed student a ‘normal biography’ because there really is no reflexive decision making, paths are anticipated, predicted and linear.
CLASSED IDENTITIES IN ADOLESCENCE

**Working classed**

Parental expectations and influence expressed by working classed participants tended to be focussed on completing the leaving certificate rather than going to college.

**Extract 7 Focus Group 5 Newport**

1. Int: What kind of expectations do you experience, now, what do you feel that your family, your parents or guardians want for you or expect of you?
2. 
3. A: they want me to at least pass school stay until at least after the, to pass the leaving cert and from then on it’s my choice because they
4. Int: how about the college aspect?
5. A: as long as its close to home, they never finished secondary school so they, if I have to go on to go to college it has to be somewhere close or
6. if I have to go somewhere far it has to be at least with someone of the family

We can see from how this participant talked that this is a somewhat frightening or at least ambivalent prospect for her parents and one they must accept rather than relish (‘if I have to go on to college’ line 8). The model of agency that she speaks through seems to be an interdependent one. Her parents want her to stay close to home near to them, but if she ‘has’ to go further away they will rely on their family network. Perhaps as they never finished secondary school (line 7) this is as much for themselves as her in an unfamiliar and hard to imagine world of college. In many instances working classed participants stated that to go to college would be their choice rather than an expectation their parents had for them. This finding is in line with what Du Bois-Reymond (1998, cited in (Ball et al., 2002) calls the
‘choice biography’ of students who are the first in families to contemplate further education. These choices are certainly not unconstrained, and more likely to be filled with tension, ambivalence and doubt.

4.6. Discussion

Analysis of the data revealed instances of the individualisation of class processes and notions of meritocracy in both groups of participant’s discussions however these discourses were much more prevalent in the middle classed participants talk. All of the participants understood the value of education and saw education to be about learning as well as a means for accessing credentials vital for employment. As such there was evidence of commitment to education for all the young people across these second level settings. Analysis also revealed distinct ways in which a sense of agency and choice were discussed. In the middle classed participant’s talk an independent model of agency was apparent. Choice, independence and autonomy were both highly valued and a driving force motivating their efforts to maximise their potential within the education system. However, the majority of the working classed participants seemed to have much less access to choice, control and independence from contextual factors. Fundamentally, the data support the notion of an interdependent model of agency as the cultural orientation of the working class students.

Working classed participants focus tended to be on situations and people and how they could fit, or not, into particular contexts. It is possible that their feelings of identity incompatibility particularly within the university context were heightened by this focus on these contextual factors. They expressed fear of leaving their own areas and an awareness of their parent’s preference for them to stay close to home. This is in line with previous work: Humphreys (2011) found high levels of bonding social capital in working class communities in Limerick, whereas middle class communities evidenced greater bridging capital. Bonding
capital underpins strong social networks and facilitates social support, however it is bridging capital that facilitates social mobility.

Though autonomy and independence have been documented as precursors to compatibility and fit in higher education settings (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012) there is less evidence regarding the impact of interdependent models of agency on young people’s sense of belonging and fit at school. Given our qualitative analysis suggests the discourse is available within second level settings and that an independent model of agency has some of the hallmarks of a banal and presumed default standard (Thomson et al., 2003) through which all education operates, the aim of the second study was to explore further the consequences of an interdependent model of agency for working classed school pupils feelings about school. Again these phenomena were explored using a group level of analysis. As has been done previously, (McNamara et al., 2013) identification with community is used, as proxy for ‘classed’ group membership given young people’s difficulty with articulating classed membership in the previous chapter and knowing from the literature (Savage et al., 2001) that class is not a salient or meaningful identity. As such it is hypothesised that identification with a disadvantaged community would be related to school integration and this relationship would be mediated by interdependence with neighbours and friends.

**Study 4.2**

4.7. Method

*Participants*

Participants were 199 pupils attending seven schools, five primary and two secondary, designated as disadvantaged in Limerick city. The schools were all located within four areas
of Limerick city targeted by a social and economic regeneration project which began in 2007. The participants ages ranged from 7 to 15 years ($M = 10.4, SD = 2.3$), 94 were male and 100 were female with 5 unspecified.

**Procedure and Measures**

A secondary analysis was conducted on data collected via paper and pencil surveys in the classroom during the school day. The questions were read at the front of the classroom and a research assistant was present to assist when necessary. The survey included questions about community identity, perceptions of social support from neighbours, meta-representations of the community, perceptions of safety, physical activities and health, well-being, family and free time, school and learning, experiences of stigma and socioeconomic variables. Variables of interest will be reported here.

**Predictor Variables**

*Community Identity* was measured using one sub-scale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The items tap feelings of belonging and membership esteem, four items were included for example ‘*I am glad to be from my neighbourhood*’ answered on a four point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Cronbach’s alpha was .71.

**Mediators**

*Interdependence – Neighbours* was measured using a different sub-scale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). This measure taps feelings of private self-esteem and included four items for example ‘*We look out for each other in my*
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neighbourhood’ answered on a four point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

Interdependence – Friends measured using the social support and peers dimension of the KIDSCREEN health-related quality of life scale (Detmar, Bruil, Ravens-Sieberer, Gosch, & Bisegger, 2006). Two items were used for example ‘Have you been able to rely on your friends’ answered on a five point response scale from ‘Never’ to ‘Always’. Cronbach’s alpha was .67.

Outcome Variable

School integration was measured using the school environment dimension of the KIDSCREEN health-related quality of life scale (Detmar et al., 2006). Four items were used for example ‘Have you got on well at school?’ answered on a five point scale from ‘None of the time’ to ‘All of the time’. Cronbach’s alpha was .7.

4.8. Results

This study explores the relationships between community identity, school integration and interdependence with neighbours and friends in children living in disadvantaged communities in Limerick city. Table 1 illustrates the correlations between the study variables.
Table 1. Correlations between study variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Community identity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. interdependence - Neighbours</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interdependence - Friends</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. School integration</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mean**

|       | 3.20 | 2.90 | 4.41 | 4.05 |

**SD**

|       | .66  | .76  | .86  | .83  |

*Note: The minimum pairwise n was 178. **p < .01.*

**Community Identity and School Integration**

To test whether interdependence with neighbours and friends act on feelings towards school integration, the PROCESS modelling tool (Hayes, 2012) was used to estimate a double mediation model with mediators acting in parallel. Figure 1 shows the mediation model along with path estimates. Bootstrap results for the mediated effects are reported in Table 2.
The overall relationship between community identity and school integration was significant, $\beta = .39$, $SE = .09$, $t(179) = 4.35$, $p < .001$. Community identity was a significant predictor of both interdependence with neighbours, $\beta = .59$, $SE = .08$, $t(172) = 7.65$, $p < .001$, and interdependence with friends, $\beta = .37$, $SE = .09$, $t(172) = 4.00$, $p < .001$. Interdependence with neighbours was a significant predictor of school integration, $\beta = .32$, $SE = .08$, $t(170) = 3.84$, $p < .001$, as was interdependence with friends a significant predictor of school integration, $\beta = .33$, $SE = .07$, $t(170) = 4.77$, $p < .001$.

The combined mediation effect via interdependence with neighbours and friends of $\beta = .31$ ($SE = .07$) was significant, 95% CI [.18, .46], community identity no longer predicted school integration, $\beta = .10$, $SE = .10$, $t(170) = 1.02$, $p = .31$. The indirect effect of interdependence
with neighbours $ME = .19$, $SE = .06$, was significant 95% CI [.08, .33] and the indirect effect of interdependence with friends, $ME = .12$, $SE = .06$ was also significant 95% CI [.04, .28].

Table 2. Magnitude and confidence intervals of the parallel mediation model between community identity and school integration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediators</th>
<th>$ME$ ($SE$)</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total mediated effect</td>
<td>.31 (.07)</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence with neighbours</td>
<td>.19 (.10)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence with friends</td>
<td>.12 (.06)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: final statistics: $R^2 = .27$, $F(3,170) = 21.88$, $p < .001$.

$ME =$ mediated effect; $SE =$ standard error; CI = Confidence Interval.

4.9. Discussion

The results suggest that at a group level, identification with their community has a positive relationship with working classed pupil’s school integration. Additionally the hypothesis was supported, community identification is positively related to these participants perception of being able to rely on support and help of neighbours and friends which magnify
positive school integration. It is perhaps unsurprising that school pupils are happier and more positive about school if they feel they have friends that they can rely upon. What is more surprising is that help from neighbours is an important additional factor in this association. The results offer further support to the argument that an interdependent model of agency is the standard cultural orientation in working classed contexts. A combination of the available resources and the experience of adverse circumstances and relative deprivation drives a need for people to rely on and lookout for each other (Piff et al., 2010).

Our results are important because they point to the positive potential of community identification as well as interdependence with friends and neighbours in enhancing working classed pupil’s feelings towards both primary and secondary school. These are heavily stigmatised, excluded and disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Hourigan, 2011; McNamara et al., 2011, 2013; Stevenson et al., 2014) but in terms of education the children and adolescents who live there are drawing on their belonging and communities as a positive resource. Thus, interdependence rather than being a problem is harnessed to keep young people in second level education.

4.10. General Discussion

The first study was cross sectional and found some evidence of the individualising process particularly in the talk of middle classed participants. The majority believed that everybody has the same opportunities in education and it is an individual’s choice to work hard and be determined that are important. This individualising discourse matched the cultural orientation of an independent model of agency also evident in middle classed participant’s discussions. Choice and independence in their futures were their central concerns. They were making choices now which would enhance their autonomy, freedom and control later in life. Additionally their perceived control over contextual factors meant their
goals of higher education in order to secure ‘good’ jobs were the focus. At the same time they felt they had no choice, there was no alternative route in the pursuit of class reproduction. Fear was evident over the prospect of downward mobility because the material benefits and middle classed psychological independent model of agency would no longer be available.

The working classed participants in this study were as aware as their middle classed peers of the credentialisation of the market place and therefore most aspired to continue their education beyond their leaving certificate. However they were more aware of the structural barriers to higher education than the middle classed participants. Furthermore the data evidenced some considerations of identity incompatibility with the higher education context. These feelings of cultural mismatch and lack of belonging may be heightened by the interdependent model of agency that was identified in the working classed data. They expressed concerns that were focussed on the social dynamics of the context in which they might learn. In addition they appeared to have less access to autonomy and control which were not presented as pressing concerns. Their thoughts about the future seemed to be quite constrained by immediate contextual factors which overshadowed their long term goals.

Findings from the second study support claims that the experiences and resources in working classed contexts are underpinned by an interdependent model of agency. The positive association between community identity and school integration were fully mediated by interdependence with friends and neighbours. Essentially, for the children and adolescents in this study a strong sense of belonging and community support was a positive resource related to the experience of both primary and secondary schooling. However our qualitative data suggest this positive resource does not appear to extend far beyond the boundaries and bonds of their communities. Paradoxically then, the model of interdependence that holds children in school in second level contexts may exasperate the objective barriers to
participation in third level education. A focus on contextual factors and social dynamics and having to adjust goals to fit with these may actually heighten the sense of barriers making them appear more concrete and difficult to overcome.

It is important to note that this research is not an attempt to demonstrate a deficit within working classed culture that is contributing to the education achievement gap. Rather the intention is to highlight a need to attend to the mutual constitution of individual and structural factors that combine within sociocultural contexts and provide students with blueprints for their understandings and motivations within the field of education. Cultural psychologists suggest that these different cultural orientations of independence and interdependence as normative guides for behaviour may advantage middle classed students who experience a cultural match between themselves and the individualised self-directed culture they meet in colleges (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, et al., 2012). Moreover, research in the social identity tradition has pointed to the importance of identity compatibility (Iyer et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2008) in student’s transition to higher education institutions. Middle classed students feel a cultural and material match between themselves and the context of higher education therefore compatibility is less of a concern. The findings point to the importance of identity, here community identity, in driving belonging at school in those at risk of early school leaving. Whilst this identification may well contain psychological and material barriers to higher education, its importance in keeping this at risk group at school through second level is not to be ignored.

Choice and independence, as acts of agency, are becoming increasingly important in contemporary individualised neo-liberal Western societies. The middle classes are advantaged by objective resources and cultural orientation to negotiate their way through the independent pathways now demanded of the young. An appreciation of these different
agency orientations may help our understanding of student’s behaviour in the education context and beyond and may be an important contributing factor in the social class achievement gap. It can not be assumed that all young people feel control over context and situations or desire and are comfortable with an independent model of agency. Working classed individuals are more conscious of context, invested in social interaction and empathetic. Therefore if institutions are serious about redressing unequal participation rates then they must be mindful that interdependence is a normative orientation for students from working classed backgrounds and implement both independent and interdependent cultural practices.
Chapter 5

General conclusion

5.1. Overview of Findings

This thesis has explored social class as a real-world contemporary social identity generally and in adolescence in particular, in order to fill a gap in the social psychological literature. This meant paying particular attention to the political, social and cultural context which for the past thirty years at least, has radically transformed the subjective experience of this social category. As such, popular belief would have it that societies have become ‘classless’. With increasing political emphasis placed individual agency the structural persistence of social class in important fields of opportunity such as education is more or less denied. Despite this the most recent evidence in Ireland shows social class remains a significant structural force in adolescents educational achievements and subsequent employment opportunities (McCoy et al., 2014). Empirical investigation in the sociology of education has mapped out the consequences of economic, social and cultural capital advantages and disadvantages adolescents from different class backgrounds negotiate and manage. Here the less well understood psychological processes which shape and constrain adolescent’s trajectories and understandings of themselves in education have been explored in three phases.

The first phase

The first phase, a cross discipline theoretical review ties together theory from social psychologies social identity approach and a relatively recent sociological cultural class
paradigm. This cultural turn in British sociology was developed in response to an impasse in class theory brought about by the individualised political context. Its proponents argue for a broadened theory of class to include not just economic factors such as employment relations but also social and cultural practices and capital resources as routine determinants of inequality. Importantly they highlight how cultural resources and practices intertwine with economic factors and give rise to today’s individualised implicit classed identities (Le Roux et al., 2008). For them the class structure under neo-liberal capitalism has not gone away but moved from obvert, collective and conflictual to obscured, individualised and hierarchical.

The social identity approach is uniquely positioned to draw on this account because of its recognition that large-scale abstract social categories or social identities are irreducibly cultural (Reicher, 2004). The approach also pays attention to both the political context underpinning the salience of identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a) and the structural contexts that determine who belongs and who is excluded from particular categories (Turner et al., 1987). These contextual conditions give rise to perceptions of the permeability of group boundaries, stability of status relations and legitimacy of inequalities. Such social conditions and dynamics facilitate the strategies people use to cope with or resist and challenge their position. Resistance and challenge happen when boundaries are considered impermeable, inequality illegitimate and status relations unstable. Importantly contextual conditions and category definitions are variable and flexible (Reicher, 2004). We have a variety of social identities and when we self-categorise in terms of a particular meaningful identity, when that identity is salient, we act in terms of the norms, beliefs and values of that membership (Turner et al., 1987). Category salience reflects social reality in that we self-categorise in accordance with how we perceive situations and contexts to be structurally organised.
The dominant and prevalent political contextual conditions are meritocratic and individualised. These ideologies organise the backdrop to our lives and naturalise status relations as secure, inequality as legitimate and construct class group boundaries as permeable. This construction makes class based inequality appear natural, elusive and difficult to challenge. Under this construction responsibility is placed squarely on the shoulders of individuals’ encouraging the maintenance of an advantaged position or improvement of a disadvantaged position through hard work and determination, an individual mobility strategy. As a consequence people recognise the persistence of the class structure but paradoxically reject the constraints of their background, do not see class as important in their own lives and collective social class categories have lost their salience (Savage et al., 2001).

In fact dis-identification and psychological distancing from class categories by claiming ‘ordinariness’ has become relatively normative (Savage et al., 2001). At the same time reference group forces systematically distort people’s perception of their own social position prompting those with very different tangible resources to position themselves around the middle of the social strata (Evans & Kelley, 2004). However claiming ordinariness is taking a classed position, somewhere between the extraordinarily rich and extraordinarily poor while wishing to transcend class identity (Billig, 1991). Ordinariness suggests something about tastes, values and beliefs as conventional and apolitical and needs to be considered by researchers as a self-categorisation strategy. This is based on the three pillars of the social identity approach, (dis)-identification, social comparison and distinction from extraordinarily positioned outgroups.

Despite the banality of meritocratic ideology and lack of class identities the economic, social and cultural capital resources that individuals’ can draw on for their advancement in
different fields of opportunity remain unevenly distributed (Reay, 2006; Savage, 2003). Moreover these resources amount to power so that the better off individuals are the greater their access to influence, wealth and opportunity (Jovchelovitch, 1996). While individual choice, freedom and self-interest are promoted under neo-liberal capitalism it is mundane everyday choices that reproduce inequality (Bottero, 2004). For instance, parents are ideologically encouraged to make choices in the field of education and it is normative and routine for middle classed parents to make choices to advantage their children (Lynch & Moran, 2006). They may live near or access the best schools, advocate on behalf of their children to teachers, pay for extra lessons, drive their children to extra curricular activities plus they can equip them with the cultural capital that’s valued in the classroom. Middle classed parents who desire not to capitalise on their advantage and break from these norms by deliberately choosing low status inner city schools suffer from anxiety, ambivalence and often micro-manage their ‘bright’ child’s trajectory through school (Reay, 2008). This anxiety stems from the construction of middle classed norms, standards and practices as morally valuable, seen as respectable, right-minded and responsible.

The stretchy, fuzzy nature of class categories perhaps creates a reluctance to self-categorise in terms of class due to uncertainty as people are often more sure of ‘who they are not’. At the same time markers of class such as accent, dress and interests are routinely used to position others and identify ‘people like us’ (Reay, 1998). Importantly these markers structure contexts to allow or inhibit belonging to classed groups (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Sociological work with working and middle classed adolescents has shown higher education contexts in particular are perceived by working classed adolescents as systematically structured according to class (Ball et al., 2002). The choices adolescents make about their future are shaped by their access to resources which intertwine with their identity considerations – whether and where they will belong (Ball et al., 2002; Iyer et al., 2009;
Jetten et al., 2008). As such a strong link exists between class backgrounds and going to college as well as the status of institution class groups choose to go to college (McCoy et al., 2014).

If disadvantaged youth perceive class boundaries as impermeable a social identity approach predicts, rather than individual mobility through education, they may take up a social creativity strategy. In order to create positively distinct identities this strategy involves adopting alternative valued identity dimensions to the norm, dress, accent and aspiring in education. This strategy may validate them among their peers but in the wider arena can set disaffected youth up as morally inferior, dangerous and oppositional (Archer et al., 2007; Hourigan, 2011). Alternatively collective challenge is a group strategy that is adopted if group boundaries are perceived as impermeable and status relations as insecure and inequality illegitimate (Reynolds et al., 2000). However the individualisation and naturalisation of the class system means that individuals’ are seen as responsible and deserving of their poor conditions (Lucey & Reay, 2002a). As a result collective challenge to the status quo may not be recognised as classed action but instead framed as mindless criminality (Reicher & Stott, 2011).

The injustice and stigma attached to negatively valued identities has a direct negative effect on psychological well being (Branscombe et al., 1999). But shared identity can reduce the sense of powerlessness and insecurity (Leach et al., 2010) and provide the psychological resources for coping with systems of inequality (S. A. Haslam & Reicher, 2006). Unlike other stigmatised identities, collective class identities can not be drawn on as a positive resource (Skeggs, 2010) buffering the negative effects of classed discrimination and stigma. Put differently Twenge and Campbell (2002) suggest that relative poverty may be internalised as a stigma in a way that race is not (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). As a result it is difficult for
parents to socialise their children to understand classed discrimination and prejudice without the language to talk about class. As a result severely disadvantaged individuals and communities are stigmatised by poverty and poverty related crime and yet it is hard to collectively challenge and reconstruct stigmatised identities and negative representations (Howarth, 2002a; Stevenson et al., 2014). Additionally, unfair stereotypes have become localised by this individualising agenda. This has consequently silenced the poor and the privileged rarely recognise their advantage.

Privilege is rarely questioned or even noticed by those who are in privileged and powerful positions. Reminiscent of the concept of mindless majorities (Simon & Hamilton, 1994) with half blindness the privileged feel ‘normal’ or ‘ordinary’ not powerful (McIntosh, 2012; Pratto & Stewart, 2012). The value and power of all things middle class resonates strongly with ideas from within the social identity tradition on the creation and maintenance of national identities. Billig’s (1995) concept of banal nationalism claims that within nation states, national symbols and markers form the backdrop of everyday life and the ubiquity of national markers imbues everyday life with omnipresent reminders of the nation and our place within it. His study of white British family’s attitudes towards the Royal family shows the monarchy are a symbol constructed as reflecting (a white) national identity. In managing their exclusion from the national community, an imagined black or Chinese bride for the heir to the throne, they reveal their own and the Royal families racism, without mentioning the ideology of whiteness (Billig, 2004). Similarly in the case of class, middle class values and tastes can be seen as ideological, hinged as they are on conceptualisations of worthiness, these evaluations are used to position others within or outside the relevant group (Joyce et al., 2012). Akin to the concept of a legitimising myth (Sidanius, Pratto, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004), this is one key way in which classed practice is borne out in terms of classed notions of moral worth.
The social identity approach points to the importance of both the political ideological context and the structural context in shaping category salience and meaning. These contextual conditions create structural barriers but also the possibilities of agency and action. It explains the psychological processes shaped by the cultural content of the identities that give individuals a sense of who they are and how they relate to others. Subjective social class categories however are messy and difficult to conceptualise, measure and prime this does not justify ignoring them. Drawing together social identity theorising and sociological theorising about class as culture provides useful insights to enable the study of class. Crucially the political context has made the notion of class controversial; this protects privilege and renders the injuries of class unnoticed. Recommendations for future research made at the first phase were to explore class in the educational context using cross sectional comparative research and innovative qualitative methods. The analysis further suggests abandoning the use of class self-categorisations and the need for identification with specific class groups while insisting that objective class matters.

The second phase

Although it was argued in the first phase that the social identity approach is uniquely positioned to study social class, the lack of explicit class identifications is a problem. Social identity theorists are insistent that knowledge of a group membership evidenced through self-categorisation and identification is vital to experience that membership (Reicher et al., 2010). Similarly, one of the reasons proposed for abandoning class in the analysis of inequality is that people do not self categorise and identify with class groups (Pakulski & Waters, 1996).

Drawing on cultural class theory it is argued here however that peoples self definitions are classed. There is evident discomfort with and a desire for distance from the unfairness of the class system, but research shows people recognise markers of class and do
class by understanding ‘who they are not’ and talking in terms of ‘people like us’ (Reay, 1998). Evaluative classed group stereotypes, values and norms are drawn upon for social comparison and distinction purposes. Two studies were presented which analyse adolescent’s self-categorisations and identifications with class.

In the first qualitative study focus group data was collected from a cross section of adolescents \((N=32)\) in schools at opposite ends of the status spectrum in Limerick city. Three themes where identified using a deductive theory driven thematic discourse analysis. Classed group processes were evident in the data despite the lack of class category labels. The participants drew on available classed discourse and defined themselves or were defined by others according to the class norms, values and stereotypes attached to the community in which they live and go to school. The middle classed participants were sure of who they were not and defined themselves as positively distinct from the available comparison group working classed students. In the education context their shared aspirations and hard work were what meaningfully united them. Participants in the mixed classed school felt the stigma of their schools designated disadvantaged status and felt they would be disadvantaged in the labour market no matter how hard they worked. The working classed participants now in second chance education felt that in school they had been negatively categorised and defined by others, they felt looked down on, perceived as trouble makers and treated differently from their middle classed class mates.

The second study was quantitative with data collected from a convenience sample of adolescents \((N=190)\) through a brief survey comparing class self-categorisation and strength of identification with gender and national group. Only after discussion with their peers in groups were the participants able to socially produce and confidently apply a class label to them selves and although the strength of this identification was weaker than gender or
national group it was not non-existent. This suggested that there was a level of buy-in and meaning in the university context where data were collected and class was salient. However the participants struggle to label them selves suggests quantitative assessment like this is inappropriate and potentially untrustworthy.

Self-categorisation theory points to the variability and flexibility of self-definitions and how the structure of contexts determines category salience and meaning (Reicher, 2004). Sociologists argue that class has become individualised, implicit and hierarchical (Bottero, 2004). From a social psychological perspective our participants were doing collective, there were shared understandings, inter-group stereotypes and an element of group threat. It was argued that the collective has become implicit, taken for granted and hidden in ideology. To capture these processes a micro-level analysis of divisive and evaluative discourses and spatial and cultural practices is needed. Furthermore these participant’s student identities were classed and therefore the argument that you do not necessarily need to be able to name a social category in order for it to be meaningful and self defining, was put forward.

The third phase

This study set out to test cultural psychologist’s suggestion that the experiences and resources available in middle and working classed contexts give rise to different cultural orientations as aspects of classed identity content. Additionally they argue the middle classes are psychologically advantaged by an independent model of agency because this mode of operating fits with the expectations of the neo-liberal individualising agenda (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012). Believing oneself to be separate from context and independent from social constraints allows goals to be prioritised and leads to a sense of control, autonomy and entitlement. In contrast the experiences and resources common in working
classed contexts support an interdependent model of agency where reliance on others means paying attention to others emotions, the social context and adjusting goals to these.

Two studies were presented. The first drew further on the focus group data ($N=32$) collected at phase two, inductive thematic analysis was employed and four themes identified. Although individualisation and notions of meritocracy were apparent in all of the participants understandings this was stronger in the middle classed participant’s discussions. Most of them felt individual merit, hard work and determination would lead to higher education and opportunity regardless of background. The working classed participants saw higher education and university in particular as a context structured by class. They recognised the need for financial and cultural resources which led them to feel both a physical and psychological distance and incompatibility between them selves and the university context.

The data also supported the suggested different models of agency between the groups. An independent model of agency was evident through choice, control, autonomy and freedom presented as important in the future for the middle classed participants. This meant they saw no alternative to the academic pathway and higher education to achieve their goals. The working classed participants seemed to be more focused on the context, socially constrained and staying close to home, suggesting they were operating through an interdependent model of agency. The second study aimed to further test this interdependent model of agency as an aspect of working classed identity content.

A secondary analysis of quantitative data was conducted. The data were collected through a survey in five primary and two secondary schools ($N=199$) designated as disadvantaged and located in four areas of Limerick city targeted for social and economic regeneration. A group level mediation model was tested using community identity as a proxy for working classed identity. Results confirmed our hypothesis that community identity has a
positive association with school integration and this was fully mediated by interdependence with neighbours and friends. It was proposed that community identity and interdependence are a positive resource enhancing working classed pupil’s integration at both primary and secondary school. This is important because this disadvantaged group are at particular risk of early school leaving (Byrne & Smyth, 2010). Our qualitative data however suggest that this interdependent orientation possibly heightens the sense of identity incompatibility and lack of belonging with higher education because of the focus on contextual factors and social constraint.

5.2. Theoretical implications

A key issue pointed out by cultural theorists is that although structurally class is highly significant culturally class does not appear to be a significant social identity (Bottero, 2004). Ireland, like Britain (Savage, 2003) is not a class conscious society. This thesis argues the social identity approach offers the principles and mechanisms to understand this paradox. The disentanglement of class position and class identity can be understood as a growing divide between structural conditions on the one hand and ideological conditions on the other. The dominant meritocratic and individualised ideological conditions are subtle and banal, they form backdrop to everyday life and are not necessarily readily available for critique. So while class matters in terms of education, these conditions encourage individuals’ to dis-identify and psychologically distance themselves from explicit collective class categories.

Cultural class theorists suggest however that this absence of class identities does not mean an absence of class processes. Dis-identifications are the end product of class processes because they involve relational social comparisons and distinctions from various classed
groups. Bourdieu (1984) highlighted the relational character of class cultures. So for instance although middle class identity may be denied as important, middle classed respectability has long been a discourse to distinguish between the middle and working classes (Dowling, 2009). Respectability is defined, in part, by not being working class. This negative evaluation in turn adds to the stigmatisation of working class culture and as a result individuals dis-identify from being working class (Reay, 1998; Skeggs, 1997). In sum this absence of class identities is evidence of class, albeit in a transformed way (Devine & Savage, 1999). Rather than collective class categories, in their practices and tastes people do class through individualised hierarchical modes of cultural distinction (Bottero, 2004). But these theorists suggest that rather than a major source of identity, identification with class appears to be contextual (Savage et al., 2001). In other words in specific contexts and situations individuals’ social identities are classed.

The social identity approach highlights how the psychological intersects with the social, that perceptions of how contexts are socially structured determine category salience. From this perspective category salience is always contextual. The starting point of the approach is that to understand individuals’ thoughts, actions and beliefs we need to know how they categorise and define themselves in relation to others (Jetten, Haslam, Haslam, Dingle, & Jones, 2014). This thesis has drawn these two literatures together and shown despite the ideological denial of class, and although not necessarily dominant, at times class is salient and meaningful in the educational context. Self-categorisation theory states category salience is determined by the ‘fit’ and ‘availability’ of relevant categories and how the context is structured in ‘reality’. The status relationship between classed students creates the definitions and understandings of who they are, where they stand and what qualities define them. These definitions are either willingly taken up (in the case of the middle classed students) or imposed upon them (in the case of working classed students).
Skeggs (2010) asserts that being classed, classified and evaluated by others, is not akin to taking up an identity. Here she is referring to working class identity offering nothing positive to those who would be sociologically classified as working class. Furthermore the social identity approach states clearly that knowledge of a group membership, value and emotional significance are vital components in identity processes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979a). In other words group memberships have to be consciously taken up to be psychologically meaningful, part of the self-concept and self-defining. The results of the studies at phase two dispute this insistence of explicit knowledge and naming of an identity. The adolescent participants in the quantitative study did demonstrate how difficult naming a class identity is in a society which is not class conscious. Explicitly self categorising in terms of class appeared to be something they just do not think about and the categories they came up with were socially produced among the groups of four or five friends, while in comparison gender and national identity were, unsurprisingly, easy to name. This social production brings into question the reliability of quantifying subjective class identity in this way. The qualitative study however found that despite this lack of language around class in the school context the participants’ self-definitions were, at times, classed. Both working and middle classed participants’ expressed classed evaluative language ‘posh, snobs, from a rough area’ in their constructions and definitions of others identities. They understood quite clearly ‘who they were not’ and drew on these definitions to express their positive distinctiveness from the ‘other’.

However these shared self-definitions were tied to geography, to the values, norms and stereotypes that are associated with the areas in which they live and go to school. Area was used as a cultural marker of class which has moral connotations. This area based classed identity positioned participants as occupying distinct classed locations socially and physically. This positioning builds a false dichotomy through definitions of deserving, so that
respectable equates to deserving while rough suggests undeserving (Dowling, 2009). Importantly this positioning was enhancing and positive for the participants in the middle classed school but threatening and stigmatising for both middle and working classed participants in the mixed classed school. However the working classed participants now in second chance education felt that they had carried the stigma while in school. Through ‘socially sanctioned value judgements’ (Tajfel, 1969) working classed students were constructed as uninterested in education, disruptive and unwilling while middle classed students are expected to be bright, hard working and determined.

Revealing structural processes, classed social categorisation and positioning at play in adolescent’s constructions of their own and others student identities begs the question how about agency? The third phase demonstrated how agency is realised and expressed by differently resourced and positioned students. This is important because it gives us insights into the aspects of the content or subjective meaning of middle and working classed identities. A social identity perspective has been criticised for not being able to state what the content or meaning of identities are. Huddy (2001) argues that it is not the existence of a social identity that is important for political participation and mobilisation but the meaning of a social identity. She suggests that a social identity approach offers so much promise in terms of its usefulness for political psychologist to understand and investigate social group’s political participation but falls short because it ignores the content of identities. Furthermore the ideologies and discourses of neo-liberalism and meritocracy expect subjects to be freely choosing, unconstrained and autonomous independent agents (Gillies, 2005; Gill, 2008; Hollingworth & Williams, 2009). These individualising discourses were present in the data but particularly prevalent for the middle classed participants. Additionally analysis tested and supported the theory put forward by cultural psychologists that these expectations align with the content and meaning of middle classed identity. This work highlights how access to
material, social and cultural resources and experiences mutually constitute the models of agency that become normative and appropriate in different classed contexts. This leads to psychological advantage for the middle classes because feelings of separation, freedom and control underpin a sense of entitlement, deserving and power (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012).

In terms of theory development agency tends to conceptualised in psychology as a model of separation, independence and individualisation, as in self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006). Social psychology generally must recognise that theorising and understanding agency in this way is oppressive because it makes default assumptions about people’s ability to act and think independently. Further, the social identity approach should be enhanced by incorporating these findings on agency and the dominant influence of ideologies of individualism. Both social identity theory and self categorisation theory point to the contextual determination of category salience. In other words it is the situation and not the actors who determine category salience, the approach claims we do not have a choice over the social identity through which we self categorise. Certainly the difference is between ascribed and acquired identities (Huddy, 2001). Ascribed identities are those that we are born with and have absolutely no choice over, while acquired identities are those which we adopt through choice. It could be argued that social class is an identity that is in both camps, it is both ascribed and acquired (W. R. Williams, 2009). It is ascribed in the sense that it makes a difference in terms of outcomes and matters, but acquired in the sense that people dis-identify and distance from class categories. However for the working classes, an interdependent model of agency may make the perception of class category salience ascribed and not a matter of choice because of the relational nature of this model of agency. Experimental studies on choice are showing that this interdependent nature of action and relational pull is stronger for working classed participants than middle classed (Kraus et al., 2009; Stephens et
The data here also support this notion particularly in the sense that our working classed participants had a definition of who they were imposed on them and they had no choice over it. The middle classed participants here had more access to choice and more independence from social constraints than our working classed participants. They may also have more choice over when they see and define themselves in terms of class than working classed participants because of the banality of all things middle classed.

Other advances made here are contextual and methodological. First, all of the research conducted by cultural psychologists so far has been carried out in America which is arguably one of the most explicitly individualised contexts on the planet. Although neo-liberal ideology and discourse are also prevalent and ‘common sense’ in the Irish context (Lynch, 2006) this was the first piece of research (that I know of) exploring these ideas in a context outside the USA. Second, all of the said research has been conducted with adult samples on the street (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2012; Stephens et al., 2007) or with third level students (Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Kraus et al., 2009, 2011; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, et al., 2012). The research conducted here was with adolescents in the second level and primary school context. Finally this prior research has used level of education as an objective indicator of class. Those with a four year college degree are categorised as middle class with those without are working class. They then have used an experimental design which makes causal explanations of effects straightforward. This is the first piece of research (again to my knowledge) that has used a mixed method qualitative and correlational design and assessed how participants define, understand and position themselves.

For these reasons, the Irish context, adolescents and methods used, the research here was necessarily exploratory. Additionally the claims made at the third phase are tentative and more research is needed to fully support the notion of different models of agency, particularly
the notion of interdependence as an aspect of working classed identity content. That said, taken together the findings at phase three offer important, if tentative, insights into aspects of middle and working classed identity content. A particular concern is the normative cultural orientation experienced by second level and primary school students from disadvantaged working classed communities. Given that community was used by participants as a cultural marker of class at phase two, this justified the use of community identity as a proxy for classed identity in the correlation study at phase three. The finding that community identity has a positive relationship with school integration and this relationship is fully mediated by interdependence with neighbours and friends is an important one. It suggests that having a positive community identity and knowing that friends and neighbours are supportive and reliable impacts these working classed adolescents integration at school. The importance of a sense of integration at school can not be overestimated as it effects youngsters’ well-being, academic achievement and school completion (Ma, 2003).

These results point to the positive benefits of an interdependent model of agency at the primary and secondary level school for working classed students. However analysis of the qualitative data demonstrated that working classed students are aware of the structural barriers they face when contemplating higher education, particularly university. An interdependent model of agency leads to a focus on contextual factors, social dynamics and constraints and may well heighten the sense of identity incompatibility with higher education contexts for working classed students. Previous research has pointed to the advantages of having a sense of identity compatibility before entering higher education and for adjustment once there (Jetten et al., 2008). Furthermore social class is strongly related to a sense of belonging in higher education. A sense of belonging has been shown to increase students social and academic adjustment, academic performance and reduce student drop out rates (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Therefore an understanding and appreciation of the cultural content
of working classed identity at an institutional level is not only a practical imperative it is a moral one, argued on the basis that equality of opportunity is a fundamental human right.

5.3. Practical applications

In their opening article of the Journal of Social Issues Ostrove and Cole, (2003) called upon psychologists to develop a critical psychology of social class in order to fill an obvious gap in the literature. They suggested the education context is an ideal setting to explore the dynamics and contradictions of social class because every day that context is where class is noticed, created, maintained and at times its psychological meaning challenged. Using a social identity approach the research here provides evidence of these processes. For Ostrove and Cole (2003) the study of class needs to move beyond an investigation of essential differences and invidious comparisons (Cole & Stewart, 2001) or a descriptor or control variable (Frable, 1997) to the exploration of class as a social identity. The studies here demonstrate a critical psychology of social class must be anti-essentialist and needs to focus specific attention on student’s understandings of themselves as occupying classed locations. Crucially those understandings shape emotions, behaviour, confidence, expectations, and sense of belonging and future possibilities.

The Irish education context is certainly structured by class as the most recent comprehensive study funded by the Economic, Social Research Institute demonstrates (McCoy et al., 2014). This longitudinal study tracked 900 students in 12 case study schools across the six years of their second level schooling and three and four years after leaving. They collected a broad variety of survey data and conducted in-depth post leaving interviews with 27 participants. The analysis clearly indicates the persistence of class inequalities in
aspirations, achievements, choices and expectations. The report also highlights the strong link between education and employment opportunities at a time when youth unemployment is such a pressing issue. Additionally, post leaving regrets and compromises are more common among working classed students, employers discriminate according to class and inequalities are nested in differences in sources of advice about their future. Working classed students are far more likely to rely on school guidance counsellors for advice about higher education as unlike their middle classed peers working classed parents lack the ‘insider’ knowledge necessary. This is worrying as since the data were collected funding for school guidance counsellors has been dramatically reduced. Moreover, working classed schools are disproportionately affected because parental contributions are not available to make up the short fall (J. Humphreys, 2014).

This thesis has highlighted how social class is ideologically hidden while paradoxically being structurally recognised by adolescents in the education context. The elusiveness, naturalisation and denial of social class however mean that classed positioning, expectations and (unfair negative and positive) representations are very difficult to challenge or reject. The stereotype threat literature highlights how malleable motivation, learning and performance are under the influence of social interaction (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Croizet & Claire, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Peer interaction, parent’s attitudes and teacher’s expectations for instance all reinforce social norms which insinuate that middle classed students are bright while working classed students are poor students. These expectations can both hinder and facilitate students’ performance and strengthen their own and societies stereotypes of them leading to self-fulfilling prophesises. Negative stereotypes associated with social identities lead to underperformance due to the anxiety caused by the risk of confirming negative stereotypes. This stereotype threat effect has been found under test conditions, in African American students (Steele & Aronson, 1995) working classed
students (Croizet & Claire, 1998) and women’s maths performance (Aronson et al., 1998). Conversely the opposite can happen when positive stereotypes associated with an identity are activated, leading to a stereotype boost effect (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999).

Over time stereotypes and representations become internalised and anxiety provoking and can lead students to dis-identify with academic achievement in order to protect themselves or potentially over identify with achievement to fulfil their own and others expectations of them. McCoy and colleagues (2014) research demonstrates for the first time in the Irish education system that school culture and expectations radically shape the routes that school leavers take. It is important to note those high expectations and the taken for granted status of higher education in high status schools undoubtedly advantages the students in the long run. But also puts them under extreme pressure. On the one hand they must be independent agents, self-regulating and in control while on the other they must mask anxiety around failure (Lucey & Reay, 2000). The middle classed participants in my focus groups felt all they did was study, study and more study and most were also taking extra lessons outside school. The competitive nature of the exam system and constantly moving goal posts in the point’s race for scarce higher education places has led to increased use of private tuition among more advantaged students (Smyth, 2009). Smyth’s work shows though that this has not led to greater advantages in terms of exam success. The students who predominantly take up private tuition are those who have the highest grades already, put in the longest hours study and aspire to higher education.

The working classed participants in the research presented here felt ‘looked down on’ and knew this was enduring across generations, they were seen as trouble makers, as unwilling and incapable – as one participants expressed ‘they think we can’t learn’. And the school they had attended is represented in images of expelled waste – ‘a shithole’. Alongside
these representations which had made their experience of school difficult these young people are battling with stigmatising representations of where they live. Representations of the people and place have been reinforced nationally by negative media attention relying on ‘cognitive triggers’ and sensationalist language ‘troubled estate’ to convey images of crime and gangs (Deveraux et al., 2011). These adolescents like the urban poor generally are managing prevailing constructions of them which imply deviance, deficit and failure (Lucey & Reay, 2000). The ideological individualisation of class means also that the differences in resources and experiences that are available to working classed and middle classed adolescence are very much ignored in people’s explanations and understandings of unequal outcomes. Inequalities in education are perceived to be the result of bad attitudes and parents not caring and worse these negative judgments can become internalised and shaming. These judgements can also be contested and resisted.

We need to be mindful that schools play a crucial role in young peoples’ development of identities, no other public institution is as important (Reay, 2010). Schools are not simply purveyors of academic knowledge surely they have a responsibility to help the young understand injustices as structural. More emphasis could be placed on social studies and discussion of class, gender and diversity issues. Howarth’s (2002a) research with an ethnic mix of adolescents from stigmatised Brixton, London is enlightening in this regard. This work points to the crucial role of psychological supports and encouragement from both home and school for young people to construct positive identities. She shows how one school in particular encouraged students to reflect, challenge and reject stigmatising negative representations of black heritage. The participants from this school were much better equipped to feel not only positive but proud of their community and history while participants from other schools struggled and psychologically distanced themselves from Brixton.
Another recent study investigating a difference-education intervention with incoming students in higher education shows promising results in terms of adjustment but also improved achievement and retention for working classed students (Stephens et al., 2014). The intervention was implemented at orientation and contrasted with a control condition. Incoming students were exposed to the real life stories of senior students from different class backgrounds. In the intervention the stories emphasised how diversity had shaped the college experience both as a strength and weakness while in the control background was not highlighted. The intervention improved well-being and adjustment for all students, eliminated the class achievement gap and encouraged working classed students to seek out more supports and resources than they normally would.

Finally, as the thesis has paid so much attention to individualising ideology in society it needs now to look to the discipline of social psychology and note that many of the theoretical positions adopted to understand social processes are applied in a way that gives primacy to individual characteristics (Brown, 2000; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Pratto et al., 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979b). This ubiquitous pre-eminence of individualism not only pervades society it also pervades social psychology and gets in the way of studying social class. Although a theory of intergroup and collective processes the social identity approach has also been criticised for its orientation towards the individual. For instance, it focuses on individual cognition in self-categorisations processes while down playing the role others play in imposing category definitions and representations (Howarth, 2002a). Additionally the approach suggests that the motivation to seek positive social identities is individually driven, this is seen as reductionist to satisfy an internal need rather than responding to external structural factors (Breakwell, 1996). From a Marxist perspective the approach is overly idealistic and does not pay enough attention to the material conditions and unequal power in intergroup relations (Foster, 1999). Foster (1999) argues that social psychology contributes to
an ideology of oppression through five interrelated themes; biologism, naturalism, psychopathology, individualism and positivism. The oppression includes classism, through these themes socially and historically constructed processes are presented as fixed and inevitable (Lott, 2002). Indeed it is only by studying collective cultural assumptions and representations of social categories such as class, that we can highlight the social and political processes at work and make this important issue available for study (Cole & Stewart, 2001).

5.4. Methodological Limitations

The limitations in the research of are now considered. The elusive and banal nature of class categories and invisibility of class inequality demanded the use of qualitative methods. This method facilitates getting at participants subjective experience and meanings of class in a context where class matters. Savage (2003) recommends researchers literally apply forensic investigation techniques to qualitative data to expose the normality of class inequality and experience of classed positioning. Furthermore Billig argues (1991) the ‘common sense’ that individuals think through to understand and talk about the world is a form of ideology. However qualitative research is necessarily interpretative both on the part of participants and researcher which means it is open to questions of validity, reliability and criticisms of researcher bias. That said, some qualitative researchers suggest that qualitative research should be judged by different criteria to that of quantitative research because it does not presume a realist ‘one truth’ epistemology (Bryman, 2012).

The trustworthiness of the research process and findings is based on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability criteria, these are addressed in turn. Credibility has parallels with internal validity and is achieved through the rigour and
systematic nature of the research process and cannons of good practice. To ensure credibility Braun and Clarke’s (2006) accessible and thorough step by step guide to conducting thematic analysis was used here. A deductive analysis driven by social identity theorising was conducted at phase two to understand how adolescents self-categorise and define themselves and others in relation to class. Data items (words, phrases and sentences) were (colour) coded, next relevant patterns of meaning were identified across the entire data corpus before final themes where pinned down and named. Analysis of the same data at the third phase in contrast was much more inductive. There were striking and important distinctions between middle and working classed student’s sense of agency and choice that deserved further investigation so the data were coded and patterns identified before theory was applied and themes developed.

Credibility can also be strengthened through triangulation. Survey based correlation studies were used here in both empirical phases for triangulation. The limitation of correlation studies is causal inferences can not be made. Furthermore there were relatively strong correlations between variables at the third phase suggesting potential overlap. However the use of mixed methods mean the strengths and weaknesses of both methods were arguably counter balanced and give a broader more complete picture than each method on its own. For instance, it was a deliberate decision not to provide participants with a list of class categories to choose from in the brief survey at phase two. Observations led to the conclusion that asking an adolescent sample directly to self-categorise in terms of class is inappropriate and potentially untrustworthy. Social class was not a category label participants were used to applying to themselves but in conversation this banal category became ‘hot’ and was expressed quickly through available and shared discourse.
This finding suggests dominant methods in psychology research such as priming this real-world messy, elusive category in a lab for experimental studies may be very difficult, untrustworthy and perhaps nonsensical. On the other hand correlation studies measuring subjective class, although quite rare, have yielded successful results. Ostrove and Long’s (2007) assessment of college belonging is a good example of research were a subjective social class variable is investigated alongside measures of objective social class. They used six subjective categories; poor, working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class and upper class and objective class included family income, parent’s level of education and parent’s occupation. Both measures were related and had implications for college experience but correlations and path coefficients were stronger for subjective social class.

Transferability has parallels with external validity and the possibilities of generalisation. To tackle this issue a rich account of the data were provided giving depth rather than breadth in the accounts which allows other researchers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings. Furthermore the context of the focus groups, urban schools and samples of adolescents are not unique these particular schools, Limerick or indeed to the Irish context. They did not make up ideological common sense, these notions are widely shared and a product of politics, culture and history (Billig, 1991). The stereotypes and representations they expressed are widely shared ‘socially sanctioned value judgements’ (Tajfel, 1969). However the findings are limited in that they may not be apply to rural samples where spatial segregation by class is far less apparent or outside the Western world.

Dependability equates to reliability in quantitative research. The recommendation is to make each step of the research process available for peer scrutiny via auditing. This has not become common practice among qualitative researchers for practical reasons. That said the steps and decisions made in this research were always a joint effort. The samples were
theoretically chosen and focus group schedule double checked, themes and extracts to be included or excluded were reviewed by the principal author and supervisor separately. Finally *confirmability* is related to objectivity. Complete objectivity is impossible in social research, in fact this research subjectivity and partial but reflexivity has been strived for here and the findings are grounded in the data. A thorough literature review of empirical studies has been drawn on to support the claims made and there is reflexive awareness that both the focus groups and the surveys used at phase two were a socially situated context with social forces and inherent power imbalances. Similarly, the focus group discussions were not naturally occurring conversations and the schedule was specifically designed to prime and illicit discussion about class issues, this is acknowledged as a limitation.

It must be acknowledged also that in focussing the research on social class in adolescence other important social identities related to inequality appear to be ignored. Issues around gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, religion undoubtedly intersect with class and have important identity implications in the classroom (Reay, 2010). However the samples were all white, similar age, and all able bodied with the only obvious variation being gender. As such, the samples lent themselves well to an in depth analysis of class without the additional complexities and contradictions of intersecting power relationships. Gender was touched on and did display interesting comparisons across and within the groups but was not explored enough to yield sufficient data to tell a convincing story here.

Another important issue to acknowledge is my tendency to homogenise class groups here, and to make generalised assumptions across middle and working classes. Perhaps this is more the case in the opening and concluding chapters which are drawing on theory and other scholar’s research than in the empirical chapters which are grounded in data. This homogenisation is perhaps a problem that is inevitable when talking and theorising in the
abstract and from a distance about groups of people as if I am not a member of either group. As Tajfel’s very important theory predicts, we tend to underestimate the differences within groups and exaggerate the differences between in the process of social categorisation (Tajfel, 1969). The problem with homogenisation is the potential to slip into making generalised assumptions that all working classed experiences are alike and all middle classed people are alike. At the same time there is the potential for structural determinism to occur which assumes that all working classed people have access to the same amount of resources and experiences and likewise with all middle classed people, and that this access determines their fate. This of course is nonsense. The class system is extremely fragmented and fine grained and people’s location within it can also vary across time and be vague and unclear. It has to be admitted that this homogenisation has been an issue that has made me uncomfortable across the entire research process. But research necessitates generalisations and probabilities and class makes people feel uncomfortable because it is evaluative and hierarchical therefore we avoid talking about it. But I feel that class matters and is an important issue to study therefore I hope in my attempts at reflectivity I have been respectful.

5.5. Future research

It would be a fruitful endeavour to explore adolescents' classed identities in a variety of contexts such as rural schools where the lives of more and less advantaged students will overlap to a greater extent than in the urban setting. Further, research exploring classed identities outside the education context perhaps in youth clubs and sports teams may provide some rich insights. Identity positioning, threat, enhancement, management, negotiation and stereotypes are likely to vary by context and power relations shift somewhat. Similarly, having acknowledged the absence of other important intersecting identities here future
research might take up this challenge again through focus group discussions and observations with adolescents in more diverse classrooms. How does class intersect with other more apparent identities and how does the imposition of socially shared meaning impact on the possibilities for resistance and opportunity.

Much more work is needed to first support the notion and then explore the consequences of different models of agency as normative cultural orientations for working and middle classed students. From a developmental perspective studies with younger children could shed light on when differences begin to appear and the meaning of such differences for children’s learning and opportunities. Schools do not operate in a vacuum. Institutional practices are shaped by state recommendations which are grounded in notions of self-regulating, self-supporting individualism (Reay, 2010). Research in the USA has shown how institutional assumptions based on these notions in higher education create a cultural mismatch and disorientation for working classed students (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, et al., 2012). This disorientation leads such students to feel overwhelmed by the choices they are expected to make and shy away from supports they are expected to seek out. This cultural mismatch may be happening much earlier in children’s schooling and be creating psychological barriers that we are yet unaware of.

5.6. Conclusion

Psychological research in education has been criticised for its tendency to focus on individual attitudes and dispositions while ignoring social categories as if the individual is ‘sealed off from the social’ (Reay, 2010). This thesis has shown that despite the political individualised climate social class is a collective structural force in the education context that
social psychologists need to be aware of and pay attention to. Social categorisation has psychological consequences, pressurising, influencing and constraining adolescents constructions of their student identities and others understandings and expectations of them. To deny or ignore cultural difference such as distinct models of agency found here is to render the injustices and injuries of classed positioning invisible, this localises issues and thus protects privilege and the status quo.
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Appendices
Appendix 1.

**Focus Group Schedule: Second level pupils; groups of 4-6; semi-structured**

**Class is very nebulous/banal and therefore not visible as an SI category**

This is a nice school – do you think this is thought of as a ‘good’ school in Limerick?

Why?

What kinds of pupils go to this school?

What about other schools, do you think it matters for a kid’s future which school they go to in Limerick?

Does the reputation of the school matter?

What about pupils who live in dis/advantaged areas – do they have the same opportunities as you do?

Do you think all the pupils of your age in Limerick have the same chances to do well in school - get good qualifications?

What are the schools in disadvantaged areas like?

What are the schools in advantaged areas like?

**Social class is implicit yet students operate in classed ways**

**Why go to school – why continue learning?**

Are you thinking of going to college (third level)?

Why?

Which college?

Why that one?

Do you think others in that college will be like you?

What kind of student goes to Trinity in Dublin?

What kind of student goes to UL/UCC?

How about LIT or other IT colleges?

How about Limerick senior college or post leaving cert colleges?

Would you consider not going to college?

Why?

Would you consider doing anything like a FAS training scheme?

Apprenticeship?

Go on the dole when you leave?

Why?

Do you know that some students do grinds for your junior cert/leaving cert?
Do you know there are schemes for extra tuition for less well off pupils?

Do you know there are access programmes to help disadvantaged students who do not get the points to get into high point courses?
Is that a fair system do you think?
Why?

Is there evidence these kids are operating in classed ways orient up/down contingent on class of origin

Is it important for you to do well in education?
Why?
Expectations
Parents teachers self friends
Why?
perspective?

Do they fear you not doing well?
Why?

What would happen if you did not do as well as you hope?
What would your prospects be?

Classed behaviour is gendered?
Are opportunities the same for boys and girls?
Are boys and girls under the same pressure?
Do you think boys and girls are treated the same by teachers?

Aspirations:
Have you though much about your future?
What would you like to do for a living?
What kind of life would you like to have?

Are there activities that you are not allowed to do?
Places you are not allowed to go?
Are there places in Limerick you would not feel comfortable going to?

Thank you so much.
Appendix 2.

**Group Membership and Identification**

The questionnaire is broken into three parts. Please write your answer to the first question and then respond to the statements by circling the number which best represents your response using the scale below:

Never 1  Seldom 2  Sometimes 3  Often 4  Very Often 5

1. Please state your gender ____________________________________

I am a person who considers my gender group important 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who feels strong ties with my gender group 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who sees myself as belonging to the gender group 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who tries to hide belonging to the gender group 1 2 3 4 5

2. Please state your nationality ____________________________________

I am a person who considers the national group important 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who feels strong ties with the national group 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who sees myself as belonging to the national group 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who tries to hide belonging to the national group 1 2 3 4 5

3. Please state your social class ____________________________________

I am a person who considers the class group important 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who feels strong ties with the class group 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who sees myself as belonging to the class group 1 2 3 4 5
I am a person who tries to hide belonging to the class group 1 2 3 4 5

Age ___________  Occupation____________________________________

Thank you
Appendix 3.

Revitalising Communities in Limerick

Health and Well-Being in Children and Young People

The questions we will be asking you today are all about you and the place you live (your neighbourhood). Please read each question carefully. Choose the box that best fits your answer and write a tick in it. If there is any questions you don't understand let us know.

This is not a test so there are no right or wrong answers. It is important that you answer all the questions and that we can see your marks clearly. You do not have to show your answers to anybody. Nobody who knows you will look at your answers once you have finished the questionnaire.

Thank you for your help!

My Neighbourhood

We would like you to think about the place where you live (your neighbourhood) when you are answering these questions.

1. What is the name of your neighbourhood?

2. The circles below show how much you feel you are a part of your neighbourhood. 'Self' or 'S' stands for yourself and 'Group' or 'G' stands for your neighbourhood. Some people feel that they are really not part of their neighbourhood, so their circles might be separate or overlap only a little. Other people feel like they are a big part of their neighbourhood. Their circles might overlap a lot.

Draw a box around the pair of circles which you think best show how much you are a part of your neighbourhood

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Now we'd like to know what you think about your neighbourhood. Write a tick in the box that best matches your answer.

3. I am glad to be from my neighbourhood
   □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

4. I'm often sorry that I am from my neighbourhood
   □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

5. I feel good about my neighbourhood
   □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

6. I feel like my neighbourhood is not important
   □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

7. Everyone is willing to help each other in my neighbourhood
   □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

8. We look out for each other in my neighbourhood
   □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

9. If I needed help I could go to anyone in my neighbourhood
   □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

10. I feel ok asking for help from my neighbours
    □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

11. Overall, my neighbourhood is considered good by others
    □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

12. Most people think my neighbourhood is not as good as other neighbourhoods
    □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

13. Other people respect my neighbourhood
    □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

14. Other people think my neighbourhood is worthless
    □ Strongly Disagree □ Disagree □ Agree □ Strongly Agree

Feeling Safe

We would like you to tell us how safe you feel on the way to school, in school, and in your neighbourhood. Write a tick in the box that best matches your answer.
15. I feel safe on my way to school in the mornings
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

16. I feel safe on the school grounds before school starts
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

17. I feel safe in my class at school
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

18. I feel safe in lunch at school
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

19. I feel safe in PE at school
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

20. I feel safe after school before I go home
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

21. I feel safe on my way home from school
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

22. I feel safe outside my house
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

23. I feel safe playing on my street
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

24. I feel safe walking around my neighbourhood
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Always

Physical Activities and Health

These next questions are about your health. Write a tick in the box that best matches your answer.

25. In general, how would you say your health is?
☐ Poor ☐ Fair ☐ Good ☐ Very Good ☐ Excellent

26. Have you felt fit and well?
☐ None of the time ☐ Little of the time ☐ Some of the time ☐ Most of the time ☐ All of the time
27. Have you been physically active (e.g. running, climbing, cycling)?
   □ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

28. Have you been able to run well?
   □ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

29. Have you felt full of energy?
   □ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

30. Has your life been enjoyable?
   □ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

31. Read the following sentences carefully and tick the box next to the sentence that best describes you. Please include whole drinks and not just a sip.
   □ I have never drank alcohol
   □ I have drank alcohol only once or twice
   □ I used to drink alcohol but I don't now
   □ I sometimes drink alcohol but not every week
   □ I drink alcohol regularly, once a week or more

32. Read the following sentences carefully. Tick the box next to the sentence that best describes you.
   □ I have never smoked cigarettes
   □ I have smoked cigarettes only once or twice
   □ I used to smoke cigarettes but I don't now
   □ I sometimes smoke cigarettes but not every week
   □ I smoke cigarettes regularly, once a week or more

33. Have you ever been offered any illegal drugs?
   □ Yes  □ No

34. Do any of your friends ever use illegal drugs?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ Don't Know

Feelings

We'd like to know how you have been feeling in the last week. Write a tick in the box that best matches your answer.
Thinking about the last week....

35. Have you been in a good mood?
   □ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

36. Have you had fun?
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37. Have you felt sad?
□ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

38. Have you felt so bad that you didn't want to do anything?
□ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

39. Have you felt lonely?
□ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

40. Have you been happy with the way you are?
□ None of the time  □ Little of the time  □ Some of the time  □ Most of the time  □ All of the time

Family and Free Time

These questions are all about your family and your friends. Write a tick in the box that best matches your answer.

41. Have you had enough time for yourself?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always

42. Have you been able to do the things you want to do in your free time?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always

43. Have your parents had enough time for you?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always

44. Have your parents treated you fairly?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always

45. Have you been able to talk to your parents when you wanted to?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always

46. Have you had enough money to do the same things as your friends?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always

47. Have you and your friends helped each other?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always

48. Have you been able to rely on your friends?
□ Never  □ Seldom  □ Quite Often  □ Very Often  □ Always
School and Learning

Now we would like to ask you some questions about school. Write a tick in the box that best matches your answer.

49. Have you been happy at school?
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

50. Have you got on well at school?
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

51. Have you been able to pay attention?
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

52. Have you got along well with your teachers?
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

When you answer these next questions, think about what happens when you are doing your schoolwork. Write a tick in the box that best matches your answer.

53. If someone bothers me when I am busy I ignore them
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

54. When the teacher is busy I talk to my friends
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

55. I think about other things while I work
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

56. It's hard to keep working while my friends are having fun
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always

57. It's hard to wait for something I want
   □ Never    □ Seldom    □ Quite Often    □ Very Often    □ Always