THE “ONGOING CULTURE SHOCK” OF UPWARD MOBILITY: CULTURAL CAPITAL, SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

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Social mobility is often viewed as a way to alleviate poverty and create equality; it represents the basis upon which the United States is viewed as a meritocratic nation of opportunity. Missing from this persistent narrative, however, is analysis of the actual experience of social mobility. This qualitative study explores the narratives of individuals as they reflect on their experiences of upward mobility through education. Data include in-depth interviews with 25 individuals with an advanced degree whose parents did not attend college, and 10 individuals who have an advanced degree similar to their parents. This study considers three dimensions of cultural capital – embodied cultural capital associated with how individuals present themselves, linguistic cultural capital associated with how individuals speak and communicate and cultural capital related to taste, beliefs and knowledge, associated with individual’s leisure time choices, food and drink preferences and beliefs about the world. Across data, mobile individuals express the expectation or need to take on the cultural practices and behavior of their new class context. Data suggest that the process through which upwardly mobile individuals experience shifts in culture is more complex than currently conceived. In addition, these changes in culture can lead to internal conflict and difficulty in connection with families.
of origin; representing the potential costs of upward mobility. Implications include an amendment to cultural mobility research and to current strategies in urban education which position cultural capital as a character trait that can be learned or taken up by individuals.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Unpacking the Persistent Narrative of Upward Mobility

This study focuses on individuals’ experiences of moving up the social class ladder through education and examines the effects of the mobility experience both internally and relationally. Named as “social” or “upward” mobility, the promise of increased opportunity through formal education remains a central aspect of the American identity. This promise is evident throughout history as part of the religious and capitalist foundation on which elements of the United States were founded (Weber, 1905). Following the belief that through education, everyone, regardless of background, might have a chance to succeed (Mann, 1848), schools emerged in the nineteenth century as the primary way through which individuals could improve their position through hard work (Reese, 2005). Embedded within the broader “American Dream” ideology, this focus on the educational success of individuals – and the potential to mitigate inequality through educational opportunity – is prevalent across myriad contexts. From Horatio Alger’s rags to riches stories (Tebbel, 1963) to contemporary rap songs about “making it” out of poverty (I Made It, 2010) and literary descriptions of mobility trends in magazines like The New Yorker (Gladwell, 2008), this narrative continues to be retold and reinforced from a variety of perspectives and across numerous domains of public life. Politically, the potential of social mobility remains at the forefront in the nation’s discussion of education (www.Whitehouse.gov/) and the economy (Bernanke, 2008).

For example, this discourse of upward mobility dominates the missions of educational programs throughout the country such as Teach for America and KIPP:
Knowledge is Power Program, which hope to solve social ills and “break the cycle of poverty” (www.teachforamerica.org/) by providing educational opportunities to “underserved” students for “more success in college and life” (www.kipp.org/). Providing access to college education for a greater number of students is also based on this premise of education as “the great equalizer.” The path to upward mobility provided by a college education (Attewell & Lavin, 2007) is now offered to more students through college access programs and online schools. The University of Phoenix is one such example, where the goal of “meet[ing] the needs of working and underserved students….make[s] higher education accessible to everyone” (http://www.phoenix.edu/).

It is clear that the promise of social mobility within the United States, and the important role education plays in that promise, remain significant in popular discourse and understanding. However, amidst all the discourse and policy aimed at increasing access to formal education at the primary, secondary and higher education levels, the actual experience of mobility and the potential emotional and interpersonal costs involved are seldom considered. This represents the focus of this study, which draws from the experiences of upwardly mobile adults in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex and under-examined experience of mobility.

Rationale for the Study: Current Conceptions of Mobility

While the concept of upward mobility is discussed within a variety of realms, most focus on the positive economic outcomes of the experience, or how to increase opportunities to improve mobility (Smedley & Jenkins, 2007), such as through “reducing incarceration” (Mauer, 2007) or providing access to quality healthcare (Smedley, 2007).
Given the recent economic downturn, current literature considers the “death” or “withering away” of the American Dream (McClelland & Tobin, 2010) and increased concern that absolute mobility gains are not enough to move individuals “to a different rung on the economic ladder” (Pew Economic Mobility Project, 2012).

Pew’s (2012) study, “Pursuing the American Dream” is the most recent study on social mobility to date. The report found that “only 4% of those raised in the bottom quintile make it all the way to the top quintile as adults, confirming that the ‘rags to riches’ story occurs more often in Hollywood than in reality” (p. 2). This is the population in which this study is most interested, and indicates the rarity of the individuals interviewed for this project (see Chapter Three for an in-depth description of the participant group). Downward mobility to the degree just described, from the top rung of the ladder to the bottom, is also a rarity, indicating that there is “stickiness at the ends of the wealth ladder,” (p. 13) and that individuals, whether at the top or the bottom, tend to stay where they were born. While individuals across each quintile tend to earn more than their parents and experience small movement upwards, “Americans whose parents were at the top and bottom of the wealth ladder are likely to be at the top and bottom themselves” (p. 2). These findings are indicative of a larger trend in national discourse, in which the American Dream has been “stolen” (Smith, 2012) with the creation of “two Americas” – the 1% and the 99% (Smith, 2012). The promise of meritocracy and the
American Dream, then, have been “betrayed” through the “assault on the middle class” (Barlett & Steele, 2012).¹

The study of social mobility from a more academic context stems from research within sociology (Miller, 1971) and focuses on the study of mobility conceived in economic terms, with questions examining a wide range of social phenomena, including: occupational status or change, marital status, gender relationships or dominance in the workplace (Payne & Abbott, 1990), mental illness (Hollingshead, Ellis & Kirby, 1954) and political attitudes (Dietrick, 1974). Central to this work is the development of statistical models for measuring mobility. According to the Blau-Duncan Model (1967), family background (measured by father’s occupational status over time) and educational attainment represent the largest indicators of mobility. This field is then grounded in economic comparison and measurement, and is largely concerned with how economic change influences the income of individuals, and society, in a number of contexts. The use of occupational status, income and educational attainment as indicators is consistent.

Consistently missing from these conceptions of the American Dream and upward mobility are the more cultural and social aspects of movement across social class. Rather, many studies argue for increasing the rate of upward mobility and consider strategies for increasing economic numbers without a framework or vocabulary to consider how the experience of mobility might be measured or improved, or what might be lost through the

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¹ Hochschild (1995) also asserts the prevalence of the American Dream ideology in her book, *Facing Up to the American Dream*. She analyzes advertisements and cartoons taken from *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* alongside national data sources that play on and refer to the topic of the American Dream. She unpacks the disparity in opportunity that exists when comparing White and Black Americans. With the more current publication of the Pew study finding the same disparity between Black and White Americans, this seems a significant concern, though outside of the scope of this project.
process. This study presents data that speak to the complex experience of mobility and asserts the need to view this experience in a more nuanced way, which encompasses the significant role of culture.

Though in academia and within popular media, social class and upward mobility are often framed in economic terms (McClelland & Tobin, 2012) and defined based on “income, education, wealth and occupation” (New York Times, 2005), attention has also been paid to the “cultural” aspects of social class. Drawing on the seminal work of Bourdieu (1977; 1980; 1984), some sociologists have instead been interested in the cultural aspects of social class stratification, and the significance of tastes, behaviors and dispositions, or what Bourdieu (1979) refers to as “habitus.” Habitus is defined as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1979, vii); the natural habits or ways of being that one inherits and with which one is raised. The concept of habitus is significant in understanding the cultural aspects of class. According to Bourdieu, those born into the “bourgeois” – or dominant class – inherit the desired habitus of those in power. Bourdieu suggests that one way that social class domination is maintained is through cultural practices, which are distinctive by social class. The social class in power dictates the preferred cultural capital individuals should embody (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). While some view the role that culture, or cultural capital, plays in perpetuating inequality as central (Apple, 1982b, 1995; Lareau, 2003), others consider the learning of cultural capital as a mechanism through which to improve one’s class location through cultural mobility (Dimaggio, 1982; Scherger & Savage, 2010) or by “incorporating new experiences into one’s habitus” (Horvat & Davis, 2011, p. 166). Therefore, in addition to
considering the economic aspects of social class, attention has been paid to the realm of culture as well. Disagreements exist, however, regarding the potential use of culture as a mechanism through which inequality might be perpetuated or disrupted.

This focus on culture has recently reached popular conception, as various reports by journalists consider popular charter schools which place the power of student character, such as “self-control and grit,” (Tough, 2012) or “being nice” (Matthew, 2009) as central. This has become a new strategy for education reform and social mobility. This is evident in the “new paternalism” schools (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013; Whitman, 2008), such as KIPP: Knowledge is Power Program, which explicitly focus on teaching and assessing “character” and “middle-class values” (Whitman, 2008, p. 64) to their largely low-income and minority student populations. In these contexts, inculcation of the habitus of the dominant class is central and seen as good for the students while any potential difficulties associated with changing one’s “character” remain largely unexamined.

The power of culture is evident in educational success and central to experiences of upward mobility. However, this study argues that cultural capital acquisition is far more complex than is implied by cultural mobility theorists or the framework of the “new paternalism” schools. In fact, cultural capital acquisition involves negotiating previously held class practices with new “bourgeois” practices acquired through education. These practices are sometimes in conflict or in opposition, which has internal implications for upwardly mobile individuals, as well as implications for relationships with family members, peers and colleagues. These aspects of learning cultural capital and taking on
the cultural practices of the elite have not yet been considered\(^2\) and represent one focus of this study.

**Reproduction and Symbolic Violence: The Significance of the Study**

College is often seen as the site for entrance into this different cultural realm, though scholarships into private schools and involvement with nonprofits and religious organizations can also act as this initial exposure. Much work has been done to frame college access as an important strategy for education reform and equal opportunity (Redon & Hope, 1994; Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2006). Sociologists have focused on the experience of college as having the potential to support the acquisition of “cultural capital” by “disadvantaged” students. Through “close proximity to middle class peers” and “raising students’ interests” in cultural activities such as the arts and theater, the acquisition of cultural capital then corresponds to the child rearing practices and partnership decisions of disadvantaged students – evidence that higher education does “pay off” (Attewell & Lavin, 2007, pp. 82-83).

Researchers have also focused on reforming the quality of higher education to provide better support for a wider range of diverse students, including first-generation students (Rendon, 1994; Harper & Quaye, 2009). Some studies have argued for “engaging” diverse students in college through “removing barriers” (Harper & Quaye, 2009), using “validation theory” to “foster academic and interpersonal development” (Rendon, 1994), building a community through addressing difference and inequality

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\(^2\) For a recent example that considers the effects of this experience on family relationships, see Lee and Kramer (2013), who discuss the distance with family members that emerges with first-generation college students due to some shifts in “conversation repertories” and new knowledge acquisition.
(Aries, 2008, Aries & Berman, 2012) or offering structured first-year programs to build learning communities (Thayer, 2000). While the benefits of college are profound and the supports that these studies suggest are important for improving the college experience for low-income students, in each context, the potential costs or difficulties associated with social mobility are not considered. Rather, these champions for higher education – influenced by the dominant American Dream ideology – assume that taking on the cultural capital of the dominant class is desired and, in turn, view the process as a wholly positive and uncomplicated one. In addition, the difficulty that is sometimes experienced with maintaining connection or closeness with families of origin after achieving mobility is not explored (Lee & Kramer, 2013). This study considers the process through which cultural capital is acquired and habitus is changed through upward mobility. In addition, the ability to maintain relationships with families of origin is considered.

Though research in higher education is based on the positive benefits of earning a degree, the notion that education provides a means to combat social inequality is heavily contested by a variety of scholars. The role education plays in the “reproduction” of the elite is addressed in what constitutes a significant body of literature positioning education as a societal institution that prepares subjects to take up the classed location into which they were born due to the capitalist economy (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) or through the cultural domination of the elite (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Bourdieu’s (with Passeron, 1977) conception of cultural reproduction informs the framework for this study and helps to theoretically explain the difficulties associated with the experience of upward mobility. According to Bourdieu, through the process of
inculcation, or transmission of the dominant culture through the education system, symbolic power is enacted since individuals who are not born into the dominant class do not possess this culture. The structurally embedded imposition of cultural capital is, therefore, an act of “symbolic violence,” in which attaining the culture of the dominant class is positioned as an unattainable goal, yet the systemic domination is hidden because the power enacted is within the realm of culture, and so “symbolic” and not overt. Though aspects of the dominant culture might be achieved or learned, as is explored in this study, the effects include internal conflict and external distance or tension with family members. Better understanding the symbolic power associated with cultural capital transmission – and therefore the symbolic violence enacted on individuals through that process – enables this more complex experience of upward mobility to be realized.

The Experience of Upward Mobility: Study Description

The effect of upward mobility on individuals has been the subject within a large body of autobiographical texts (Rodriguez, 1981; Steedman, 1986; Villanueva, 1995), collections of memoir (Dews & Law, 1995; Mahony & Zmroczek, 1997; Ryan & Sackrey, 1996; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993; Van Galen & Dempsey, 2009), and interview studies (Luhrano, 2004; Sennett & Cobb, 1972). These personal stories, often written from the perspective of academics, represent a wealth of knowledge and experience surrounding what social mobility means and the difficulties associated with the experience which, to date, have not penetrated the more positive “American Dream” ideology just described.
Through these autobiographical texts, it is clear that becoming upwardly mobile via education is not without difficulty and struggle; that “education destroys something and recreates [individuals] in its own image” (Dews & Law, 1995, p. 1). Though experiences differ across gender, race and personality, many difficulties associated with the process are consistent. Implicit is the symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) enacted on individuals internally as some describe feeling guilt over “leaving their family” (Steedman, 1986), a lack of belonging (Kadi, 1993) or the loss of kinship (Villanueva, 1995). Considering the complex experience of mobility, Lawler (1997) asks: “What happens when people occupy both a working-class and a middle-class habitus during the same lifetime - when a later habitus is founded on the pathologizing of an earlier one?” (p. 14). Lawler, like many of the narratives that explore this concept, focuses on the internal struggle and conflict in identity that emerge as a result of upward mobility.

In their seminal work, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Sennett and Cobb (1972) speak to this “dividing of the self” (p. 207) as a significant cost of mobility. Considering the individual and internal pain associated with this experience is significant to understanding the social class project and how it maps onto individual lives. The current study asks similar questions about the internal experience of mobility, yet also considers the implications of the experience on the external relationships one possesses – particularly with the family – and seeks analysis across a variety of experiences and
contexts.\textsuperscript{3} Taking the important concerns these texts raise, yet considering them systematically rather than through an autobiographical lens, this project asks the following questions:

1) How do individuals who have experienced upward mobility narrate their experience? What memories do they include in these narratives? How do these experiences relate to individuals’ current lives?

2) How do they view their experience of upward mobility as having influenced them personally? How do they see their experience of mobility as having affected their family relationships, both throughout their education and in their current lives? How do they view the experience as having influenced them professionally?

This research explores the lived experiences of individuals who have been socially mobile through education by exploring the perspective of 25 individuals – across race, gender and ethnicity – who are in the position to reflect upon their social mobility experiences. Mobility for this study is defined using education because college represents one important educational site where cultural capital might be “acquired” (Attewell & Lavin, 2009). Participants include individuals over the age of 30 who have earned an advanced degree, but whose parents did not attend college. Data include recorded and transcribed in-depth interviews with participants, each lasting an average of two hours. Data also include interviews with 10 individuals who were not upwardly mobile, but had

\textsuperscript{3} Participants represent a wide range of professions and fields, including law, medicine, business, the non-profit sector, development, psychology, K-12 and higher education, and academic positions within the humanities and “hard and soft” sciences. Because these memoirs and autobiographies come largely from the academy, this study offers important insight on this experience from a wide range of perspectives.
earned an advanced degree and were raised by parents who had also earned an advanced degree. These two groups interviewed provide clarity on what, of the difficulty found across interviews with mobile individuals, might be attributed more directly with their mobile trajectory, rather than the growth, development and difficulty that naturally occur over time and within relationships. Comparison between these groups is considered more directly in Chapter Seven. Through drawing on the voices of 25 individuals who have experienced mobility, this research departs from existing scholarship, which places economic outcomes as central. This reorients the focus away from the persistent narrative of the American Dream toward a more nuanced understanding of the experience of upward mobility and the significant role culture plays in the process.

Organization of the Study

Each chapter explores the experience of social mobility, paying particular attention to the taking on of cultural capital by upwardly mobile individuals and the symbolic violence enacted on individuals through this process. Following this introduction, Chapter Two offers the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study, including the exploration of cultural capital and symbolic violence as orienting concepts which frame the guiding research questions and the potential contributions of this study to theory and practice. Chapter Three describes the methods used to collect and analyze data along with a more detailed description of the participants in the study, differences within and across these participants and issues of validity. Chapter Four investigates one way in which participants’ “habitus” has changed through drawing on Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of “embodied cultural capital” and finds that “restraint” and “covering up class”
are processes associated with cultural capital acquisition. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of “linguistic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991), Chapter Five considers the “communication gulf” that mobile individuals negotiate in their new class contexts, including school and the workplace. The concepts of code-switching and translation are explored. Chapter Six describes the distancing that occurs between upwardly mobile individuals and their families of origin when exposure to middle class culture through college creates shifts in tastes, beliefs and knowledge – each aspects of Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural capital as explored in his seminal text *Distinction*. Findings in the realms of travel, food/drinks, beliefs and money are explored. Chapter Seven considers the important role of parental involvement through the college search process and into adulthood and compares the experiences of upwardly mobile participants with the comparison group of ten middle class individuals. Implications for the lasting impact of college attendance and upward mobility on the relationships between families of origin and upwardly mobile participants are considered. The study closes with implications for theory, research and practice and plans for future research.
CHAPTER 2
Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Cultural Capital, Cultural Mobility, and Symbolic Violence

This research project draws on the extensive work of Bourdieu (with Passeron, 1977, 1979, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992, 2001 and 2008) and his focus on the cultural aspects of social class in order to unpack the lived experience of social mobility as described by the 25 individuals interviewed for this study. Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital provides significant grounding for this research and is explored in this chapter as a conceptual framing for the larger argument of the study. In addition, Bourdieu is drawn on to support the analysis within each dimension of cultural capital explored throughout each chapter in the study.

Due to the connection Bourdieu draws between the education system, inculcation of the dominant culture and reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), the critiques made of the education system and its role in reproduction are considered first (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Kohn, 1969; Lareau, 2003; 2011). The notion of reproduction represents a theoretical orientation to the complex work of Bourdieu. His concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and the “pedagogic work” of the “cultural arbitrary” are also considered. Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus are then positioned within the field of “cultural mobility” where the notion that one might “achieve” cultural capital in both K-12 and higher education is considered.

Taking a different lens than “cultural mobility” theorists, others in sociology have attempted to better understand the role of the individual within the larger dominating
structure that perpetuates social class. Therefore, drawing on the work of Willis (1977) and Bettie (2003), the concept of agency within reproduction is also considered. Particular attention is paid to the practices of “performance” and “performativity” Bettie (2003) finds among the “middle class performers” in her ethnography *Women without class*. Given the lived experiences of those interviewed for the current study – who themselves experienced agency within the dominant class structure – the process through which this occurs and what it entails is important to consider as a framework for analyzing the potential costs of mobility.

Finally, the “hidden injuries” of class, and mobility, are explored as the cultural changes mobile individuals undergo lead to what Baxter and Britton (2001) refer to as “habitus dislocation” and experience feelings of discomfort, loss or inadequacy. These changes can also create distance and tension with families of origin. Toward analysis of the “costs” associated with the mobility experience, this section closes with Bourdieu and the concept of symbolic violence. This concept is framed as an explanatory tool through which to better understand the ways in which classed individuals experience and live class domination through culture. Despite the gains associated with movement up the social class ladder, which are both described by individuals in this study and central to the dominant narrative of the American Dream, it is evident that significant costs are associated with this experience as well.

**Reproduction and Cultural Capital**

From the perspectives of a variety of scholars in education, sociology and economics, education is understood as an aspect of stratification via social reproduction,
ultimately bringing into question the notion that education is a method through which to eliminate inequality (Apple, 1982b; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Kohn, 1969; Lareau, 2003). Bowles and Gintis (1976) focus on the “fading of the American Dream” (p. 4) and cite the root of the inequality experienced in the United States during the time in which they wrote as “the capitalist economy” (p. 53). Through their correspondence theory, they connect the education system to the systemic inequality endemic to capitalism, and argue that individuals are reproduced into the class from which they come, in economic terms, through educational trajectories and potential occupational status.

Moving beyond just the “rewarding and promoting” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 11) or “testing and selecting” (Sorokin, 1959, p. 188) of specific students within the education system, Bowles and Gintis also argue that in order “to capture the economic import of education we must relate its social structure to the forms of consciousness, interpersonal behavior and personality it fosters and reinforces in students” (p. 9). In so doing, Bowles and Gintis help to articulate why societal institutions play such a significant role in maintaining the social class structure. They indicate the ways in which the education system, which promises to bring equality in the American context, instead helps to ensure that individuals remain in the class position to which they were born through “interpersonal behavior and personality.” This concept, while central within the sociology of education, has not been well-received among popular audiences, in part

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4 The important role of child rearing in reproduction was considered by Kohn (1969), Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Lareau (1989) and was empirically studied using Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital by Lareau (2003; 2011). Though outside the scope of this project directly, this manifestation of reproduction and social class is significant. The cultural capital that is passed down from the parents plays a significant role, then, in reproduction.
because it challenges the very notion of the American Dream ideology (discussed in Chapter One) and the assumption that the United States is a place of opportunity and equality (Collins, 2009). Education is viewed, however, as a central mechanism through which society’s structure is maintained.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) also offer a perspective regarding reproduction, which focuses on the cultural elements of social class location that are perpetuated within society through education. Bourdieu (1986) discusses the existence of three forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. He defines economic capital as that which is “immediately and directly convertible into money,” including goods and property rights (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Social and cultural capitals, in contrast, are less overt than economic capital, more difficult to quantify and take time to develop. Social capital involves the people known and associated networks that provide access and connections to power and other forms of capital. Cultural capital is defined in three categories: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1986), each of which is outlined below. Social and cultural capital are particularly important, for they are both transferable within society to economic capital, yet they are disguised in other forms, such as: work you do, people you know, activities you enjoy, food you eat, language you speak and degrees you earn. In this way, wealth and power are passed down from the family and kept within a family, or class, without, necessarily, the overt inheritance of money, jobs, or resources. These three forms of capital are inter-related
and together, maintain the power of the dominant class through culture, thereby reproducing social class.\(^5\)

As mentioned, Bourdieu separates cultural capital into three forms\(^6\). The “embodied form” involves the tastes, attitudes and dispositions associated with class location. This form also includes behavior, interests and knowledge related to the “habitus” of an individual, that is, the “durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1979, vii) one inherits and with which one is raised. Linguistic capital (1991) is considered an important aspect of the embodied form of cultural capital as well\(^7\). The “objectified form” includes “objects such as books, works of art, and scientific instruments that require specialized cultural abilities to use (Swartz, 1997, p. 76). Particular abilities, then, about how to consume and appreciate classed objects are significant alongside ownership of these objects. The “institutionalized form” legitimizes each form of cultural capital through educational degrees and certificates (Bourdieu, 1986).

Like the forms of capital, the forms of cultural capital are inter-related. For example, the aspects of culture explored through Bourdieu’s seminal text *Distinction*, combine these varied states of cultural capital. One’s interest in attending art museums and taste in art (embodied form) is informed by knowledge regarding how to “consume” a painting in order to determine its aesthetic superiority (objectified from), information

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\(^5\) Bourdieu describes the relationship between the capitals, indicating a closer relationship between social and cultural capital, than either with economic capital (Swartz, 1997).

\(^6\) Swartz (1997) finds that in later writings, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) posited the concept of “informational” capital to better speak to broad dimensions associated with cultural capital, and the tendency in research to focus only on “highbrow” culture as argued by Lareau and Weininger (2003).

\(^7\) Linguistic capital is explored more directly in Chapter Five.
which might have been conferred at an elite university in the form of a degree (institutionalized form). While not always the case, understanding the complexity and interrelatedness of each form of cultural capital supports analysis of this cultural knowledge, particularly as it is acquired by participants in this study.

The concept of habitus is central to the work of Bourdieu. He asserts a distinction between the “habitus” of social class groups and argues that the “dominated class” possesses a habitus that is born out of “necessity.” In contrast, the “dominant class” possesses a habitus framed in opposition to necessity – born out of freedom. The class-based habitus one possesses, then, guides their cultural capital in a variety of dimensions, including their tastes and interests, the knowledge they possess, their language practices and how they express themselves. It is through these distinct class “cultures” that social class is reproduced.

Significant to Bourdieu is the role the education system plays in perpetuating social class reproduction. According to Bourdieu, there are a variety of fields, such as the institution of the school or the job market, which confer the dominance of one group over another through the use of these forms of capital, as well as through habitus.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) are particularly concerned with the education system and

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8 This aspect of Bourdieu’s theory and the implications of the differences between the “tastes” of the dominant class and the dominated class will be considered more fully in Chapter Six.
9 The concept of “field” is significant to Bourdieu's theories, though a careful examination of the complex concept is outside the scope of this project. Briefly defined, the field is “the social setting in which habitus operates...structured spaces that are organized around specific types of capital or combinations of capital” (Swartz, 1997, p. 117). Therefore, field indicates the space or “situation” in which habitus or cultural capital is enacted or produced. This concept enables the space for Bourdieu's concepts to be understood relationally. The central “field” of concern in this study is the education system. In addition, the job market and/or particular fields of work are central, including the academy. Finally, specific workplaces described by individuals in the study are examples of fields as well. In each case, “interactions among actors within fields are shaped by their relative location in the hierarchy of positions” (Swartz, 1997, p. 120), positions which vary across participants and contexts.
the ways in which, through pedagogic work (PW), the cultural arbitrary of the dominant group is imposed and recognized as legitimate. Pedagogic work is defined as “a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training…and internalization of the principals of a cultural arbitrary” (p. 31). Put differently, the PW – and in effect the education system, is concerned with the socialization of classed beings so that the culture of the dominant class is understood as the “cultural arbitrary”; objectively desirable even in its subjectivity. As Bourdieu states, the “…productivity of the PW is objectively measured by the degree to which it produces its essential effect of inculcation, i.e., its effect of reproduction” (p. 33) of the cultural capital of the dominant group.

The education system then serves the purpose of legitimizing the dominant group’s culture, enabling it to be seen and enacted as a “universal culture” (p. 40). Thus, for Bourdieu, the relationship between education and culture is significant, and does much to help explain how education can be a socializing agent through which individuals can learn the “culture” of a status group to which they are compelled to belong. Education then effectively imposes the cultural arbitrary of the dominant [status] group and creates an illusion of this culture as the one true culture. This view of education is significant, since a central question for consideration in this study involves the implications of this “inculcation” described by Bourdieu.

A significant aspect of the “cultural arbitrary” is its tendency to change. Bourdieu offers the example of linguistic capital, in which “the logic and the aims of the strategies seeking to modify it are governed by the structure itself” (1991, p. 64). The changes
which occur in language – “attention to pronunciation, diction, syntactic devices” (p. 64) – are always shifting. It is the structure, however, which determines the ways in which the language shifts, thereby the rules that dictate the components of “linguistic capital” are always changing. This is particularly true when considering particular words which, as Bourdieu argues, “lose their discriminatory power and thereby tend to be perceived as intrinsically banal, common, facile, or as worn out” (1991, 64). This enables the reproduction of the elite, since “the very motor of change is nothing less than the entire linguistic field…the center of this perpetual movement is everywhere and nowhere” (1991, 64). This “motor of change,” however, is dictated by those in power. This speaks to the difficulty the dominated class might have when attempting to take on the particular cultural practices dictated by the cultural arbitrary.

Though Bourdieu leaves conceptual space in his theory for a trajectory – for example, the potential for one’s habitus to be modified or for one to acquire the cultural capital of the dominant class – he does not attend to this question empirically. However, much empirical and theoretical research has attempted to make space for those individuals within this reproduction structure who do experience mobility. The next two sections delve into this question of agency within reproduction, yet do so in different ways. The first considers the concept of “cultural mobility” and the possibility of “achieving” the cultural capital of the dominant class through the work of DiMaggio (1982) and Attewell and Lavin (2007). Schools that position this framework toward mobility as central to their mission are also considered. The section following cultural mobility draws on the work of Willis (1977) and Bettie (2003) and considers the potential
roles students play as actors in their own reproduction, even as they influence structure or “perform” in particular ways to achieve success (Bettie, 2003). Cultural mobility, considered next, draws explicitly on Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus, as just outlined.

**Cultural Mobility and Additive Conceptions of Cultural Capital Acquisition**

The space for an upward trajectory in Bourdieu’s argument has led to studies in “cultural mobility” in which the potential for students to acquire cultural capital through education might positively affect their school experiences and success. DiMaggio (1982) considered this question through investigating the relationship between students’ interest and participation in high status activities (such as attendance at arts events, or reading literature) and their grades in school. He finds “cultural capital has an impact on high school grades that is highly significant,” even for those students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds (p. 199). Participation in “high status” activities, in fact, mirrored the “contribution of measured ability,” indicating that cultural capital was in some cases as significant to high grade earning as scholastic ability (p. 199). DiMaggio maintains that education background and class status do matter, but lay the grounds for a conception of cultural capital as an aspect of culture that might be “acquired” or learned.

DiMaggio (1982) defines cultural capital in terms similar to the “highbrow tastes” explored in Chapter Six and discussed by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984). Though DiMaggio finds through the study that “single measures of "cultural capital" or participation in status cultures are inadequate,” he focuses on the dimension of “highbrow tastes” – such as art, literature and a “cultivated self-image” – exclusively due to the data
set from which he drew analysis. His focus on “highbrow” activities, however, has been taken up by researchers as the primary indicator of cultural capital.

Understanding what cultural capital entails and how it might be measured is a significant aspect of the study of cultural (and social) mobility, particularly given the complexity of the concept. Lareau and Weininger (2003) discuss their concern with the focus on “highbrow tastes” as evident in the work of Dimaggio (1982) and others as a divergence from the concept of cultural capital as indicated in Bourdieu’s writing on the subject. This is largely in regard to two (mis)interpretations of the concept: “First, the concept of cultural capital is assumed to denote knowledge of or competence with ‘highbrow’ aesthetic culture (such as fine art and classical music)” (p. 568) and secondly that cultural capital is “distinct from, and casually independent of, ‘technical’ ability or skill” (p. 597). Lareau and Weininger find that studies in education research (starting with the work of DiMaggio, 1982) focus exclusively on these “highbrow” tastes as the primary indicator of cultural capital. This narrow interpretation of the meaning of cultural capital, they argue, is inconsistent with the writings of Bourdieu. In fact, the concept of cultural capital as Bourdieu defined it, involves more than just the aesthetic “highbrow” culture of the elite. Instead, Bourdieu describes the embodied cultural capital as tastes, but also as movement, posture, how one expresses themselves; dispositions which are natural and “institutionalized; used as social and cultural exclusion” (Lamont

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10 Lareau and Weininger (2003) consider the work of the following researchers as indicative of this tendency toward measuring cultural capital as “highbrow” activities and tastes, though ground the critique in Dimaggio (1982) as an initial interpretive framing: Robinson and Garnier, 1985; DeGraff, 1986; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan & Shaun, 1990; Katsillis & Rubinson, 1990; Mohr & DiMaggio, 1995; Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1996; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000; Sullivan, 2001; Dumais, 2002; Eitle & Eitle, 2002.
& Lareau, 1988, p. 164). In addition, he explores the importance of the “knowledge” and particular “abilities” needed to develop and enact the “highbrow” tastes so often considered (Bourdieu, 1986).

Reducing cultural capital to “highbrow tastes,” which might be acquired through “active participation in prestigious status cultures” (DiMaggio, 1982, p. 190) misses a key aspect of the power associated with cultural capital and how it maintains dominance through the cultural arbitrary. These “highbrow” tastes are determined – in an arbitrary and changing way – by the dominant class. The notion that one might simply acquire the knowledge and disposition to “actively participate” in “prestigious status cultures” misses this key aspect of the theory; that these are imposed in order to maintain distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). In addition, in the scenario posed by DiMaggio and subsequent studies, inequality is left unexamined, as the particular tastes and knowledge one should possess are still determined by the dominant class and made legitimate through the education system. In this framework, nothing of the structure Bourdieu outlines has changed. Social class domination through culture remains.

This limited interpretation of Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital also ignores the significance of the habitus one inherits and with which one is raised. This focus on “highbrow tastes” enables a conception of cultural capital, then, as something that can simply be “added” to the cultural capital a student already possesses. It implies that disadvantaged students are empty cultural vessels to which new tastes and interest in “highbrow” activities might be deposited (Freire, 1998). Lareau and Weininger (2003)

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11 Reference to the “cultural arbitrary”: the preferred cultural practices determined by the dominant culture and made legitimate by pedagogic work (PW) through education. See also pages 18-19 for a description.
warn against this tendency, indicating that these studies which frame cultural capital in terms of “highbrow tastes” and as “independent of ability or skill”: “uncritically accept given institutional standards as legitimate, and then seek methods for boosting parents’ and students’ compliance with them (p. 586). This “boosting of compliance” is confirmed as DiMaggio asserts that: “active participation in prestigious status cultures may be a practical and useful strategy for low status students who aspire towards upward mobility” (p. 190). Therefore, exposure to museums or the symphony, for example, becomes a strategy through which we might mitigate inequality. This is a flawed logic, given the significant aspects of cultural capital not encompassed within this “highbrow” definition.

In a more recent study, Horvat and Davis (2011) also consider “self-image” and explore the potential to shift one’s habitus through analysis of the effects of a program called YouthBuild. Through their mixed method study, they consider the role the program plays in changing the habitus of the students involved. Finding that “the habitus formed by early childhood experiences (either positive or negative) is not washed away, but new experiences can be and are incorporated into it’’ (p. 166), they argue that habitus can, in fact, be modified through education. They focus on three dimensions of change in habitus, including: “the development of self-esteem, the ability to accomplish something of value, and the capacity to contribute to the welfare of others” (p. 142). Horvat and Davis position their definition of habitus to include the ethical dispositions12 of the participants in their study, and find that they experience changes to their habitus within

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12 “Ethical disposition” is defined by Bourdieu (1993) as an aspect of habitus that is defined by “ethos.” According to Sayer (2005), Bourdieu does not sufficiently consider the ethical dimension of habitus. He argues that this is a significant conceptual omission, given the emotional terrain of social class (Reay, 2005; Sennett & Cobb, 1972).
this dimension. Again, the indicator of cultural capital, or in this case, habitus, is significant. Given Bourdieu’s distinction between the habitus of the dominant and the dominated classes, the authors imply that individuals lacked “self-esteem,” the “ability to accomplish something of value” and the propensity to “contribute to the welfare of others” in their habitus prior to attending the program. Through framing the habitus with which individuals come to the program as lacking, the taking on of these new perspectives on “self-image” leads to viewing the participants as “in need” of the habitus of the dominant class.

Attewell and Lavin (2007) also draw on a similar framing of cultural capital acquisition in their study investigating the potential benefits of a college degree. Building on the work of Bourdieu, yet drawing a distinction between “inherited” and “achieved” cultural capital (p. 82). Attewell and Lavin find that getting an education does in fact “pay off” both for individuals, and for their children. They explain this “pay off” in part through the acquisition of cultural capital, which they found occurred for the disadvantaged students in their study in three ways. First, through “proximity to middle class peers,” and “raising students’ interest in and knowledge of history, literature, music, theater and the arts,” going to college has the potential to “directly develop cultural capital among lower-class students” (p. 82). The second is through child rearing practices, through which low-income students who receive a college education, while not necessarily taking on the cultural capital themselves, raise their children with these practices in mind, “taking their offspring to museums and theater, purchase music or dance lessons, in a deliberate attempt to cultivate the children beyond the parent’s own
level” (p. 82). The third way is through “marrying up,” whereby an individual may marry someone who “has more cultural capital than themselves” (p. 83). Within these indicators, a focus on “highbrow” culture is evident, as is the assumption that low-income students attending college are empty cultural vessels who benefit from acquiring the cultural practices of their “middle class peers” in college.

Attewell and Lavin (2007) state that “for hundreds of thousands of underprivileged students, a college education is the first step up the ladder of social mobility, and their college attendance generates an upward momentum for most of their children” (p. 7). They also discuss the cultural element of this upward mobility, indicating that “proximity to middle-class peers during college” sensitizes “disadvantaged students to the cultural advantages that more affluent families enjoy” (p. 82). They highlight the significance of learned child rearing practices as a significant aspect (p. 56) of this change in behavior and offer an example of a participant in the study who discussed her child rearing practices as being quite distinct from her parents. They write,

She developed a very different stance than her parents toward education: ‘The main objective of my parents was to put food on the table and a roof over our heads. I wanted to raise little individuals who had personalities and could develop into responsible adults. I wanted to instill in them a love for learning. (p. 13).

This description of this student’s changing view on the child rearing practices of her mother is read as a positive indication of the influence of college on this individual’s child rearing practices. Another lens on this vignette, however, portrays the potential for family conflict as an individual now has criticism for the practices of their family of origin. In addition, it assumes the child rearing practices of this participant’s parents as
lacking in some way. It might also be argued that these changes in child rearing strategies offer a clear example of the differences between the habitus born out of “necessity” of the dominated class and the habitus born out of “freedom” of the dominant class. This vignette, then, speaks to the legitimization of the dominant habitus as the “universal” culture that is celebrated and framed, in this case, as a benefit. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue, it is through the education system, specifically higher education, that this legitimization occurs. According to Bourdieu, this process is in part the goal of the education system, and the way that social structure and stratification processes endure.

This “additive” conception of cultural capital, as well as the tendency to view disadvantaged students as “in need” of cultural capital, has marked a tendency in educational research and practice to view the explicit teaching of the cultural capital of the dominant class, defined popularly as “character education,” as a reform effort. This is similar to DiMaggio’s (1982) assertion that “active participation in prestigious status cultures” might become “a practical and useful strategy for low status students who aspire towards upward mobility” (p. 190). Strategies have developed, however, from “prestigious cultures” to include the “ethical dispositions” discussed by Horvat and Davis (2011), as well as linguistic and embodied cultural capital. In these schools, disadvantaged students are taught explicitly and systematically to speak, behave and express themselves in particular “middle class” ways (Whitman, 2008).

Named by McDermott and Nygreen (2013) as “new paternalism” schools, a type of school – often charter – has developed which positions “character education” as central to the mission of the school. Well-funded (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013; Ravitch,
2010) and supported across political parties, this reform effort draws on concepts just defined in cultural capital acquisition to provide disadvantaged students with the skills and character they “need” to be successful (largely defined by going to college or reducing the achievement gap). KIPP: Knowledge is Power Schools are the most well-known and written about, though a variety of smaller networks exists as well, including Achievement First in New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island and Mastery Charter schools in Philadelphia. Though little academic research exists on the practices of these schools and their potential as a reform effort (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013), journalists have written books for popular audiences that have been widely read (Matthews, 2009; Tough 2008; 2012; Whitman, 2008). These accounts are largely positive in nature, describing how the “unique approach” of these schools is “the answer to many of the long-standing challenges and inequalities inherent to urban education” (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013, p. 85).

There are a few factors which make these schools distinct, including more time for instruction (extended school day, required summer school), deliberately cultivating a “college-going culture” in the school and “explicitly teaching nonacademic social development or “character” (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013, p. 87). The last category of character development is the trait of most interest to this study. It includes: “instructing students in attitudes and values along with strict regulation of their behavior and appearance” (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013, p. 87), each of which are examples of

13 Increased “time” is also a significant aspect of the habitus of the “dominant class” as defined by Bourdieu (1984) in which the ease and luxury of time is central to the development of tastes and interests of the bourgeois. A “college-going” culture is also important, given the conception of college as initial introduction to the habitus of the dominant class. The importance of college is explored more directly in Chapters Six and Seven.
cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1984; 1986). Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan and Shaun (1990) also define these kinds of “academic habits” as cultural capital and argue that “non-cognitive” character traits such as attitude, homework completion, dressing appropriately and not being a disruption, support academic success of students. The most obvious example of this approach in practice is through KIPP’s strategy for regulating student behavior called SLANT (Sit up, Listen, Ask questions, Nod if you understand, and Track the speaker with your eyes). This offers for KIPP a framework for teaching and assessing these behaviors as they are learned and performed by their students.

These practices are connected, by some, to middle class behaviors that “disadvantaged” students do not possess, though actively need. The journalist David Whitman (2008) finds in his book Sweating the Small Stuff, that the methods these “new paternalist schools” employed involve teaching students “not just how to think but how to act according to what are commonly termed traditional, middle-class values” (p. 64). The explicit teaching of the cultural arbitrary is clearly celebrated in this context and holds wide appeal. This is due to the underlying assumption or belief of this approach, that:

Instilling these character traits will enable, or at least facilitate, the process of upward social mobility for low-income urban students. This belief in the possibility of producing upward mobility for urban youth through new-paternalist schools appears to be central to their mass appeal (Mcdermott & Nygreen, 2013, p. 87)

This perspective is present in other reform efforts outside of KIPP as well, and in other areas of K-12 education. For example, Heckman (2013), who focuses more explicitly on

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14 This perspective is challenged by a few (e.g., Horn, 2011; Lack, 2009), however, who view this approach to education critically and describe KIPP, specifically, as part of the neoliberal education agenda or as “an intervention aimed at cognitive and behavioral control” (Horn, 2011, p. 98). This critique is not yet known popularly, however.
early childhood education, outlines a number of “non-cognitive skills” such as “strength of motivation, an ability to act on long-term plans, and the socio-emotional regulation needed to work with others” (p. 12) as central to providing children from low-income backgrounds “a chance” to succeed.

The implications of this framing of the education system are significant; students in school must work to develop the cultural capital of the dominant class in order to be successful. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), this preferred cultural capital is necessarily different than the culture of the dominated class. It is this distinction between the desired behavior in the school, and the behavior developed in the home, which helps to maintain social structure or compels the learning of the cultural capital of the dominant class. The profound role culture plays in education – from early childhood education through graduate school – leaves little space, then, for improving life chances or changing the systemic inequality without taking on the cultural capital or habitus of the dominant class.

Inherent in each of these studies is also the notion that low-income individuals are empty vessels and that “new” habitus might fill in the deficiencies of upwardly mobile individuals, enabling a shift in dispositions and perspectives that provides opportunity to move up socially. These conceptions of changing habitus or the taking on of cultural capital, however, miss the ambiguity inherent in social mobility found across the data in the current study. Framing the taking on of cultural capital as additive and in strictly positive ways limits the potential to understand the complexity and difficulty associated with this experience as prevalent in autobiographical texts on the topic and across the
data for this project. Their experiences help to unpack the potential costs associated with the “cultural production of the educated person” (Levinson, Foley & Holland, 1996) and the shifts or change in culture implied. To date, little attention has been paid to this aspect of the experience; rather, the assumption that the taking on of middle class culture is a desired result of policy and education is prevalent. It is clear, then, that the goal of middle class culture acquisition is present across all levels of the education system, as evident through the examples of charters schools in K-12 and the focus on “close proximity to middle class peers” in college.

Agency within Reproduction through Performance

In contrast to the body of work just explored, other researchers and theorists have positioned the individual as having a more agentic role in their reproduction. The empirical work of Willis (1977) is foundational in this area. His ethnographic work, which considers “how working class kids get working class jobs,” paved the way by articulating the role of the individual within class structures. Willis demonstrates how the “lads,” the working class young men in his ethnographic study, were not passive in their socialization; rather, they became actors in the process through “penetrating” the system in a variety of ways. Willis articulates the “cultural production” of these “penetrations” as not “simply mechanical” but as “working upon” classed individuals toward achieving “partial resolutions, recombinations, [and] limited transformations which are uncertain to be sure, but concrete (1977, p. 125). Individuals both inform their own socialization and in so doing inform “distinct class forms at the economic and structural level” (p. 2). Agency is then the way individuals are created in practice, even as they are given a
framework of existence based on the social structure within which they live. This conceptual framing of the dominant class system enables a more nuanced understanding of the socialization of young people into classed positions in society. It also highlights mobility trajectories that are still determined by the class structure. Rather than an empty vessel, the subjects Willis frames are substantive; they are enacting “penetrations” to the structure while still experiencing reproduction.

The notion that youth are “performing” their identities, in some ways, helps to explain how classed subjects might be formed in practice, even within a dominant structure. In addition, performance speaks to the experience of mobility; it offers an analytical lens toward how this experience is achieved or maintained. Deeply concerned with and aware of their public identities and how they are being received, successful students become “impression management experts” (Foley, 1990, p. 62) or “performers” of a “public identity” of their gender, race, class, or sexual identities (Bettie, 2003, p. 50). As Bettie asserts, “In a kind of ‘passing,’ then, some students choose to perform class identities which are sometimes not their own” and in so doing have to “negotiate their ‘inherited’ identity from home with their ‘chosen’ public identity at school” (Bettie, 2003, p. 50).

Bettie articulates this process as both “performance” and “performativity,” thereby contributing to the discussion of agency, particularly within a school context. Performance, then, represents the student’s ability to “consciously imitate middle-class expressions of cultural capital in an attempt at mobility” whereas “performativity” represents the fixed nature of cultural capital in which students are “caught in
unconscious displays of cultural capital that are a consequence of class origin or habitus” (Bettie, 2003, p. 52). The recognition that both “performance” and “performativity” are possible contributes to understanding the ways in which some young people achieve upward mobility via education, and yet might still experience and express feelings of inadequacy, guilt and not fitting into the “performed class.” It is in these moments that “one’s performance does not align with one’s notion of an ‘authentic’ true self; one’s performance can be incongruent with who one thinks one really is” (Bettie, 2003, p. 52). This is a potentially painful experience. In this way, the subject is “constructed by performance,” (Bettie, 2003, p. 52), a performance that is heavily mediated by gender, race, and class.

This was true for one group in Bettie’s study, which she called “middle class performers.” For both the White and Mexican-American girls in Bettie’s study, a “certain amount of ambivalence toward mobility and/or the acquisition of the middle-class cultural forms that accompany mobility” was expressed. This ambivalence was evident through their desire to be mobile and achieve academic success while not wanting this desire “to mean that their parents’ lives were without value” (p. 156).

Drawing on Gibson (1988), Bettie asserts that the “middle-class performers in her study “adopted a strategy of “accommodation without assimilated” so that in the face of racial conflict and inequality they made accommodations “for the purpose of reducing conflict” yet at the same time allowed their “separate group [identity and culture] to be maintained” (p. 158). This nuanced understanding of performing class culture, and the powerful ways in which it intersects with race and gender, offers insight into some of the
strategies employed by the participants in this study, including code-switching\(^{15}\) and translation in the dimension of language and maintaining “hard work” and “real life” experiences from their background. While some aspects of cultural capital might be “accommodated” through performance, in other dimensions the data in the current study suggest that assimilation occurs. This assimilation can lead to internal conflict with the person one has become or lead to relational struggle with one’s parents and families of origin, representing the potential “costs” associated with this experience.

**Costs of Mobility and Symbolic Violence**

In *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, economists Sennett and Cobb (1972) embark on a project with a goal to expose the class-based indignity working class men experience in the United States. Though critiqued for paying too much attention to the male perspective and misrepresenting the voices of some participants, the seminal work does much to expose the more cultural and invisible effects of social class. Writing about upward mobility, they draw on the work of John McDermott (1969) and describe the youth in a college context who undergo feelings of inadequacy. They argue:

> These working-class boys and girls are made to feel inadequate by a ‘laying-on of culture’ practiced in college by their teachers and the more privileged students – a process that causes people to feel inadequate in the same way “status incongruity” does, by subjecting them to an unfamiliar set of rules in a game where respect is the prize (pp. 26-27).

Sennett and Cobb’s (1972) description of the inadequacy felt with the “laying on of culture” helps consider the benefits of mobility in relation to the costs, which continue even once mobility is achieved. The positive outcomes mentioned by Attewell and Lavin

\(^{15}\) Code-switching is defined and explored more in Chapter Five.
(2007) through the gaining of middle class culture is what, according to Sennett and Cobb, causes feelings of inadequacy and pain. Similarly, they discuss the “loss of a sense of fraternity with people you value (p. 110) that occurs when individuals experience mobility. These sentiments expressed by Sennett and Cobb are echoed in the autobiographical texts described in the introduction chapter of this study, in which upward mobility is framed as painful and maintaining the ties with family members as difficult. These feelings of inadequacy and loss might be explained through a re-framing of the taking on of cultural capital toward a complex process which carries with it the potential to create internal conflict, as well as tension or distance with families of origin. Chapters Six and Seven explore this in detail.

The emotional and painful terrain of social class is considered by Reay (2005) in which she describes the “psychic economy of social class,” including the inadequacies just described, as contributing “powerfully to the ways we are, feel and act” (p. 1). This study finds that one aspect of these emotional aspects of class involve the habitus, and the shift in habitus some individuals undergo through mobility. As Lehmann (2009) argues, the “social mobility project has at its root a transformation of habitus” (p. 643). The transformation of habitus can occur based on new experiences or “repeated practice aimed at the embodiment of new dispositions” (Sayer, 2005, p. 30).

The potential to shift habitus, however, can lead to what Bourdieu (1999) calls a “fractured” or “cleft” habitus. This speaks to the ability to take on the cultural capital of the bourgeois, yet also involves loss or change of who one is, or was. Bourdieu explores the concept of a fractured habitus further as: “habitus divided against itself, in constant
negotiation with itself and with its ambivalence, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities” (p. 511). The notion that one might be “doomed” within this duplication of habitus is significant as the discomfort that emerges from shifting who one is via their habitus is evident to Bourdieu. This concept is also prevalent in autobiographical narratives (Dews & Law, 1995; Mahony & Zmroczek, 1997; Rodriguez, 1981; Steedman, 1986; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993; Van Galen & Dempsey, 2009; Villanueva, 1995) as well as in Sennett and Cobb (1972) who find a consistent “dividing within the self” (p. 207) among those they interviewed. Bourdieu has also described the “tormented” or “cleft” habitus and argued for empirical research on this topic, stating, “I have many times pointed to the existence of cleft, tormented habitus bearing in the form of tensions and contradictions the mark of the contradictory conditions of formation of which they are the product” (1999, p. 510).

This process mentioned by Bourdieu is explored by Baxter and Britton (2001) and Lehman (2007) as “habitus dislocation,” in which an individual is directly faced with the shifts in habitus he or she has experienced and describes feelings of pain or discomfort. Baxter and Britton (2001) define habitus dislocation as “a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority” (p. 91). Though most subsequent research considers the response to this experience, such as dropping out (Lehmann, 2007), or downplaying one’s working class background (Granfield, 1991), the current study views “habitus dislocation” as one potential source for the costs associated with the experience of
upward mobility. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) offer an important framework – one of symbolic violence – through which to analyze the potential costs associated with this experience.

Symbolic violence occurs when power “manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 4). This adds “symbolic force to those power relations” – enabling the overt and hidden perpetuation of power and violence to be enacted on those without power. Symbolic violence is enacted on the dominated class through their lack of symbolic capital, which is based on the cultural arbitrary.

The aspect of arbitrariness in Bourdieu’s theories of symbolic power and violence is significant. While attempts to better understand the nuance of his theory empirically shed light on its meaning, the changing nature of the cultural arbitrary means that there is no one definition of symbolic violence and no defining characteristics of those in power. The notion that we might empower low-income students with the necessary cultural capital or “character” for success in school and life (Matthews, 2009; Tough 2008; Whiman, 2008), then, misses a significant aspect of Bourdieu’s theory – that the specific cultural capital that some are seen as lacking is arbitrary. The symbolic power enacted via culture, as Bourdieu defines it, further enables and perpetuates dominance. Possession of these cultural artifacts does not dismantle the symbolic power of the dominant class. The particular practices are arbitrary; even when the cultural aspects of social class are learned – symbolic power and symbolic violence still remain.
It is for these reasons that the perspectives of upwardly mobile individuals are of particular interest and importance. The mobile individuals in this study were born into a dominated class location yet, via the education system, now occupy a more respected and powerful class position through obtaining cultural capital. As many argue is possible, the mobile individuals in this study do take on much of the cultural arbitrary – developing particular ways of being, dispositions, expressions and beliefs and describe change across these dimensions and others. The pedagogic work (PW) involved in this process is more nuanced and complicated than currently described in “cultural mobility” literature.

Across these fields and literatures, then, it seems that not enough attention is paid to the potential difficulty that might be produced through the (re)creating of oneself, and the performance or taking on of middle class cultural capital. Though this difficulty is framed theoretically by Bourdieu and is common in stories describing the experience of upward mobility, it is often not considered. Rather, it is assumed, across texts, that the cultural practices of the middle class can simply be added on or gained through the explicit teaching of middle class practices, or through the influence of middle class peers in college. Related to this assumption is the embedded assumption, as described above and throughout this dissertation, that this gaining of a middle class habitus simply means gaining new and even better sets of knowledge, skills and dispositions without conceptions of loss or the siphoning of one’s natural self from one’s habitus of origin. In addition, the assumption that low-income individuals are “in need” of the cultural capital of the elite is a consistent lens through which much of the research and practice regarding cultural capital is based. This study seeks to fill in this gap through exploring these
mobile individuals’ experiences and provide more layered and person-centered insight into the range of ways that mobile individuals may make meaning of, and make “choices” around, their own identities and behavior in relation to their own mobility. It seeks to share these narratives as one way to add to understandings about the real complexity, conflict and tension that the inculcation and taking on of a new habitus (and necessarily eschewing the old habitus) engenders. Rather than adding on cultural practices as many studies assume, the individuals in this study speak to a conflicting process of acquisition, in which conflicting or disparate cultural practices are negotiated in the habitus. These complexities co-exist with the benefits and gains, and they have import for understanding the relational layers of these processes – and of becoming, as one participant put it, “unrecognizable” to one’s family of origin, and for some, to oneself.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology and Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and better understand the experience of upward mobility, via education, among individuals who have earned an advanced degree but whose parent/s did not attend college. The phenomenon of social mobility is explored with particular attention to how individuals make sense of their own experience of mobility and how they have lived and continue to live the mobility experience in their own lives. Though this project draws primarily from ethnographic methods, largely in-depth interviews, the perspective provided by phenomenology as described by Moustakas (1994) grounds the intent and analysis of the project. Through taking a phenomenological perspective on the experience of mobility, this study “derives textural descriptions of the meanings and essences [of the experience through] setting aside the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings [so that] phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 33-34).

This section begins with a description of the methodological approach that frames the research and analysis. In addition, participant selection criteria, participant descriptions and pertinent sub-group differences are discussed. Research methods are then described, with particular attention to a pilot study in which key questions were asked in order to modify the protocol for the in-depth interviews, which represent the largest data source informing the analysis and findings of this project. This section closes with a consideration of issues in validity, including the potential for bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2005).
Methodology

This qualitative project draws on methods in ethnography and narrative analysis. Taking a phenomenological stance, the study considers the meanings participants give to their experiences in becoming upwardly mobile. To that end, this research draws from the lived experiences of individuals who, now as adults, reflect on their upward mobility over time including a consideration of the implications of this experience on their current lives.

A central aspect of phenomenology involves the development of a topic that “seeks to uncover the qualitative factors in behavior and experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105) and argues for simple, open research questions that seek to understand the phenomenon in question. For this reason, I also draw, in part, on narrative analysis. Due to the purposeful openness of the guiding research questions, introduced in Chapter One and included again below, much of the interview data and participant responses were open-ended and non-sequenced. As a prime example, participants often delve deeply into a salient experience, completely narrating the story without interruption. Through this approach to and aspect of the interviews, I was able to pay attention not just to the content of the stories shared, but also to consider through careful analysis, why the story was told the way it was (Reissman, 2002). For example, I explore the emotions expressed throughout the interviews as participants cried at the distance they felt with family members, resisted expressing anger over conflicts with siblings until pressed, or laughed off discomfort in the workplace. In some cases, then, tension or conflict felt with family members, in the workplace or internally was not shared until the interview was well
underway. As interviews progressed, participants opened up, built on previous stories shared and felt more comfortable weaving their emotions and the difficulties they had experienced throughout their mobile trajectory alongside the joys and accomplishments. A person-centered approach to interviewing, which is a hallmark of phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994) was an important framework that supported the openness with which participants shared their experiences.

Phenomenology explores a particular phenomenon through the perspectives of those who have experienced it and seeks to understand that which is particular to the individual alongside that which is shared between members of a group that shares the experience. This approach is rooted in a desire to learn deeply from study participants about “themes that sustain inquiry and awaken further interest and concern” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). Research questions should therefore be open ended and enable the “examining of the phenomenon from many sides, angles and perspectives” (p. 58). To that end, the study was guided by the following questions about the experience of upward mobility in educational and professional contexts and beyond:

1) How do individuals who have experienced upward mobility narrate their experience? What memories do they include in these narratives? How do these experiences compare with individuals’ current lives?

2) How do they view their experience of upward mobility as having influenced them personally? How do they see their experience of mobility as having affected their family relationships, both throughout their education and in their current
lives? How do they view the experience as having influenced them professionally?

Theoretical Stance on Conducting Research

In considering the research questions asked, interactions with participants, and orientation to data throughout the analysis stage, I drew on three theoretical stances in order to remain thoughtful and open to the content of the data, critical of my own bias and perspective, and attentive to social theory. An outline of these stances follows.

The first is the framework provided in feminist ethnography. Beverly Skeggs (2005) describes the consistent “attention to ethics” which is central to feminist ethnography and enables a “questioning of the virtues of objectivity, distance and detachment” (p. 437). In each in-depth interview I attempted to, first and foremost, remain ethical. I also remained aware of the distancing between researcher and participant that can occur. The content explored throughout interviews was sensitive at times, and difficult for some participants to share. For this reason, this open orientation focused on maintaining connection with participants was an important approach to and framing for data collection.

The second orientation is framed by Foley (2002) as a “cultural Marxist” standpoint in which the “contradictory perspectives” of cultural Marxism and postmodernism are brought in conversation. (p. 486). Drawing on his ethnography *Learning capitalist culture* Foley describes his attempts to both stay grounded in the theoretical project, yet decides to “sprinkle the text” with vignettes of his interactions with kids and teachers in the field (p. 481). The goal he describes, and the orientation I
drew from, is to “create accessible, highly reflective realist cultural critiques” (p. 487). Foley’s stance was particularly important as I worked to prioritize the distinct voices of the participants while also considering the meaning of their experience within a cultural and theoretical framework that began to take shape through analysis.

The final orientation is that of Freire (1998) and his grounding theory of “unfinishedness,” which argues that all humans at all stages are in a “constant state of becoming” (p. 92). In drawing on this critical educator’s stance, I began every interview actively open to the potential of learning from the participant; I consistently viewed my data and research as unfinished. This approach was primarily in relation to the research project, and to the ways in which each participant’s perspective and experience would add to the data and my shifting conception of the story the data were telling. My commitment to unfinishedness was also personal, however, as I approached each interview prepared to gain something from the experiences and life of another person. I was open to the possibilities of the unknown and unfinished in multiple senses and moments.

These theoretical stances acted as principles that guided my interactions with the participants in the study. A description of who these participants are and why they were selected follows.

Participant Selection

In choosing participants for this study, I drew on Maxwell’s conception of purposeful selection in which “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to prove information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices”
(Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). In selecting participants in this way, I hoped that those whom I interviewed would help me answer my research questions, given their lived experiences and the ways that their biographies fit within what I sought to learn. Based on conceptions of social class and mobility, I decided to use education as the primary selection criteria. Individuals, then, who identified as having an advanced degree and who had parents who had not gone to college were invited to participate. In general, individuals with a high status degree (i.e., JD, MBA, Ph.D.) were recruited. In two cases, high school teachers with master’s degrees were included; still the majority of the 35 participants have high status degrees. All names and references to cities, colleges or universities throughout the study are pseudonyms. In some cases a sister university or city has been chosen to replace the name given during the interview for readability.

During preliminary plans for my study, I had considered narrowing the participation criteria to include race or ethnicity, but later determined that the important lived experience I am interested in involves mobility via education and that it seemed important to learn from a variety of racial and ethnic groups who have all experienced this phenomenon rather than limit the voice of those I heard from to just one subset of the population who have achieved social mobility. The role that race and ethnicity play in the experience of mobility is significant and was mentioned throughout interviews and reported when relevant. It was not my intention, however, to investigate race and ethnicity, rather I hoped to better understand the experience of mobility, across social identities, and so this prevailed as the primary lens through which I selected participants. Through this decision, I hoped to “adequately capture the heterogeneity in the
population” to “ensure that the conclusions adequately represent the entire range of variation” (Maxwell, 2005, 89). Therefore, this study is situated to learn from the experience of individuals from both urban and rural backgrounds in the West, Midwest, Northeast and South of the United States, from a variety of racial and ethnic groups, from state schools, small liberal art schools and elite private schools, and both men and women – all having experienced upward mobility via education. In this way, we might better understand this experience through the lens of a variety of identities and backgrounds.

For this same reason, I added 10 participants to the participant group who had attained the same advanced level of education as their parents, in other words, people who were not upwardly mobile, being born into an a middle or upper class family. Through this shift in research design, it was my attempt to make social class the connecting identity marker throughout my participants, and to offer, then, a comparison group. A description of the participants studied can be found in Table 1. The majority of analysis is concerned with the life experiences of the upwardly mobility participants. A comparison between these two groups, however, represents the focus of Chapter Seven.

\textit{Table 1: Participants}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
<th>Father Occupation</th>
<th>Mother Occupation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy Ramirez</td>
<td>Biracial</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>State / Ivy League</td>
<td>Higher Ed Administrati</td>
<td>Factory Worker</td>
<td>Social Services</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{16} This sample is referred to throughout as the “middle class” sample, though that term is defined differently in the literature. For the purposes of this study, an adult is defined as middle class if he or she earned a graduate degree and grew up with one or both parents also having earned a graduate degree.

\textsuperscript{17} All names and references to cities, colleges or universities throughout the study are pseudonyms.

\textsuperscript{18} “Elite” in each category is defined as within the top 25 colleges and universities listed on the US News and World Report for 2012.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Industry</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Andy Haddad</td>
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<td>State / Elite</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Small business</td>
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<td>State</td>
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<td>Support businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anthony Vaughan</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M.B.A</td>
<td>Ivy League / State</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
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<td>Dry Cleaners</td>
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<td>Brady Williams</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M.D.</td>
<td>Ivy League / Ivy League</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
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<td>M.A.</td>
<td>State / Catholic</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>K-12 Administrators</td>
<td>Military /</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Bookkeeper</td>
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Sub-group difference

Despite the connection of education and mobility that unites the participants in this study, there are also significant differences between them that are important to mention and which have the potential to inform the analysis and findings. This is evident in Table 1, where a variety of racial groups, occupations and graduate degrees are represented in the data. The family background and parent occupations also vary widely, though commonalities exist based on educational level within each group. In addition, the
income level of participants varies widely, often due to field of work, but also due to age. For example, a lawyer who has the earning potential of over $100,000 is making just $40,000 because he has recently graduated from law school. Others who have achieved an advanced degree are making the decision to stay at home with children and so are making far under their earning potential. The median family income was $200,000 with the lowest at $40,000 and the highest at $900,000 a year.

In addition to these more demographic differences, there was also variance in the kind of school one attended. Twelve of the mobile individuals earned either their bachelor’s or graduate degree (or both) from Ivy League universities, and the remaining thirteen respondents earned their degrees from state colleges and universities, or smaller liberal arts or private schools, many of which are considered elite as well (See Table 1). In some cases, this distinction did shift the initial transition to college – where the more elite colleges and universities represented a wealthier student body for the upwardly mobile individuals to transition into. This sometimes resulted in increased feelings of discomfort or with a stronger urge to change. Geographic location also played a role. The potential blue collar opportunities afforded in some areas (such as the auto industry in the Midwest) sometimes provided a more stable childhood with more financial stability, without parents having gone to college. In some cases these more stable conditions meant more support for college, both emotionally and financially.

**Sequencing of Data Collection**

Phase I of data collection was a pilot study conducted in order to discover areas of weakness in my interview protocol and to gain insight into other issues or questions to
consider in the design of the current study. Phase II was participant recruitment and in-depth interviews of Group 1: the upwardly mobile participants. Phase III was participant recruitment and in-depth interviews of Group 2: the middle class participants. Phase IV was informal follow-up conversations and analysis of participants’ publications and other aspects of their public lives; this phase was completed throughout Phases I and II.

Phase I: Pilot Study

Upon receiving IRB approval from the University of Pennsylvania, a small initial round of three informal interviews was conducted between December 2011 and January 2012. Data from these interviews were shared with a dissertation committee member for careful analysis, feedback and instruction. As a mini “pilot study,” (Creswell, 2007) these interviews further informed the research questions as well as the content and flow of the interview protocol as the project began. After formative analysis of the transcripts from the first three interviews, the protocol was revisited and revised based on understandings that emerged from these participants and their experiences as they relate to the guiding research questions of the study. Of particular importance was a comment made during one interview in the initial pilot study by David, a young man in his early 20’s completing his undergraduate degree at an Ivy League institution. David mentioned turning “on and off” depending on who he was around and how exhausting it was when he was “on.” His powerful comment pushed me to consider additional questions to include in the study protocol, particularly questions related to communication style and spaces in which participants felt like an outsider. The process of socialization David was experiencing as a current college student, as well as the heightened awareness of his peer
network, loomed large throughout our conversation. Therefore, I was compelled to interview adults who had undergone the experience already. In addition, given my interest in familial relationships and conceptions of change over time, it was clear that I should focus on those over the age of 30 who had completed the educational stage of their mobile trajectory.

Participant Recruitment

As recent economic studies indicate, the primary population of interest is relatively small (Pew, 2012), and participants who fit the selection criteria were not easy to find. Through the use of snowball sampling (Polsky, 1969; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), and with the help of the social networking sites Facebook and LinkedIn, I found interested people who fit the study criteria. After sending an initial explanation letter and confirming interest and fit (see Appendix C), I sent an email to confirm the time and place of each interview. I continuously recruited participants, first for Phase II and then for Phase III, throughout the duration of data collection.

Phrases II and III: In-depth Interviews

Once the protocol for interviews with upwardly mobile individuals was formalized based on insight gained from the pilot study interviews (see Appendix A), I drew on ethnographic research methods, including individual in-depth interviews. Upon obtaining consent, I conducted interviews that ranged from one to four hours in length, most lasting approximately two hours. Fourteen of the interviews took place in the participant’s home, nine in the participant’s office, five in a café, one in a private study
room in a university library and six over Skype. Conducting interviews over Skype was not ideal, as it is more difficult to develop a relationship with interviewees when not communicating face to face (Weiss, 1994). Due to the difficulty in finding participants who matched the criteria, Skype interviews were still conducted in order to include these individuals in the study. Awareness that this represents a difference in data collection across participants is noted, however. I brought a pie to each interview as a token of appreciation and sent a thank you note in the mail soon after each interview.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The same protocol was used for each interview, though the protocol for non-mobile individuals was slightly modified and shorter (see Appendix B). While the same protocol was used across interviews, as noted earlier in this chapter, the interviews were semi-structured so that the conversations could follow the path each interviewee charted as we engaged in dialogue about their experiences. When conducting each interview, I drew on the description of in-depth interviews outlined by Moustakas (1994) and used in phenomenological research, attempting to make many questions “open-ended” with “guiding questions and topics” (p. 181). In addition, I considered Weiss’ (1994), description of the relationship a researcher builds with her informants alongside the importance of reflecting on interviews via comments and memos after each interview. I also drew on the strategies in narrative analysis, where I left space for and encouraged narration of salient stories (Reissman, 2002).

Each interview started with a description of participants’ backgrounds, including descriptions of their childhood and where they grew up, educational experiences and the
story of how they learned about, applied to and experienced college. I then asked probing follow-up questions about specific support individuals might have had for getting into and paying for college, initial experiences in education institutions (in terms of where they fit on the comfort/discomfort continuum), any shifts in personality, behaviors or lifestyle after college, and relationships with friends before and after college. I also asked questions about individuals’ families, including descriptions of their relationships with family members in the past and in a current context (particularly parents and siblings). I also asked questions about keeping in touch with family, including: how often they spoke over the phone or saw one another, what they talked about when they spent time together, and if they shared their work and details from their life with family members. Finally, if participants were married or had children, reflections on partnership decisions and child rearing strategies (as compared with their families of origin or with their partner) were discussed. After each interview I wrote a descriptive memo (Maxwell, 2005) in which I described specific details about the participant’s affect, clothing worn, gestures and disposition, moments of emotion expressed by the participant and salient terms as well as setting details and initial reflections on interview content.

After initial analysis (described below), emic terms emerged as potential areas of interests to add to the protocol and probe for as necessary or useful (Maxwell, 2005). For this reason, after the fifth interview, I began to ask questions about change; whether participants felt they had changed due to their educational trajectory and specifically in which ways, including probing questions for tastes in the areas of food, music and fashion as well as interests, personality traits and conceptions of money. Given the
sometimes-painful view of this experience evident across autobiographical accounts, I closed each interview asking what had been most enjoyable and difficult about their educational trajectory. For the interview with middle class participants, stories of college and school were also asked, as were questions about change, belonging and familial relationships. Finally, across interviews, various demographic details were clarified and requested throughout the interview, including occupational status, educational background and income of parents, siblings, partners and partner’s parents. Race, ethnicity and religion were also discussed as well job history and geographic moves. For a full set of protocols used with each population group, see Appendices A and B.

Interviews were semi-structured and many participants commented at the end of the interview that it had felt more like a conversation, wondering if I “had learned from them what I needed.” While the major topics mentioned above were addressed in each interview, the flow of the conversation largely dictated the order of topics, the time spent on each question and the variety of topics discussed that were outside those mentioned (of which there were many).

Phrase IV: Follow-Up Conversations

Each data source in Phase IV was meant to complement the data collected through the in-depth interviews, providing some basis for data triangulation, or the use of “multiple data collection methods for more substantiated constructs and hypotheses” (Maxwell, 1994, p. 14). Follow-up meetings for coffee or lunch with participants occurred with two participants, as they expressed interest in keeping in touch. In some contexts, participants mentioned that finding other individuals with whom they could talk
about the topics explored through the interviews was difficult. In these follow-up
meetings, individuals would also ask what I was finding in the study; I used this
opportunity to conduct informal member checks in order to verify my interpretations of
their narratives (Maxwell, 2005). In some cases, participants expanded on themes
introduced in the interview, and an ad hoc second interview commenced. These would
also sometimes happen right after the interview, as was the case with six interviews. In
each case, participants asked that I put the recorder away, so that we could just talk. In
these times, my own identity as an upwardly mobile individual appeared to offer
legitimacy to my interest in the topic and acted as an entry point for further conversation
where information was shared that participants were not comfortable having recorded.

Phrase IV: Participants’ Public and Professional Lives

Fourteen of the 25 upwardly mobile participants in the study have a public
identity as an academic, a writer, a business owner, a teacher or an artist. Many have
written books or articles and some have personal websites or websites for their business
or organization. These public resources provided another source of data through which I
could triangulate findings and learn more about the professional interests of each
participant, delving into their opinion on topics we did not have time to discuss in the
interviews. In some cases, I read books and articles written by or about participants.
These documents provided me with more detailed knowledge about the work and
interests of those participants who had public identities.
Data Analysis

As data were collected and transcribed, I uploaded interview transcriptions to Atlas.ti after initial readings of the transcripts for understanding. In addition, data matrices were created which helped organize survey data acquired via interviews, as well as variation and similarities across participants. Revisiting each interview for a second time, I highlighted “significant statements” (Creswell, 2007, p. 61) or quotes and looked for “clusters of meaning,” (Moustakas, 1990) using “horizontalization” across quotes, in which “every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question [has] equal value” (Moustakas, 1990, 118). I then revisited each memo written after re-reading their transcribed interview and added interpretations, key terms of concepts for analysis and mentioned significant narratives or stories found in the interview. I also revisited initial memos written for comparison, and to support validity across my perceptions of the data (Maxwell, 2005).

Employing these methods, I started to identify codes that were largely descriptive and comparative in nature, laying the perimeters of the experience across participants. After meeting with each dissertation committee member to discuss the emerging code list and confirm data collection completion, I finalized the code list and began coding interviews using Atlas.ti. I started with more descriptive codes, such as “parent relationships,” “initial education transition,” and “outsider,” and used them to code five interviews. From there, I discovered more analytical codes, paying particular attention to emic terms that emerged across interviews, and included these using the memo function. Analytic memos such as “difficult topics of conversation,” and “constructing an entire
new world to explain life” added important emic terms to the code list (Maxwell, 2005). Considering, then, which codes seemed to be more grounded in Atlast.i – I discovered ways in which I might (re)frame the codes most often used into more analytical codes, looking for the nuance within the description. In this way, the descriptive code “Parent Relationships” became the more analytical codes: “difficulty in keeping in touch with family,” “parent’s perception of work/proud,” and “sharing new life with family.” Similarly, the descriptive code of “change” became “exposure,” “fashion,” and “restraint.” I then re-coded the first five interviews and continued to code each interview using the new analytical codes determined (Miles & Huberman, 2002).

Reflective memos, which had been written after each interview (as mentioned above), were also uploaded to atlas.i and coded using the same coding scheme. Initial chapters began to emerge via frequency of code and analysis across reflective memos. A second round of dissertation committee meetings confirmed the initial chapter list and then reports of each code related to chapter themes were created and used to analyze potential findings across participants (Miles & Huberman, 2002).

Data collection began in January 2012 and continued through October 2012. Data analysis began in October 2012 and continued through February 2013 in tandem with the beginning of the writing stage in December 2012.

Validity

Concerns with validity are significant in qualitative research. This is particularly true in a project such as this, where the subjective interpretation of the researcher might influence the portrayal of an individual’s lived experience. The danger in
misrepresentation was a significant concern throughout data analysis and in writing each findings chapter.

I draw on Maxwell’s (1992) framing of validity as “relative,” yet with the goal of limiting researcher bias and ensuring “valid” data. This is the intention, even though it is “always possible for there to be different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives” (p. 41). Approaches to ensure validity, then, “seek to comprehend phenomena not on the basis of the researcher’s perspective, but from those of the participants in the situations studied” (p. 48). Maxwell outlines five validity categories important in ensuring validity in qualitative data, two of which are of concern for this project. The first is “descriptive validity,” in which the researcher is primarily concerned with “the factual accuracy” of their account, or “what the researcher reports having seen or heard” (p. 45). In this case, there is no cause to question the accuracy of the stories shared by participants in the study. In addition, each description of what I witnessed, or how an individual said something during the interview was drawn from a memo written directly after each interview. This was one attempt to ensure “descriptive validity” of the data presented. The second category Maxwell outlines is “interpretive validity” which: “is grounded in the language of the people studied and rely as much as possible on their words and concepts” (Maxwell, 1994, p. 49). For this reason, participants have been quoted whenever possible to prevent inaccurate representation of perspective, but also to limit bias of the researcher.

I drew on the concept of “rich data” (Maxell, 2005, p. 110) in order to validate potential findings across and within interviews. Due to the open-ended protocol, and my
desire during interviews to encourage a participant to “narrate” (Riessman, 2002) deeply significant moments and experiences, I often had long narratives and stories to analyze. This enabled more careful and complete conclusions. In addition, I consistently looked for examples of disconfirming evidence or “discrepant data” (Maxwell, 2005, 112), which can be found throughout the proceeding data chapters. This prevented my offering just one viewpoint, or missing significant data which might lead to a challenge to analysis.

As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) make clear, eliminating the influence of the researcher is impossible. In the case of this study, the researcher’s positionality (Alcoff, 1988) is of great importance since my own experience is connected to this phenomenon as an individual who has experienced upward mobility. This poses issues in validity. Phenomenology argues for the importance of “discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meaning and values” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 103) and in turn offers strategies for unpacking bias and researcher experience from analysis. The concept of “epoche” and the practice of “bracketing” – in which “investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” – helped to ensure validity (Creswell, 2007, p. 80; Moustakas, 1994). These practices allowed for my story, as the researcher, to be included in the work in a systematic and controlled way (Moustakas, 1994). This process was employed at each stage of the data collection process, for each question included on the protocol. As well, reflective memos about my researcher identity, specifically as it related to the research
topic and perspectives and experiences of the participants, were written throughout the research process (Maxwell, 2005).

In addition, and with similar intent, an interview with me, as the researcher, was also conducted by a research assistant using the study protocol. This interview was coded and analyzed to discover potential sources of bias in analysis and conclusions. This is not a part of the data explored for the project. Instead, the transcript from the interview offered insight into potential partiality toward certain themes and experiences, given my own experience with the content explored across interviews. In some cases, the transcript (and my experience with the topic) was an asset as it helped me to guard against the possibility of inadvertently imposing my experience on the data. The focus on familial relationships and sharing work with family, for example, seemed important insights for analysis across interviews. However, while it was documented in my interview that I experience guilt and pain associated with my family for “having left home,” or struggle to share aspects of my life with my family, other participants had vastly different experiences. Since I was aware of the bias of my own interview, I actively resisted evidence that confirmed my experience. Rather, I knew to approach analysis with the prospect of multiple findings, or even a different finding. Our own identities influence how we analyze and what we “read” through analysis. Having my responses to the interview in hand enabled me in part to pre-emptively ward against my bias and judgment based on my own experience.

Finally, while I have no reason to believe that any of the participants in my study are unreliable, the nature of qualitative data is such that all data informing analysis for
this project comes from the perspective of individuals, who have told their own stories. As personal accounts often are, the data is subject to the personal interpretations of the participants interviewed. Attempts were made to triangulate, or compare different data sources, when possible by drawing on the publications and public identity artifacts of participants, which existed for 14 of the 35 participants. Through these data sources, I was able to read participants’ publications, criticism of their work and current projects of interest. This enabled me to compare data about work, education background and interests with data collected during interviews. The firsthand lived experiences and narratives told, however, which represent the bulk of the data collected, are based entirely on the firsthand accounts of the participants for which there is no comparative data.
CHAPTER 4
Embodying Cultural Capital through Performance, Restraint and Covering Up

*You do sometimes feel like you’re wearing a different mask*

- Claire Crocetti, Master’s Degree

Popular conceptions of social class involve economic standing, earning potential or the possession of goods and property (Class Matters, 2003; Pew Mobility Study, 2012). However, social class theorists, such as Bourdieu (1983), posit that social class is defined as and lived within the realm of culture as well, and enacted in the body and mind in a variety of ways. The concepts of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1983) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1979; 1984) help to explain the ways in which social class is experienced in the body and in turn presented in social interactions, particularly for upwardly mobile individuals.

Bourdieu defines cultural capital in its embodied form as “the form of long-lasting dispositions in the mind and body” and “always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 243). Therefore, the embodied cultural capital with which one is born will always act as a foundation for behavior and disposition. This has implications for the upwardly mobile individuals in this study who describe taking on particular behaviors and dispositions that are clearly distinct from those with which they were raised. A significant aspect of embodied cultural capital also includes *habitus*, defined as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1979, vii), and is significant in understanding the cultural aspects of social class. Bourdieu’s theory of habitus focuses cultural forms such as sensibilities, tastes and styles not exclusively
related to embodiment. Yet, much of what Bourdieu refers to as habitus does work through the body – how you hold yourself, walk, dress and express emotion.

Of particular interest to Bourdieu is the “transmission” or “acquisition” of embodied cultural capital or habitus (pp. 243-244). Bourdieu views the factor of “time” as central and argues that, while cultural capital can be learned via education institutions, those born into elite families garner more time for “acculturation” to occur since “differences in the cultural capital possessed by the family imply differences in the age at which the work of transmission and accumulation begins” (p. 246). This is one way, Bourdieu argues, reproduction of social classes is maintained. While other forms of cultural capital are significant, this chapter draws on the embodied form to understand how upwardly mobile individuals experience and perform changes to their cultural capital. This is evident as they present themselves in classed locations such as schools, colleges or the workplace in order to achieve success.

As Bourdieu (with Passeron, 1977; 1984) make clear, cultural capital and class-based cultural practices are central to how social reproduction occurs. That individuals who experience upward mobility would need to take on the cultural capital of the upper class, developing a habitus particular to that context, is not then surprising. Attewell and Lavin (2007) mention the benefits associated with a college education for this very reason, that working class or poor students might “gain” the cultural capital of the middle class through “close proximity to middle class peers.” This is, in effect, a central

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19 There are three “forms” of cultural capital outlined by Bourdieu of which the embodied state is one, outlined above. The other two forms include the objectified state – in the form of “cultural goods” and knowledge as well as the institutional state – which attempts to make objective these preferred behaviors through the earning of education credentials and qualifications (Bourdieu, 1983).
component of moving up the social ladder and has been discussed both theoretically and empirically. Many studies have considered whether cultural capital can be learned across class backgrounds (Dimaggio, 1982; Scherger & Savage, 2010; Horvat & Davis, 2011) and some view the taking on of cultural capital as a potential reform effort through which educational institutions might provide access to low-income students through teaching them preferred cultural capital at an early age (Tough, 2008; 2012), as was described in Chapter Two. Perceptions of accomplishment and self-worth (Horvat & Davis, 2011) and desired student behavior (Tough, 2008; 2013) are some examples of how cultural capital is framed across studies. Little attention has been paid, however, to the ways in which social class is enacted in the body, which Bourdieu argues, is central to the conception of cultural capital and habitus. Across these studies, the ways in which cultural capital is learned or “transmitted” has also been limiting, implying a simple inputting of dispositions, tastes and behaviors. The data in this chapter, instead, speak to the complicated and inconsistent process involved when taking on and learning cultural capital outside of one’s own background. While some participants mention being comfortable with their newly acquired cultural capital, others report discomfort or an inability to perform correctly. Additionally, for some the process is in constant flux as they shift how they present themselves depending on context. Attending to the learning of cultural capital in these more complex ways enables analysis that includes the difficulties associated with such a process.20

20 See Lee and Kramer (2013) for one recent example in which the “sacrifices” associated with gaining a new habitus and how “the transition into an elite habitus affects students’ interactions with their home communities” (p. 18) are considered.
The concept of performance\(^{21}\) (Bettie, 2003) is a useful analytical tool in understanding the way in which social class is enacted in the body and “performed” by working class students. In her ethnography in Waretown High, Bettie identified a small number of white and Mexican-American working class students who “were upwardly mobile middle-class performers” (p. 140). She frames these girls as “exceptions” to the reproduction rule and points to their ability to perform middle class cultural capital in order to be placed in middle class academic tracks, receive support in the school setting, and gain proximity to middle class peers. Bettie describes examples of the embodied form of cultural capital, such as wearing more subdued make-up and choosing to wear more conservative clothing, as one aspect of how both white and Mexican-American working class girls performed middle class.\(^{22}\) Clothing is an important aspect of cultural capital that aids in a mobile individuals attempt to effectively perform middle class culture. Wearing the right shoes, a suite and tie, or the preferred name brands can support your attempt at presentation; “vital” as clothes are to “the proper office portrait” (Lubrano, 2004, p. 130). Alternatively, wearing the wrong clothing can act as an external symbol that one does not “belong.” Both results occurred within the stories told by the participants in this study.

\(^{21}\) Bettie also contributes to the concept of performance through her distinction between *performativity*, in which girls “enact class scripts of which they were unaware” (p. 192) and *class performance*, where girls “acquire cultural capital by association” (p. 192) and “perform a class identity they did not originally perceive as their own” (p. 192). This chapter focuses on the latter, in which mobile individuals are performing class identities to which they were not born.

\(^{22}\) Bettie focuses on the intersection of race, class and gender and so the differences across and within the White and Mexican-American students was of particular interest to her. Though Bettie highlights the gendered and raced aspects of movement across social class, the possibility to perform class based practices in order to achieve academic success was consistent across the mobile students she observed – both White and Mexican-American.
This chapter examines how participants describe the performance of class in their everyday lives to gain further insight into the connection between cultural capital and embodied classed performance. Performing middle class is then one way in which cultural capital might be taken on, where working class individuals learn the cultural capital of their desired class location and “perform” that cultural capital in order to fit in, move up, or belong. As mentioned, considering the taking on of embodied cultural capital as performance offers more conceptual space for the difficulty, or costs, sometimes associated with mobility, a difficulty described throughout autobiographical narratives about mobility (Rodriguez, 1981; Steedman, 1986; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993; Dews & Law, 1995; Villanueva, 1995; Ryan & Sackrey, 1996; Mahony & Zmroczek, 1997; Van Galen & Dempsey, 2009) and within the experiences of the participants in this study.

This chapter also offers an analysis of the difficulties participants associated with the taking on of cultural capital, difficulties that I argue represent a form of “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 2001). In his book, *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as, “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling” (2001, p. 1-2). This concept describes the potential to dominate and enact violence in more subtle and less overt ways, all within the cultural realm. Through “misrecognition” and “feeling,” for example, individuals might experience internal
violence because they do not possess or embody the cultural arbitrary\textsuperscript{23} necessary for success (which has not overtly been named or defined). This phenomenon is evident across participants’ stories. They often describe feeling uncomfortable and being inconsistent in how they performed or presented themselves, aware that they might be “seen through” or that their mistakes in performance might be “noticed.” The concept of symbolic violence emphasizes the arbitrary and changing culture of power, helping us to understand the potential difficulty associated with taking on or performing cultural capital in this way.\textsuperscript{24} Central to this process is how mobile individuals take on cultural capital, which they view as necessary to their success in a variety of contexts. This is the focus for the following section.

\textbf{Learning Cultural Capital as a Necessity}

Upwardly mobile individuals mention the need to shift aspects of who they are in order to be welcomed and successful in their new contexts. For many, shifting aspects of how they present themselves in order to be successful is “just something you do” and not anything they had consciously considered before our interview conversation. That they needed to perform was viewed as natural. The following participants, Stephanie and Anthony, offer two examples of how necessary the taking on of cultural capital has been, and is, to their success.

\textsuperscript{23} The preferred cultural practices determined by the dominant culture and made legitimate by pedagogic work (PW) via education. See also pages 18-19 for a description.

\textsuperscript{24} The power exerted and violence felt are each symbolic, not overt. The desired cultural capital, which provides benefit and solidifies dominance, is arbitrary in nature and therefore not consistent. Therefore, the examples offered through data are not meant to be definitions for or consistent conceptualizations of symbolic violence. Rather, the examples provided might help shed light on the role symbolic violence plays as cultural capital is taken on and performed by mobile individuals not born into the dominant class.
Stephanie Harper, a 32-year-old White medical doctor in the Northeast, lives in a small townhouse along the ocean with her husband, whom she met at a party while in college eleven years ago. Their home is comfortable, though sparse with little furniture. Most time is spent in the kitchen, it seems, where evidence of the breakfast they cooked with bacon and grits the morning of our interview is on the stove and in the sink. She was born and raised in a small town in the South with a mother who struggled with alcoholism and a father who has never been a part of her life. Neither went to college. Stephanie had a deep commitment to her grandmother, whom she lived with and cooked and cleaned for throughout her childhood. When Stephanie was thirteen her grandmother passed away and, because her mother was unable to take care of her due to addiction, she lived with her emotionally abusive aunts and her only cousin, a boy a few years younger than her, who she says was “physically and emotionally abused” by her aunts as well. Despite her excellent behavior in school and attempts to gain their approval, she told me, with a sad look on her face, that her aunts would call her “ugly” and “fat.” While she speaks with compassion about her grandmother, she describes her aunts as “evil” and “crazy,” drawing out the word “crazy” and gesturing with her hands in the air for emphasis from her seated position across from me on her couch.

Since Stephanie works so hard as a doctor and also finds her aunts abusive, she does not keep in touch with her family as much as they would like. She talks to them about once a week now. This is compared to her male cousin who talks with them more often. Stephanie describes her cousin as “her only, kind of, sibling figure” and shared that though they were close growing up, they are not close now. She wishes that they were,
but that “for some reason, he just doesn’t like me.” When asked what he does for work, she describes him as “kind of a bum, unfortunately” who “hasn’t had his child in years” since he moved to a different city. Because he does not work, he “has more time on his hands” and so is more actively involved in the family. For example, “he can call my aunts and do this, that and the other.” This is contrasted with Stephanie: “I’m working all the time, so I don’t have time to be doing all of that. So. So, he’s the good one. Which is funny because I used to be the good one, so it’s kind of role reversal, over time” (interview, April 13, 2012). She raised her eyebrows and placed emphasis on “good.”

Since she “got good grades” and “never got in trouble” she used to be seen as the good one growing up. Now, however, since she is not as involved in family issues or keeping in touch, Stephanie feels that her cousin is now seen as the “good one.”

Stephanie connects her career choice in medicine with her background taking care of her grandmother: “I’ve always been a caretaker – nobody ever took care of me, so, it just kind of fell into place” (interview, April 12, 2012). After completing her undergraduate degree at a large state school and her medical degree at a small, rural, private school in her home state, her first entry point to elite culture was to the Ivy League school where she is currently completing her residency. When asked if she has had to change at all in order to become a doctor she looked quizzically and said, “I guess it’s something I never really thought about. It’s just something you do” (interview, April 12, 2012). She then describes the ways in which she has had to “adapt” in order to be successful, including shifts in her “dress,” “talk” and “walk”:

I’ve had to learn how to adapt. I think adaptation is huge, I think you have to be able to adapt to different situations, different people.
**How have you had to adapt?**

I mean, it’s even just adapting on a daily basis. Like I said, I’m becoming more just who I am, being basically like, “Fuck it, this is who I am,” but you can’t start out that way. You cannot start out that way. You can’t do it [shaking her head]. You’ll never…nobody will ever take you seriously. You still have to dress the way, and talk the way, and walk the walk, to get in the door.

**At what point were you in the door?**

I don’t know if I’m still in the door. (Stephanie, interview, April 12, 2012).

Stephanie frames “dressing the way, talking the way and walking the walk” that she has had to learn as adaptation. She mentions her “subconscious mechanism for survival” which involves “reading people,” and “observing people’s body language and social cues,” and she describes this mechanism as “engrained” in who she is (interview, April 13, 2012). Despite the ways in which she has adapted and her “mechanism” for observation, she still is not sure she is “in the door,” even after three years. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1983) definition of embodied cultural capital, how one dresses, walks, talks and their “body language and social cues” are all aspects of the cultural capital developed in the body and central to social class reproduction. They might also be viewed as examples of performance (Bettie, 2003), where her outward presentation of self informs her success. This is the case for the middle class performers in Bettie’s study who gain entry into higher-tracked courses and middle class peer groups through outward middle class presentation. Though Stephanie wishes to say “Fuck it, this is who I am” she knows that this would prevent her ability to “be taken seriously” as a doctor. This need to adapt in terms of how one presents him/herself was consistent across interviews.
Anthony Vaughn, an African American business owner in a rural area near a large Northeastern city, discusses this need to present himself as well. He draws on the metaphor of “wearing a uniform for a game” to explain the way he performs in his work context. During our interview, Anthony spoke with passion about the importance of his mother and his church when considering how he had made it to where he is today. Originally from “the projects” in a large city in the South, Anthony’s mother worked at a dry cleaner to support their family of five while his father struggled with alcoholism. Neither parent attended college. Anthony, the oldest, made decisions early on to “stay out of trouble” with the help of his mother and found tremendous success both academically and as an athlete. He played basketball throughout high school and college and, with a GPA of 4.0, gave the speech as Valedictorian at his high school graduation.

Making it to an Ivy League institution was an experience he could have never imagined for himself, he said, and he was intent on being successful. When he first arrived as an undergraduate, he found out that he was not likely to graduate due to the “predictive index” which took into account school background, income level, parents’ education, race and test scores. Anthony describes his knowledge of this fact as what inspired him to work incredibly hard and excel. Instead he surpassed expectations, graduating first from an Ivy League institution and then earning his MBA from a well-known state school. His work life has also been successful as he worked as a consultant for a number of years and now has started a successful business with two business partners. He also lives in a large five-bedroom home, meticulously decorated with photos.

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25 Anthony remembers seeing this in a file at some point, but does “not remember how he saw it,” who might have showed it to him or in what context this information was learned.
of his family lining the walls. Raising his eyebrows and telling me to look around, he referred to himself as “blessed.” More than these external examples of success, however, Anthony points to the success of his sons and wife, the support of his mother, and the respect he has earned in his church as more indicative of the pride he feels.

Though Anthony is now an entrepreneur, he spent most of his career in the corporate world as a manager or a consultant. Like Bourdieu (1983), who challenges the notion that one’s success in the “economic game of society” is based on chance alone (p. 241), Anthony compares learning how to behave or perform in the workplace to learning the “rules to a game”:

You need to understand some basic fundamental principles when you’re in the professional workforce, it’s like there’s certain rules just like if you were playing a game. You basically understand that there are rules to operating. You can’t just; there are expectations with regard to dress. There are expectations with regard to communicating. (Interview, Feb. 9, 2013).

For Anthony, this involves wearing a “suit and tie.” Like Stephanie, Anthony introduces two of the many dimensions in which there are expectations for how to perform or behave – dress and communication – both of which are aspects of embodied cultural capital and habitus. Later in the interview when attempting to explain these “rules” and how he needs to perform in professional environments, Anthony draws again on his metaphor of “the game”:

I mentioned about the game, you go in—and if you were playing football, you know, you’ve got a uniform you put on. Shoulder pads, a helmet, a face mask, a this, that or the other, and then you go to play the game. You would be out of place if you went to play the game and you didn’t have your helmet on, you didn’t have your shoulder pads or your jersey on. You need your uniform. (Interview, Feb 9th, 2013).
Anthony’s conception of the “game” metaphor helps demonstrate the importance of each aspect of your behavior in the workplace, and shows that these aspects of how you present yourself – your uniform – become in some way associated with your potential success at the “game” so that you are not “out of place.” Like Stephanie’s description of “dressing the way and talking the talk,” Anthony describes dress and communication as aspects of this “uniform” he has learned he needs to wear in order to be successful. Success in these contexts is implied as “playing the game” or as Stephanie mentions, “getting in the door” and “being taken seriously.”

For both Stephanie and Anthony, “adaptation” or “putting on a uniform” is something one “just does.” This speaks to the sometimes-subconscious actions associated with enacting habitus and the strength of the cultural arbitrary that has been made legitimate as argued by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). Stephanie assumes it normal that she would need to adapt in some way and Anthony describes that one who does not “put on the uniform for the game” would be “out of place.” Though the process of taking on cultural capital for success is normalized, this does not prevent the potential discomfort that arises as individuals mention times when they did not fit in their new context or felt uneasy with their performance, experiences explored later in this chapter.

**Embodying Habitus: Restraint**

This section explores the specific dimensions of embodied cultural capital and habitus negotiated and performed by participants. It is organized within the analytical

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26 The preferred cultural practices determined by the dominant culture and made legitimate by pedagogic work (PW) via education. See also pages 18-19 for a description.
framing of restraint. Examples of embodied cultural capital might be understood in both external and internal ways. Outwardly, the way one sits, their facial expressions and how they carry themselves in meetings each correspond to the overall performance they offer as they present themselves socially and in professional settings. Internally, the ways in which frustration or dissenting opinion are expressed are also examples of embodied cultural capital and linked in many ways to the external presentation of self. Across each example, the need to restrain some aspect of how individuals presented themselves and interacted was consistent. Consideration of the way this is done, however, and the restraint that is necessary to engage successfully speaks to the internal difficulty associated with this experience. This experience of restraint is sometimes missing from empirical studies that explore the possibility of taking on cultural capital (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; DiMaggio, 1982; Horvat & Davis, 2011, Tough, 2012). Understanding one way in which acquiring cultural capital is experienced in the body – as restraint – enables a more nuanced understanding of this experience.

Ronnie Toma, a 30-year-old from a small Southern city, describes the important shifts he has experienced in the body as he attempts to present himself correctly in professional contexts and events as a lawyer. Ronnie experienced a huge transition in his life when a counselor at his local state school saw his LSAT scores and encouraged him to apply to “higher ranked schools.” She offered very little else in terms of information or direction, but that one recommendation landed Ronnie in an Ivy League school on the East Coast for law school. This, his initial exposure to elite culture, was not an easy transition, as he describes never feeling “comfortable in that environment.”
pressed for reasons why he experienced this discomfort, it was difficult to offer an example. Looking exasperated, he shrugged his shoulders and said, “I’ve spent a lot of time over the years trying to think about and isolate what made me uncomfortable about the environment…it’s just hard to say” (interview, March 1, 2013). Ronnie is also careful to try and not “trash any of my classmates, but I never felt --I never felt comfortable in that environment” in part because of the different people. He describes: “I just found myself around people who were very different from the people I was used to spending time with” (interview, March 1, 2013). He draws on the different background of his friends from home compared to those in law school in terms of work and leisure time to explain the difference:

In my early-to-mid 20s, you know, we all worked shitty part-time jobs, some of us more than one. And we all just freakin’ drank, just drank all the time, took pills and it was just kind of like a hard drinkin’ culture and…yknow, a lot of law students drank a lot, but it somehow felt different. (Interview, March 1, 2013).

In addition to these distinctions associated with work and partying, Ronnie also mentions differences in eating out that represented how different he felt from his fellow students. He describes “hating going out to eat” with students from law school:

…because they tend not to be nice to servers and they tend to squabble about the bill, yknow what I mean? Like, debate who put in enough or whatever. There have been several times, when like...especially in my first year when I was like, trying to fit in, you know? Where I would be at a table with five people, all of whom I know had a lot more money than me where I'd just be like, "Fuck it, here's another 20, let's go." Yknow, just because I was so sick of arguing about who had to put in more and who didn't. (Interview, March 1, 2012).

Though not directly related to embodied cultural capital as the following examples are, these differences between the people in law school and his friends from home help to frame how out of place Ronnie felt, and sometimes feels, in the new contexts he
experiences since earning his law degree. These differences play out in his law office or at law events differently, but are still present. He describes the “topics of conversation” about “golf,” “homes,” and “cars” in his workplace. In addition to these social differences, Ronnie discusses ways in which he shifts how he presents himself and communicates in order to be more successful in graduate school and professional settings. Ronnie uses the metaphor of a toolbox to describe specific ways of presenting himself; “I feel like I got more in my toolbox now, in terms of like, behaviors and affects.” When asked to describe what those tools were, he used the setting of his “lawyer social events” to further explain.

It's a weird subtle thing and I don't know quite how do describe it. Um...but I can go to a networking event with lawyers now...and I don't like it [laughing] but I can do it without embarrassing myself. There's sort of a social mode you have to do um, I actually think a lot of it has to do with holding yourself back, like, making your gestures smaller, making your facial expressions more restrained. (Interview, March 1, 2013).

While describing this change in his mannerisms, Ronnie, with a height of 6 feet, stiffened in his armchair and pulled all his limbs tight into his body, his arms by his side, demonstrating his attempt to make himself smaller, to restrain. At another point during the interview, he looked down at his legs crossed at the ankles and laughed out loud, gesturing down to his legs with his hand for emphasis and stating: “I'm crossing my, I'm crossing my ankles. I NEVER would have done that four years ago, y’know? Like, it would be more natural for me to like sit like this, you know, like take up more space and slouch around a little” (interview, March 1, 2013). He then demonstrated this by sitting back and spreading out into the chair, slouching with his legs moving forward and taking up far more space. His knees now reached the table in front of him and he laughed at how
differently he was sitting. He sat up a bit to continue the interview, though he did not cross his ankles again. These physical changes in presentation offer a significant window into the particular embodied cultural capital, or the “social mode,” socially mobile individuals must take on in order to “fit in” and traverse the workplace – a law social event, for example – without “embarrassing” themselves. In our interview, Ronnie also demonstrated an ability to move between and across these different ways of presenting himself, performing particular ways of being depending on his environment. This speaks to the importance of better understanding how cultural capital is being taken on. For example, are individuals able to demonstrate, as Ronnie does, different ways of being that depend on one’s context? Or, in contrast, are some individuals unable to perform these embodied expectations?

As mentioned, this restraint of the body that Ronnie describes is evident internally as well, as participants mention needing to control their natural response to emotional situations. This involves learning the correct tools to restrain their “intensity,” anger, or frustration for the comfort of others, or to maintain professionalism at work, particularly meetings in the workplace.

This need to restrain inner emotions and impulses was the case for one respondent; a White professor named Steve from the Midwest in his 50’s, who, looking over at me from across his desk, shared his experience since entering the academy a number of years ago. He described his childhood as “quite poor,” and recalled that “food was an issue,” particularly after his father and mother divorced, leaving Steve, his mother and his two brothers to live on his mother’s bookkeeper’s salary. Like Ronnie, Steve had
a long trajectory toward his career, which involved seven years toward the completion of his bachelor’s degree across three different institutions. He referred to his early academic self in his 20’s as particularly passionate and intense, stating: “I didn’t know how to perform….I didn’t know the protocols, and so, you know, I’m sure that the rush of anxiety and adrenaline, um, when I would have to perform in class would make me louder and, probably….more intense” (interview, May 3, 2012). He mentioned thinking back knowingly to that younger version of himself, recognizing his behavior in his current working class students who have not yet “learned how to perform.”

Steve described having to learn the aspect of performance that he did not have early in his career as an undergraduate. He mentioned the difference between “learning cultural capital” and “living cultural capital” and charted his own growing ability to perform in the workplace, providing an example of “learning” cultural capital. This involved restraining the more resistant, confrontational and “fuck you” part of himself:

The feelings of confrontation and resistance are still there, I think it’s the strategies and the performance of it that’s gotten better, right. So then when I first came here, it was like, watch out – I was very aggressive at times. It was in my first job interview. I didn’t know how to do it, right, but there was a real, sort of, “fuck you” part of me, that was going to be confrontational and that has to do I think with, you know, being an outsider. And so I think what I’ve learned to do is to hold on to that but it just, it can be performed better now. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

For Steve, then, learning how to perform has been central to his ability to be successful in his career, even as “an outsider.” When reflecting on his professional persona now, Steve mentioned a shift in his mood and passion: “I’m a lot less, um, explosive and intense and, I mean the intensity is there but it’s not, you know, it’s, performed better,” and then described the “tolerance” he has developed for aspects of the world or his work which
frustrate him. He described learning how to “put my energy where I think it belongs and I can have more control over that, I don’t have to respond to everything that comes up”; ultimately channeling his frustration into areas of his work that are more productive. He shared examples of this, such as advocating for a first generation student at the college, or engaging in research that matters deeply to him. He marks the change as positive, yet still marvels at how different “the intense fire in his belly” looks. Steve has learned to perform correctly in the workplace, then, through restraining or containing the aspects of himself that are more intense or confrontational. Though he knows the “fire in his belly” is still there, the ways in which he is allowed to express it have shifted greatly, in part so that he is able to advocate for working class students or conduct research that is important to him. It is clear, however, that learning how to moderate this passion and intensity through performance was necessary to his success.

Larry Lehman, another White professor from the Midwest, frames this need to correctly present oneself in the workplace as well, though he has had more trouble taking on the performance aspects that Ronnie, Steve and Bettie (2003) describe. Currently in his 60’s, Larry was trained as a teacher in a small private college also in the Midwest but was inspired by the political landscape of the 1960’s and ‘70’s. He discussed his first time ever in a bookstore when visiting New York City while in the service as “the beginning of what should have been my college education.” Laughing nostalgically, he mused: “Here I am two and a half years out of college, and I’m really beginning to now learn what it’s like to learn, and kind of take charge of my own education.” This exposure in New York City led Larry to graduate school where he was exposed for the first time to
people who were incredibly different than him. Like Ronnie, much of that education involved engaging with individuals from vastly different backgrounds than himself. Though not yet directly related to the shifts in cultural capital necessary for upward mobility, the stories Larry told offered a rationale for why he felt so different from many of his colleagues. The story that follows represents the first time Larry realized how significant social class was in framing one’s lived experience. He describes the incredible distance he felt with one fellow graduate student:

Her zip code was 90210; that's where she had grown up. Her father was a psychiatrist and had been a psychiatrist to the rich and famous [laughter]. The conversation that we had was so funny, who knows how it started, but she, when she grew up, went to Dodger baseball games. She and her friends would be chauffeured to Dodger Stadium, and the chauffeur would drive them right to a certain gate and make sure they got in the gate and then would wait for them, and would be, would be right there waiting for them. And so she went to lots and lots of Dodger games. So my side of that was that I can still remember not having television and listening to baseball games on the radio. And, so, um, during those really young years, one of the dreams of my life time would be, “will I ever get to go to a Major League Baseball game?” Right - I mean that would be, gosh, that would never happen. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

The distance between their experiences with professional baseball provided an example for how different their backgrounds had been. When asked if the two of them were close, Larry again laughed and said: “Never, never close [pause] I mean in that case the distance was just, was just too much.” This incredible disparity that he describes between their experiences lays the groundwork for how Larry frames his discomfort in the workplace, much of which involves the performance of embodied cultural capital described by Ronnie and Steve.

Now a professor at a small liberal arts school in the Northeast, Larry has had a very successful academic career, publishing a number of books and achieving a high
profile in his field, yet he discusses his day-to-day experience at the college where he is employed as lacking, particularly in meetings:

I don't work well in meeting settings. I don't have, I don't have the moves, right, I don't have the self-confidence to, to speak up in, in meetings. Um, one of my evaluation reports some years back criticized me because I don't participate in meetings. I attend meetings but I don't, I don't participate. And that's a self-confidence thing….my feeling like I don't have the command of the, of the language or the social skills or, or whatever. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Described as “not having the moves,” Larry discusses his struggle in the workplace, having had difficulty making connections with colleagues and generally feeling discomfort at workplace events and meetings. When pressed for an example of what he is like in meetings, what not having “the moves” looks like, Larry describes himself as “usually quiet” and as “not saying much.” He then contrasts that usual behavior with the opposite, when he will “use humor as a coping mechanism, so I'll say, I'll say something funny, but nobody laughs” (interview, April 13, 2012). After laughing at this tendency, he said,

Like that, that's what I'll do. I'll say something and then I'll laugh at what I just said. And that's a, it becomes kind of a habit. But it's a habit born out of lack of confidence, of how else to do things. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

We laughed together at his example during the interview; however his experience does provide important insight into the difficulty sometimes associated with performing cultural capital. Larry understands two important aspects of the performance necessary in his workplace, first; that there are particular ways of being that he is supposed to perform, and second; that he does not possess them. He can feel the difference during the meetings and has also received negative feedback on his evaluations for not performing correctly. In this example, then, the taking on of cultural capital is a necessity even when it is more
difficult to accomplish. It is also clear that the process through which he learned cultural capital had not been entirely successful – even after an entire career he still believes he is still lacking in these areas regarding how he communicates in meetings based on assessments generated by others in his professional world. Larry offers a thoughtful explanation for the differences he consistently feels. In an attempt to explain the distance felt with the fellow graduate student regarding the Dodger’s games, he said:

That's that trajectory thing. You can't go back to the launch point, right, and change what set that original trajectory. You can change the trajectory along the way but it's always going to be determined somewhat by the speed of launch, the angle of launch. Where you are now is always gonna be a function in some way or other of where you started from. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

As Bourdieu (1984) argues, these differences in cultural practices associated with communication illustrated by how Larry presents himself during meetings can be attributed to the “transmission” of cultural capital as having started later for him. As Larry himself shares, though his trajectory has been long and impressive, where he started the “launch” makes all the difference. From that perspective, Larry sees himself as someone who will “always” be in a different location from his colleagues regardless of how long his “trajectory” might be.

Larry also clarifies the importance of learning the “rules of the game” (Anthony) or “the moves” needed in order to participate in these professional spaces. Whereas Ronnie, Steve and Anthony mention having learned these in some ways, Larry knows he has not and has even been criticized for it. He also bases this lack of “moves” on social class. Based on the comments of his middle class wife who is also a professor, he said:

“She would say… it's class background, you don't have the moves. And she would laugh,
right, about that, she meant it as a joke, and it was true. I don't have the moves, whatever those moves are” (interview, April 13, 2012). Connecting the cultural practices Larry seems to be missing in the workplace with his social class background supports the notion that there are particular class-based cultural practices which need to be learned in order to prevent embarrassment (Ronnie, interview, March 1, 2012), challenge protocols (Steve, interview, May 3, 2012) or develop confidence (Larry, interview, April 13, 2012) in the workplace and that restraint or holding back is an important way in which these tendencies are reframed or altered.

In contrast with Larry’s difficulty with meetings in academia, another White professor, Leo, discusses his ability to negotiate his own faculty meetings with more confidence, drawing on the attempts of his parents to raise him “to have class, [and] not in the social class kind of way.” He quickly clarified the role of his parents, stating: “I mean, they did not have it all right, because I don’t think they had all the knowledge to get it right, but at least they had some vague awareness that presentation mattered” (interview, March 30, 2012, emphasis added). He describes this presentation as “knowing what to say and how to say it, how to be savvy, how to be professional” (interview, March 30, 2012). When asked to describe further what “presentation” or having “class” means he defined “dressing properly” as one dimension of “class” that matters. When asked for an example of what he meant by this, he described his choice of shoes on the day of our interview: “I was dressing today and I thought about our meeting and, you know, I still wore my jeans, but, you know, I wore these shoes” pointing and looking
down at his loafers, implying the decision making he goes through in order to present himself correctly.

Though clothing will be discussed in the following section, the implications of “presenting yourself properly” are evident in Leo’s performance at meetings in the workplace. Discussing his own behavior in meetings, he said: “When I’m at faculty meetings, I’m usually quiet, but I know how to express something in a way that is tactful, I think, professional” (interview, March 30, 2012). The “moves” to which the previous professor Larry refers as something he does not possess, are clearly held by Leo. Where Larry is silent in meetings, or says something funny that no one laughs at, Leo is “tactful.” Though both are from working class backgrounds with neither parent attending college, their success with performing in professional settings differs. It seems clear, then, that the degree to which an individual takes on the practices of the elite class, or feels comfortable doing so, varies across experience and context. One potential distinction involves the general lesson that “presentation matters,” which Leo learned from his parents. Another is the training he received in graduate school.

In addition to the “class” his parents attempted to instill in him, Leo mentions having been trained in graduate school in how to be savvy in meetings, how to perform correctly:

I think when I was at graduate school, the people who were my mentors, my dissertation advisors, groomed me—let me know when I was making mistakes, how to behave. They would say, ‘Your momma raised you right, but you don’t always show it.’ And so, I think, people saw that. He can—we have something to work with here. (Leo, interview, March 30, 2012).
The very “moves” Larry describes not having, Leo mentions having been “groomed for” by his professors in graduate school. Though he learned, in a general sense, from his parents that “presentation mattered,” this specific knowledge of how to present himself was not known to him. Rather, he says that he “made mistakes,” which he describes as wearing a “leather jacket” and having “longer hair in the back.” He also, as will be explored later in this chapter, has actively worked on expressing his anger in a controlled way, contrary to what he was taught by his father. The language Leo uses to describe how his mentors viewed him may provide an example of the symbol violence enacted on upwardly mobile individuals through the symbolic power of the cultural arbitrary.

Particular ways of being – including “behaving” and presenting yourself “correctly,” wearing the right clothing and controlling your emotions – are viewed as desirable and his mentors in graduate school attempted to prepare him for success by teaching him this desired cultural capital. That he might need “grooming” as a pet does, or that he gave them “something to work with” as they molded him into an effective graduate student and now professor implies that Leo is somehow lacking, less than or in need. The difficulty associated with being seen in this way, and in turn seeing yourself in this way, makes clear the potential symbolic violence associated with this experience.

To support Leo’s description of this “class” he learned, he discusses the differences between himself and a former colleague, a working class man who grew up poor. He describes him as “just rough and tumble” with “really sharp edges.” Leo also attributes his own ability to “shed some of [his] class stuff” as what distinguished him from this colleague, who “just couldn’t turn it off and on.” This distinction was not
without trying, however, as Leo describes this colleague as having tried: “It’s hard to explain in words, but, I think when he tried it just made it worse….he annoyed people” (interview, March 30, 2102). It is clear throughout this discussion of presentation that the discomfort or lack of confidence put forward by both Ronnie and Larry are reframed as trained presentation (Leo) or learned performance (Steve) in order to learn how to correctly present oneself in the work environment. Again the concept of symbolic violence is a useful framing for analysis as we see in Leo’s description of his former colleague. When his friend is unable to “turn it off and on” it becomes his fault that he is unable to perform correctly; rather his attempts “made it worse.” That his “really sharp edges” were not accepted by other middle class colleagues as a more efficient or direct way to engage suggests that his strategies were not seen as legitimate. Though not overt, the symbolic power associated with how one is supposed to behave or perform in the workplace is clear. It follows, then, that not performing correctly in that context leads to symbolic violence, as individuals did not like this colleague of Leo.

In addition, how individuals learn and perform embodied cultural capital varies considerably. While Leo could draw on his parents’ desire to “present” correctly and position the training he gained in graduate school within that framework, Larry felt he did not possess the skills needed to be heard in meetings; he struggled to perform. He did not have “the moves” that Leo seems to possess.

Leo’s performance in the workplace, however, is contrasted with the way he presents himself in his neighborhood. When he and his wife first moved to the small town in the South where his college is located, he was there before his wife and spent time
reorganizing his garage. He spent time “adding a work bench and shelves” and generally “working with his hands” both inside and outside, with his “pick-up truck in the driveway” and his “sneakers” on. He describes his neighbors’ shock as “wide-eyed” as they asked quizzically ‘you’re the professor?’ when they first met him. He retold the story: “And I’m like, “Yea. I’m the professor.” I guess they expected somebody with a tweed jacket and the leather patches and the pipe, and, you know, that’s not me. I don’t know, that’s just the way I present myself” (interview, March 30, 2012). In this context, then, he presents himself through working with his hands, first in the garage and later building his own staircase and redoing the floors. This set of skills seems a source of pride as well, as he mentions that people with whom he works, whose “parents were both educated,” do not know how to work with their hands.

Leo’s examples illustrate that the way an individual presents him or herself may shift depending on context. Though Leo is aware of the generic and stereotypical way to present “professor” (as indicated by his description of what his neighbors must have been thinking and his own consideration of what to wear for our interview), he actively chooses how and when to present these different aspects of himself depending on the context. Continuing to drive his “pick-up truck” is one example of the decisions he makes in terms of how he presents himself in his neighborhood. While he “never wears sneakers to work,” he does not feel the “need to go out and buy a Prius.” That individuals pick and choose particular aspects to perform based on context is an important aspect of how cultural capital is performed, one that includes some agency. Leo describes the need to “sound as if I’m an educated person in the way I speak… in how I write” and he wants
his clothes and shoes to match that image when at work. The kind of car he drives, however, does not need to be dictated by the cultural capital he has learned in order to be successful.

Despite this confidence Leo shares in how he presents himself professionally in meetings and at home in his neighborhood, he also mentioned having experienced a shift in how he expresses his frustration, an example of the potential for these shifts in cultural capital to be in progress and incomplete. Through revisiting the concept of emotional restraint introduced through Steve, it is clear that Leo has experienced some degree of restraint in this area as well. Leo mentions how much “calmer” he is compared to when he was young and “used to get into fights all the time” (interview, March 30, 2012). Leo shares stories from when he was a child that help illustrate the shifts he has undergone in expressing his emotions in contrast with his father having taught him to fight:

When I was in fourth grade, my father saw me at a little league banquet and this kid was pushing me. So, we went home and he said “if I ever see—don’t let anyone ever push you again.” So he taught me how to fight, bought me a punching bag, taught me how to punch. He told me, “You just throw the first punch. You don’t say a word.” So that’s what I used to do. I did that all through high school. Somebody would give me some crap and I would beat them up. So that’s changed. (Interview, March 30, 2012).

Leo laughed as he described how that part of him has changed, that he “did not take that with him into adulthood.” Given this background in expressing his frustration through fighting as he did through high school, Leo also mentions how difficult it has been to learn his newfound calm response. He describes how he sometimes “gets very angry” and “lets things that frustrate [him] fester, rather than confronting people in a calm manner.” This story illustrates the potential for changes in cultural capital to be incomplete or in
progress. Despite expressing knowledge of the way one is supposed to “be,” participants offer varying degrees of comfort with these changes and, in fact, are sometimes still partially changing and attempting to modify behavior that lingers from childhood. The presentation of the self and the expression of emotion or frustration, then, can become more subdued and calm, further examples of “holding yourself back” as Ronnie described, or pieces of the “uniform” one must put on in order to engage in their work space, as Anthony mentions.

Anthony also mentions the importance of managing anger and “picking and choos[ing] your battles wisely” (interview, February 9, 2013). A significant aspect of Anthony’s success in the workplace, and in his Ivy League undergraduate institution, involved the support he received and gave to others when they first started – particularly other African Americans. He mentioned a few mentors specifically by name who helped him “learn the ropes,” and he in turn did this for new employees who came in after him. He mentioned telling those who were “quick to anger or [who would] want to fight every battle” that:

You can’t fight every battle. Pick and choose your battles wisely. Is this one worth fighting? If it isn’t, let it go. You have to learn when to take a stand and when to let it go. Otherwise you won’t ever be able to perform and succeed in the manner that you desire. (Interview, February 9, 2013).

Like Leo, Anthony was trained and in turn helps others who enter the field and who might not know how best to present themselves in the workplace. Anthony draws on the concept of performance and makes clear the necessity of developing this ability to restrain one’s emotion in order to be “success[ful].” Similar to the shift in the body described by Ronnie, Anthony’s assertion that one has to “learn when to take a stand and
when to let it go” also implies the ability to go between different performances of class, shifting one’s behavior based on context. Though Anthony is largely framing this need to “learn the ropes” based on racial difference, it is clear that the cultural knowledge of restraining oneself in a variety of realms is consistent across experiences.

This experience is also consistent with what Lubrano (2004) describes in his book, *Limbo*, which is concerned with the experiences of upwardly mobile individuals he calls “straddlers.” He describes how “American corporate culture is based on WASP values…everything is outwardly calm and quiet. Workers have to be reserved and unemotional and must never show anger” (p. 130). The experiences Lubrano describes are consistent with the experiences of those in this study, where the need to restrain emotion and frustration in the workplace is necessary and should be replaced with more calm and quiet behavior. Drawing on Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), this calm and quiet behavior necessary in the workplace represents an example of desired embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1983). The symbolic power of this behavior has been made legitimate as an aspect of the cultural arbitrary through institutions, such as education. Symbolic violence is then enacted through suppression or change of one’s habitus, most visible when individuals do not possess or cannot perform these desired cultural practices. While some individuals do not describe pain associated with this experience of restraining their habitus, the assumption that they must restrain their bodies and how they express themselves in order to fit the dominant form of embodied cultural capital is evident across interviews. The symbolic power asserted on these individuals through restraint implies the existence, then, of symbolic violence as an aspect of upward mobility.
The diversity in experience is also significant to better understanding this process. Rather than viewing the learning of cultural capital as passive and simple input, the experiences of mobile individuals in this study have demonstrated a more complicated process that involves performance, shifts in embodiment depending on context, and struggle. This nuance across experience is explored further in the following section, where the external presentation of self is considered.  

**Covering up Class**

The focus on how one performs or presents him or herself translates to the need for some upwardly mobile individuals to cover up or hide certain aspects of their appearance, or how they appear in social settings. This highlights the social aspect of the taking on of cultural capital and the vigilance surrounding how one was appearing to others, attempting to prevent looking as if they did not belong, or as an outsider.

Upwardly mobile individuals discussed being “noticed” (Larry, interview, April 13, 2012) for these differences or that these differences were so “obvious” to everyone (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012). This section focuses on these demonstrations of class, including: how food is eaten in social settings, the clothes and make up worn, the visibility of tattoos or piercings and the crookedness of one’s teeth. Each of these is an external example of embodied cultural capital. In addition to restraining certain aspects of  

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27 It is important to note that each individual mentioned in this section is male, indicating the intersection between classed and “gendered habitus” (Bourdieu, 2001) and that restraint may correspond more directly with gendered – specifically male – performances of embodied cultural capital. Bettie (2003) also describes the importance of intersectionality and the ways in which girls perform varied versions of femininity which are informed by class and race [performances] as well. While careful consideration of these important intersections is outside the scope of this project, the consistency with which men shared that they needed to actively restrain their bodies is worth note, even as it is framed within the larger framework of embodied cultural capital.
their feelings, personality and how they present themselves as described in the previous section, participants also mention needing to cover up, hide or prevent being noticed for doing something incorrect with their external presentation of self in a social setting.

Ronnie, a lawyer from a large city in the South, mentions being noticed for doing something incorrect, worried about being seen as a “crude outsider” in social spaces generally occupied by lawyers. He describes certain “unconscious habits that are terrible for situations like that” (interview, March 1, 2012), drawing out the word terrible for emphasis. Laughing, he describes these behaviors more specifically:

I lick my fingers when I'm eating. Or I eat with my fingers, y’know? Or uh...if I’m using a spoon, I don't hold it right, unless I like remember to hold it right, like little things like that. Um. So I'm always worried I'm going to do one of those things wrong and look like, like a crude, you know, a crude outsider. (Interview, March 1, 2012).

Even after mentioning the “toolbox” he has developed for situations like the one he describes, he still “feel[s] like they're going to see through me, that I’m not the right kind of person” (Ronnie, interview, March 1, 2012) due to these “unconscious habits.” For Ronnie, in addition to the fear that he will be seen as “crude,” he worries that he will be “seen through” since “I don't occupy the social space that they think I do, or that a lawyer is generally thought to occupy.” Through Ronnie’s example, it is clear that the ways in which people present themselves – in this case, how they eat in a work-related social setting – brings up feelings of insecurity, that they might be found out and outwardly look like they internally feel: as an outsider.

This is the case for Larry as well, as he draws on the discomfort he feels with formal dining as a “class symbol” for why he feels like a stranger; a reminder that he “is
not supposed to be here.” When asked to expand on the “class symbols” that make him a “stranger in a promised land,” Larry mentions:

Sometimes eating, you know, being at meals and not knowing how to eat. [Motioning with his hands and thinking, he said] Let's see, how…. people who eat with their fork and they're right handed, you put the fork in your left hand, which just looks so stupid to me. With the fork upside down, right, and then you push things over with your knife or something like that. It's things like that. But I know that, I know that other people notice. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Larry demonstrated with his hands, moving them in line with his attempted description of how to use utensils, using your knife to put food on your fork and then resting your knife on the side of your plate and picking up the fork with your other hand. At “something like that,” he threw his hands in the air as if giving up and laughed. Even when trying to recall the particular cultural practice associated with eating that he knows “people notice” he does incorrectly, he struggles and states how stupid he thinks it looks. These outward symbols of class evident in one’s embodied cultural capital speak to an internal sense of discomfort and not belonging that was expressed as difficult and frustrating by participants. This is the case even when the cultural practices they are fearful of performing incorrectly look “stupid” to them, as Larry mentions when discussing how one is supposed to eat using particular utensils or when Ronnie looks down at his crossed legs and, laughing, rolls his eyes at how he looks. In addition to annoyance and frustration, some individuals described emotional responses to this feeling that they do

28 Larry is referring to Strangers in Paradise by Ryan and Sackrey (1996) which explores the experiences of working class White individuals (mostly male) in the academy. He called on this text a few times throughout our interview, grateful that I had read the text and so could use it as a framework for explaining how he sometimes felt saying, “I'm glad you know that book, Strangers in the Promised Land, because I think that's really it, I think that's it…I'm a stranger in their promised land, I'm not supposed to be here” (interview, April 13, 2012).
not possess the correct cultural capital for their environment. Kathy Wozniak, a White professor at an Ivy League business school in the Northeast, provides one such example.

Kathy is constantly aware of how she is presenting herself in the workplace, and she recalled moments from her initial days in her Ivy League undergraduate experience when she attempted to “cover up” her class. She mentions move-in day her freshman year, when her dad and brother walked into her dorm room with a lot of “plastic grocery bags full of [her] stuff.” She laughed thinking about the perspective of her roommate and her parents, who must have “heard banjo music in their heads when they saw me walk in with my dad” (interview, May 3, 2012). Here, Kathy is drawing on a cultural stereotype, invoking the image of her as being from the country due to her different class background. Though only an hour outside of the city where she went to college, the class differences between Kathy and her roommate were vast. Kathy describes her roommate as having her own “Mercedes Benz,” that “matched her mom’s and sister’s.” She also mentions her roommate’s sheets: “I’m sitting on her bed and realizing that these are Polo Ralph Lauren, like little polo guys are all over her sheets and I’m just thinking like, “Oh my God.” In order to analyze this initial entry to college, Kathy uses an experience her brother, who also earned his undergraduate degree and is now a banker, described to her. Laughing, she tells the following “edamame moment” story to demonstrate when she is lacking the knowledge she needs to present herself as she is supposed to in that setting:

The first time [my brother] was at a work thing where they had edamame, he put the whole thing in his mouth and was like, ‘Hey. This is terrible. This is so fibrous - how do you like this?’ And finally somebody came up to him and said, ‘You don’t eat the whole thing.’ And so we’re both full of these moments. (Interview, May 3, 2012).
Kathy is able to recognize that there is just some knowledge that she does not have, which leads to these “edamame moments” in which her lack of knowledge or different background is evident. These external mistakes, such as eating the outside casing for edamame, act as symbols for when, both as an undergraduate and even now as a professor, she feels she stands out, when she is sure that the “banjo music” must be playing in the heads of those around her as it did that first day of college.

Kathy mentions that while she does not make “gigantic mistakes anymore” since she has been a professor for a number of years, she knows that she “makes a million little mistakes all the time” that are sure to be noticed by those around her. Kathy describes these mistakes largely around the knowledge she does not possess, describing how those around her must be asking: “What kind of watch do you wear? Whose shoes do you have? And what sort of jeans are those” (interview, May 3, 2012). She also describes how comfortable her husband is in certain settings and the knowledge he possesses about particular furniture and art as a contrast to herself, stating that “there’s so much that I’m never going to be able to do or know” (interview, May 3, 2012). It is through the contrast of her middle class colleagues and husband that she is better able to understand what she lacks, and the potential “mistakes” she makes. This demonstrates Bourdieu’s (1984) assertion that those who “acquire” the habitus and tastes of the dominant class never attain the ease or comfort of those who inherit it (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 68). This lack of “ease” is evident for Kathy, particularly when she compares how she feels to her middle class husband who, having “inherited” his cultural capital, feels at ease. She draws on this distinction to explain how she “married [her] cultural capital,” since “all the cultural
capital stuff he’s just got in spades” (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012). This marks a clear difference between herself and her husband, of which Kathy is very aware.

Kathy, Ronnie and Larry each illustrate the awareness that there are certain ways of being that they just do not know, and that it has been made evident to them that people around them take note of these perceived presentation blunders in myriad ways. This was evident in discussions of appearance and clothing, when participants mentioned particular cosmetic factors that mattered a great deal and which, at times, they would take great lengths to control or cover up in order to fit in or look appropriate. Kathy, again recollecting moments from her freshman year in college, shares:

I have memories of standing in front of my closet and crying and just thinking, “I can’t. There’s nothing that’s even remotely acceptable.” Like, not even like fake. So that was sort of the experience I had every time I had to get dressed to go do anything at school. And I remember begging my parents - and I think it was my only Christmas present, to buy me a J. Crew barn jacket29, this was like the big, the first giant wave of J. Crew stuff and I think I wore that 365 days a year for years, like long after no one was wearing their barn jacket anymore because it was like my one thing that I had, and it was like long, and it could cover what I was wearing, so it was kind of like I could pass a little bit even though I couldn’t, like it was so obvious to people. (Interview, May 3, 2012, emphasis added).

Kathy makes clear the emotional aspects to this visible difference; that she consistently cried at the prospect of how unacceptable her clothes were, that she couldn’t even “fake” it. Even with the barn jacket covering up her unacceptable clothes, Kathy mentions that it must have been so “obvious to people” that she did not belong, framing another example of how easy it must have been to “see through” her (Ronnie, interview, March 1, 2012) since her outward appearance highlighted her different background. She said: “Well I

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29 A popular J. Crew oversized jacket that costs approximately $100. It is made of corduroy and has large pockets.
mean that people just—it’s your haircut. It’s your shoes. It’s your make-up. It’s all these things that I don’t think I even realized then” (interview, May 3, 2012).

These concerns continue to the present as well. The wife of a colleague in the business school, a friend of hers who works as a consultant, has “taken [her] on a little bit as a project,” taking her shopping and teaching her about what she should be wearing. Though not “that interested in it,” she is “grateful” to her friend and has started to learn that people really notice. She said:

The thing that’s been interesting is when I’ve been, sort of, dressed by her, the number of people who are like, ‘Oh,’ so you realize people are paying attention. People notice, people get like, ‘Oh those are whatever brand shoes.’ (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Though careful to not “become a slave to this stuff,” she does “realize that wearing my husband’s completely faded old Levi’s and Chuck Taylor sneakers is sending a very particular message,” one that she increasingly realizes she needs to be conscious of given her professional position. At this point in the interview, Kathy, a tall, athletic woman with a bob haircut, looked down at the outfit she was wearing and shrugged. Her ironed light blue v-neck shirt with slacks with simple black heels seemed appropriate enough, but she believes that other people notice different things about her outfit, like the brand name.

As an adult, then, she has let go of the emotional response, crying in front of the mirror, but recognizes that she still does not understand or know what she is supposed to do in order to wear the right clothes, or present herself in the right way. Her friend’s support in shopping, while well intentioned, is similar to the preparation Leo experienced in graduate school when he was “groomed” to become a professor. Though not overtly indicating that something is incorrect with how Kathy dresses, the implication is that she
is lacking in some way. This enables analysis again using the framing of symbolic violence, where Kathy does not possess the correct way of being that is consistent with the cultural arbitrary.

Steve, also a professor, mentions being unsure of how to present himself. He has learned over time that what one wears does matter a great deal. Laughing, he told me he still feels “more confused than ever” (interview, May 3, 2012) and points to his awareness that “it’s all a performance” as what brings the confusion:

I never know how to do any of that, and, you know, especially with, like, dress, it just confuses me. I don’t know. I mean one of the things that happens is that once you cross over and have the experience of moving across social locations you realize it’s all performance, and what do you do? It’s like, there’s no, it’s all sort of synthetic in a sense, right, so it’s like I don’t know whether to wear a tie or not wear a tie, I don’t know…none of that makes sense to me. And so I tend to be very neutral, I just kind of, I don’t really look for style I just kind of figure out a way not to draw attention. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

As we learn from Steve in the previous section, the concept of performance is central to how he has learned to be successful in the workplace, and the clothes he wears are no different. In this process of adapting to social class norms in the workplace, he has found a way to be “neutral” – to not “draw attention.” In this way, he is not being noticed as Kathy was for wearing the right shoes that her friend picked out, but he is also not being noticed for wearing the wrong clothing. The timing of the performance also seems to cause confusion, as Steve mentions the changing nature of “whether to wear a tie or not wear a tie.” Knowledge that he should wear a tie matters a great deal, but also knowing when it is necessary is another aspect of performance that sometimes causes confusion.

More, though, than confusion associated with picking what to wear to present themselves correctly, some participants mentioned not feeling like they belong in the
clothes they know they are supposed to wear. In this way, it is not just learning what one should look like and playing the part. Even when they outwardly wear what they are supposed to, they still, in their minds, look like they do not belong:

I'm not a tie and jacket kind of person and, uh, and when I do put on a tie and jacket I suppose I don't look like I belong in a tie and jacket. And, uh, so, my wife and I would go to events at, at [our daughter's college] and, and I would at least feel like, you know, I don't belong with these other parents. I would feel that way. And if you feel that way it probably shows in some way or other. My daughter's probably reading that - Dad feels out of place. (Larry, Interview, April 13, 2012).

Larry, who is a professor and successful academic, mentions not feeling comfortable among the parents at the college his daughter attends. How is this possible – given the work he does in the academy, the deep knowledge he has of what the classes his daughter attends are like? He should know best what it is like to engage in a university, yet he feels he does not belong. He does know what to wear, as he and everyone there is wearing a “tie and jacket,” but that does not lead to his feeling comfortable in that clothing. He feels that when he puts on a tie and jacket, it is clear that he does not belong in it. He shares that this discomfort shows up in other ways as well – such as the conversations he has and how he eats – discomfort that he is sure is noticed and felt by his daughter.

So, specific questions about what one should wear and how one should present him or herself are a piece of the concern mentioned. Anthony mentioned that “you can’t just come in without your tie” and Leo mentioned having considered what he should wear on the day we met for an interview, putting on different shoes in preparation for meeting someone new. What these individuals tell us through their personal narratives is that it is sometimes more than just thinking about what is appropriate. It is also negotiating confusion and discomfort, becoming someone’s “project” or wearing clothing that one
feels s/he does not “belong in” – each of which influence how one is able to present him or herself and might also be viewed as examples of symbolic violence. And these are necessary concerns since, as evidence across data, people will notice.

Similar to Kathy’s strategy of covering up her [wrong] clothes with her J. Crew barn jacket in college, covering up became a necessary strategy for some mobile individuals who have tattoos or piercings as well. Named by another participant in the study, Kris Valley, as a “class thing,” tattoos and piercings seemed to be important to those who had them, yet always needed to be “covered up” in order to maintain professionalism.

Kris is a talkative and confident professor with a boisterous laugh and a big smile. She is from a small town in the Northeast where her family was “sort of the low-income family in the wealthy community.” Her parents – both musicians who did not attend college – struggled to provide consistency for the family. They had significant financial troubles when her father was stopped from working in real estate because of a serious car accident when Kris was in her early teens. They moved a lot, from townhome to smaller and smaller apartments, but always stayed in the same school district since both of her parents were committed to education. After earning her undergraduate degree at a state school, she made her way to an elite Ivy League university for a master’s degree in education. She has taught writing and literature in a variety of contexts since then, currently as a full-time professor at a community college in the Northeast. Kris mentions moments throughout her education when she felt different than those around her. She recalls one experience when she and her friends
…went shopping and everybody had their credit cards, and I remember going into Armani, which I had never heard of and I remember looking at price tags and just being like, “This is insane! It’s like $500 for a sweatshirt. This is crazy!” And everyone was just like swiping credit cards and like buying stuff, and I remember just like, I didn’t understand that. I didn’t know what credit cards were. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

Not knowing what credit cards were or that a clothing store like Armani existed helped Kris describe how different she felt from her fellow students. It did not prevent her from making friends, however. Though aware of her difference, that she “didn’t grow up around it,” she still “got it” on some level and “subconsciously just found people” more like her, with whom she could be friends with. In comparison, she shared that she has actually felt more discomfort in her work setting now:

I think now, as a working adult, sometimes I feel it more because of my tattoos, because of certain things that sort of show my class and where I came from. Yeah, my tattoos are a big one, honestly, because I do think they are more of a class thing. Like I came from a class where like yeah, everyone had tattoos, and that was normal. And, obviously, I have to hide them. (Interview, June 17, 2012, emphasis added).

Kris showed me each of her tattoos; a large, artful design on shoulder, a tree on the nape of her neck and a simple vine on her wrist. There was also one on her thigh that I did not see. As she showed me each tattoo, she exclaimed “I love my tattoos” and shared that they are an important part of her. Yet, she also shared that she is committed to hiding them in order to ensure she presents herself professionally. Her tattoos, then, offer another example of the need for upwardly mobile individuals to cover up signs of social class that could enable those around them to “see through them” (Ronnie, interview, March 1, 2012). Similar to Kathy’s concern with the clothing she wears, Kris’s need to
hide her tattoos is “obvious” and something she puts much thought into based on where
the tattoos are on her body. She describes her strategy for covering them up:

So they’re all pretty much ones you can hide, except my neck. If I wore-like I’m
always very cautious of any clothing I buy for work. So I make sure, like I
purposely don’t cut my hair, even though there are many times I want to chop it
off because I need to keep it at a certain length to hide my neck. My shoulder, I
always make sure when I buy clothes, like that, like…..I can’t wear regular,
standard tank tops for work. I always have to make sure it’s sort of a wide sleeve.
My wrist, I always have a bracelet on or a watch on to hide it. And again, it’s not
that-they can’t fire me for it but it’s my own, I guess, sort of percept-and I love
my tattoos. Like I love them. Outside of work, I’m totally different. (Interview,
June 17, 2012).

Though she does not regret her tattoos, and, as mentioned, “loves them,” Kris does not
want them to be seen in her workplace and instead has to go to great lengths to cover
them up, influencing how she wears her hair and the clothes and jewelry she buys.

This is for good reason, it seems, as another participant, Isaac, who has a master’s
degree in social work, mentioned the looks he gets in his wealthy neighborhood pool in
the summer when he takes his son swimming and the tattoos on his chest and arms are
visible. Unlike Kris, Isaac reports that his tattoos are not much of a concern in the
workplace as a therapist. The residents in the “vanilla” and “affluent” neighborhood he
lives in now, however, express visible discomfort with his tattoos. He is prepared for this
reaction; however, as he said “people always come around once they actually get to know
me” (Isaac, interview, April 7, 2012). The “always” in his statement implies, however,
that the discomfort many express in seeing his tattoos is a consistent experience he is now
used to negotiating.

Whether resisting the embodied structures determined by social class and
performance, or simply not having the cultural knowledge or comfort associated with
presenting oneself “correctly,” it is still messaged to these mobile individuals that they need to cover up or hide these outward, physical symbols of class. There was, however, an important contrasting example involving the outward class symbol of teeth. Larry, the professor who expresses not having “the moves” to perform in meetings, laughs and points at his teeth, a few of which are not in a straight line in his mouth. He says:

> Look at my teeth. I….no braces. I don't remember anybody in my class having braces ever. Now they may have, you know, and I was just oblivious to braces….but it mattered so little to me that it just never, I just never noticed. But I'm sure people around here notice my crooked teeth. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Here, Larry is aware, as are other participants, of being “noticed” for his outward class symbol, his crooked teeth. Where others in the study, however, choose to ask for a coat to cover up their clothing (Kathy), wear clothing to cover their tattoos (Kris) or develop a neutral fashion style to prevent being noticed (Steve), Larry’s teeth remain as they are and have been throughout his life: crooked. I asked why he had not chosen to fix his teeth, since, as a professor he makes over $80,000 a year and so has been able to afford braces for some time. He looked surprised and thoughtful and responded:

> Boy, that's a good question. That's a really good question. Um, I don't think there's a decision. You know, nobody's ever asked me that, I don't think anybody, I don't think I've ever asked myself. What a great question. I just never, uh, I'm, I've been aware that it could be done, you know, but, just never, I guess I'm comfortable enough. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Larry is aware that this class symbol is noticed, yet has “never” developed a strategy to fix them, even as he has worked to fit in during events for his daughter, or early in his career made more efforts to perform during meetings. It is possible to see Larry as subconsciously resisting changing this aspect of his appearance.
Conclusion

This chapter explored the premise that upwardly mobile individuals take on the embodied cultural capital of their new class context in a variety of complicated ways, including performance, restraint and covering up. Specifically, this chapter explored the outward presentations of embodied cultural capital and habitus through investigating the shifts described by participants in how they present themselves, including: how participants interact in work settings, sit, eat and express their views, as well as the clothing and make up they wear, their tattoos and how they wear their hair. Concerns with restraint and covering up were each considered as widely shared, providing insight into the struggles underlying how habitus develops and cultural capital is learned across one’s experiences. The difficulty associated with taking on cultural capital is evident across their stories as was how these difficulties reflect forms of symbolic violence in their lives.

Learning how to present oneself appropriately is an important aspect of the experience of social mobility. Many individuals described feeling a need to restrain their bodies or expressing their opinions as well as attempting to cover up external symbols of their class background. In many cases, a heightened awareness of being “noticed” or “seen through” as an outsider was consistent, as was their sense of how obvious it is to others that they do not belong. At times, these changes were partnered with frustration; other times these shifts in self-presentation were simply viewed as necessary to becoming or remaining successful. All had encountered the expectation that they would learn and take on the cultural practices of the social class to which they now belonged and viewed this process as necessary to their success. Yet the process through which success or social
mobility occurred is quite complex and their personal responses were varied and variable across time. Sometimes they experienced powerful feelings of not belonging or awareness that they might be viewed as not belonging due to having performed incorrectly or inappropriately. This also led many to assume they may be lacking in some way, in need of “grooming,” or of becoming “someone’s project” in order to learn the necessary cultural capital. I have argued that the discomfort and pain associated with these feelings, as well as the need to restrain or cover up oneself, is a form of symbolic violence. The differences across examples also highlight the differing ways in which embodied forms of cultural capital might be learned or performed.

The focus on performance is significant. The stories these mobile individuals shared demonstrate their awareness that they might be seen as an outsider or be caught doing something incorrect. They attempt to perform in order to successful. When considering cultural capital as performance, the notion that one does not fit in or belong (Dews & Law, 1995; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993) might also be explained theoretically. Sennett and Cobb’s (1972) concept of the “dividing of the self” (p. 207) is useful, as individuals are actively performing identities that are in some ways distinct or different from those they performed prior to the “transmission of cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1983). The consistent practice of performance, then, may lead to internal conflict or tension. This is indicated by Bettie (2003) who describes situations in which “one’s performance does not align with one’s notion of an ‘authentic’ true self; one’s performance can be incongruent with who one thinks one really is” (Bettie, 2003, p. 52). She describes this as a potentially painful experience, and indicates how, through
performance, the subject is “constructed by performance,” (Bettie, 2003, p. 52). These performances of embodied cultural capital may be “constructing” mobile individuals, which Bourdieu (1999) argues can lead to a “fractured” or “cleft” habitus – in which a “habitus [is] divided against itself” (p. 511) – which causes ambiguity, pain and discomfort. This has also been named “habitus dislocation” (Baxter & Britton, 2001) in which an individual is directly faced with the shifts in habitus he or she has experienced and feels pain or discomfort. Awareness of the change experienced by mobile individuals, then, has the potential to cause pain. This concept will be explored further in Chapter Six.

There are other dimensions in which cultural capital is learned and enacted, and where the taking on of these practices leads to difficulty in a variety of ways. These issues will be explored further in the following chapters, starting with the “communication gulf” upwardly mobile individuals experienced when in elite spaces for the first time, and the tension that sometimes develops when the cultural practices taken on by the mobile individuals is in conflict with those of their families of origin.
CHAPTER 5

Negotiating the “Communication Gulf” across Class Contexts

I had quite a few incidents where I felt like I was being punished, in a sense, or put under a microscope because of my communication and interactions, not because of the quality of my work, not because I didn’t have high expectations, not because I didn’t push those under me, but because somebody didn’t like how I said something.

- Sequoia King, Ph.D.

For Bourdieu (with Passeron, 1977; 1990; 1991), language is a significant aspect of how social class is reproduced through culture. According to Bourdieu (1991), “linguistic exchanges - are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized” (p. 37). Therefore, language is another aspect within the cultural realm – alongside embodied cultural capital – through which class is maintained and through which one’s social position is made evident. As with other realms of cultural capital, Bourdieu is particularly concerned with the inculcation and transmission of language as capital (Bourdieu, 1982). He argues that “the education system possesses the delegated authority necessary to engage in a universal process of durable inculcation in matters of language” (1991, p. 62). Therefore, the education system is deeply implicated in the transmission and perpetuation of class-based language practices. Through curriculum and pedagogy, but also particular programs of study and schooling policies, the specific “cultural awareness and a refined and elegant style of language” acts as a “selection device” for particular students (Swartz, 1997, p. 1999) and ultimately further facilitates the reproduction of social classes through culture; in this case via language.
Language practices are also distinct and class-based, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). “Bourgeois” language, they argue, is characterized by “tendency toward abstraction, formalism, intellectualism and euphemistic moderation…with distinguished distance, prudent ease and contrived naturalness” (1977, p. 116). They compare this description to “the expressiveness and expressionism of the working class…which manifests itself in the tendency to move from particular case to particular case, from illustration to parable” (p. 116). Through these distinctions, which are transmitted in the home and community as well as through the school system, language enables the unequal distribution of “linguistic capital,” the value of which is determined by the “linguistic market” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Framing individuals’ linguistic capital in terms of its “market value,” Bourdieu argues that “the academic market value of each individual’s linguistic capital is a function of the distance between the type of symbolic mastery demanded by the School and the practical mastery he owes to his initial class upbringing (1977, p. 116). Put differently, one’s social location determines the language practices learned in the home, and dictates the value of these language practices in society. As in other realms of cultural capital, the preferred way of speaking is based on the cultural arbitrary, always defined by those in power. Particular language practices of the bourgeois define, then, what desired “linguistic capital” entails.

For these reasons, language, Bourdieu argues, is a particularly insidious form of cultural capital given the connection between language and notions of intelligence and knowledge. Bourdieu and Passeron view “the unequal class distribution of educationally profitable linguistic capital [as] one of the best hidden mediations through which the
relationship between social origin and scholastic achievement is set up” (pp. 115-116). The particular currency for this kind of capital is seen in the institutionalized form of cultural capital in which degrees conferred by the university help solidify the cultural arbitrary (Bourdieu, 1983). In this case, particular linguistic capital becomes the preferred style of communication, one that yields power in the workplace, educational institutions and in society in general. Therefore, the preferred method of communication, including “pronunciation, diction, and syntactic devices” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 64) is dictated and perpetuated by the education system, which is both the creator and maintainer of class reproduction via preferred language practices, or linguistic capital. This theoretical framing, which connects language practices to reproduction, has important implications for upwardly mobile individuals who move across social class through education. One aspect of this trajectory through education involves learning the language practices of the middle class in order to be successful in school and beyond. This chapter considers the complicated ways in which these new language practices are taken on, and the potential difficulties and complex experiences associated with this process.30

In addition to the way Bourdieu has framed the significance of language, sociolinguistic theorists also make the connection between social location and language, largely drawing on the language codes theory of Bernstein (1964; 1971). Bernstein observed that working and middle class children are taught different language “codes” at home and argues that the language “code” a person uses both frames and represents their

30 Though outside the scope of this project, English language acquisition is also explored as a dimension of cultural capital (Blackledge, 2001). A number of autobiographical narratives also position the loss of native languages as a significant and painful experience associated with social mobility (Curillo, 2009; Rodríguez, 1981; Villanueva, 1995).
social identity (Bernstein, 1971). In a more recent framing of this concept, Littlejohn (2010) argues that “people learn their place in the world by virtue of the language codes they employ” (p. 178). Therefore, language use is a stratifying aspect of identity both internally – as individuals learn their place in the world, and relationally – as others’ perceptions are made and communicated in a myriad of ways.

Drawing on the language “codes” theory of Bernstein, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) compares two communities in a mill town in the Piedmont of the Carolinas and finds the significance of language on culture and community. Heath views “culture as learned behavior” and understands language habits as “part of that shared learning” (p. 11). She also considers these culture-based language habits in relation to the schools and teachers, and finds various concerns with pronunciation and verb tense, however, “most of these formal differences among dialects caused relatively little difficulty in communication. More troublesome were differences in the uses of language the children brought to school” (p. 278), a finding that Heath suggests is seldom considered in research on the topic.

These conceptions might also be viewed within the lens of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. Drawing on the language codes theory of Bernstein (1971) and the ethnographic work of Heath (1983), Lareau (2003; 2011) demonstrates the ways in which these language “codes” are an aspect of child rearing, in which children in different social class backgrounds are “taught to use language differently” (Lareau, 2003, p. 107). Lareau (2003; 2011) finds, as does Heath (1983), that these differences in language use learned in the home translate to the classroom, where particular ways of communicating and
speaking hold more or less currency in the institution of school. For example, Lareau finds that middle class parents draw on negotiation skills and reasoning as a discipline strategy, one aspect of the middle class child rearing strategy she calls “concerted cultivation.” These skills are then viewed as preferable in the school site, as middle class students demonstrate an ability to “defend an argument with evidence” (p. 132) among other benefits. This is contrasted in Lareau’s ethnography with working class families in which language served much more “functional” (p. 107) purposes which did not provide advantages in the school context. Though framed as valuable in a variety of ways (more autonomy, increased social competencies), this difference in language learned in the home means that the advantages provided via the language learned in a middle class family, such as increased vocabulary and asserting a well-defended opinion, are not available for working class students. Though arbitrarily determined by the education system as preferred, these particular language practices provide advantages to middle class students.31

This set of practices, and the beliefs upon which they are based, has led to a series of programs and initiatives that attempt to provide the preferred cultural capital of the education system to low-income students as a potential reform effort. One aspect of this

31 Foley (1990), in Learning Capitalist Culture draws instead on Habermas (1975, 1979, 1985, 1987) and Goffman (1959) as he considers “situational speech performances” in which “people act out their proper roles” (Foley, 1990, p. 179). He argues that “each class performs its speech style during ritualized class interactions in various institutional settings” in which “bourgeois actors assume they are leaders and speak often and in an official manner” whereas “working class actors assume they are outsiders who only have the right to speak when allowed by others or when rudely demanded by themselves” (p. 180). The implications for this reading on class-based language practices are rich, yet outside the scope of this project, which draws more directly on the class theory of Bourdieu. That language and communication remain a significant aspect of social class performance is important to note, particular as it pertains to upwardly mobile individuals who may have the potential to move between these “speech communities” in which they were raised.
strategy, then, involves “catching low-income students up” to the literacy practices of the middle class children through “early intervention” (Tough, 2008). This is due to an apparent disparity in language use between children from different social class backgrounds. The study of Hart and Risely (1995) has been widely cited, as they found distinctions within language practices based on social class. They compare the number of words per hour children growing up in “professional families” hear (2,153) compared to children in the working class who hear nearly 1000 fewer words (1,251). This is again contrasted with the children in the study whose parents are on welfare, who hear half of the words heard by the working class children (661).

This same structure of study was used to determine children’s vocabulary across the three groups and similar data was found, in which children knew 1100 words, 750 words, and 500 words respectively. Neuman also studies this disparity between social class language use through letter recognition, hours read to, and general accumulated experience with words (2009, p. 19). At the elementary level, then, much attention has been paid to early childhood intervention, which Neuman (2009) argues is the key to “changing the odds for children at risk.” Economist James Heckman (2013) draws on the findings of Hart and Risely (1995) and also argues for these language-based interventions in preschool. He also includes non-cognitive skills, such as confidence and perseverance in addition to cognitive skill development. This impulse to “catch students up” consistently frames the disadvantaged students researched as lacking in culture, in this case language habits that are preferred by the school.
Though this line of research focuses on literacy rather than Bourdieu’s notion of linguistic capital, the tendency to compare class-based practices and the related, systematic attempts to “catch low-income students up” to their middle class counterparts is important. Learning the language practices preferred by the education system is more complicated than is implied across these studies. In addition, learning language practices outside of those with which you are raised holds myriad implications for students at any age that have not yet been sufficiently considered (Lee & Kramer, 2013). Given this focus on the cultural aspects of academic success, it is no surprise that the need to learn and perform the preferred language practices of individuals’ educational institutions and workplaces was an important aspect of mobile individuals’ experience. Across interviews, individuals described particular aspects of their communication – in terms of style and content – that they needed to shift in a range of ways.

Specifically, data illustrate particular practices associated with language and communication that were necessary to learn or perform. Examples include: engaging in less direct or more abstract communication, shifting volume or tone, learning “correct” vocabulary and grammar, and leaving behind particular “accents.” Conversation practices with colleagues are also considered, as mobile individuals mention being “silenced” or learning to “restrain” or “hold” themselves in some conversation contexts. Across these examples, data suggest that the ways in which these practices are learned, responded to, and experienced vary considerably across participants. This speaks to the more complicated process of learning cultural capital as was explored in the previous chapter. Data illustrate that new language practices can, in fact, be learned but that the process
might be difficult for or resisted by participants, be challenged by family members or lead to the development of new, integrated, language practices, including the practice of “code-switching” across class contexts. The difficulties associated with learning new linguistic capital are also considered, as individuals express feeling restrained in their speaking and in conversations in the workplace. They also mention various strategies for trying to “catch themselves” before making a mistake. These difficulties are explored through Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence, as Bourdieu (1977; 1991) asserts, is “a gentle and imperceptible violence,” (2001, p. 1) enacted via symbolic power when an individual does not possess or perform the preferred “cultural capital,” in this case linguistic capital, dictated by the cultural arbitrary. The potential symbolic violence associated with silencing, concern with job security, and increased vigilance to prevent a potentially destructive “gaff” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 41) is considered. Therefore, as with the changes in the body that are performed by upwardly mobile individuals as they take on necessary embodied cultural capital (explored in the previous chapter), the difficulty associated with gaining new language practices is considered through analyzing the individual and collective experiences of the upwardly mobile individuals in this study.

The conceptual tool of translation or code switching – which is the practice of switching between two or more languages, dialects, styles or registers – is considered in the final section as an additional framework for better understanding how some participants make sense of necessary shifts in language explored throughout the chapter. This positions the potential benefits associated with this skill of translation, and upward
mobility in general, outside of the realm of economic improvement (Pew Mobility Study, 2012). Data, again, support the need for a more nuanced understanding of how classed language practices are learned or performed. “Code-switching,” in this context, might also be viewed as a strategy for lessening distance that emerges between upwardly mobile individuals and their families of origin, which will be explored in the following chapter. The section begins outlining the factors associated with the “communication gulf” individuals learn to negotiate in their new class contexts.

**Responding to the “Communication Gulf”: Implicit Language Use**

Bourdieu (1991) argues that those who inherit the “bourgeois” way of speaking are better prepared for success in the university and beyond, and offers the following description as one aspect of these language practices: “to understand without having to be told, to read between the lines” (1991, p. 158). Many of the individuals in this study noted the importance of learning this distinction. They describe social mobility as requiring them to learn more “nuanced” and “less direct” ways of speaking in order to be heard. This is framed as one aspect of the larger “communication gulf” that exists for individuals between different classed contexts. Implications for both social and work-related contexts are considered.

Victor Santiago, a Mexican-American man in his early 30’s originally from Texas, found his way to an elite liberal arts school in New England, and went on to earn a master's degree in forest ecology at an Ivy League institution. His initial experiences with elite culture at his liberal arts college are salient. He recalls one conversation with a stranger on the train ride he took alone from Texas to New England that illustrates “how
little he knew” prior to going to college: “I remember distinctly one conversation on the
train up there, this guy is asking where I’m going to school, and after I told him I said
‘I’ve never been to this place, I don’t really know if it exists, it might be in someone’s
garage’” (interview, March 14, 2012). He ended the story laughing and shaking his head,
marveling at how “ill prepared” he had been. He said: “I knew nothing about the place, I
had never visited before, I didn’t even know what a liberal arts school was. I mean,
college – I had never been to college, at all, even to visit,” and yet he was moving north
across the country over 2,000 miles.

Victor shared that he is “grateful,” though, for what he gained through the
experience; he believes that it is through the training he received at this small liberal arts
school that he is now able to be more “politically effective.” He describes the training it
provided him: a “crash course in understanding power, language and culture” (interview,
March 14, 2012). When asked how this training occurred, he frames the specifics of this
“crash course” as directly related to language:

I had to make myself understood. You know, you have seminars and all these
different projects with other students, you have to make your voice heard, and so,
you can’t just sit there and curse and [laughing] get mad, you have to actually
speak fluently. (Interview, March 14, 2012).

Through Victor’s initial experience in higher education, he learned how necessary it is to
“speak fluently,” making sure you are “understood.” He shared that this skill he
developed has supported his ability to work across contexts as a forester, “translating
vocabulary and meaning” across various populations of people including “the park
directors” and the “tree-trimmers.” Victor also mentions how college introduced him to “a lot of great people” and describes his undergraduate experience as “one of the few times in life when I met people who were genuinely curious and where conversations over dinner would span a range of topics” (interview, March 14, 2012). These positive experiences associated with diverse people and knowledge, however, also led to his struggle with what he describes as “the communication gulf” which he “did not realize at first” but which “became more apparent” with time. He describes negotiating these different learning practices as “hard.” When asked what he meant by the “communication gulf,” he described how different the “meaning behind language” is when you “move up the social class food chain”:

Working class people, when they talk, generally tell you kind of straight up, like, there’s—there’s this very plain language, like they mean pretty much what they say…And then as you move up the social class food chain, um, that becomes less, the language becomes more nuanced. So, people say things, and then, ascribe all this interpretation that you don’t know. (Interview, March 14, 2012).

Victor frames the language practices of different social class groups he experienced while in college in ways that are similar to Bourdieu’s definition of “linguistic capital” as a tendency to “abstraction…and euphemistic moderation” (1977, p. 116). This is reflective of Victor’s description of language that is more “nuanced.” Victor describes how working class people “don’t use language as a mask,” but as he moved up, he needed to learn to “read between the lines more,” a description which matches exactly how Bourdieu defined bourgeois language practices. He offers one example that involves expressing dislike. Whereas growing up he might have explicitly said, “I don’t like

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32 The positive aspects of “translation” and “code-switching” are explored as one implication of these contrasting language practices later in this chapter.
asparagus”; he noticed that people with whom he went to college would say something different: “They’ll tell you, that’s not my favorite thing, I prefer something else.”

Laughing at his example, he said that he had to draw on “their expressions and stuff” to figure out, “Okay, they don’t really like that” (interview, March 14, 2012). When asked how he experienced this in college, he mentioned that people would misinterpret what he said at times. For example, he shared that when asked if he wanted to go to dinner with classmates, he would “just say no, or I can’t do that right now, you know, I’ve got things to do, and this just isn’t my priority today.” He later found out that this was interpreted as “you don’t like us” since his friends were used to explanations that were less direct.

This offers another example of the need to learn cultural capital in order to be successful in particular contexts. In the case of Victor, he needed to learn linguistic capital in order to be successfully understood by “not cursing,” “speaking fluently” and “reading between the lines” to figure out what people meant by what they were saying. He, like other participants, learned that he needed to use this less direct communication style himself in a social context to prevent conflicts with friends. This need to learn more abstract and less explicit language use in the higher education context was also evident for mobile individuals as they entered the workforce.

This was the case for Sequoia King, an African American lecturer and public speaker in a large city on the East Coast. She recently graduated with her Ph.D. and speaks with authority and clarity on her accomplishments and her future, including a variety of high-level speaking engagements and increased online readership for her blog. Despite this confidence, she mentions a number of challenges she faced in her previous
position in an educational organization as having to do with language. She describes working as a teacher trainer for an organization that had a strong culture in which “there was a lot of up speak and people would talk like this” and she demonstrated, laughing and saying her last word “this” as a question in a higher pitched voice. In contrast to her friends in the organization, she says, “I had deliberately not changed my language. I know friends of mine who would use their type of communication in order to make people comfortable, and I refused to do it.” She describes this decision to “resist” as: “my own little undercover protest. I was like, ‘That’s not who I am,’ like,’ I’m not going to change my speech to make you all comfortable’ (Interview, May 23, 2012).

Sequoia charted her active resistance to the more abstract language associated with linguistic capital, sharing that it got her in trouble in this professional milieu. She offered the following story that occurred while she was still a teacher trainer for that organization in which she and her boss, Bill, had an argument over language:

He [Bill] said to me, “Where is your team?” And I was like, “I don’t know. I told them to be here.” He was like, “Well, I need them here now.” I was like, “Oh, yeah, they should be here.” He was like, “Did you hear what I said?” “I did.” [nodding her head]. He was like, “Then why aren’t you moving?” Maybe I missed something? He was like, “I said I need them here.” So I walk away, because I’m like, “I think what he meant was that he wanted me to go get them, but I’m not playing this game with him, so I walk away. He follows me. He’s like, “I gave you a directive. You need to go get them.” And I was like, “Whoa, you give directives to dogs. And you didn’t give me a directive.” He was like, “I told you I need them here.” “Sir, your needs are not an issue for me.” And he was like, “I told you to go get them.” “No you didn’t. You told me you need them here. That has no implication for me.” And he’s like, “Well, they’re your team members.” “Yes, they are, but I’m not in that sentence: ‘I need them.’ That’s y’all. I told them where they needed to be.” (Interview, May 23, 2012).

Sequoia’s inflection as she told the story indicated the intense frustration felt by both her and Bill as she paused and raised her voice at “Whoa” and “Sir.” She is describing an
experience in which she was reprimanded for not responding to an indirect request by her boss to do something that he, she argues, never requested. After telling the story, she asked angrily, as if speaking to her boss: “You don’t ever say what you mean, and you’re mad at me because I said what I meant?” (Interview, May 23, 2012). Though ending her sentence with a question, the emphasis was on “me” as she expressed her frustration at his indirect way of speaking, and the expectation that she should actively respond to his indirectness. This offers one example of many, she said, in which the communication practices of the organization she worked for were different than her own, more direct way of communicating. Her telling of the story linked this example and her broader struggle at this organization to social class and invisible rules governed by language. This difference in language practices caused considerable problems and difficulties for Sequoia:

I felt like I was being punished, in a sense, or put under a microscope because of my communication and interactions, not because of the quality of my work, not because I didn’t have high expectations, not because I didn’t push those under me, but because somebody didn’t like how I said something. (Interview, May 23, 2012).

Communicating in a way that differs from the preferred style in her organization is framed as a clear detriment to Sequoia’s success, regardless of her professional training and the content knowledge and abilities she demonstrates. For both Victor and Sequoia, then, taking on the more indirect and implicit ways of speaking associated with linguistic capital becomes a necessity for being “understood” and building or maintaining friendships in college (Victor) and being respected and successful in the workplace when more implicit directives are given (Sequoia).
While both individuals learned that different language practices were at play throughout these experiences, their responses to the expectation that they need to communicate more implicitly differs. Victor attempts to shift his way of speaking in order to be understood, and learns to “read between the lines,” actively “drawing on their expressions” to figure out the meaning behind the more “masked” communication of his middle class peers in college. Sequoia also frames the language in her previous workplace as “beating around the bush” in which her middle class colleagues “don’t ever say what [they] mean.” In contrast to Victor, however, she describes her resistance to this indirect communication:

So it’s not just my resistance to how they speak…but also pressing people to really say to me what it is you are trying to say because you are beating around the bush, and we allow you to do this when we-when I do what I know you mean, but you never asked me. And I’m not going to do it, so you are just going to have to come out and say whatever it is. (Interview, May 23, 2012).

Drawing on the example above in which Sequoia argues with her boss about getting her team together, she demonstrates both an awareness of and resistant toward abstract speaking. Sequoia was aware that her boss wanted her to go get her team, yet, she actively resisted since his “directive” was only implied in his question regarding where her team was. This offers an example of Sequoia’s resistance to conforming to the more implicit language practices of her boss, and the organization. According to Sequoia, if she continues to perform in these instances, she is “allowing” her boss to get what he wants without directly asking for it. She admits that her resistance to this common occurrence in her organization has “caused problems, though,” as she shares that Bill “tried to get me fired” due to the experience just described. She describes herself now as more
“professionally mature” but maintains her stance of resistance toward this “implicit versus explicit language sort of thing” (Interview, May 23, 2012). While responding to similar expectations in language practices in their respective contexts, Victor and Sequoia negotiate these differences in contrasting ways. Both are responding to these rules being either implicitly or explicitly imposed upon them, but they do so in different ways; that is, they adapt in unique ways that each speak back to the symbolic power asserted via the dominant language practices which hold currency in the “linguistic market.”

Claire Croccetti, a White history teacher, offers yet another, more self-regulating strategy, for how this expectation for more “abstract” language might be negotiated. Claire was raised by her mother, who, she says, struggled with mental health and abuse issues from the past. While her mother expected that Claire graduate from high school, the expectations, Claire said, “stopped there.” That Claire had not planned to attend college, let alone graduate school, became a factor in how comfortable she felt once she entered graduate school. When asked if she fit in socially while working toward her master’s degree in history, she laughed and said,

Not really. I definitely felt I was, like, out of my league. You know, cause a lot of the people that go to graduate school kind of know that they’re on that track from high school and I just really had no clue I was gonna end up there. (Interview, August 2, 2012).

She also describes how her classmates were “younger” and that “a lot of them were going full-time” and that “mommy and daddy are paying the bill, or whatever.” She frames that distinction as “sometimes annoying.” More than these social differences, however, Claire mentioned her academic discomfort. “I feel like I do have gaps in my knowledge base. You know, it’s like, ‘who is Foucault?’ I don’t know who this person is, and people are
calling him ‘Foucault’ like they know him’ (interview, August 2, 2012). She shared that she feels like she “has had to learn all this stuff” while getting her master’s degree (rather than having more of a basis beforehand) but feels grateful to have had her “world opened up” in terms of learning about issues of “gender” and “race” and the ability to question history. About the ways that this experience provided new knowledge she said, “You mean the history textbook might be wrong? Like, that was even more exciting to learn.”

This new learning was not experienced or thought about as wholly positive, however, since in addition to being more knowledgeable it also means that Claire has become particularly aware that she might be saying something wrong, or “insensitive” and that she should really “think a lot before [she talks]:

I do try to think a lot more before I talk but I do have a, like, a problem with sometimes just saying things before I think about them. You know - sometimes I’ll say things, and I’m like, ‘ugh, ‘maybe I shouldn’t’ve said it that way. Sometimes I come off as more brash, or insensitive, than I mean to be and like, I just try to, like, say it how it is… and not, like, beat around the bush” (Interview, August 2, 2012).

Claire shared that she sometimes wishes she would “just think first before she speaks” since her inclination to “just say it how it is” can sometimes be viewed as insensitive. This is particularly true around issues of “gender” and “race” – an awareness of which is new to Claire and might involve more “nuanced” language. Her fear that she might be perceived as insensitive leads Claire to try and self-regulate what she says since she “sometimes comes off as more brash.” Claire’s natural communication style of not “beating around the bush” relates to Sequoia’s desire for “explicit” language and to Victor’s description that “working class people tell you straight up” and “mean what they say.” Claire’s example also illustrates the strategy through which she negotiates this
difference in language practices as she is developing the skill to “think more before [she] talks” to prevent saying something incorrect that might reveal her “knowledge gaps” or be perceived as “insensitive.” Like Victor who learns to “read between the lines” and Sequoia who “resists,” Claire’s response to the existence of different language practices is distinct, involving her own, self-imposed filter. This is a way of adapting that is based in self restraint, something discussed in Chapter Four in relation to dress and outward affect and expressions of emotion. These adaptations all speak to the ways that these mobile individuals read the people and milieu around them and locate themselves responsively through action, dress as well as language use and interactional style.

Considering the assumption that individuals can easily take on the language practices of the middle class in order to be successful in educational contexts, as is the premise of some educational and social programs, misses a significant aspect of this acquisition process. In fact, individual responses to the expectation that one should change their language differ greatly as indicated by the experiences of Victor, Sequoia and Claire, which are emblematic of the broader participant group as well. It is clear that some strategies, such as Victor’s ability to take on new practices, are preferred and better received over other, more resistant responses, like Sequoia’s. Where Victor has found success, Sequoia has almost been fired and, more broadly, has struggled professionally in some ways. Strategies focused on changing individual language practices to better fit those of the educational institution prevents space for more complex literacy practices to emerge across individuals in a workplace, wherein individuals might speak directly. In addition to dominating forms of expression, organizations and schools also miss the
potential benefit associated with more direct ways of speaking, which can be lost as individuals move across social location and take on more “abstract” or “nuanced” language practices. The initial, more natural perspectives of individuals like Claire are also lost as she spends time “thinking before she talks” in an attempt to prevent a “gaff” (Bourdieu, 1991). Across these examples, it is evident that the process of gaining the “linguistic capital” necessary for success differs considerably—both in terms of the internal experience and outward manifestations of the stance one takes in relation to their adaptation to different, classed ways of speaking and engagement. In addition, replacing or deeply changing one’s way of speaking may also lead to difficulty, as is explored in the following section.

Difficulties with the “Communication Gulf”: Volume, Accent, Diction and Grammar

In addition to speaking in more “abstract” and “nuanced” ways, additional dimensions of the “communication gulf” were described across interviews. Mobile individuals discuss the need to shift the volume and tone of how they speak, unlearn the “accent” with which they were raised, limit the use of slang and speak with correct grammar. Similar to the particular changes in the body described in the previous chapter, individuals were expected to restrain or silence certain aspects of their voice when they spoke too loudly, angrily or talked too much. In addition, participants mentioned being

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33 The examples on the “communication gulf” in these two sections are not meant to be defining of the components of “linguistic capital” nor to assert particular language practices of the middle or working class. In addition, the examples do not speak to the experience of every mobile individual in the study. Rather these sections offer a variety of aspects associated with linguistic capital that support the notion that language matters in a significant way and that there is an expectation to shift language practices when experiencing mobility. What that specifically looks like, however, varies across individuals, family background, geographic location as well as racial and ethnic groups.
vigilant about their performance of these language practices, attempting to “catch”
themselves or, as Claire describes in the previous section, “think” before they speak in
order to prevent a mistake that would reflect badly on them or not be received. In some
cases, family members noticed these changes and expressed discomfort, which caused
distance and feelings of alienation. Each of these dimensions offer further examples for
the difficulty associated with taking on the cultural capital of the middle class and shows
that there are not only benefits and increased opportunity, but drawbacks as well, both
internal and relational.

Sequoia, a lecturer and public speaker, offers an example of how important
volume and tone are when communicating. She describes an example in the teacher
training organization where she worked in which she was critiqued because “somebody
didn’t like how [she] said something.” She shares yet another altercation between herself
and her boss, Bill. She was asked to attend a meeting with the director of the program and
Bill to discuss the quality of her work. She describes how the meeting began: “When Bill
comes to the meeting, the first thing he says is, ‘When you talk to me, you raise your
voice, and you make—that makes me uncomfortable’” (interview, May 23, 2012). She
emphasized the word “uncomfortable” and rolled her eyes in annoyance as she described
Bill’s issue with her “raised voice.” The meeting was meant to be about the progress the
teachers she was training were making, yet he chose to comment first on her language
practices and his “discomfort” with how she spoke. Clearly her communication style, in
terms of her natural volume and tone, was an issue in this work setting.
These issues were not only relevant in this setting. Sequoia shared another story that occurred nearly ten years later when she was invited to speak at a large national meeting and found that she was, once again critiqued for how she spoke, rather than the content of what she said. After receiving the invitation, she sent a copy of the speech she planned to give. She says: “They asked me to come for rehearsal, and then after I was done they told me that I sounded angry” (interview, May 23, 2012). Sequoia threw her hands in the air when she said “angry” and looked exasperated. Despite having earned her Ph.D. and a reputation for public speaking, Sequoia was still critiqued for not speaking in ways preferred by the organization for which she had worked for so many years. Though she was frustrated by and actively resisted these aspects of this organization’s preferred communication style, Sequoia does mention changing other aspects of her communication through her graduate program:

I think that one of the things I have acquired from getting a Ph.D. is being quiet, and doing more listening than I do talking, and sort of watching and being more of an observer than maybe I would have been. (Interview, May 23, 2012).

This change marks, for Sequoia, an example of her having “become more confident” yet it seems a clear contrast between her experiences in the teacher training organization where she was much more confidently resistant to their expectations around language. While learning “when to do more listening than talking” seems a useful skill, this quieting Sequoia experienced, either directly via her experiences with the organization or implicitly via graduate school, also speaks to the concept of restraint explored in the previous chapter. Just as individuals mention “holding themselves back” or the need to quiet their “intensity,” Sequoia has needed to restrain her voice in multiple ways.
This is also the case for Kris Valley, a White Ivy League graduate in her 30’s from a small town on the East Coast, who experienced being silenced in a social setting. She described an awkward conversation with a wealthy classmate who “came from one of these incredibly elite, like 90th and Park in Manhattan homes - I mean, it was nuts. Like, literally the whole floor of a building was their house.” Kris describes the following moment as “one point where I felt uncomfortable class-wise”:

I remember, one time [my classmate] said, “You just don’t know how to appreciate silence.” I remember being like, “Uhh…now I don’t. I want to talk, talk, talk, because it’s awkward, awkward, awkward.” Like, it’s one of those things where, I think, they grew up very blue-blood and sort of like, “We sit and we eat salad. We don’t talk,” and I grew up gabbing away at a table. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

Kris laughed loudly as she said “awkward” and pursed her lips and batted her eyes as if to imitate an elite communication style when saying “we sit and we eat salad,” painting a picture of the imagined childhood of her classmate. She also draws on the language practices she learned as a child in her family, described as “gabbing away at a table” to make sense of the differences between herself and her classmate from a more “blue-blood” background. Through the experiences of Sequoia and Kris, it seems that individuals are encouraged to silence themselves, or make themselves quieter or sound less “angry,” in order to be successful both socially and in the workplace. Through drawing on the concept of symbolic violence, *restraining* the voice of individuals offers another example of the symbolic power enacted via the language practices that hold currency in the linguistic market. Just as in the examples of performance in the previous chapter, individuals must restrain their voices in some way, making themselves quieter in order to conform to the preferred language practices in these new contexts.
Knowing the correct vocabulary or grammar became an area of concern for upwardly mobile individuals as well. Participants mention being vigilant around these issues, trying to “catch” themselves before they make a mistake. This vigilance is consistent with the concern that individuals might be “seen through” as expressed in the previous chapter when cultural capital is performed in the body. Though these performances and language practices can be learned, the awareness that these ways of performing and speaking are not natural remains and is experienced in myriad ways that all include a sense of discomfort, shifting, and giving up aspects of one’s more natural ways of being. This tendency is explained through the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who describe these scenarios as being centered around the “preoccupations” of the “speaker” as one makes conscious choices about language with regard to: “rhetorical devices, expressive effects, nuances of pronunciation, melody of intonation, and registers of diction or forms of phraseology” (p. 117) that are dictated by the “bourgeois.” They argue that:

All these stylistic features always betray, in the very utterance, a relation to language which is common to a whole category of speakers because it is the product of the social conditions of the acquisition and use of language” (p. 117).

Any mistakes in these “stylistic features,” then, have the potential to reveal or “betray” one’s “social condition.” Therefore, the vigilance many upwardly mobile individuals in the study demonstrate regarding particular ways of speaking or communicating is for good reason, as their working class background might be “found out” through how they communicate, a discovery that has implications for their professional success and
trajectories. This is particularly true given Bourdieu’s correlation between language and “scholastic achievement” as mentioned previously.

In addition to the experience of Claire who tries to “think before she talks” which was explored in the previous section, Kris Valley offers another example of this vigilance, describing language-related discomfort as a professor at a community college. During our interview, she discussed her propensity for “slang” when she is not careful: “There are times when words just come out of my mouth that I know are not academic. I’ll catch myself if I’m starting to have a comfortable conversation with somebody, and slang comes out.” During our interview, she unintentionally illustrated both her tendency for slang when comfortable, and her practice of “catching” herself when she has said something that is “not academic.” When discussing her relationship with her ex-husband’s family, Kris said that she could just “kick it” with her ex-mother-in-law and then stopped and laughed, telling me that this was an example of one of those phrases that would just “come out” while she was at work. She then shared a recent story in which she said a slang word she could not remember and the person with whom she was talking “parroted me and laughed at me for it.” In addition to being viewed as insensitive or “too brash” as is Claire’s concern, being “laughed at” by a colleague for using slang is another rationale for why Kris attempts to “catch herself” from making a mistake. Like restraint, this vigilance might be seen as an example of the symbolic violence enacted on individuals who do not naturally possess the desired cultural capital for the space in which they are performing. As participants shared, always needing to “think before you talk” or “catch” yourself before “making mistakes” in tone or diction is exhausting – a
form of self-policing that emerges from the consistent experience of having the cultural arbitrary set of rules and regulations imposed by others and their preferences – and contributes to the notion that one’s communication practices, in their natural state, are unacceptable or lacking.

Grammar was also an area of concern as participants mentioned the need to speak and write correctly. One participant, a White professor in his forties named Leo, described the importance of “speaking properly” in order to make sure others are aware that he is “an educated person.” There was also a correlation between “speaking properly and using “proper grammar”:

I think I try to speak properly, with proper grammar. You know I don’t put “at” at the end of sentences, stuff like that because I want to sound as if I’m an educated person in the way I speak. I care about how I write. I care about my email, and I’m starting to write emails faster out of survival, but, even then, I try to make sure that they’re capitalized and punctuated. (Interview, March 30, 2012).

Evident in Leo’s perspective is the correlation Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) make between the “educationally profitable linguistic capital” and “scholastic achievement” in which particular aspects of how one speaks which are deemed “correct” become a sign of intelligence. For this reason, Leo, who would like to be perceived as an “educated person,” makes sure his grammar is correct. This is the case even when Leo is pressured for time and emails must be written “faster”; “capitalization and punctuation” are still a primary concern. This also demonstrates another area in which mobile individuals become vigilant, attempting to prevent grammatical mistakes that might signal to their peers or colleagues that they do not belong, are less intelligent or are not “educated.”
Kris, the community college professor, also notes how concerned she is with spelling, vocabulary and grammar as she tries to “catch herself” before she says something incorrectly. Despite this vigilance to prevent an error, however, she still sometimes “slips” and makes grammatical mistakes:

Like, growing up, my father always said, “It’s always blank and I,” because that’s what he had been taught. And I still sometimes say it wrong when it’s not that. Obviously I know the rule inside and out….but I still catch myself—like I said it earlier. Even after I said it, I knew, and like, you have it on there [pointing to the recorder]. I said “something and I,” and I knew I used it incorrectly, but it just sort of – comes out. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

The concern Kris feels toward speaking “correctly” was evident, again, in our interview together when she mentioned having made a grammatical mistake throughout the course of our conversation. Despite her attempts to “catch” herself, these mistakes still “come out” and she struggles to prevent them. She also realizes that she learned some of these incorrect language habits from her family. She mentions her father in relation to grammar mistakes, and her mother’s inability to spell as the source for her language practices that are “incorrect”:

So I notice my mom can’t spell for crap, and I never realized it before. Just growing up my whole life, I just never even noticed, and now she’ll write a note to me and I’m like, “Oh God, Mom. I really should show you.” Or using words incorrectly. I definitely just hear vocabulary, like just not used properly, which is funny. Growing up, my father was the manner king, like we always had to have napkins in our lap, and I think he always tried—like I think he did care about class, in some ways, and he always tried to teach us what he thought he knew, but a lot of the time, I now know, was incorrect. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

She now sees the attempts her father made at teaching her how to speak properly as incorrect. This is similar to Leo’s description of his mother’s attempt to teach him about “class, and not in a social class way” without the exact knowledge of what that entailed in
the previous chapter. Even parents from low-income or working class backgrounds who make an effort to teach their children the correct “cultural capital” to be successful are not able to successfully prepare their children for the specific cultural capital learning they need to accomplish in order to traverse these middle class spaces. Though the general idea that “presentation matters” (Leo) or that grammar is important (Kris) is taught, the specific knowledge associated with that awareness is not known or is sometimes incorrect. This can lead to discomfort with family members since the language practices with which individuals were raised are now viewed by mobile individuals as incorrect, different or deficient. In some cases, accents and ways of speaking are actively shed or unlearned in response.

This is the case for Kathy Wozniak who mentioned the process she went through as she “lost” the accent with which she had been raised. Kathy, now a professor at an Ivy League institution, felt that it was “obvious” to people when she was an undergraduate that she “did not belong” in terms of how she presented herself, and described the important role accent played in this struggle:

And if it’s not [your hair, makeup and clothes] it’s the way you talk. So I was made fun of mercilessly, I’ve since mostly lost it, but, you know, I used to say “werter” you know, “Oh you want some werter to drink,” and I just took abuse for that and so I stopped doing it. Then I got abused by my family, “Oh Kathy, would like a glass of waaaater?” You know they’d all laugh. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Kathy emphasized the “waaaater” her family would imitate, batting their eyes and dramatizing the word with a long “a” sound. She asked me incredulously, as if she was asking her family: “Like, ‘what do you want me to do? Do you want me to sound like…like really. Should I just switch, like I speak one language at home and I speak one
language when I’m not home?” (interview, May 3, 2012). Kathy was seen as an outsider in her home environment, stuck between not fitting in while in college and being made fun of when she came home. Now, having been a professor for at least fifteen years she says “I think I sound like I sound” and her family mostly “leaves her alone” now since it has been so long. The differences in their ways of speaking, however, were stark when she was first “losing” her accent. Though the “abuse” Kathy describes seems playful, the potential for family members to find the language practices taken on by mobile individuals’ as offensive was also possible.

This is how Stephanie Harper feels; a doctor who was born and raised in the south and comes from a family who “talks pretty fucking country.” She points to a shift in her language practices as one potential factor that leads to a tension she feels between her aunts and herself. Stephanie shares that her aunts tell her that she has “outgrown her raisin” with a decidedly negative connotation, though Stephanie does not see it in negative ways. When pressed to find out exactly what they mean when they say she has “outgrown her raisin,” she mentioned language: “I don’t really talk fancy by any means but I probably don’t talk as country as I used to. That’s why, you know, my family thinks I’m trying to outgrow my raisin’” (interview, April 13, 2012). The words Stephanie might use or the way in which she speaks due to the context in which she now works (an elite medical school) or now lives (the Northeast) has influenced how she talks. This is felt by her family members as “less country” than she once was. Stephanie herself mentioned in the previous chapter that she has had to shift the way she communicated and “talk the talk” in order to be “taken seriously” and “get her foot in the door.” Though
she tries to “just be Stephanie” and “cuss like a sailor,” she has had to shift aspects of how she speaks in order to be successful as a doctor. Her aunts have noticed and their comments imply a feeling that Stephanie has rejected the way she was raised through her change in language. This offers another example of a difficulty that can emerge as individuals shift their language practices in order to be understood or taken seriously in their new contexts as discomfort or distance develops with family members due to these new and different language practices. These responses by family members and friends from participants’ contexts of origin are costs of the adaptations in language practices these mobile individuals make, and they speak to the deep and complex implications of shifting cultural capital, specifically linguistic capital.

**Conversations in the Workplace**

In addition to the concerns with *how* one speaks explored in the previous sections, discomfort with the content of conversations at work and in social settings emerged as another element of the “communication gulf” between mobile individuals and their new class contexts. Anthony Vaughn, an African American business owner originally from the South, discussed an important aspect of his personality that he had worked hard to maintain in his adulthood based on his belief that you “can never, ever underestimate the impact of a pleasant personality” (interview, February 9, 2013). He finds it important to be able to talk to everyone, regardless of this or her title, and has continued this practice throughout each stage in his career. This was evident for him in college, when he befriended a number of the staff at his elite undergraduate institution. While not his intent, this led to his survival at times when, if money was tight and Anthony was not
able to eat, some staff in the cafeteria would let him slip into the dining hall to eat with his friends. He also mentioned a tremendously important conversation he had with his barber when Anthony was in his 40’s about how to reframe the pain associated with growing up without the positive influence of a more consistent father. His barber said:

“Don’t hate your father, thank your father. Thank your father for showing you how not to be.” Anthony was taken with the powerful wisdom of his barber, stating:

I could not have paid for a better psychologist…it was like an epiphany, an awakening. I felt this emotional burden leave me and I realized that’s why I am the way I am with my kids. I make sure if I said I’m gonna be there, I will be there. (Interview, February 9, 2013).

Anthony uses this experience to share how important it is to listen to people from all backgrounds and learn from them – respecting people because of their “personality,” not because of the “title they hold.” This tendency, to talk to and learn from all kinds of people, is a characteristic Anthony says he has continued throughout his life. This perspective was not necessarily respected in his workplace, however, for which he describes needing to adjust or “modify” his communication.

Anthony was confronted with this difference early in his career when working in the finance department for a large corporation. He was told by a manager above him how important it is to “network with the people with higher titles” and told Anthony: “I noticed that you interact a lot with, uh, the clerical people and that you might want to be careful about that.” Sitting up in his chair, gesturing with his hands, Anthony said, “And I told him, ‘Well, you know, I can appreciate what you’re saying but all I’m telling you is I go to lunch and speak to people who I’m friendly with who are friendly with me. It doesn’t matter what title they are’” (interview, February 9, 2013). He describes his tone
during this conversation as “firm” and “clear” even though he was just 25 years old and speaking to an older manager. Attempting to explain the difference, Anthony said, “But he was class conscious, title conscious. I’m not.” He mentions interacting with people who are “class conscious” often in the corporate world and understands himself as “respecting people, not titles.” Anthony, therefore, actively resists his manager’s assertion that he should limit the time he spends with those who do not have impressive titles and draws on the ability to “just talk” to clarify one reason why he feels this way:

> I always felt that people who did not have the titles were the real people. They’re the ones that just talked, you know. I could go to any restaurant, and we go to McDonald’s, or go wherever, and just be sitting around chit-chatting because I’m just acting like I normally act. When you’re dealing with people who have a title, quite frequently you would not have a real conversation because they’re holding and you feel you need to hold because they’re not really talking to you….They’re saying things but they’re not really communicating at the level where it’s genuine. (Interview, February 9, 2013).

When speaking, Anthony emphasized the word “real,” and shifted his shoulders inward when describing the “holding” some people with “titles” do when communicating. The desire for Anthony to be with “real people” and have “real conversations” was juxtaposed to the act of “holding” that he witnesses others do.

> Despite his resistance, he has had to take on some of these communication practices that involve “holding” in order to communicate with those who “have titles.” (interview, February 9, 2013). His voice was calm and casual at “hey, how are you” and deepened at “hold.” Despite Anthony’s comfort with all kinds of people and his desire to “act like [he] normally acts,” he has learned to “adapt” and “modify” his conversation style to those with whom he works.
Just as individuals expressed the need to restrain some aspects of themselves in order to speak or perform correctly, Anthony needed to develop the ability to “hold” or “refrain” in order to effectively communicate with certain people in the workplace.

Anthony also finds the relentless focus on “work” tiresome. He frames those in the corporate world as having “sterile” conversations during lunch. He offers an example, carefully enunciating his words with a deep voice: “So what do you think about, you know, how we should increase revenues” (interview, February 9, 2013). He then leaned closer to me, nodding his head, saying, “And you know what, right now I’m not interested in revenues. I’m interested like in this, this lunch right now [pointing down]. Matter fact, [pointing to me] what’s going on with your kids?” (Interview, February 8, 2012). Not only does Anthony want to be able to speak and learn from whomever he chooses, and eat wherever he wants, including McDonald’s, he wants to be able to “take off the uniform” and “have a real conversation” outside of sterile, work-related, topics.

For him:

Lunch is an opportunity to take a break as opposed to talking more about business. I understand there’s a time and place for these things. Don’t misunderstand me but, you know, it’s like are you kidding me? I want to have a real conversation with you. (Interview, February 9, 2013).

Asking about someone’s kids, or “having a real conversation” is preferable for Anthony during lunch so that he can “take off the uniform” he discussed in the first chapter.

Despite this frustration, Anthony still knows when he has to “keep the uniform on” and “hold” or “refrain” during conversations. While actively resisting the notion that he should reduce the time he spends with the clerical staff, he has shifted his language in some ways in order to accommodate the communication practices in his workplace,
learning to “adapt.” Whereas some communication practices feel more difficult to take on, others are easier to perform in some situations. That mobile individuals make decisions regarding which practices to take on and when to do so, speaks to the complicated processes involved when communication habits are unlearned, modified or changed.

Ronnie, a White lawyer in a law firm on the East Coast, also mentions differences between how he speaks in the workplace compared to how he spoke growing up. He describes the seriousness with which his colleagues speak and how, instead, he and his friends “back home” will “do a lot of joking, you know, sit around and drink and joke” (interview, March 1, 2012). He discovered early on that most people at work did not do that, and when he would “attempt to make a joke about some, like, terrible situation, people would look at me and say, like, "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.” He bent forward, with his hands up, saying, “No. No, you don't understand. Like I'm trying to shoot the shit,” but his attempt at speaking casually about difficult things, or just “shooting the shit” was lost on his colleagues. He learned not to communicate in this way anymore and instead became quieter, thereby disengaging socially from his colleagues. The topics of their conversations also led to his disengagement:

Yeah I don't know anything about golf and I have no interest in knowing anything about golf. Um, [sigh] they talk about their homes a lot, uh, like where their house is and the things they might do to their house, yknow? That's like a really common topic of conversation. Oh, and their cars. (Interview, March 1, 2012).

Ronnie sighed heavily after “um,” indicating his boredom with their focus on “homes.” He looked down and laughed after he said the word “cars.” He first told me that “I don’t have a car” and then laughed again and said, “Well, I do have a car but it's sitting on
blocks in my friend's yard in Tennessee” and laughed again, using his hands for emphasis. Both the way Ronnie is used to communicating and the topics he is used to talking about do not fit with the conversation practices in his law office. Given his discomfort, I asked if he planned to do anything to negotiate these differences. He responded: “I think I just need to get more comfortable” and describes his attendance at “networking events” as a chance to accomplish that. He also describes hoping to get to a place in his career where “I am able to build a record for myself that stands independently of my personality. And hopefully that will take some of the pressure off me to network” (interview, March 1, 2012). For Ronnie, the conversation practices in his workplace and the need to network were a clear indication that his “personality” did not fit. His goal is to get to a place in his career where his “personality” and the potential mistakes he makes like “licking his fingers” while eating or “shooting the shit” will no longer matter since he will have been so successful at his job. Until then, however, he has decided that he will just need to try to get “more comfortable.” Awareness, then, of the need to communicate in ways that correspond with the expectations and norms of the workplace, or that one is not communicating correctly, are clear across examples and again negotiated in different and complex ways.

As Ronnie describes the topics of “golf, homes and cars” as dominating conversations at work, another participant, Amy Ramirez, also feels out of place sometimes because of the content of conversations at work. A bi-racial Ph.D. candidate in her 40’s with a master’s degree, she offers another example in which she feels inadequate
with the people she works with at an Ivy League institution because she has not been out of the country,

I've never lived in another country, I've never visited; I mean I had my passport for a while but then I ended up never going abroad, it expired. So when they talk about these places or these institutions overseas around here, I don't know. I don't really know what they're talking about sometimes. (Interview, May 18, 2012).

Evident in Amy’s description is the importance of traveling outside of the country, and the tendency for conversations in the workplace to be an area where this distinction between herself and her colleagues is obvious. Learning “golf,” buying a “home” or traveling “abroad” represent activities participants mention feeling pressure to accomplish in order to fit in professionally in their new class context. There is an expectation, then, to engage in middle class practices or activities in order to speak about them in the work context. This expectation is one that Amy actively works on both personally and in the work she has done in the past with student support services. She describes the attempts she would make to “help” the students she was supporting “get some cultural capital” while also learning a lot about these skills herself:

I would take those students to a country club for golf lessons so they were familiar with that, you know, I brought in a professional etiquette person to teach them, you know, how to eat and stuff like that but at the same time I was learning a lot….it's been an education for me too. (Interview, May 18, 2012).

Though her knowledge of international travel is an area which she still needs to learn about or gain exposure to, she feels lucky to be around “all the wonderful, brilliant Ph.D.s., faculty, staff, and students who have traveled all over the world” with whom she “can have intellectual conversations” (interview, May 18, 2012). Amy seems to trust, then, in her ability to continue to learn the necessary skills through close proximity to
those with whom she works. She takes a stance that she indeed should learn these skills, have specific sets of new experiences, and that through doing so she will modify her communication style to one that is more engaged because it reflects greater shared knowledge and experience with her more elite colleagues.

Stephanie Harper, a White doctor in the Northeast, also describes the importance of language in her workplace, a hospital at an Ivy League institution. She mentions speaking differently than her colleagues, and connects this different way of speaking to how they view her intelligence:

I think sometimes people talk to hear themselves talk and make themselves feel better about themselves by sounding smarter. There’s a lot of that going on. I think people here just always want to sound really smart.

*So do you feel like you are trying to do that in order to fit in?*

I’m not very good at it, that’s the problem, so I think sometimes people think I’m stupid because of it.

*How can you tell they think you’re stupid?*

They make comments.

*Like what?*

I don’t remember any exact examples off the top of my head, but it’s just the way, you know, they talk to you, you can tell. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Stephanie rolled her eyes with seeming annoyance when telling me about her colleagues’ way of speaking and shrugged her shoulders when admitting that she’s just “not very good” at talking to make herself “sound really smart.” She believes this difference in language practices negatively affects how she is viewed in her workplace, however, and describes feeling “stupid” in other contexts as well, such as when she “doesn’t know
what is going on” or “can’t make a decision.” She attributes this feeling that she is viewed as “stupid” to her tendency to “observe and watch people” something she has done “since [she] was little.” She describes how she still does that “all the time” and through that she can “tell” people think she is not smart:

I mean its subconscious and engrained in who I am. But I—but I think I’ve just tried to be less affected…it’s one of those things where I say, you know, I’m not going to speak in a certain way or do all this other bullshit, to make you think that I’m some smarty-whatever person. If you think I’m stupid, if you think I’m whatever, that’s your business. I don’t have anything to prove to you. I’m trying to work on that more. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Stephanie shared that she is working on caring less about how people view her and not worrying about “proving” herself by speaking in a “certain way.” This is the case even when, as previously mentioned, Stephanie has had to change how she speaks and “talk the way,” in order to be “taken seriously.” It seems the shifts she has made have not made a large difference in how she believes she is perceived in the workplace, even as these changes have led to her aunts accusing her of having “outgrown’ her raisin.” In addition, though not directly related to how she speaks, Stephanie mentions at a different point in the interview a colleague who: “always picks at me…he’s like “come on, I know you’re from the trailer park, come on” (interview, April 13, 2012). She mentioned having shared a few details about her background socially and laughs off the comment, finding it “funny.” However, this classed comment by her colleague demonstrates another way in which she is perceived as different then some of her colleagues, in addition to speaking differently. This seems to add to her belief that she can “tell” that her colleagues see her as different in some way by their “comments.” even if at times she seems to find it humorous.
In each case, participants describe discomfort with the content of conversations or the ways language is sometimes used in the workplace, which they view as distinctive from the way they are used to conversing. In Anthony’s case, he tends to refrain from speaking “with those who have titles” while maintaining his commitment to “real people” by eating with whomever (clerical staff) and wherever (McDonald’s) he wants. Ronnie, instead, chooses to disengage, work on feeling more “comfortable” or exceling at work so that his “personality” does not matter and so that he is not viewed through a deficit lens. Amy actively works on learning the particular skills and knowledge necessary in order to engage in conversations at work. Finally, Stephanie is attempting to worry less about being seen as “some smarty-whatever” by her colleagues through “speaking in some certain way.” In each case, language practices and conversations in the workplace represent another dimension in which preferred linguistic capital is met with a variety of responses by upwardly mobile individuals who are expected to take on or perform these particular language practices.

Importantly, difficulty is associated with these experiences as well. Drawing again on the notion of symbolic violence enacted on individuals, each participant speaks to and could describe a potential experience where the symbolic power of linguistic capital is at play. Anthony experiences restraint in how he talks, “holding” back and “refraining” his natural communication practices. Ronnie and Amy experience being silenced in the workplace as each has little to offer in conversations about “homes,” “cars” or “golf” or in Amy’s case, “travel abroad.” Ronnie, instead, garners unintended negative responses from colleagues when he attempts to “shoot the shit.” He now chooses, instead of that
more natural style of communication, to disengage and “be quiet” at work events. Stephanie’s experience illustrates the connection Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) assert between linguistic capital based on “social origin” and “scholastic achievement” (pp. 115-116). She consistently draws a connection between language that makes her colleagues sound “smart” and her own language practices. This is why she “can tell” her colleagues think that she is “stupid” based on how she speaks. Though she attempts to combat her tendency to believe that she is perceived as “stupid,” it is a concern she discusses with anxiety and mentioned often (at twelve different points throughout the interview).

Each of these areas of difficulty associated with language and communication in the workplace speak to the need to better understand the symbolic violence enacted via impositions of cultural rules and norms that are foisted upon upwardly mobile individuals in a system that confers dominance through the perpetuation and regulation of speaking and engagement styles. They also represent a number of examples where the language practices mobile individuals possess are viewed as a weakness or in need of modification to conform to the preferred language practices of the “bourgeois” (Bourdieu, 1991) or middle class. Their stories also suggest, however, that maintaining language practices across classed contexts is often viewed as a benefit. Through processes of “translation” or what is referred to as “code-switching,” mobile participants are able to move between spaces linguistically and find success despite their internal experiences that are often framed negatively yet viewed as a trade-off for these benefits. These processes are explored in the following section.
“Translation”: Benefits to Code-Switching

In addition to the sociological framing of language considered above, researchers in communication and linguistics have considered how and why language practices shift across and between groups and individuals. In an attempt to explain what occurs in processes like “code-switching,” Howard Giles (1979) explains through his communication accommodation theory that communication patterns and language use also have the tendency to shift over time. The theory suggests that individuals will shift gestures and speech to “accommodate” those with whom they are speaking (Giles & Smith, 1979). Taken further, this also occurs over the course of one conversation through what is named convergence theory, where individuals adapt speech patterns to more closely resemble those of the person with whom they are speaking (Giles & Smith, 1979). This tendency is described across a variety of disciplines as “code-switching,” to explain how individuals shift their language practices and communication styles across contexts in order to be understood and viewed as competent, belonging, or acceptable to a particular group. The upwardly mobile individuals in this study described their experiences with related processes of linguistic accommodation. They spoke of their efforts to learn and need to perform the language practices of the elite, while maintaining their abilities to communicate in the social world in which they were born and raised. Participants represented this process of code-switching across class lines in positive terms, valuing their ability to speak and be understood within a variety of contexts. This

34 Code-switching has also been discussed as an intentional strategy for adapting (or teaching others to adapt) within and across social class and cultural milieu and there is much debate in the education field, for example, about programs and teachers who do or do not recognize the need to explicitly teach code-switching as an important skill set to their students from under-served communities (Delpit, 1995).
is particularly true as mobile individuals “translate” concepts or connect with working class individuals, which they see as an asset provided by the language practices with which they were raised.35

Victor, a Mexican-American forester who earned a master’s degree from an Ivy League institution, describes this versatility in language as “translation.” He mentioned that he has had to learn the particular words that “nobody uses except rich people” and offers the words, “constituents, or minorities” as examples. He actively had to learn this “whole new vocabulary” through “talking with these people whose parents were Ph.D.’s” who “used different language than my parents used.” He asserts that from these experiences he has developed the ability to “extrapolate” and “translate” concepts. He uses his position as a forester, where he works with a highly educated professional class alongside a number of tree-trimmers who are not educated to demonstrate what “translation” looks like in practice:

When I was working in parks as a forester, the echelon above me was, you know, your very educated professional class. But I was managing a bunch of tradesmen, essentially. So like, third, fourth generation tree-trimmers, who never went to college, some of them didn’t have a high school education. But, because of this experience, I could serve as a mediator. You know, I could read between the lines of what the Park’s director and his constituents were talking about, and at the same time, I could understand what my work force was going through, and their concerns. But that was because I had to make myself understood, so I would use their language to explain complicated topics and vice versa, use big words to explain things about basic maintenance. (Interview, March 14, 2012).

35 Stuber (2005) considers whether the working class roots of upwardly mobile individuals are a liability or an asset in the workplace and finds that both are true: Although the narratives in this study show lower- and working-class origins are sometimes disadvantageous, they also reveal that upwardly mobile people are able to use the cultural resources provided by their disadvantaged social origins and mobility experience to connect with clients and coworkers, and otherwise achieve occupational objectives. (p. 160). Individuals in her study describe their ability to “switch” their language depending on the audience and how this provides an ability to connect with all kinds of people with whom they work to achieve occupational objectives.
Victor directly attributes this ability to talk across class contexts, which he says has served him well in the workplace, to his undergraduate experience at a small liberal arts school. This makes him an effective manager, he argues, and has offered a skill set that is particularly helpful to his job.

Similarly, Kris, the professor who describes being made fun of for the slang she sometimes uses, also describes how helpful her own versatility in language is as a teacher:

I can kind of code switch into any language I need to, depending on who I am with. It’s one of the things I think that makes me really good at my teaching, that I can be with the poorest group and I can switch real fast into that language because that’s part of what I was around for a large part of my life, but I can also easily switch into like an elitist-style and kind of go both ways. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

Kris mentioned seeing this aspect of herself as a positive influence on her work, and spoke with pride about her ability to talk to a wide range of people. This has also helped her socially and enabled her to stay close with an “amazing circle of friends from high school” who, she says, were initially uncomfortable that she went away to a “fancy” Ivy League school for her master’s degree after earning her undergraduate degree with a few of them from a local state school. Over time, though, she feels that they see that she is the same as she always has been, which she attributes to her ability to “code-switch”:

Definitely in the beginning, they were like, “oh my God. You went to Yale36.” And for their parents it’s definitely a thing, like I’m all of my friend’s parents’ favorite friend because I’m the one who went to Yale. But with them now, like they know who I am. I think I changed as far as like just knowing how to find information better and having stronger vocabulary and being able to code switch, but with them I’m still me, you know what I mean. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

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36 A sister school to the actual school she attended.
Kris frames her ability to “code-switch” as an important aspect of her continued relationships with friends from home whom do not have the same level of education that she does. This ability also has implications for maintaining closeness with family members, as the following example makes clear.

Staying connected to family members while maintaining the language practices necessary to be successful in the workplace proves difficult for many mobile individuals. Amy Ramirez, who works in higher education and has earned a master’s degree, has found that over time she has developed the ability to “switch the way [she] communicates.” She has three sisters and seems to be committed to her family, commuting over an hour each way to work so that she can live closer to her family. She also visits her father in Puerto Rico and through her relationship with him and other working class friends, alongside all that she has been exposed to through the university where she works, feels that she is able to “fit in with everybody.” Though this was not always the case for her in college, now she feels comfortable with a wide range of people.

Now I feel like I fit with everybody. I can go to a reception here [an Ivy League university], and feel comfortable with colleagues. All the wonderful, brilliant Ph.Ds., chairs, faculty, staff, students who have traveled all over the world, and you know, have intellectual conversations with them and then I can go to Puerto Rico with my dad and take a hike through the woods where he, with the machete, makes the path for us or, you know, I used to substitute teach high school, and then work with student support services kids and high school kids. I just feel like I have that whole realm and everything in between. I have friends, one girl is working on her associate’s, she lives in section 8 housing, and then other friends who are, you know, Ph.Ds. If I started off in this level, I don't know that I would have been able to connect to the working class, like I can now, cause it's a different world and you kind of need to switch the way you, I don't know….communicate. (Interview, May 18, 2013).
Though she is now able to communicate across these various groups, Amy understands the difficulty she might have had connecting with the working class if she had a different background. For example, if she had not spent time bartending on the Mid-Atlantic Coast, waitressing in the city where she is from, or hiking in the jungle with her father in Puerto Rico, she might not have the versatility she now describes having. This implies both a deep distinction in practices associated with different social classes, and also the particular position an upwardly mobile person embodies, if they develop the code-switching skills to traverse a wide range of contexts with a variety of people. The individuals whose narratives are included in this section have accomplished this important skill, even if, like Amy, they “haven’t ever thought much about it” (interview, May 18, 2012).

Central to the development of code-switching, however, is the ability to retain the language from your background even as you learn the specific vocabulary (Victor), correct grammar (Kris), accent (Kathy) and topics to discuss (Anthony). This is why Sequoia King, whose trouble with language and communication style in the workplace was discussed previously, made a concerted effort to resist the normed language practices pervasive in her organization. She describes witnessing an African American professor of hers in college “switch” her language, which Sequoia described as “amazing”:

I had a professor, who I still think is probably one of the most brilliant people I have ever met, and my first semester, we are in honors seminar and she’s using these big—these big sort of words and it was so beautiful to listen to her, and then within a moment, she switched to like, “Yeeeeeaaa, and that’s what I’m tryin’ to say” [modeling a more casual way of speaking] and I was like, “Oh my god! That’s amazing! I want to be able to do that.” I thought that was so awesome. (Interview, May 23, 2012).
Sequoia offers this example of code-switching in a professional context early in her career as her inspiration to actively resist taking on the language practices of her organization: “So I just didn’t feel like I needed to mimic…I didn’t let myself. I was like, ‘That’s not who I am,’ like, ‘I’m not going to change my speech.’” Across examples, the expectation that these practices are taken on is consistent, yet when one attempts to maintain both language practices and develop the skill of “translation” or “code-switching,” a heightened skill to communicate is achieved. Across these examples, this strategy to maintain both languages is viewed as a positive outcome of their mobility and a benefit to their work.

Given the pressure to conform to particular behaviors in the workplace – and, this study argues, class based-cultural norms, resisting the taking on of these varied behaviors seems difficult. Drawing on the metaphor he uses to describe how one is supposed to present himself in the corporate world as “putting on his uniform,” Anthony describes witnessing how “some people just don’t seem to be able to take it off.” He always makes sure he can “take it off,” and for him going to lunch at McDonald’s with the clerical staff and having “real conversations” with “real people” helps make sure “you don’t get lost in who you are.” This can happen, he warns, if you stay “on” all the time. For Anthony, finding the people with whom he can be “real” has been a helpful strategy in maintaining a balance between these two ways of being, “on and off.” Clearly, this process takes considerable negotiation and the extent to which participants are aware of their own shifting language practices varies across individuals.
The prevalent notion that “linguistic capital” is always preferred, or that it should replace the language practices learned as a child, might be reconsidered to include a more complicated conceptualization of what the taking on of cultural capital entails, one that takes into account the lived experiences of these negotiations, adaptations and processes of learning how to present oneself through linguistic shifts and changes.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights yet another dimension of cultural capital – language and communication – learned by upwardly mobile participants in the study. The participants’ stories provide insight into the “communication gulf” that exists between the language styles and practices found within a mobile individual’s new class context and those learned within the social settings and class contexts in which they were raised. Adapting to the language and communication practices in their institution or workplace, particularly how they speak, is viewed as a necessity. Their individual responses to this normative expectation, however, vary considerably. While some participants accept new vocabulary and ways of speaking, others actively resist these changes and are, in a few cases, reprimanded directly. In many cases, the direct admonishments are coupled with or dwell alongside indirect disadvantages and assessments of deficiency or outsider-ness. The assumption that any individual with differing language practices can simply take on or perform the “linguistic capital” holding currency in the “linguistic market” (Bourdieu, 1991) seems lacking. A more complicated process occurs with the learning of cultural capital in which individuals make decisions about which practices to perform. They may completely disengage for fear of making a mistake, or actively maintain other ways of
speaking and embed new linguistic capital with previous language practices in order to code-switch and translate across contexts. Attention to each of these responses to the significant experience of feeling compelled to change one’s language habits is necessary to more fully and critically conceptualize the role language and culture play in social reproduction as well as in the potential to mitigate reproduction through education.

Through an analysis of symbolic violence, the negative and even harmful implications of changing one’s language practices and the content of one’s conversations become evident. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, language holds the power to assert superiority and maintain dominance in profound ways. In this case, vigilance and silencing for fear of being viewed as “stupid” or making a mistake are additional examples of symbolic power being enacted on mobile individuals. As they learn they are only listened to, valued or understood when they speak in particular classed ways that are outside of the language with which they were raised (Bourdieu, 1991), the expectation that they change their language practices is made clear in myriad ways. Acquiring “linguistic capital,” which Bourdieu argues is central to being viewed as intelligent within the field of education, has the potential to enact symbolic violence on those who shift their language practices. Vigilance around grammar and vocabulary, being silenced or told to speak more softly, or feeling in danger of losing your job each represent examples of the power of symbolic violence.

The attempts to focus on character education and “self-control” for low-income students (Tough, 2012) or the framing of early childhood literacy as an opportunity to help low-income students “catch up” to their middle class counterparts (Heckman, 2013;
Neuman, 2009) each represent seemingly well-intentioned reform efforts to mitigate the reproduction of social classes. They lack, however, an important conception of what the experience of changing something as significant as one’s language and communication style entails for individuals who go through the process. While often a benefit, the difficulties and losses associated with this aspect of cultural capital are also important to consider and should inform these “culture-based” reform efforts.
CHAPTER 6
Cultural Learning: “Exposure” to New Tastes, Beliefs and Knowledge

[Through college] I became more worldly for sure because I had lived in a very closed, narrow environment. I hadn’t seen a lot.

- Anthony Vaughn, MBA

A significant aspect of Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of *habitus* is that of a distinction in taste, knowledge and lifestyle, where the dominant class dictates the particular tastes – such as in art, food and leisure – that are preferred and legitimated through the cultural arbitrary. A combination then, of appreciation or taste for (embodied state of cultural capital) and abilities to consume and possession of (objectified state of cultural capital) particular objects and practices set apart those who hold this “high” class habitus with “distinction.” These “high culture” manifestations of cultural capital represent the focus of his seminal text, *Distinction*, and help to clarify the relationship between culture and power in society. The dominant class asserts, through the cultural arbitrary, particular tastes, behaviors and “cultural competencies” (p. 2) as preferred ways of being and knowing. These are based on one’s habitus, which is defined by one’s social position.

The connection between habitus and choice is also considered by Bourdieu. Though tastes are of one’s own choosing, the choice one makes is deeply implicated by their habitus: “Individuals enter various fields of taste with dispositions that *predispose* them to make lifestyle choices characteristic of their class habitus” (Swartz, 1997, p. 163,

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37 Bourdieu defines habitus as “a system of durable, transposable dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1979, vii).
38 This list represents only a few examples of specific subjects defining taste and distinction that are explored by Bourdieu, of which there are many.
emphasis added). The working class, then, engage in “forced choice[s]” which are “produced by the conditions of existence which rule out all alternatives as mere daydreams and leave no choice but the taste for the necessary” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 178) emerging from a “habitus of necessity.” In contrast, the “habitus of freedom” is determined by the absence of need, in which style and form are stressed over function. Concern, then, with the aesthetic in relation to “everyday choices in life” such as “cooking, clothing or decoration” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 5) determine the choices made by the dominant class.

Bourdieu’s differentiation between a “dominant class habitus of freedom” and a “working class habitus of necessity” has implications for the participants in this study. Because habitus informs taste, Bourdieu argues that there exists an “opposition between the tastes of luxury or freedom and the tastes of necessity” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 177). Dominant class habitus is thus defined in opposition to the working class habitus. The distinction Bourdieu explores between class-based habitus has implications for those who might learn or embody the habitus of the dominant class through upward mobility, as is the case for the participants in this study. In the previous chapters, individuals might “perform” cultural capital in its embodied state, or “code-switch” between different class-based language practices. When considering taste or knowledge as the dimension of cultural capital being acquired, however, new complexities emerge. Within this framework, the ability to retain tastes predicated on “necessity” while also developing

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39 Or a habitus born out of “distance from necessity” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 177).
40 Bourdieu also considers the role income plays in tastes and habitus, yet argues against “supply-demand models of consumer behavior that limit explanation of consumer choice to one of purchasing power” (Swartz, 1997, p. 164). Instead, one’s habitus, conditioned as it is by social class, deeply informs one’s preference or tastes.
tastes determined by “freedom” implies oppositional tastes or knowledge. In this way, the “unlearning” of particular tastes or perspectives must occur before the taste of the dominant class is developed since, as Bourdieu argues, they are inconsonant with one another. Additionally, new knowledge associated with taste and behavior becomes difficult to ignore once it is gained, particularly involving better health choices or information that might improve quality of life.

In addition, the “moral dimensions of habitus” (Sayer, 2005, p. 51) are considered through shifts in mobile individuals’ beliefs about the world, such as politics or racism. This is also considered through mobile individuals’ attempts to maintain aspects of the habitus with which they were raised. Extending Bourdieu’s conception of habitus, then, to include “ethical dispositions” enables consideration of the more emotional or value-laden aspects of cultural capital and how these might also be learned, or retained through upward mobility. These tensions in cultural capital acquisition are explored in this chapter through the dimensions of travel, food/alcohol, beliefs, and money.41

The concept of symbolic violence is also considered within this dimension of taste and knowledge. Dominant class dispositions are given more value and legitimacy because they “appear to originate from qualities of charisma, knowledge and aptitude rather than from distance from necessity” (Swartz, 1997, 169). These differing tastes and dispositions become “classifiers” of social subjects who “distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make” in a system that confers dominance on those with more capital

41 Each dimension – travel, beliefs, food/alcohol and money – represents an area in which participants described the emergence of newly acquired knowledge or preferences. This list is small, however, compared to the exhaustive cultural dimensions of taste Bourdieu explores in Distinction (1984).
based on the cultural arbitrary (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6). This enables the power enacted based on culture to remain symbolic. Working class individuals make the choices that lead to a cultural (and economic) position as dominated. These choices are determined, however, by an “invisible” or “symbolic” power structure that leaves their habitus – and the tastes developed from that perspective – to be that of the dominated class without overt or obvious domination enacted (Bourdieu, 2001; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). For those individuals who experience mobility through formal education, like those in this study, acquiring the tastes and dispositions associated with the dominant class can lead to a disdain for or distancing from the tastes with which they were raised, and in which their families of origin still engage. Moving from a cultural milieu that is dominated to one that is dominant also creates internal conflict, particularly in the area of money or wealth. These tensions – both with family and internally – are explored in this chapter through the concept of symbolic violence.

College is viewed as a site where these aspects of cultural capital might be developed or learned. This is the case in Attewell and Lavin’s (2007) empirical study on the advantages of higher education, called *Passing the Torch*. In this study, they draw a distinction between “inherited” and “achieved” capital. In this distinction, cultural capital is inherited from the family as Bourdieu asserts. Cultural capital can also, however, be achieved, particularly through attending college and earning a bachelor’s degree. They argue, building on the work of Lareau (2003) and Lamont (2000), that “access to college education” is one way cultural capital might be achieved (Attewell & Lavin, 2007, p. 82). Attewell and Lavin assert that through “proximity to middle class peers,” and “raising
students’ interest in and knowledge of history, literature, music, theater and the arts,”
going to college “may directly develop cultural capital among lower-class students (p. 82,emphasis added).\textsuperscript{42} The acquisition of cultural capital described by Attewell and Lavinimplies a direct transmission of capital, with little attention to the interests and tastes withwhich low-income students arrive to college. While useful, this framing of culturalcapital acquisition does not attend to the complicated process often involved in shiftingcultural practices (as is explored throughout this study) or difficulties with maintainingconnection with families of origin are also not considered (as is explored in this chapter).These implications are explored in this chapter, alongside the complex process ofacquiring cultural capital as described by participants in the study.

Thus far, chapters have focused on embodied cultural capital as well as linguisticcultural capital and the ways in which these elements of cultural capital are taken on orlearned by mobile individuals. Considering the important site of college as initial“exposure” to “the dominant class habitus,” this chapter explores the complicated wayclass-based tastes, beliefs and knowledge are acquired by upwardly mobile individualsand the symbolic violence enacted on individuals through this process. Conceiving ofcultural capital acquisition as a more complicated process enables a nuanced

\footnote{\textsuperscript{42} This is one of the three ways college attendance enables the acquisition of cultural capital. The second isvia child rearing through which low-income students who receive a college education, while not necessarilytaking on the cultural capital themselves, raise their children with these practices in mind, “taking theiroffspring to museums and theater, purchase music or dance lessons, in a deliberate attempt to cultivate thechildren beyond the parent’s own level” (p. 82). Evidence of this is present in this chapter. For example,some upwardly mobile parents actively “expose” their children to travel, for example, to combat the more“closed” environment in which they were raised. The third way is through “marrying up,” whereby(particularly women) may marry someone who “has more cultural capital than themselves” (p. 83). Thiswas the case across a few examples in the study where both men and women “married [their] culturalcapital (Kathy, interview, May 1, 2012). In some cases this led to conflicts within the marriage. For moreon this topic and the likelihood of developing new habitus and class sensibilities through cross-classmarriages, see Streib (2013).}
understanding of the benefits associated with upward mobility as well as the difficulties.

This chapter, then, closes with a consideration of the benefits mobile individuals experience when they maintain the knowledge and perspective inherited from their families of origin. First, however, the initial site of exposure to “dominant class habitus” – college – is explored.

**College: “Exposure to a Whole Different World”**

In their mixed methods study, Horvat and Davis (2011) consider the possibility of changing habitus through analysis of the effects of a program called YouthBuild. They find that the program “produced changes in elements of [the students’] habitus,” and articulate this change through the lens of a transformation in their “worldview” in which students “develop a different way of seeing the world” (p. 146) and “their place in it” (p. 153). This mirrored the strategies of the program, in which YouthBuild participants “were encouraged and expected to think broadly and act out these new understandings about themselves and their environment” (p. 158). Similarly, through college, participants in the current study mention a shift in their worldview or perspective due to “exposure to a whole different world” (Kris, interview, June 12, 2012) and “all new different people” (Dave McNeil, August 6, 2012). This tendency to frame attending college – often their initial experience in an elite space or a middle class institution – as “exposure” to a more expansive and broader world was a consistent finding across interviews. In addition,

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43 A critique of the implied process through which cultural capital is acquired, or habitus altered, as evident in this article is discussed in Chapter Two.
44 This “broadening” aspect of cultural learning is also similar to Peterson and Kern’s (1996) assertion that the elite have an interest in culturally knowing all things – an “omnivore” take on cultural practices. In the context of upward mobility, however, the cultural practices of one’s family are not considered an aspect of
participants consistently described the world from which they came, where they grew up, as “smaller” or limiting in some way. Often, participants drew on the contrast between these “worlds” to describe how different they felt when first “exposed” at their initial entry; college. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1984) distinction between class-based habitus, it seems that college offers, for many upwardly mobile individuals, initial exposure to the “dominant class habitus” that is born out of a “taste for freedom” rather than “necessity” with which they were raised.

Hana, an Asian American consultant, described what a “different world” college was for her. At an early age, she was left with her grandparents after her parents separated. She has had no contact with either parent since that time. Hana worked throughout high school and was emancipated at the age of sixteen. With the support of her guidance counselor and the influence and support of her more academically minded peers in the suburban, middle class school she worked to gain entrance to, Hana was accepted into an elite liberal arts college with a full financial aid scholarship. Hana describes her initial entry into college:

I got to [college] and my god, talk about a different world. Like, people come from Dalton, or, you know, Horace Mann, or they have… I don’t know, like, traveled to Greece to learn about the Greek Empire while they were in Middle School, or they learned how to, you know, use a fork, or, whatever, hold a wine glass. (Interview, March 31, 2012).

the desired culture. Though being open to trying all kinds of new foods, or visiting anywhere in the world, the “meat and potatoes” of one’s childhood is “really horrible” (Kris) and not worth knowing. It does not gain them cultural currency as being open to new – “more exotic foods” – does. This asserts the connection between knowledge and taste; that one must learn which new cultural practices should be actively acquired and which should be forgotten.
Hana draws on many of the cultural practices associated with “dominant class habitus” explored through this project as she attempts to make salient the “different world” in which she found herself when she arrived at college. She includes learning about the world through travel as an artifact of this “different world” along with gaining particular knowledge about “how to eat and drink.” Exposure to this different world became an important aspect of the cultural learning accomplished in college for Hana and for each participant in this study.

Across the mobile individuals in this study, this new “exposure” was often in contrast with the worldview – or habitus – of the participant’s family of origin. This was the case for Thomas Yorks, who earned a JD and master’s degree in Organizational Dynamics and is now the CEO of a social service company. Thomas describes the work of his mother as “homemaker,” while his father was a pressman, or printer. He mentions the role college played in broadening his world:

College definitely gave me a broader perspective than if my parents had college educations. I came from a background where your life was your life, and you didn’t really…there wasn’t as much comparison as there is today with other parts of the state, the city, the world. You just knew your own situation, and all the people around you were more or less in the same situation and so, um, that was your world. (Thomas, interview, September 25, 2012).

Thomas compares this frame of mind to his experience at an Ivy League institution where he earned his master’s degree. It was through that educational experience that he was “exposed to people who broadened [his] perspective on things.” In these examples and across the interviews, considering their perspective as having been expanded, mobile individuals are positioning their family context as more “closed,” compared to the

Kathy, a professor whose father worked in a refinery and whose mother was a nurse, negotiates these different worlds as she travels a few hours by car each month to visit her family, a promise she made 15 years ago and has kept ever since. She says that the “scope of the horizon” is different between her life and the lives of her parents, who live in a “much smaller world” than she does:

The scope of [their] world is maybe you buy a house in the next town, maybe you work at a different company than your parents. What success means and what your scope of … the size of the horizon is just totally different. It’s just a much smaller world. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

According to Kathy, the perspective of her family is so different because the point of view is from a different place; therefore the “size” of her parents’ “horizon” or the “scope of their world” is considerably smaller. And it is all about “exposure,” Kathy says:

“When you’re not exposed to anything that’s beyond that, then those become the boundaries of the universe.” She compares this to the people she was exposed to in college “whose parents were raising them like, ‘Go live in England,’ or ‘Why not go to Thailand?’” She struggled to understand these “different worlds” stating how “it’s just hard to translate experiences.” Like Victor, the environmental scientist from the previous chapter, Kathy draws on the tool of “translation,” as she attempts to make sense of the different perspectives associated with the worlds in which she lives. In addition, like Thomas, she is drawing on her family’s “smaller” perspective or “horizon” to compare her own exposure to people in college who traveled as young people and so were exposed to a “broader” world much earlier.
Don Peterson, a teacher with a master’s degree in the field in which he teaches, also describes what an impact his educational journey has had on his worldview. His father grew up on a farm in the Midwest and worked as a cabinet maker, opening and closing a few cabinet shops throughout Don’s childhood. His mother primarily stayed home and helped with the bookkeeping for the business. He describes his path as very different than his family’s due to the “exposure” to different “outlooks” that he gained in college:

I think because of my path, I've had exposure to a way of thinking, you know, a different group of people, a more liberal outlook of the world, I traveled a lot more. Yeah, I think that probably has made a big difference. Maybe that started in college and maybe college has made some of those other things happen as a result. (Interview, July 8, 2012).

Don describes his new “outlook” as “liberal” and also draws on the “exposure” he gained through college and a “different group of people” to explain the different “path” he has taken compared to his family. He discusses this difference to expand on the relationship between him and his brother, which he describes as “not terribly close”:

I just was on that path. I think it was probably an exposure to, you know, lots of different people. As soon as I graduated a couple of friends and I backpacked through Europe for about 6 months. My brother never thought about that or it just didn't interest him in particular. He's left our home state, certainly, but not a lot. Um, I think probably just exposure that was more out there than my little community. (Interview, July 8, 2012).

While Don graduated from an elite liberal arts college, earned a master’s degree and moved 1000 miles away from home, his brother stayed in the town where they were raised and opened up a cabinet shop with their father, which he still owns and operates today. To Don, his brother’s “scope” of sight (Kathy, interview May 3, 2012) seems
smaller then, and this has implications for their relationship, as Don uses this difference in worldview to describe why they are not “terribly close.”

This distinction between brothers was also evident for Dave McNeil. Dave, a CEO who is married with three children, currently runs a division of a large international company. In addition to these professional experiences, earlier on, he was also exposed to a broader world through the Ivy League institution he attended for college. Like Don, Dave draws on this difference in perspective to explain why he is not particularly close to his brother.

I would say that I'm a little bit more worldly in my exposure to things and I think he's a little bit more like my parents, a little bit more traditional in, you know, he just doesn't travel a lot, he just - his job is his job - and he has his kids and he's in this town and they don't leave it very often and he's married to someone who is very conservative and so they’re much more like my parents in that regard. I'm much more, kind of, open to new ideas. We get along; we just don't have much in common. (Interview, August 6, 2012).

Dave describes his brother and himself as “friendly” but “so different” that maintaining a close relationship seems difficult. When asked to describe why they are so different or have so little in common, this concept of “exposure” is again drawn upon:

The only difference is in the exposure. So, he had the same upbringing as me, very sheltered, and then he went to a state school, you know, where a high number of people have never left [our town]. So, he just hung out with people that looked a lot like him and had very similar backgrounds. So that was his exposure, while for me it was much different exposure. (Interview, August 6, 2012).

While drawing on the concept of exposure as others in the study have, Dave is also discussing the importance of the type of college one attends. He, like half of the other participants in the study, attended an Ivy League institution, and through that experience has developed a different perspective than his family, with a broadened worldview and
increased exposure to difference. This is the case even with his brother, who is also college educated, and who now works as an engineer. It seems, then, that the degree to which this exposure occurs is even greater when the institution of higher education is more elite, as in the case of an Ivy League institution or an elite liberal arts college.\(^{45}\) This experience of exposure to a broader world was consistent among the 17 participants in the study who earned at least one of their degrees in an elite institution (see Table 1).\(^{46}\)

This section begins with an exploration of the potential to change habitus through the work of Horvat and Davis (2011). They describe the influence of the program, Youthbuild, on its participants as “personal, deep, and undeniable” (p. 153) through broadening participants’ worldviews. Despite the positive outcome of this shift in habitus, the way it is defined implies that a participant in the program might learn to view their previous context as limiting or “closed.” This is because a “broadening” of one’s worldview represents new learning that is celebrated and desired, yet leads them to view those in their previous context (e.g., family members, friends) as holding a “smaller worldview” than the one they have developed through the program. The significance of “exposure” to a “different world” as described by the participants in this chapter is similar, as individuals view the context in which they were raised as “closed” or “smaller.” While exposure to a broader world through college, then, led to shifts in

\(^{45}\) Recently, Khan’s (2012) ethnographic work on privilege and the “making of an elite class” that is “open” and “worldly” in response to the globalizing world supports this shift in perspective as an important component of upper class culture. Khan writes of the importance of a “more open world” as an aspect of elite culture: “Today what is distinctive among the elite is not their exclusivity, but their ease within and broad acceptance of a more open world” (Khan, 2011, p. 36). Though outside the scope of this study, the prestige or elite designation of the institution one attends for college or graduate school seems an important factor in the experience of upward mobility as well.

\(^{46}\) The shift in cultural capital associated with tastes, beliefs and knowledge as is explored throughout this chapter was consistent across participants, regardless of whether they attended an elite college.
participants’ “tastes” in terms of how they spent their time, the kinds of food and alcohol they consumed and their relationship to money and shopping, this exposure also led to a (re)framing of their family of origin as “smaller” or “closed.” This tendency is explored in the following section through the practice of travel.

Travel: Cultivating a New Habitus

This initial “exposure to a different world” led, in many cases, to an appreciation of and continued interest in travel.\(^{47}\) Travel offers an example of a choice made from a “habitus defined by freedom” as described by Bourdieu (1984). One must have expendable economic capital but also free time and knowledge in order to incorporate travel into one’s consistent leisure time repertoire, as was the case for many in the study. The opportunity to travel and see new places was consistently described with pleasure and pride as participants recounted the number of countries they had traveled to or the plans for their next trip. When asked what has been enjoyable about their education, travel was consistently mentioned as one of the positive aspects of their mobile trajectory, a tangible method through which participants develop and maintain “exposure to new worlds.” The appreciation for travel consistently mentioned by participants, however, was often described in contrast to the way in which they were raised and was met with reluctance, discomfort or rejection by participants’ parents. This indicates a difference in the habitus with which upwardly mobile individuals were raised and speaks to an active attempt, on their part, to cultivate this aspect of their new habitus, one that is in direct

\(^{47}\) In addition to exposure and interest, in some cases knowledge of how to travel was also explored in college through opportunities to study abroad or through experience as individuals needed to travel to actually get to their colleges.
contrast with the previous habitus of their families and communities of origin. This
cultivation was also evident, in some cases, in participants’ descriptions of how they raise
(or plan to raise) their children. These data suggest, then, that the taking on of cultural
capital is a complex process in which aspects of one’s own habitus are expanded upon or
replaced with new knowledge and interests.

Brady Williams, currently an emergency room doctor, describes turning down the
offer to take over his father’s carpentry business after graduating high school. He
attributes his reluctance to “follow in his father’s footsteps” as a carpenter as “some ill-
defined notion of knowing that I did not want to stay in [my state].” This was not yet met
with awareness of where he would go and what he would do, however, since he “didn’t
know where most of the countries I have [now] been to were until I was out of college”
(interview, April 12, 2012). Once he was exposed to the option of international travel in
college, however, it has become one aspect of the person Brady desires to be; “the kind of
person that interesting things happen to”:

I knew I wanted to be that person that had been to a lot of places and had seen
things. It definitely means a lot to me. In the past six or seven years, I have been
to twenty countries. Every time I go, I love it. I can’t wait. I am always thinking
about the next plane trip I am taking. I am always fighting the urge to buy a plane
ticket somewhere. There are so many things that are amazing that I want to see. I
need to go to Patagonia. I need to go to Tokyo. I need to go to China. I need to see
the Great Wall. I need to get real Szechuan food. I need to see Everest. These are
things; I just need to see them. If I am not doing these things, I am not entirely
sure why I am here. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

For Brady, travel represents the view of himself he longs for and a “need” that he must
realize; without seeing these places that exist in the world and being that person who has
“been a lot of places,” he doesn’t “know why he is here.” Travel, though enabled through
“dispensable income” (Karen) and free time (Hana), is framed by Brady as a “need” he must accomplish in order to be the person he now imagines himself becoming. This is contrasted with his own description of himself prior to college when, “to be honest, I did not even know where Rhode Island was.” This ability to see new places has become a significant aspect of how Brady views himself and is indicative of a shift in his habitus; one that he is actively cultivating. Bourdieu’s (1984) description of habitus helps to explain, in part, how travel has become a “need” in Brady’s perspective.

Habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systemic, universal application – beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt – of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions. (p. 170).

Brady, in understanding his desire to travel as a “need” and through his own description of travel as “definitely mean[ing] a lot,” is actively reconstructing and cultivating this aspect of his (new) habitus. Travel is now universally important to Brady, having become a significant aspect of the “kind of person [he] wants to be,” one to which “interesting things happen.” This love of traveling is in contrast to the perspective of his mother and stepfather, with whom he talks about his travels only “a little bit.” He describes them as being “initially a little bit iffy about it, and then, after I survived a couple of times, they were like, ‘Okay. I guess you are okay.’” Exposure to new worlds and seeing new things does not seem an aspect of their habitus. This reluctant acceptance of travel by these mobile individuals’ parents was consistent across interviews, and is in direct opposition to the upper class students Kathy describes meeting in college whose parents encouraged them to travel and see the world with such sentiments as “Go live in England,” or “Why
not go to Thailand?” (interview, May 3, 2012). This difference in perspective on travel represents one aspect of the cultural learning an upwardly mobile individual needs to accomplish and, in the case of Brady, incorporate as their own since in the habitus of the dominant class, this is viewed as important cultural capital. It seems, however, that this new habitus which includes a “need” to travel is difficult to maintain alongside the more fearful perspective toward travel held by his mother and stepfather. The new knowledge he has gained about where these countries are is also impossible to “unlearn” now that he has traveled to these places and possesses this geographic knowledge. These perspectives on travel are, as Bourdieu (1984) might argue, in direct opposition. “Changing” or “altering” (Horvat & Davis, 2011) habitus, then, might have significant implications for what aspects of one’s habitus remains, a process which may involve more loss or pain than is currently conceived in current theories on the topic.

Hana also mentioned how important travel is for her; that she has “traveled quite a bit” because it really “shakes things up for her” and offers her valuable perspective that she finds incredibly important. She explains, smiling with wide eyes, “You know it’s watching other people do what they do, and see how they live, you know. Villagers in Nepal live a very different life than us. And it’s incredible” (interview, March 31, 2012). At the time of our interview, Hana had been working for a demanding company as a consultant for six months, and so had not recently traveled as much as she had grown accustomed to over the past ten years since graduating from college. She shared that this was difficult for her: “It’s been a while since I’ve traveled, and I feel like I’m dying, like I really feel that way. [Laughter]. There seriously is like, something not working
properly” (interview, March 31, 2012). Travel has become such an important aspect of Hana’s life – of her habitus – that she feels like she is “dying” when she has not gone on a trip in “a while.” Travel is incredibly important, then, and is in contrast to the way she was raised as she describes how her grandparents “did not take her anywhere to travel” when she was young. She also mentions her upwardly mobile husband who, “at this point has probably traveled to 60 different countries,” yet “his parents have never left the country.” Parents’ lack of experience or comfort with travel and seeing new places is a tangible example of the “exposure” to the dominant class habitus that college provides to upwardly mobile individuals and how it dwells in stark contrast to their families of origin.

One way to address this difference in perspective on travel is to try and share their new experiences with their family members through exposing their family to new places and contexts. This attempt, while sometimes successful, is often met with disinterest, reluctance or lack of understanding. Karen Green, a scientist with a Ph.D., moved to the East Coast for graduate school and has decided, for the moment, to settle there. She and her husband are looking to buy a home and start a family in the next few years. She described how “nice it is now to have more dispensable income” so that she can do things she “wasn’t able to do as a child”:

We can travel, you know, we went on a cruise to the Caribbean, and we went to Barbados for our honeymoon, and I wouldn’t, as a kid-going to [a neighboring state 100 miles away] was a big deal. So-it’s been fun. I kinda wish my parents would do some of it, but I know they never will. I know they wouldn’t feel comfortable doing it. Like even if I said, ‘Hey come on a cruise with us!’ They’d be like, even if we paid for it, they’d be like, ‘Oh, no!’” (Interview, March 4, 2012).
She describes her parents as “very sheltered,” and explains that they “don’t know that things are different” in other places, and while she wishes she could expose them to these new places, she knows that they would not come. While dispensable income, as Karen mentions, is the way she and her husband have been able to travel, it is not the money that is holding her parents back from traveling. Rather, she says that even if she were to pay for them, they would still not come along. To this, Karen shared that she will continue to invite them, but she is “not going to drag them or anything.” Her husband, Peter, is also upwardly mobile and has similar experiences. Peter’s parents traveled across country for their wedding, and it was “a big deal,” as they exclaimed, “Oh, we haven’t been on a plane in you know, over a decade.” Laughing, Karen shared, “And I’m like, whoa we go a few times a year. So it’s a different perspective.” Karen’s desire to share her expanded horizon or “different perspective” with her parents – and their resistance to going with her – was consistent across the experiences of the mobile individuals in the study.

Another participant, Dave McNeil, mentioned “making” his parents travel with him, and his regret that he had not done this earlier as his aging parents struggled now to travel. Now a successful CEO on the East Coast, he describes how he and his wife do “spend money on traveling” and shares their immediate plans to take their children to Europe in a few years “once they are a bit older.” Since he makes “somewhere between like 500,000 and 750,000” he is able to afford their love of travel, and has recently begun “making” his parents go on trips with them. This is because it became difficult “seeing my parents through my perspective,” particularly when he compared how little they had
traveled to the experiences of his wife’s parents who worked professional jobs as a doctor and librarian. He describes this difference: “I look at my wife's parents, they were already well-traveled anyways, but they're able to…they have this great enjoyment of life with us and with our kids and they're able to experience it.” This awareness of their different experiences has caused him to bring his parents along on trips with his wife and three children:

So we made them go to Disneyworld. I paid for them to go. They loved it. I mean, it was like, unbelievable, it was, ‘No, no, no, we can't,’ but then when you expose them they love it. And I wish we could have done more of that. Cause now it's gotten to the point where, like, I bought them tickets to go to Ireland where it's like, ‘Eh, get your money back, we're not going.’ So now they’ve gotten to the point where they’re just not physically or mentally able to do those things. So that's a small regret. (Interview, August 6, 2012).

Dave ignored his parents’ resistance to traveling with his family and was glad he did, exclaiming that they “had a great time.” This resistance to travel is sometimes based in the discomfort parents have in being outside of their comfort zone. Jon Salvador, a successful director for a large corporation, talks with his mother multiple times a week and consistently pays for her flights to come visit his family a few states away. Recently, though, they have decided to go visit her more often:

We've realized my mom is better in her own city than coming to visit. My mom is very freaked out by novelty and she just hasn't traveled much with her life. So when you take her out of her comfortable environment you put her in [our state], her life skills plummet, you know. She doesn't know how to get anywhere, she doesn't know how to do anything, she's very uncomfortable. Um, whereas when she's in her community she kind of has her routines and she knows what's going on. (Interview, July 13, 2012).

Since much of the upward mobility described through this project also involves geographic mobility, there are significant implications to physically seeing family
members and spending time with them if they are uncomfortable visiting their children in their new context. Negotiations for how often one visits, vacation time, and cost become more complicated as parents express disinterest or difficulty in traveling.

Individuals also describe this difference in perspective when reflecting on the way they were raised, and have actively tried to raise their children with a “broader worldview.” As Jacqueline, an educational administrator with an Ed.D., mentions: “All our travel was car travel, you know, visiting family.” Placing emphasis on “car,” Jacqueline describes her mother as “afraid of new things and the world” and compares this with her own expanded worldview she gained through education. Instead, the ability to “know how to experience and appreciate new and foreign things” is described by Jacqueline as a positive aspect of her trajectory and “something [she] wants to instill in [her] daughter” (interview, March 22, 2012).

Each of the upwardly mobile individuals with children described a desire to provide for their children a chance to see the world and develop this more global perspective that they learned later in life. Dave McNeil mentions this distinction between the way he was raised, and the strategies he uses to raise his children:

> Now we're much more of an open family, school's part of the learning process for my kids, [but] there's other things, like travel; other ways they need to learn, it can't just be about school. And, um, [they're] open to new ideas, new ways of thinking, new ways of living, you know, much more accepting of others. (Interview, August 6, 2012).

This early exposure to a broader world is an aspect of the education Dave is providing for his children that he sees as incredibly important. Providing “another way to learn,” openness to “new ideas” and “new ways of thinking” is now an aspect for Dave of what
“a great life means - you want to try to educate them, try to expose them to, to everything so they can make the right decisions when the time comes.” Learning outside of the classroom through travel becomes, then, an important way in which Dave feels he can instill in his children the ability to “make the right decisions.” This is in contrast to the “closed” or “smaller” ways in which Dave and each of the upwardly mobile participants in the study describe having been raised.

Even for those participants who do not yet have children, ensuring that their future children receive exposure to a larger world has already been considered. Stephanie, the doctor from the South, has plans to show her children that their “little cosmos, the little place where you’re living isn’t everything there is in the world,” and that “there’s things out there beyond you, and you can do whatever you want to.” Like others in the study, she contrasts this with what she was unable to do as a child: “I’d love to take my kids traveling places, because that’s one thing I hate that I didn’t get to do as a kid, is travel” (interview, April 12, 2012). She understands the exposure to a broader world she “missed” in her own childhood and so actively wants to provide that for her future children. This contrast continues to the present, as, like Karen’s and Dave’s parents, Stephanie’s mother continues to resist invitations to travel. At the time of the interview, Stephanie and her husband had invited Stephanie’s mother on a trip to a Caribbean Island that they were planning to take just two weeks later. Laughing, she described how her mother was trying to get out of the trip:

My mom has never even been, like, on a real vacation. And she tried to bail on this, and I’m like, “Ma, you’re going to die one day, you’re going to leave money, and I’m going to go on vacation with it, you better go have fun with it.” I’m like,
“You’ve never been on a real vacation, you have a passport, you better go use it!” (Interview, April 12, 2012).

Stephanie was excited for the trip, sharing that they were staying “off the beaten track” since she does not “like to stay in busy places.” She was, however, still weary of her mother “bailing” on the trip that was just two weeks away.

At times, this interest in going to new places and seeing new things represented a barrier for parents in understanding their now upwardly mobile child, and created some distance and even tension. Sequoia King mentions an experience that illustrates the distance this difference in perspective on travel can sometimes cause. Sequoia was given the opportunity to travel abroad to give a talk in front of hundreds of people in Shanghai and was excited to share the impressive news with her family, from whom she now lives around the corner. Her news was met with confusion, however, and a lack of understanding by both her mother, and a close friend from church.

My mother had all these questions about, “What is Shanghai?” and I’m like, “Mommy, it’s a city.” “I ‘ain’t never heard of Shanghai. And they flyin’ you to China. Do you need shots?” I’m like, “Mommy, just listen.” And so my friend’s mother from church say to me, “Well, I’m glad you told me your mother had all those questions because I did too. I didn’t get it.” I said, “Well why didn’t you ask me?” And she said, “Well you got to remember we don’t all, we don’t all have all these degrees like you do.” (Interview, May 23, 2012).

Though Sequoia has maintained a closer relationship with her family and community than others in the study, she still needs to explain to her parents why she would be interested in traveling abroad, and why they should not worry. And, as Sequoia mentions, her friend from church made clear that her opportunity and interest in traveling abroad represented one aspect of her “degree” that separated her from the other members of the
church. As with her mother, it seems their interest in and knowledge about travel are quite different.

Finally, in other contexts, the new learning and exposure to broader horizons that upwardly mobile individuals experienced led to viewing their parents as lacking the knowledge or experience to which they were now being exposed. One example involves Wesley, a man in his late 60’s with a Ph.D. who recently retired from being a professor. He considers his father’s lack of travel as one example of him being “a simple man”:

> He was a simple man. By no means stupid, but nevertheless had very simple tastes and had not traveled very much. I guess it was Thoreau who said, "I have traveled much in Concord." Well he's traveled much in Baltimore. (Interview, February 16, 2012).

Wesley mentions his father’s “simple tastes,” indicating the existence of a dominated class habitus defined by “necessity” rather than “freedom” (Bourdieu, 1984). This is different than the habitus Wesley has developed through his education and the middle class family into which he married. The learning accomplished through travel and the exposure to different worlds and people are in opposition to the interests and knowledge of their parents and siblings. This distinction in “taste” and “travel” led to a shift in the way some upwardly mobile individual described their family of origin, viewing them as “simpler” with “smaller horizons.” The implications of this tendency and the tension it sometimes caused will be discussed later in this chapter. Now, another area of distinction – food and drink – will be explored.
Food and Drink: Unlearning “Simple Tastes”

This expanding of one’s perspective beyond what he or she was raised with translated to food and drink as well, as current eating and drinking practices were compared with what participants ate or drank while growing up. While the particular “tastes” in food or drinks individuals develop through upward mobility are important, the learning they accomplish to discern among these tastes is also important. On the “dual meaning” of taste, Bourdieu (1984) writes,

Taste in the sense of the ‘faculty of immediately and intuitively judging aesthetic values’ is inseparable from taste in the sense of the capacity to discern the flavours of foods which implies a preference for some of them. The abstraction which isolates dispositions toward legitimate culture leads to a further abstraction at the level of the system of explanatory factors. (p. 99).

Bourdieu’s theory of a cultural distinction of taste is about the actual tastes one develops, in terms of “flavors of foods” or music preference or art appreciation. However, the knowledge or explanation behind this discernment of taste is a significant – though more abstract – aspect of habitus. Whether related to more refined taste, trying new food or eating out, food and drink consumption represents another aspect of habitus in which a mobile individual’s perspective was broadened to include the development of new tastes alongside new knowledge of how and why that taste might be preferred. New aspects of habitus and new practices associated with participants’ cultural capital were, again, being cultivated.

48 It is this “dual” nature of the concept of taste which positions tastes, interests and lifestyle – the specifics of which Bourdieu outlines in Distinction (1984) – as aspects of both the embodied and objectified forms of cultural capital.
Drawing on her exposure to “more people,” Sequoia, the African American urban educator whose mother had a number of questions about her upcoming travels, mentions her openness to new food that she had not been open to as a child:

I think as I’ve kind of been exposed to more people, I’ve been open to other things. I grew up in a house where we had fried chicken and all this kind of stuff, and so I don’t think—I never had guacamole as a child, or hummus. But as an adult, I think I’ve been less afraid to—it was just this sort of unlearning things that I had learned in my house, or hesitations that I had picked up when I was younger, that I was willing to say, “Oh, I’ll try it.” (Interview, May 23, 2012, emphasis added).

Sequoia describes having shifted her willingness to try new things, and the particular food she now eats, which she did not eat when she was young. Through this process, she has actively “unlearned” what she learned growing up. Sequoia also gave up meat when she was in college, which her father, who grew up raising hogs on a farm, found “hilarious.” Sequoia’s new eating practices were so outside the experience of her father that he found her shifts in eating humorous and while not framed as difficult in this context, becoming an object of laughter within one’s family might be difficult for others.

This negotiation of different eating habits is also the case when people meet partners outside of their own class background, like Thomas Yorks, the CEO of a social service agency. He met his wife in college and describes how she “would never feed me like my mother fed me. My wife makes sure—she’s very aware of good nutrition.” Thinking about the food he ate when he was young, he laughed and exclaimed: “We would never eat that way.” He describes how he’s “been exposed to business travel and world travel, to lots of different kinds of food” (interview, September 25, 2012). As with travel and meeting new people, college was an important site for exposure to new food,
which has both symbolic and practical implications. Dave McNeil mentions that he now eats “100% different” than when growing up. He grew up with “the classic Irish meat and potatoes” and then describes the intense experience college was when he first got there:

“So you can think of what college was for me, right. Chinese food, trucks, Italian all over the place, it’s fascinating” (interview, August 6, 2012). He compares this with his own child rearing strategies, describing his kids as “picky” but as having been

…exposed to every type of food and they, they're forced to try it and they gag and they yell and they cry but it's funny you mention it, it's 180 degrees different. I mean it's just so, so, different. It's like, hey let’s try that, Indian food, Chinese food, Asian food. (Interview, August 6, 2012).

In addition to this incredible 180 degree difference for Dave, he again mentions the importance of exposing his own parents to this difference as an adult:

The one thing I've done for my parents, we've exposed them to those types of things, like we've forced them to go to restaurants where they, like my dad never had Chinese food until six years ago when we introduced him, like we ordered Chinese food [and said] Dad, it's all we've got. So you can either stay here and not eat anything or come with us. And they try it and it’s like, ‘Oh, this is great, I love it!’ (Interview, August 6, 2012).

Similar to when Dave made his parents go with his family to Disneyland, he “forces” his parents to try these different foods in order to “expose them to those types of things.”

Dave has clearly negotiated this shift in perspective, and the accompanying distance that sometimes develops with family members, through sharing these new cultural practices with his parents, which, he promises, “they love” (interview, August 6, 2012).

This awareness of different eating and drinking practices was sometimes further developed in adulthood, as Brady Williams mentions the “refining” of his tastes over time:
It’s sort of like coffee. I never used to drink coffee, until I got to medical school. Then, as I started drinking coffee, I was like, “Well this coffee is kind of crap, I like this coffee.” Now I buy my own coffee that I grind up. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

Brady actually travels an hour and a half to a larger city nearby “just to buy a bag of coffee and bring it back,” since the coffee is much better. He also mentions his different perspective on drinking alcohol, describing his classmates in his rural high school as “drinking kegs in the woods” – which he refused to do – as compared to his friends from medical school who “were more whiskey drinkers.” His interest in wine he attributes to “the writers who like French and wear black and wear berets,” with whom he was friends in college. Describing his own drinking habits now, he says, “I’ll drink a Budweiser, but I won’t like it…. I mean I still drink beer, but it’s probably more expensive beer, like a microbrew.” This connection between being able to afford “better” taste is mentioned by Kris, the community college professor as well:

Now I make different choices because I can afford to. I mean, I used to definitely drink PBR, not because it was cool, but because it was cheap. Miller Lite was a big one. I guess I drank really cheap, crappy stuff and now I definitely drink—I’m kind of a snob about my wine and my beer and stuff now. So that changed. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

Brady makes clear the learned social aspects of drinking, whereas Kris is clearly affected by the expense of different types of alcohol and how her increase in income enables the more “snobby” decisions she now makes. Developing these “more refined tastes” also involves learning new knowledge associated with consumption; the “right” wine or beer to drink, which Indian restaurant in town was the best, or which of the healthy food options is actually healthier. This knowledge became another example of the distance between participants and their families of origin. Kathy mentions the intersection
between her middle class husbands’ drinking practices and the knowledge her parents have on the particulars of wine:

So a while ago I brought a case of my husband’s favorite beer, which is an imported beer so my parents are like, [mimicking a sarcastic tone] “Ohhhh,” and we keep it in the refrigerator in the basement. So when we arrive, he drinks a beer, and he’ll drink a beer with the two dinners that we have while we’re there. When my sister was dating this guy, he used to bring wine when they would come for the weekend, because he’s really into wine, and he sort of thought it was a gift, so we would open it, we would drink some of it and then I would come back a month later and they’d have a stopper in it, and they’re like, “Oh some of that wine is still,” like they don’t know, so I’m like, “Oh thanks!” and then I like, quick, get rid of it. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Not only are her parents sarcastically “ohh-ing” over the imported beer she brings for her husband, but they offer her wine that she implies is spoiled since it has been open for a month. In Kathy’s example, alcohol represents an artifact for the different tastes associated with social class distinction, as described by Bourdieu (1984). The necessary knowledge associated with these tastes, and the practice of consuming these particular items, are also evident. This knowledge represents newly acquired awareness that is difficult for Kathy to ignore or unlearn. She can cover up her parents’ mistake and pretend not to notice this “gaff” in wine knowledge in front of her family, yet she still notices and recalls it during our interview.

Another realm of food consumption in which new knowledge was learned by participants involved healthier eating. Kris, the community college professor mentioned previously, discusses how different her perspective on healthy eating is, compared to her family’s understanding of healthful eating. She describes the food she currently eats, and feeds her son as “all organics, no GMOs, [genetically modified organisms]” but when asked if that was the food she was raised on, she exclaims:
Hell no! We ate whatever we could afford to eat and like we still always had like diet soda....so I’m very, very health conscious. I wasn’t raised that way at all, because they didn’t know. They wanted to be health conscious. They still don’t know. Like the stuff they eat-like they eat just horrible crap and don’t realize it, and I always am trying to explain it. (Interview, June 12, 2012.)

Kris explains this unhealthy eating, with which she was raised and in which her family members still engage, as “lack of knowledge.” Though she is “always trying to explain it” to them, they still make what Kris considers unhealthy decisions. She explains further:

They buy into all the processed, horrible food and you know, like my sister will have some really crappy juice that’s like V8, but it’s like fake and I read the ingredients and she’s like, “But no! I get my vitamins this way,” and I try to explain - so my strategies are definitely different than theirs. (Interview, June 12, 2012.)

Both money and knowledge dictate whether Kris’ family eats “healthily,” according to Kris and her perspective on what is healthy. This knowledge about healthy eating has also determined, in some ways, Kris’ taste. She no longer has a taste for “diet soda,” for example, and finds “processed foods” and “crappy juice” to be “fake” and “horrible.” She tries to explain her shift in taste and the “strategies” she has learned for being healthier with her family, yet their strategies remain different. Money has also enabled Kris to make decisions about eating “all organic” and being more “snobby” about her beer and wine, since she used to drink only the “crappy stuff” she could afford. This has shifted her taste or preference away from PBR and Miller light, beers that, for example, Brady would drink but “would not like” now that he has also developed a more refined taste for alcohol through exposure in college and graduate school. In these new educational contexts, Brady was exposed to drinking wine or whiskey, rather than “drinking a keg in the woods” like he grew up with in his home town. In each case, initial exposure to
different drinking and eating practices, knowledge acquisition about these practices, and having enough money to support the new preference each played a significant role in changing their taste to one that corresponds to the “dominant class” habitus discussed by Bourdieu (1984).

In addition to the inability to afford healthy food and know the best practices associated with healthy eating, participants mentioned some resistance from family or friends to their healthier decisions. Sequoia – who stated that she is about 20 pounds over her ideal weight at the time of the interview – mentions the pushback she has received in her church community as she has tried to lose weight and be healthier, attributing their response or discomfort with higher levels of education and issues associated with social class:

I think the interpretation of social class has a lot to do – So, for instance, my friend who works at the bank, like he makes more money than I do. He makes more than I did at my last full-time job, but in his mind, there’s this distance because I have a Ph.D. and he never finished undergrad. Or the people at the church who feel like, “You think you cute because you…” “Lady, I don’t think I’m anything.” “You done lost all that weight, you got…” Like, “That’s because I wasn’t well.” I was like taking medicine. (Interview, May 23, 2012.)

For Sequoia, losing weight and eating healthily are important to her for reasons outside of the perspectives mentioned in this section thus far; she was truly worried about her health. While Sequoia previously shared her willingness to try new foods and toyed with being a vegetarian while in college, she is frustrated that members from her church frame her attempts to lose weight as an aspect of her education or shifted social class. Her losing weight becomes another example of the distance between herself and her community due to education, even though, as in the case above, her friend is actually
making more money than she is. These behaviors associated with travel and food or health can become evidence – for both mobile individuals and their families and friends – that they have shifted aspects of who they are. Though Sequoia resists this assumption, as she feels it is not true, education still represents this distinction in cultural practice and behavior.

These differences in food preference also translate to where food is consumed and the practice of eating out. Most participants in the study mention their confusion when arriving at college. First, the very notion that they did not have to pay for food but rather could just go to the dining hall for their meals was an exciting realization, particularly since, as in the case of Victor, he “was not sure how he was going to eat” when he arrived at college. They were later confused when their friends chose to “go out to fancy restaurants” (Jacqueline, interview, March 22, 2012) even though they had free meals on the meal plan. One participant, Kathy, even opted out of the meal plan entirely because she knew it was cheaper for her and her parents if she just made meals for the week in her kitchen, and grabbed a “pretzel and soda” for lunch each day. Eating out for special occasions was definitely a practice that some mobile individuals were familiar with, but the perspective on eating out was entirely different when compared to the elite dining spaces some individuals were exposed to via college. Kathy explains:

So growing up, we didn’t eat out – like, we really didn’t have money. When my mother and father wanted to announce to my older brother and myself that they were expecting my sister, they got McDonald’s and brought it home for dinner, and I remember my brother and I like elbowing each other and being like, “There’s something big going down,” like, “Holy crap! They brought home McDonald’s,” like, “Oh my god,” right, like we’re moving or something, like something is up. And if we got really good grades, once a year they would take us out to dinner at one of those Inns with blue-haired people who go and there’s
prime rib and whatever, and that was a big deal, like dress up. My mom would do my hair and they would sort of talk about how proud they were. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

This version of eating out for special occasions was rocked for Kathy when she went to her first “fancy” restaurant in the downtown area of the city where she went to college. Though not far in mileage from where she grew up, the experience was entirely different:

My senior year, there was a student of my advisor who had defended her dissertation and because I had done a lot of the data work in her dissertation he took us out to lunch, and I just remember - I remember what I wore and I remember thinking, like, ‘Oh my god. This exists.’ (Interview, May 3, 2012).

This initial exposure to another way of living – whether eating out, making healthier decisions, or developing refined tastes – was impactful across interviews. Many, like Kathy, remember exactly what they were wearing when they first ventured into these new contexts, having a seemingly visceral experience. This new knowledge and exposure is also marked as something they cannot unlearn. Kathy now views the eating out practices of her childhood and the enthusiasm with which she ate McDonald’s in celebration of her baby sister’s arrival through a different lens – perhaps with more admiration or longing – but definitely differently. Exposure to “fancy” restaurants has changed her perspective.

That mobile individuals’ families of origin have not had these experiences can create distance. In response some individuals attempt to share these new perspectives with their families of origin, as Dave does. Though initially resisting their trip to Disneyland and trying new food, Dave’s parents responded positively to the exposure Dave offered. This is not always the case; however, as some new tastes or knowledge upwardly mobile individuals gain through their education prevent participants from maintaining a close relationship with their family of origin. This distance is explored in the following section.
through the shifts in beliefs upwardly mobile individual experienced through their educational trajectories.

**Lacking “Cultural Overlap”: Strained Communication with Family**

Implications for gaining habitus have largely been considered in the sites of school and the workplace; the “new” contexts in which habitus is developed and enacted, rather than the “old” communities from which individuals come. This is the perspective of Lee and Kramer (2013), who find in their mixed methods study on shifts in habitus among upwardly mobile college students that the experience of social mobility can lead to a divide with their home communities. Though the population of focus varies considerably from this study, as Lee and Kramer interviewed current college students compared to the adults across various professions interviewed for this study, their focus on the “sacrifices” of this experience, and the difficulty in maintaining connection with family members, offers insight. This represents the focus of this section, where mobile individuals mention experiencing distance with family members – described as a limited ability to “just talk” or converse comfortably – due to the changes in tastes, beliefs and knowledge they have experienced through their mobile trajectory.

Among the “sacrifices” made by upwardly mobile students, as outlined by Lee and Kramer (2013), a lack of connection or distance with family members and friends from “home” was described. One explanation for this, they find, is the students’ shifts in “conversational repertoires”: “Over time, respondents find that their conversational repertoires have shifted such that they have difficulty communicating with the friends and family members that they left behind at home. (p. 26). Those interviewed attribute these
shifts to “knowledge” and a “way to talk about things,” and reflect on the loss associated with these changes due to a distance that emerges with families of origin:

It’s a double-edged sword. I really like that I’ve gained this knowledge and these ways to talk about these things. [But] I feel you definitely lose so much when that’s the only way to talk or that’s the only way to be heard. What happens when you go home and you can’t talk to your families or community? (p. 28).

Like the mobile participants whose experiences are outlined in the previous chapters, individuals conform to particular ways of acting and speaking in order to “fit in” or “be heard” in college or the workplace. As this chapter argues, mobile individuals also shift their worldviews and tastes alongside the new knowledge they gain through education – each an aspect of the cultural capital necessary to be successful. This section explores the role that shifts in habitus – in terms of tastes, knowledge and beliefs – play in the strained communication and distance participants experience with family members. The concept of symbolic violence is again considered, as the inability to talk freely with family members represents a painful experience in which individuals sometimes blame themselves for the distance or long to be closer to family but instead settle for a partial closeness.

Given the “different world” to which participants were “exposed” and in which they now engage, it becomes difficult for upwardly mobile individuals to share their “new world” with their family members. One participant, Hana, describes the “new world” she would need to construct in order for her to talk more freely and often with her family. An Asian woman from the West Coast, Hana describes herself as the product of a “failed marriage.” She grew up without any contact with or support from her parents and instead lived with her grandparents for most of her childhood. For high school, she
applied for a bussing program that brought her to a more desirable suburban school. Due to the academically minded peer influence in that school, she moved out on her own at sixteen and worked to support herself so she could live in her school’s neighborhood. While she lived with her grandparents until she was sixteen she does not see them as being particularly close to her. Now, her grandmother is at the end of her life and they live across the country from one another. They do not regularly keep in touch: “I probably talk to my grandmother once a year, if that” (Hana, interview, March 31, 2012).

Attempting to describe why they talk so little, she draws on the metaphor of “constructing a different world” as evident in books like the “Hunger Games” or “Harry Potter,” to illustrate how she and her grandmother live in such different worlds and how that influences their (lack of) communication:

For me to describe to her what’s happening in my life, it’s to have to construct an entire world through language….it’s like a different world, and I would have to construct the elements, the foundations of my world, you know, like, where [my city] is, and what I do, in order for her to understand, and so it’s a lot of effort, right? If I were to engage in that, it would have to be an on-going effort, and our relationship is one such that, you know, that level of effort wasn’t going to happen, and hasn’t happened for a long, long time. (Interview, March 31, 2012).

Calmly describing herself as having a “non-relationship with [her] family,” Hana does not frame this difference as painful. Because she believes that so much work and effort would be involved in keeping in touch with her grandmother and having and maintaining a close relationship, she accepts this as fact and simply does not engage.

Hana also discusses having little to talk about as a reason for why keeping in touch is difficult. She draws on the relationship between her husband, Graham, who is also upwardly mobile (and his family), to help illustrate the difficulty associated with
attempting to maintain closeness, particularly when the “worlds” are so different. She shared: “With Graham’s family, he has a hard time talking to his parents, there is, sort of, a distance. His life is entirely different from what his parents have ever known.” Though this does not keep him from talking on the phone with them, about once every two weeks is the norm, the conversations feel “distant.” Hana attributes the distance to not having enough of a “cultural overlap” in what their everyday life looks like: “We have very little to talk to each other about. I think they’re great people, there’s no reason why we don’t, but there’s just, not much of a cultural overlap.” She offers examples of what this “cultural overlap” entails:

Graham’s parents didn’t go to college. His mom, I think, reads quite a bit, but it’s like romance novels. His father I don’t think reads at all, so like, that’s what I mean by a cultural…like, difference in interest. So I don’t really know how to speak to them….the conversation topics are very few and far between. (Interview, March 31, 2012).

There is a difference in “interests” evident between Graham and his parents that Hana attributes to their not having gone to college. These different interests influence the content of their conversations as well. Hana mentions that she could talk with Graham’s family about politics, but that it is not advised since his father is an “extremely, like Rush Limbaugh, Republican.” There were some topics, like politics and race, which were actively avoided in order to prevent disagreements, a factor which will be discussed more fully later in the section. More than this difference in beliefs, however, Hana mentioned the “intense difference in experience” as the largest reason for why Graham and his parents have so little to talk about:

Graham’s probably, at this point, traveled to 60 different countries; his parents have never left the country. The things that Graham and I do together, you know,
we watch old movies, or we read the news and talk about the emergence of, I don’t know, Turkey as an economic power player, or the non-emergence of Turkey as an economic power-player, things like that. From what I could gather in the six days I’ve spent with his family, their conversations are based on things that happen in their immediate lives, like, this neighbor had this happen. I mean, they’ve been living in that house for 30 years! So it’s very much rooted in what’s happening around them, rather than, you know, some larger global event. It’s difficult to have a conversation where one of the sides doesn’t know what the other person is talking about. (Interview, March 31, 2012).

Their experiences are now different, their world more expansive. Again, the “exposure” to a broader world associated with college has led to shifts in knowledge and taste – changes in one’s habitus – which influence how family members might connect. These differences also influence the kinds of conversations mobile individuals are able to have with their families. In many cases, these conversations indicate feelings of distance since they experience difficulty even “knowing what the other person is talking about.” This inability to “find anything to talk about” – to find common ground across their now-different lifestyles and worldviews as shaped by their different habitus – is one potential source for the distance mobile individuals experience when communicating with their families.

While Hana discusses the distance she and her husband feel toward their families without expressing pain or emotion during the interview, other participants describe this distance as painful and communicate that directly and/or with a sad look or a sigh, sometimes to the point of crying during the interview. In these cases, the ways in which one has changed is viewed as the source for the distance and the reason that individuals can no longer “just talk” with their families.
This is the case for Kathy Wozniak, a professor in her 40’s, who mentions accent, dress and make up in previous chapters when considering the ways in which she has changed since her initial exposure to the “dominant culture habitus” in college. While at times these changes, as evidenced in the last chapter, do not seem to cause Kathy distress, in the case of the impact on family relations, her affect seems quite different as she responds with intense emotion when considering the distance she feels from and with her parents. As she begins her response, she starts to cry and grabs another tissue. She continues:

This is hard. I think that my parents know how devoted I am to them ‘cause I would do whatever they needed, but we’re not really close, like we don’t talk….I think I’m literally unrecognizable to them. They’re very recognizable to me ‘cause that’s where I’m from, but it’s not where I live anymore (Interview, May 3, 2012).

At “we don’t talk,” the sadness Kathy feels regarding this distance between herself and her parents is evident. She stops for a moment and cries, collects herself while blowing her nose, and the interview continues. She articulates clearly her knowledge that she has changed, and that these changes are normal:

You know, I’ve been doing this for a long time now and, you know, you are absolutely affected by what you’re around and everything like what you need, what you do, um, your habits, you know, exercise, what you wear, how you talk, you know, like all of it. (Interview May 3, 2012).

When she connects these changes in herself with the distance she feels with her parents, however, she is again moved to tears and feels sad that she is “unrecognizable” to her family. Yet, she also recalls “my dad’s sort of hated joke” which is “some offensive joke he tells” the specifics of which she cannot remember. In these moments, she witnesses and feels how different they are and though she clarifies that she is “never disrespectful”
to her parents, “there are times when I’m sitting there and I’m thinking like, you know, like really, like I can’t believe you said that.” Since she visits her family for a weekend every month, she experiences their distance more often than others in the study, which, to Kathy, seems to make it more painful. She offers the metaphor of a “scab” to explain: “it’s probably more like picking off a scab way more often than other people do because I’m in it and I’m out of it, I’m in it, I’m out of it on a regular basis” (interview, May 3, 2012). The distance she feels with her parents, then, becomes more painful since she experiences it so frequently. While for Hana, who does not have regular contact with her family, this experience does not create the emotional response it does for Kathy, many in the study mentioned this as a source of pain, or describe, as Greg does in the following example, the loss of family as what has been most difficult about their mobility experience.

Greg Ainsworth, a White educational administrator and consultant for a suburban district, welcomed me into his large suburban home with a plate of cookies. We sat on his patio overlooking the acre of land he owns behind his home. He describes going “all the way through public school” in the small town where he grew up, but that he had “honestly never really thought of college, it was just something in my family that we never, ever spoke of.” He compares his working class background with the master’s degree and doctorate he earned from an Ivy League institution, and speaks with pride about his accomplishments. Though he feels content with the work he does and proud of how far he has come, he mentions a loss associated with this experience:

There’s an inevitable loss of [pause] familial understanding. Family members just don’t get you. There is a loss - I can’t, in a very real way, connect with my
younger sister. Cause we have absolutely nothing in common. We, we play nicely, but it’s not the same. And it’s me who has changed, cause it’s clearly – she’s very much, um, who she always has been. (Interview, August 15, 2012).

The distance Greg mentions feels particularly painful since he recognizes that he is the one who has changed, partly blaming himself for the distance he feels with his sister.

Like other participants, Greg draws on the example of “talking” as an indication of closeness and discusses shifts in beliefs and ways in which he has changed as a barrier to talking with his parents as well:

> My father hasn’t changed a lick. There’s a lot of things that, frankly, I just can’t talk to my dad about. Or my mom, for that matter. Well - I can talk more with my mom. I think my mom at least is willing to listen, but my father is kinda set in his ways. (Interview, August 15, 2012).

This offers a particular difficulty associated with this experience, a potential “cost,” that individuals at once feel proud of their accomplishments and happy in their lives, as they simultaneously feel a loss of familial closeness that is the direct result of their social mobility. Individuals often frame this loss as their own “fault,” as we witness through Greg’s description of his relationship with his sister and his own changing beliefs.

Kathy also frames the distance with her parents as an implication for her having been changed by her surroundings and inadvertently becoming “unrecognizable” to her family even as they are still recognizable to her. Like Greg, she feels that she is the one who has changed and so is directly implicated (by herself and her family) in the distance that is now between herself and her parents. The symbolic violence enacted on mobile individuals in this context is two-fold as they experience both the pain associated with being distant from their family members while also blaming themselves for this distance due to their change in “beliefs,” having become different from their families, even to the
point of feeling “unrecognizable.” This pain or discomfort, wrapped up in the framing of strained conversations or having “nothing to talk about” is an aspect of the taking on of cultural capital that is seldom explored, as Lee and Kramer (2013) mention, but which holds deep significance for participants in the study.

As Kathy and Greg make clear, developing new beliefs – another aspect of one’s habitus – also has an impact on upwardly mobile individuals and their relationships with their family members and how freely they communicate. As mentioned, college provides for upwardly mobile participants exposure to a different world, one that was named by interviewees as “open,” “liberal” and “broad.” For many, exposure to this new world was accompanied by a shift in ideological and political beliefs as well as an appreciation for diversity. In many cases, these new beliefs and appreciations are different than the beliefs with which they were raised and that are still held by their family members. This exposure, in many cases, informs the shifting terrain of “ethics and morality” explored by Sayer (2005) as another element of habitus and speaks to the important role “emotional and psychic responses to class and class inequalities” should play (Reay, 2005, p. 1). Though framed in this study within the concept of dispositions and tastes, the shifting notions of ethics garnered emotional responses from family members and led in many cases to distance more often than shifts in the body or language as already explored.

An important aspect of these changing beliefs involved exposure to a wide range of people. Dave McNeil, a White man in the study, currently runs a division of a large

49 It is important to note that many of the participants in the study have been educated on the East or West coast where political beliefs, particularly in institutions of higher education, are less conservative than in other parts of the country. On this topic, then, the data are biased toward the gaining of a more “liberal” outlook as an example of the new knowledge learned through education.
company in which he manages over two thousand employees. He describes college as an important place where he was exposed to many different kinds of people, and draws on the lack of diversity in his home context to explain how “eye opening” college was:

I wasn't very exposed to diverse... like, all my friends were White and they were all Irish and they were all Catholic and they were all just... that was their environment. So college, from a personal standpoint, was very fun, it was eye opening, it was great just meeting all new different people from different states, from different countries. (Interview, August 6, 2012).

He mentions diversity again when comparing this background with his own child rearing strategies, in which his daughters are “open to new ideas, new ways of thinking, new ways of living and much more accepting of others.” He marks their exposure to other people and places through travel as one way he and his wife have been able to provide that perspective, which is so different than how he was raised. Exposure, in this context, leads to being comfortable around and tolerance of a variety of people.

Claire Crocetti, a teacher with a master’s degree whose mother cleans houses and manages a cafe, also mentions how different she is about issues of diversity as compared to her family. She describes herself as having learned to be more tolerant of difference through her husband, who “has so many diverse groups of friends that I met.” This makes it “hard to go back into my other community,” where she witnesses “accepted racism.” She shares an example that happened in front of her daughter, which demonstrates how different these perspectives on racial difference are:

I mean, even at my mom’s house, my husband and my sister got into a fight because she said, “I don’t wanna get on the bus, there’s black people on the bus.’ And this is what they really think, and this is like, a lot of it is that my mom never exposed them to diverse people, and it was like, accepted racism. So, it’s...I feel like I’m in, like, two different worlds. (Interview, August 2, 2012.)
Claire draws on the racism expressed by her family members as indicative of the “different world” in which she lives. This difference between how she was raised, seen through the beliefs and behaviors of her younger siblings, and how she now lives causes tension with her family members. This was the case for a number of participants, who would draw on this difference in perspective on race or political beliefs as emblematic of their different habitus and as a primary source for distance with family members.

Don, a teacher on the West coast with a master’s degree, describes why he and his brother tend to have shorter conversations: “The things we get into might create sort of this schism, so that's probably one of the reasons that we tend to not have long involved conversations” (interview, July 8 2012). He attributes this difference in beliefs as one reason why he and his brother are “not very close,”

We're not close since we are a fair amount different, I think, in the paths we've taken and political views and things like that. We kind of avoid politics, and, uh, I think that, especially in the Southwest I think there's very much an anti-Hispanic feeling and being overrun from Mexico. You know it's one of those conversations that kind of pop up a lot, and I try to avoid it the best I can because it's just hard. You know, I don’t agree. (Interview, July 8, 2012).

The “path” Don took diverged from his brother and has led to differing opinions on politics, as well as issues surrounding race and xenophobia. These have now become topics they “avoid” and this avoidance of topics that would provoke tension or conflict has led in part to his description of their relationship as “not close.” Don attributes this difference between them to his education and career decisions.

Greg, an education administrator, also describes how “politics” is an area that is off limits for conversations with his family. He attributes this difficulty in communication with his parents to “different attitudes and beliefs about race and
society.” As mentioned, Greg knows that he is the one who has shifted in these “attitudes and beliefs” through his education, when compared to his father who “hasn’t changed a lick.” He provides a few examples of the kinds of beliefs that prevent him from freely talking with his family:

Certainly with our President being an African American president…I can’t hang around my family without some comment being made about him, some derogatory term. I don’t know if it’s so much because of his Blackness or the fact that he’s a Democrat that, you know, comments are made about him. And they tend to rip him apart, and…but it’s not just that, it’s…you know, it’s comments my mom makes about the same-sex marriage legislation in New York and her believing that the entire state of New York is just basically going to Hell in a hand basket. [Laughing]. You know, ‘What’s this world coming to….the hand of God’s gonna come down type of thing. And I’m like…um, no. (Interview, August 15, 2012).

Greg knows that these beliefs were probably always there, growing up, but he did not notice them until he had changed, until he “no longer felt that same way.” Greg’s description of his mother’s discomfort with same-sex marriage and “the hand of God” coming down is also representative of a shift in religious beliefs that sometimes led to tension or discomfort with parents or siblings.

Though not a consistent finding, and outside the scope of this project, the role shifting religious beliefs play in familial relationships was also significant. This, in some cases, led to differing political opinions as well, as indicated by Leo, a professor in the South. He describes strained communication with one of his brothers due to their different political opinions and his brother’s tendency to “vote against his own interest” due to his religious convictions. Talking about his brother, Leo said:

He’s like a single issue voter who goes to church very frequently, is a very conservative Catholic. And he will only vote for Republicans because of abortion issues, that kind of thing. He’s a guy that votes against his own interest. He’ll
come to me—he’s in a union—and he’ll talk to me about all the problems he’s having because of the union busting, you know “they want to get rid of my union, they want to do away with my benefits, they want me to work longer hours for less pay,” and I’m like, “Well, gee whiz. Would you just vote for the people that don’t want to do away with the National Labor Relations Board?” And I don’t say anything to him. I just listen. So we don’t talk about a whole lot in detail. It’s just his kids, you know, what his kids are doing in soccer….that kind of thing. I kind of just—I avoid the subject. It’s kind of like a “don’t ask, don’t tell,” kind of thing. (Interview, March 30, 2012).

In order prevent difficult conversations, Leo and his brother have less detailed and engaged conversations, “avoid” certain “subjects” or Leo will “just listen” and not share his opinion openly. This has implications for the closeness he feels with this brother since there are a wide variety of topics about which they just cannot talk and so many conversations are one-sided since he does not share his opinions for fear of agitating disagreement or conflict.

This was also the case for Larry, a professor in his 60’s, who discusses with pain a distance between his mother and he that developed early in his educational trajectory – when he was first introduced to politics and the anti-war movement. He came back home in his mid-20’s after serving in the war to his small town in the Midwest, where he was once the paperboy as a child. While visiting, he became aware of a bipartisan bill to cut off funding for the war in Vietnam and engaged in what he described as his “first political act of all time.” He went door to door in this small town where he was from with a petition to support the Amendment. He nodded his head, surprised at how bold he had been, and continued telling the story:

I can't believe I did that. I, I could not do that today in my own neighborhood here. And I did. I spent the whole day going around town. At the end of the day, and I knew the town well, I knew all the houses, knew all the people. People would say, you were the best paperboy we ever had, but nobody wanted to talk
about the war. At the end of the day I had one signature. I had one signature
[whispering]. I came in the house, um, my mom was at the kitchen counter,
making dinner. I walked in, she didn't turn around, she just said, "What are you
doing?" I said, "What? Who me? Nothing, Mom!" And she turned around; tears
were running down her face. She said, “The phone has been ringing all day long.”
She said, “People want to know what is wrong with you. What happened to you?”
[long pause]. And, the end of the conversation was, um, “If you're going to do
that, if you're going to do these kinds of things, you have to leave. This is my
town, these are my people, these are my friends; I need them. And if this is what
you want to do, you have to do it someplace else. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

He ended the story again in a whisper, and placed emphasis when his mother said “my,”
indicating the distinctions between them in that moment. The changes that Larry
experienced were viewed by his mother as “wrong,” indicating that something had
“happened” to him and so she asked him to leave because of it. Though early in his
mobility trajectory, this experience taught him to keep his work and his shifting beliefs
from his mother in order to maintain the closeness he had with her. It took time, however.

Picking up his story, he shares:

We were, estranged, I guess, is the way to put it. But then began to, to build back.
In almost any other kind of way, we've become close again, and certainly, I mean,
way before the end of her life, we were quite close. Some of my fondest
memories of my mother in the house were in later years; I would go back and
spend a week, usually a week in the summer and a week in the winter. I would go
back. Things worked out quite well. Wouldn't talk politics, right, or wouldn't talk
about, you know, wouldn't talk about [my work]. I would just say, “Well, I'm
teaching, I have a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule this term.” You know,
things like that. And she might make some comment about, “You sure don't work
very much. [Laughing]. That’s pretty hard for somebody who worked in a kitchen
for all of her life to think about, what, you only work Monday-Wednesday-Friday
and you're done by noon?” Yeah, people don't, see, she never went to college.
Never went to college. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Larry is able to see past some of the misunderstandings that his mother held about this
work, and he actively worked to build back a relationship. He describes the relationship
as “partial,” since he was unable to “be close about [his] work life, [his] professional life,
[his] occupational life.” He continued to mention that “there was just no way she could have understood” since she had never been to a college campus; she never visited him at college. Though still described as painful, he expressed being thankful for the closeness of their relationship, particularly as she aged.

Larry offers, then, an example of how to maintain closeness despite such significant differences in beliefs and how one views the world. The experience was still painful, and there seems a loss and sadness associated with the distance he experiences with his mother. This was evident in the interview when, deep in thought about his mother and their relationship, he shared a moment from the previous year when he had gone back to the town in which he grew up:

Her [his mother’s] church was a small Lutheran church on a hill. It's like postcard, surrounded by cornfields with a cemetery on the side. And just, uh, I guess it was last summer when I was back, both my parents are buried there, and so I went just to, just to see the cemetery and, uh, I, as I was driving toward it, I had that postcard feeling. I thought, God, you know, that's really something. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Larry’s voice was full of emotion, nodding his head and whispering the word “God.”

When asked why he continued to go back home so often, even though his parents had passed and he no longer had friends in the area, Larry responded, speaking slowly: “Oh, it's, um, it's the roots thing, you know. [Pause] It's, um, going back to who, to who you really are” and at that last phrase Larry’s eyes began to fill with tears. Despite the death of his parents, particularly his mother who recently died when in her 90’s, he still longs to reconnect with “his roots” and continues to visit his home town. It seems a piece of himself, of who he once was, is still in the small town where he grew up.
The changes in habitus that mobile individuals need to develop have a lasting impact on their own perspective, as well as their relationships with family members. For example, despite the connection Larry feels to his mother and his home community, the new knowledge he gained and the differing beliefs he has developed remained unaccepted by them. The pain associated with distance with family, and awareness of one’s own changes as a source for the distance, might be viewed through the lens of symbolic violence. Though not overtly severing ties with family members, the “partial” relationship Larry described is an outcome of the changes in habitus he has experienced; changes that were unintentional but that remain markers of internalized change in one’s cultural capital and habitus. That distance with family members due to shifts in worldview and beliefs is a consistent aspect of the mobile experience supports Bourdieu’s assertion that it is through culture that symbolic power is achieved and maintained. The symbolic violence associated with distance with family – and the tendency to blame oneself for this distance – are consequences of that symbolic power.

Acquiring “Middle Class Expectations”: Tension with Family

As discussed above, in some contexts, the acquiring of a “dominant class habitus” in the form of tastes, behaviors and beliefs leads to conflict or tension between upwardly mobile individuals and their families of origin. The power of culture is again evident, as the acquisition of knowledge and experiences by upwardly mobile individuals can lead to “middle class expectations” (Andy, interview, May 22, 2012) for their families of origin. Viewing family members through a new cultural lens – where “dominant class habitus” is
the [arbitrary] goal – can have a negative impact on the relationship with family members.

Like other participants, Wesley – now a retired professor – describes college as having exposed him to many new things and people, including Patsy, who would later become his wife. Exposure to this new class context led to tension with his father, who was a probation officer. Wesley mentions being “unkind” to his father during a “certain wise guy stage of life” during which he viewed his father as “stupid” or was “thinking of him as not knowing very much about very much” (interview, February 16, 2012).

Drawing on the shift in political beliefs just discussed, Wesley mentions that he thought his father was “stupid politically….a rather dimwitted Republican” and expressed “embarrass[ment] too, that he was excluded from the collegiate life that I knew. I saw that as a gap between me and my father” (interview, February 16, 2012). As Attewell and Lavin (2007) assert, college is often the site where cultural capital might be actively learned. The way one views one’s family has the potential to change, then, as it becomes obvious that family members do not possess the knowledge mobile individuals now realize they need to have in order to be successful in the “new and different world” of their college.

This framing of his father as “now knowing very much about very much” was contrasted when Wesley met his wife’s parents. Where he saw his father as not being able to engage in the collegiate life he was becoming accustomed to, he found – in his wife’s parents – teachers for how to engage in that world:

I thought Patsy’s parents were terrific. They really were, and in a sense, I-I was very gratified by marrying into her family. Her father, for example, taught me
various things about city life which he was very aware of. Taught me how to smoke. Um. And what I mean by that, and again, this is one of these small things that can be significant, I think. When you smoke a cigarette and when you smoke a cigar, and how you keep a pipe going, and that kind of thing. And here I am, uh going with his daughter, a 20-year-old guy, and being eager to learn from him. I thought that Patsy’s mother was a terrific person, supportive, and uh compared - I saw my own parents as relatively simple people, my mother a simple midwesterner, and um my father, a city guy who’d really never gone beyond the [local beach towns] in his travels. But Patsy’s parents, without being wealthy, nevertheless managed to live interesting lives, lives that I found infinitely more interesting than the lives of my parents. (Interview, February 16, 2012).

The new knowledge and cultural practices Wesley was exposed to in college led to some tension in how he viewed his father and mother as “excluded” from the life to which he was being exposed. This was exacerbated through the comparative example of his wife’s parents, whom he found considerably more “interesting” than his parents. Presumably her mother, who had earned a master’s degree from a local university, and father, a successful business owner, could better support Wesley’s entry into this “collegiate world,” framing his “eagerness to learn” from them. This continued over time, as Patsy – now married to Wesley – “encouraged [him] to look outward” and pursue his doctorate in a different state, a decision which made little sense to his parents. Entry into this middle class world, then, created the need for Wesley to look outside of his family of origin for particular knowledge and understanding. It also created a gaze back to his family of origin that included a new critique of their practices born out of his new habitus.

The knowledge that mobile individuals gained through education became, in some cases, a new lens through which they viewed their family and the decisions made by family members. This tension in relationships, based on knowledge, is also evident in adulthood, as participants mention the different lifestyle choices their families make –
from “voting against their interests” (Leo, interview, March 30, 2012; Claire, interview, August 2, 2012) to “eating horrible food” (Kris, interview, June 17, 2012) and “ignoring unresolved mental health issues” (Isaac, interview, April 7, 2012). For some – particularly around health concerns – this creates direct conflict as mobile individuals judge and at times comment on the decisions of their family members through their new knowledge base and learned “expectations” which are based on the new habitus they have taken on.

This is the case for Andy Haddad, a professor, husband and father of two. He speaks with his parents often, sometimes a few times a day. Though they live a thousand miles away, he tries to visit them as often as possible, at least a few times a year. Despite this closeness in contact – particularly with the birth of his two children – Andy describes their relationship as having some “tension and disconnect” due to “the middle class expectations” to which he sometimes holds his parents. He draws on a popular TV show reference from *The Simpsons* to help illustrate this difficult aspect of their relationship:

I always think of this wonderful *Simpsons* episode, where Lisa is gonna marry this guy from England. He’s basically this blue-blood British guy who makes a real attempt to be friends with her family and it reminds me so much of my wife and I. The two families are just so different, but this is the future, so Bart's like, you know, he's got tattoos, and he smokes and he's, like, a construction worker, and Homer's Homer and Maggie's still not talking and his family is like these blue-bloods and they come over and Homer asks him to wear these pig cuff-links and he says to Lisa, like, “I absolutely refuse to do that, I will do anything, I will put up with all their crap, but I absolutely refuse to do that on my wedding day.” And she says, “But these mean something to us, and if you can't accept that then I can't be with you.” There's a great scene at the end, where Homer comes to her and he says, “Ah, you know, I'm really sorry it didn't work out, and I hope it didn't have anything to do with the pigs.” And Lisa, who's been, like, really snooty and really classist toward her parents throughout this whole process, says, “Tell me about your day, Dad.” And he's just like, “Well first I had pork, or I had beer, or whatever it is,” and then Homer becomes Homer and she's accepting of him as
Homer. And I think of that a lot, like, we do have tension around that sort of stuff where I think I'm trying to impose middle class expectations on them and they don't have those expectations. Like what they do on a regular basis. You know, my parents’ idea of fun is getting in the car and getting a coffee and going down to the river or going to some little dinky dink town and, like, trying to find a stained glass place, and those are the things we did as kids because we couldn't afford to do anything else. Gas was cheap so we could just drive around, and they still do these things. And I'm always telling them, like, get out, get in a plane and go somewhere. And, why? So we, I think there is some tension or some disconnect. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

Like Wesley, Andy references a number of the changes in tastes and behavior described throughout this chapter, as he critiques his parents’ preferred leisure time activities and their notions of travel as “car” travel compared to “get[ting] in a plane and go[ing] somewhere.” He believes that their “horizons are smaller,” relates this to the limits within his own childhood, and wishes for more for them based on the perspective he now has and the values he now holds.

Andy also looks to the example in *The Simpsons* with longing, as Lisa is finally able to “accept Homer for Homer” and seems to wish he could do the same. Andy finds it difficult to not “impose” these “middle class expectations” onto his parents.

I mean for them, it's, wake up, go for a walk, it's great. I'm not going to call them simpletons, because I think that that can be an insult, but to some degree they have simple lives, and I think they want that, and I think they're very happy, but I think I want better for them. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

Having been exposed to travel, and other “middle class luxuries,” Andy perceives these practices, this perspective, as better and so desires “better for them” as well. However, this causes both internal and external conflict. Andy describes a time when he and his mother got into an argument that was about her health and the fact that she smoked. In his retelling of the story, his mother indicates that the way he was speaking to her had shifted
over time: “My mom said something to me once in the context of an argument, like, ‘You wouldn't have said that to me 10 years ago.’ That's when I left home, which coincided with leaving home for my Ph.D” (interview, May 22, 2012). This argument, he believes, was fundamentally about his misaligned expectations.

The argument between Andy and his mother was “a commentary on her smoking.” Smoking, like “teeth” (Larry, interview, April 13, 2012) or “tattoos” (Kris, interview, June 17, 2012), was mentioned as a class symbol – “one of those things that matters a great deal” (Wesley, interview, February 16, 2012). Another participant, Ronnie, mentioned getting “dirty looks” and “lectures” from fellow students when he smoked outside his Ivy League law school. In response, he started smoking right outside the entrance “in protest,” though ultimately he decided to quit smoking since he was “sick of getting winded” and “knew that it was bad for [him]” (interview, March 1, 2012). Like Ronnie, Andy used to smoke when he was younger. He gave it up later in life since his middle class wife “basically said I’m not marrying a smoker,” and has since reframed his view on the practice, encouraging his mother to stop smoking as well:

She smokes, and I'm constantly trying to get her not to smoke. My parents come from a community, a place, where smoking is very normal. And again, those are class things. Now, nobody in our circle smokes. And I think I was giving her a hard time about smoking and I may or may not have said something that was rude. But what I explained to her, was I just want her to be healthy and I want her to see her grandkids grow and I want her to see her great-grandkids. But that also speaks to their fatalism. My parents don't think that, I don't think that my mother thinks she's good enough to quit smoking. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

Though Andy once smoked himself, he now has the perspective that it is not a practice in which someone he loves should engage. It is with this intent that he tells his mom she should stop smoking. The new perspective he now has about smoking is difficult for him
to keep to himself now that he feels it so strongly, having quit himself. Similarly, he sees the travel practices of his parents and desires “more” for them – implying the difficulty associated with “unlearning” the “exposure” mobile individuals experience through college – of a broader, more diverse, world. Just as Andy now wants this for himself, he longs for his parents to have this exposure as well; to “get in a plane a go somewhere.” Andy’s habitus, what is now “internalized necessity” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170) has shifted and when this distance is evident between his mother and himself, there is tension.

In each instance, difference in knowledge and behavior – evidence of a change in habitus – creates distance between upwardly mobile individuals and their parents and siblings of origin. Both Wesley and Andy spoke about their parents with respect and love, yet their differences in behavior and knowledge caused some tension or disconnect in their relationships. While these situations are extreme, a similar tendency seemed to influence the potential closeness in familial relationships for many upwardly mobile individuals in the study, as they offered examples of their families’ “poor political decisions” or “bad” eating, drinking or exercise practices and shared various examples where family members did not understand content related to their work or schooling. Viewing family members as lacking the preferred tastes, knowledge and behavior of the “dominant class habitus” demonstrates again the symbolic power of the cultural arbitrary and the significant role culture plays in perpetuating the symbolic power of the dominant class. This is evident, it seems, even when individuals are not born with the same habitus, and instead learn it later through education and then turn their cultural gaze back on their families of origin who now lack the cultural capital they have acquired. The
internationalization of this deficit orientation towards the former habitus and those who occupy it is a high cost to pay for the acquisition of the new habitus and the acceptance and success it can bring in their new milieu.

**Money and Consumption: Internal Conflict**

Improved economic standing and financial freedom are in many ways central to the shift in habitus and the cultural learning discussed throughout this chapter. It takes economic capital to eat organic food, drink microbrews and travel abroad. Bourdieu (1984) discusses the relationship between income and consumption (or taste) and warns against the propensity to create causal links between them. He instead argues that one’s habitus, which is determined by social location, informs one’s tastes and consumption. He writes, “taste is almost always the product of economic conditions identical to those in which it functions, so that income tends to be credited with a causal efficacy which it in fact only exerts in association with the habitus it has produced” (1984, p. 375). Tastes and interests, therefore, which stem from the “habitus of freedom,” are central to the choices in culture the dominant class makes, for which economic capital is needed. Bourdieu then views the consumer decisions made, which are associated with income, as being “mediated” (Swartz, 1997, p. 164) by culture, or habitus. As upwardly mobile individuals learn the cultural practices of the dominant class through exposure, and then experience an increase in income (as many in the study do), the kinds of consumer practices discussed by Bourdieu as reflective of a “dominant class habitus” are generally enacted or lived out by upwardly mobile individuals.
The habitus inherited is quite significant, however, according to Bourdieu (1984) who discusses the parvenu\textsuperscript{50} as lacking the “ease or naturalness” with the cultural capital of the “bourgeois” as compared to those born into the dominant class (p. 68). This is particularly true with conceptions of money and consumption where, according to Bourdieu, “having a million does not in itself make one able to live like a millionaire” (p. 374). Instead, the parvenu, he argues, “generally take a long time to learn that what they (initially) see as culpable prodigality is, in their new condition, expenditure of basic necessity” (1984, p. 374). Making decisions from the perspective of the elite, therefore, is about much more than income or economic capital; it is “culturally mediated” (Swartz, p. 164). For the parvenu, the ability to spend money outside of necessity will still be considered wasteful, even though what “basic necessities” means has changed based on their new social location and income. Data in this study suggest that for some upwardly mobile individuals, Bourdieu’s conception of a long learning process associated with money and consumption in which individuals maintain their “habitus of necessity” in relation to money is, at times, accurate. However, some individuals do take on more “dominant class” practices associated with money and consumption. This movement away from a habitus of necessity, however, often causes internal conflict for mobile individuals as they begin to lose perspective on the value of money based on their previous conception of “need.”

\textsuperscript{50} The Merriam-Webster definition of parvenu: One that has recently or suddenly risen to an unaccustomed position of wealth or power and has not yet gained the prestige, dignity, or manner associated with it. Drawing a clear distinction between the “inheritors” and the “parvenus” (p. 219), Bourdieu describes this group of individuals (in French culture) as those who acquire money without the inherited habitus to go alongside the social location that the new money provides.
Though initially exposed to more expensive tastes and interests through college, individuals describe actively making different decisions related to their changing habitus, lifestyle and income as adults once their income increased. This leads to internal conflict for some, as conceptions of money and consumption shift alongside the development of tastes and interests that cost more money. These shifts in consumption further solidify the choices they make as outside of the “habitus of necessity.” In some cases, this also causes discomfort with families of origin who are disturbed or overwhelmed by the shift in consumption practices participants engage in and embody.

Jon Salvador, a manager in a large corporation, speaks to this change when he expresses feeling “lucky” that he has experienced all that he has, yet describes the learned awareness of how far he still has to go – of all the people who have attained even more than he has:

I feel lucky. And, you know, not just the economic freedom but the amount of stuff I get to do, you know, I've rung the bell of the New York Stock Exchange. I've, um, been to every continent. I feel very lucky. And I'm reminded cause I work with people who are much wealthier than me. And, um, I'm reminded that in the grand scheme of things I'm not anywhere near, you know, the people who make the world run. My 45,000 people pales in comparison to the 2.2 million people the CEO of WalMart has to think about, so, I just know I'm not on the big scale. But relative to anyone I've ever known I'm on the biggest scale that I can imagine. (Interview, July 13, 2012).

Negotiating this broadening of scale in relation to Jon’s family presents conflict, as the contrast between his and his family’s financial situation presents difficult decisions. Though he donates quite a lot of money to nonprofit organizations near the city in which he lives, he does not invest in the community where he grew up, and does not give his
family any money. He does not see money as being the only factor in his extended family’s struggle:

I felt like if I knew how to get them out of that cycle I would invest in it. But - and this sounds really crass and coldhearted - they're sort of past the point of saving when it comes to trying to get them into a different economic state. (Interview, July 13, 2012).

He describes how badly they handle money, how dramatic their day-to-day lives are and how, when an influx of money does appear, such as a tax return, “they'll buy a new television instead of pay down any of their debt.” This marks a difference in knowledge of what to do with one’s money, and how best to spend it. Jon makes around $750,000 annually and, laughing, implied that this figure was not something he always shares: “I'm fine telling you about it, just not my mom.” This, however, leads to discomfort in his relationship with his mother:

My mom can't go three conversations with me without her saying some equivalent of, you know, “I don't know what you make and I've never asked how much you make, and I'm not going to ask, but I just,” you know, she'll somehow fit it in. I think it just eats at her, when she sees our life and she sees what we do and she's just, she's like, I can't imagine how much money they must make. (Interview, July 13, 2012).

Though Jon talks on the phone with his mother twice or three times a week, tension surrounding how different their financial situations are weaves its way into their conversations, and their relationship more broadly. One way that Jon deals with this is through choosing to keep specifics on his financial situation from his family.

Jon’s experience illustrates a shift in perspective at the top of his scale – as he realizes how far he has yet to go and how much more money and power those above him have. Others, however, cannot shake the perspective from their childhood, as they
consistently prepare for when they ultimately lose everything and are in poverty. This is the case for Isaac, a therapist who is married with two children. Growing up with his father, who has worked in auto parts since he was young, has continued to influence Isaac’s perspective on money.

I think there’s still…like I go to buy an expensive product and I pause, like, “Oh, I shouldn’t do this, this will put us under financially.” My wife will call me out. I’ll say like, you know, “When we’re poor,” she’ll say “Stop saying ‘When we’re poor,’ you’re almost like viewing us like we’re going to be poor.” But I think a lot of that comes from my father’s upbringing, like, we planned to be in absolute poverty, so you should never spend too much, you should never enjoy life, you should always work, work, work. I’m still kind of breaking those old habits. I think part of me does but then there’s a part of me that’s still very much invested, like if I get offered an extra shift on a holiday where I can get time and a half plus holiday pay, I should do that because we need that money because we’re going to be in poverty. And that’s not true - we’re doing fine financially, we’re nowhere close to poverty. (Isaac, interview, April 7, 2012).

Isaac makes around $150,000 annually with his wife, who is from a middle class background, which is definitely enough, he says, to live comfortably. He struggles, though, to “break the old habits” formed when he was young. He said that his father will always live this way, working too hard until he dies, and he wants to unlearn that perspective. Unlearning this perspective is not easy, however. For example, when given the chance to work a holiday and make overtime, it is still difficult for him to resist. As Bourdieu (1984) asserts, the perspective that there are no longer economic constraints takes some time to learn since it is so ingrained in one’s upbringing.

Each participant engages with this shift in perspective differently. Isaac is struggling to break his habits around conserving money and working all the time, despite being reminded by his middle class wife that he no longer has to do so. Andy, a professor
and father of two, describes intense internal conflict surrounding these same shifts in money and consumption that he has witnessed in himself:

Although I'm very happy, I'm basically just, like, this middle class asshole. Excuse my language, but that's how I feel - I don't feel like I have the same struggles in my life. My wife and I have immense conflict around finances because my attitude is, nobody's coming to take the house so who cares if I go to a baseball game, right? I mean, I want to be a middle class asshole, because I didn't have these things growing up, I didn't have a lot growing up, and now I have resources at my disposal. And I don't want to worry about money; I don't want to worry about my class. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

On one hand, Andy is happy to have the luxury of this new perspective on money, where he does not have to worry about “when we’re poor,” the way Isaac expresses. This causes internal conflict for Andy, however, as he views himself and his new perspective on money as “an asshole” without the worries of financial constraint with which he was raised. This also plays out in his child rearing practices and how he views his three year-old daughter and the “middle class expectations” with which he and his wife are raising her. To illustrate what he means by “middle class asshole,” he shares a story of a day when he took his daughter shopping since she had been having a tough time with the birth of her little brother.

So - I'm going to take her to Modell's and I'm going to get her a baseball glove and we can play catch and it'll be a nice daddy-daughter time. So we go into Modell's and she sees a tennis racket and says, “Daddy, I want a tennis racket.” And I said, “Sweetie, we came for the glove.” And she said, “But Daddy, I also want the tennis racket.” And I said, “Okay sweetie, that's fine, we can get a thing of tennis balls and we'll go in the back and you can hit” - what do I care, okay, it's an extra 15 bucks. So then we see, like, a shirt she wants and she says, “Daddy...” To make a long story short the bill was $73. She got a glove, she got a bat, she got a tennis racket, she got a tennis ball, she got a shirt. Basically, I was just in that middle class asshole mode, where I was, like, whatever. Every physical activity a kid at that age could do we bought something for. And so we get to the front, we get to the cash register and, um, there was a set of hockey cards. I collected cards when I was a kid so I liked showing it to her, but she didn't care. I said to her, “Do
you want the cards?” I mean, I'm just in this middle class asshole mode, right? I'm, like, you know, might as well and she says, "No, Daddy, I don't want it," and puts it back on the counter. And the cashier rings everything up, I pull out my money, I pay with cash, grab this big enormous Modell's bag, start walking away, and she throws a fit cause she wants the cards. I can't tell you what I felt at that… I felt so ashamed of what I had just done and so ashamed at what I was doing to this kid. There was a woman there that was looking at me and, like, this woman had two kids and they were buying one thing that clearly one of the kids absolutely needed, and I was just this asshole buying a 2½ year-old a bunch of crap, that, she's only used half of. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

Andy tells the story, overwhelmed and embarrassed by the “middle class asshole mode” he was in. It is also clear that he feels implicated in his daughter’s behavior, expressing shame “at what [he] was doing to this kid.” Andy’s initial response in this moment would be to directly yell at her and stop her behavior, but he feels like he cannot do that, reflecting classed concerns regarding restraint and expressing emotion as discussed in previous chapters:

And that's the moment where my class comes out and it's, like, “No kid, you're getting in the car, you're going to appreciate this, you are not going to yell at me in front of all these people.” But of course I don't do that because that's not what middle class people do - they don't yell at kids in front of other people, right, so I just get angry and calmly tell her that, you know, you had your chance and you're not getting it now. She has a massive freak out. I have to pick her up, bring her into the car, start to calm her down. And I'm sitting in the driver’s seat and behind me is a bag, $73 worth of crap, and a crying kid in the back who didn't get a set of hockey cards that she could care less for. And I called my wife and I said, you know, “I know we're supposed to do something right now but I really have to just drop her off, like, I really can't be with you guys right now.” (Interview, May 22, 2012).

Andy is quick to clarify that he’s “an awesome dad,” and that he “love[s] [his] children so much” but offers the story to illustrate how “some things happen in our life that really hurt me and make me reflect on who I am, my class status.” He spoke with such love and joy about his wife – discussing how they first met and how much he and his parents love
her. He shared that his kids “are everything” to him. Yet, this shift in perspective and behavior around money, and the difficulty he finds in negotiating the large spectrum he traverses, causes tension in his family, and himself. Analyzing his story, he shares:

I think I have class resentment against my daughter sometimes. And it manifests in frustration toward my wife around parenting. My daughter has everything. Like, she has so much. And it frustrates me to see her act as a spoiled kid sometimes because that for me – and the upbringing I had – is the worst trait. Like, humility is such a valued trait and just, like, being grateful and accepting of your circumstances is kind of noble. I mean that's where you get your pride. You don't have it, you can't point to, like, your big house, or your big car or whatever, but you can be a humble guy, and you can be a good person. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

When looking at himself, then, or the perspective his daughter now has, his notion of being a “good person” – “grateful” and “humble” – seems an impossible goal. His new tendency to be a “middle class asshole” is in direct opposition to this perspective on what it means to be a good person and this tension, at times, plays out in how he views himself, his wife and his daughter. Andy made clear in our interview that he knows well what it means to struggle financially and not have the ability to purchase what you want or need. He also knows what it means to drop $73 dollars on a child’s whim. This scale of financial perspective can be difficult to negotiate and speaks to the internal conflict caused when taste and consumption practices associated with a dominant class habitus are taken on by upwardly mobile individuals. The process is complex and inconsistent. It causes internal conflict which is painful for Andy and sometimes represents a struggle in his relationship with his wife and his daughter.

As is true for Andy, shopping is an area in which these shifting conceptions of consumption and money are consistently played out. Hana, the Asian American
consultant on the East Coast mentioned earlier in this chapter, also mentions how important it has been for her to maintain perspective when she engages in “wealthier” consumer practices. She exclaims, “I love Chanel!” and describes an experience she had while in France that demonstrates her shift in consumption and the spending of money:

A few years back, I went to Paris - I love traveling, I love Paris. Anyhow, I went to Paris with my best friend from college, who grew up in a very humble town in Michigan, and his father was a furniture maker. And, uh, we went to Paris together and I bought a Chanel\textsuperscript{51} bag. Okay, that was like a really fun event, you know, it’s totally frivolous, I understand, ‘cause that’s like, it’s someone’s annual salary, like, probably in Brazil or India, or whatev—more than that, right, so totally get it, totally get that perspective. But he and I, as much fun as we had in that shopping event, loved it, but sort of had a perspective about it, like, wow, my friend’s dad, you know, that is like his two month salary. You know, that perspective. (Interview, March 31, 2012).

Hana then compares this perspective maintained by her and her friend because of their social class background with the perspective of someone from a different social class background:

When I have hung out with people whose mothers have like, 15 Chanel purses hanging in her closet, it’s like, Well. So the commonality is perspective, right? Like, when I am doing something frivolous, I am hyperaware that it is frivolous, and I am hyperaware that, you know, when I was in high school, I would have worked four months to be able to get that amount of money in order to – you know – I would have had to use it to buy food, right? (Interview, March 31, 2012).

When asked if her ability to maintain this perspective about money was consistent, she responded emphatically, “Um…no….I would like it to be consistent, but I know that it’s a futile effort, to a certain extent.” In order to illustrate how difficult it is to keep this perspective on money, she has to go no further than the brunch she had that morning:

\textsuperscript{51} Chanel is a designer brand specializing in handbags. They are worth between $500 dollars to over $5,000, depending on the style and year.
You know, my friend and I just went to brunch, you know, had a bowl of soup and coffee and we spent, together, you know, $23. When I was in college, and my college gave me a stipend to live, like spending $23 on a given morning would have been a stressful event, right? (Interview, March 31, 2012).

She continues by describing the gifts – often jewelry – that she receives from her husband for her birthday, and relays that those do not stress her out. Then, laughing, she shares that maybe it does stress her out at some level, but she is not aware of it anymore because she has now “acclimated.” She draws on the metaphor of a frog in boiling water to illustrate:

It’s the frog in the boiling pot syndrome: you put a frog in regular room temperature water, and you put it on top of a gas range, and you turn the fire on, and the frog just, as the water is getting warmer and warmer, just sits there, and then it atrophies and dies because it’s just used to the temperature, it acclimates, right? So, whereas if you put a frog in a boiling pot for the first time, like, when it’s boiling, it’s going to jump immediately out. And, so, like the frog in the pot that’s not boiling, but that’s going to boil, I think we acclimate. (Interview, March 31, 2012).

The gravity of the metaphor Hana used to explore this shift in perspective (“atrophies and dies”) is indicative of the tension and pain associated with the changes she feels she has undergone. It also implies a lack of awareness – that Hana was unaware of the change in her environment until she was already acclimated. Whereas the shifts in culture described in previous chapters seem to be conscious or actively learned, some of the shifts in perspective that mobile individuals describe are less conscious. As Andy’s story about shopping with his 2½ year-old daughter implies, these are not decisions he was proud of having made – particularly given the internal pain and conflict these choices in consumption create.
Despite the tension and conflict these varied perspectives have caused, mobile individuals described strategies they had developed in an attempt to integrate these diverse perspectives about money and consumption. Andy, a professor on the East Coast, mentions maintaining some aspect of his “lower-class sensibility” while also trying to enjoy the luxuries with which he can now engage:

I think I still have, like, a lower- or working-class sensibility about things, and I certainly still see the world in that way. But it poses all sorts of conflict for me because I drive a Prius and I have a home that is paid for and I have a stupid TV and I have cable and I have, like, I mean, look! Look around you, I just have a lot of crap. It's posed a lot of conflict for me but in recent years I think I've learned to kind of accept it and just embrace it. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

He does this through being “grateful for the things” he and his wife’s salary (together between $70,000 and $90,000) allow him to do. He also admits that he really likes these “consumer luxuries” even though that marks a change from who he was ten or fifteen years ago. This change has meant, however, that he needed to reconsider the possible implications of his ability to have these luxuries over others:

It allows me to travel, it allows me to give my kids a lifestyle that I didn't have. It affords me consumer luxuries which, 10, 15 years ago, I would have killed my future self if I said that, but, you know, I like going to baseball games, I like having cable. I like being able to say, like before my wife left today, we can just go out tonight if we need to, just go out to eat. I see the comfort in being able to make those decisions, and I no longer see it in, kind of, zero-sum terms, like I don't think that me making those decisions and buying the baseball tickets means that somebody else doesn't get that. (Interview, May 22, 2012).

To combat this internal conflict associated with consumption, individuals attempt to draw on their working class background in order to appreciate the luxuries they currently have, while not losing perspective on the value of money. For example, purchasing and enjoying a Chanel bag, as Hana does, without losing sight of how much that luxury item
costs – or what spending that amount of money on one item might mean to another individual making decisions based on a “habitus of necessity.” This attempt to maintain perspective on consumption is also employed when the knowledge associated with consuming these cultural practices or experiences is acquired. Tom, a professor, shares his strategy:

I mean I’ve always loved to eat and certainly having access to more money and better cooking is something that I’ve learned to appreciate and enjoy. And I certainly like drinking good wine but none of that has become, um, I haven’t become really obsessive with any of that, you know? Good wine is fine; I don’t have to spend a lot of time studying it. Good food is what I like; I don’t have to spend a lot of time reading about it, developing a taste. So it’s just sort of finding that middle ground, I guess. Accepting the joy that money can bring without having to figure out the more pretentious parts about it, how to wear it, how to do it. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Participants, then, try to actively negotiate this shift they experience in relation to consumption and money by striking an internal balance between enjoying “middle class luxuries” (Andy, interview May 12, 2012) while not being overtaken by the need to take on the “pretentious” aspects of the increased access to money; the objectified cultural capital (knowledge) that stems from dominant class tastes and increased income. They also try to mediate their spending in some way and minimize their consumption practices. This nuanced strategy for learning and embodying habitus associated with taste and consumption is fluid and complex. Making sense of the new tastes and knowledge associated with an improved social location can cause internal conflict for mobile individuals. Andy, for example, blames himself for his daughter’s behavior yet feels “class resentment” toward his daughter due to the “dominant class habitus” she is
developing. Working to maintain the perspective one developed in childhood from one’s family of origin is another strategy used and is explored in the following section.

Advantages of Upward Mobility: “A Secret Weapon”

Across the data from this study, it is clear that mobile individuals’ working class habitus is a barrier, at times, to success in the middle class world in which they have become educated and now work and live. Through restraining or silencing themselves, being vigilant to prevent a mistake or losing connection with family members, mobile individuals need to negotiate the different cultural practices they naturally possess – their habitus – in a variety of ways. Researchers in higher education have focused on this tendency for working class students attempting to negotiate the cultural terrain of college. Many have found that students become “cultural outsiders” (Lehmann, 2007; Quinn, 2004) and experience a great “degree of inadequacy, inferiority and intimidation” (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 440). However, in a qualitative study with working class college students in Canada, Lehman (2009) finds that while these “barriers” to success are evident due to “habitus dislocation52,” a working class background can also become an advantage or benefit for upwardly mobile individuals in a college setting.

Naming these benefits “moral advantages,” Lehman finds that working class students “draw on their working-class backgrounds to construct uniquely working-class moral advantages, such as those associated with a strong work ethic, maturity, responsibility, and real-life experiences” (p. 1). This consideration of advantage or

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52 Defined by Baxter and Britton (2001) as “a painful dislocation between an old and newly developing habitus, which are ranked hierarchically and carry connotations of inferiority and superiority” (p. 99). This offers a more descriptive conception of the “costs of mobility” asserted by Sennett and Cobb in 1972.
benefit leads to a conception of habitus that includes “ethics,” an aspect that is not fully considered by Bourdieu (Sayer, 2005). This moral reading on habitus leaves some upwardly mobile individuals thankful for aspects of their experiences that they have retained as these experiences offer insight, context and passion for the work they do. Therefore, despite the changes in worldview and practices mobile individuals experience due to exposure to “dominant class habitus” some still describe the importance of maintaining the perspective of their families of origin.

This is the case for Kathy Wozniak, who sometimes marvels at the differences in perspective she holds as compared with her colleagues at the Ivy League institution where she is currently a professor. She struggles to explain to her friends the commitment she feels towards her parents, demonstrated by the monthly trip she makes to see them, driving five hours each way to stay for the weekend. Her colleagues and friends exclaim: “Are you kidding me? Like not only are you going to see them once a month, you’re cleaning the house and you’re like running to wherever to buy them stuff too?” (Interview, May 3, 2012). Kathy describes that, yes, she could pay for a cleaning service to clean for her parents, but that the money is not really the point. She has maintained aspects of her parents’ perspective on family and support, and they still determine how often she sees her family and how she spends her time with them. Kathy speaks to this perspective in terms of “problems” being on an entirely different scale:

We have problems, you know, like stresses, but we don’t have problems, like, they’re problems that we’re lucky to have. Like – “I don’t know how I’m gonna finish this paper before I have to fly to this conference because I need to read this and that ‘cause I want to discuss it and like oh my gosh, like when am I gonna sleep.” These are not problems. Like this is not, you know, is the frostbite so bad from the double shift I just worked all outdoors ‘cause I know I’m going to lose a
finger, like those were problems that we grew up with, you know. Or - this giant pipe at this refinery that they sent me out to go check on - they accidentally did this thing and so we all inhaled all these fumes and they don’t know what the effect of, you know….Like that stuff, that happened as we were growing up, you know, where you’re disposable to the company ‘cause you’re just a laborer, you know, like these aren’t problems. (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012).

Though Kathy feels regret at not being closer to her parents, and not having as much to talk to them about as she once did, she expresses gratitude for the perspective her childhood and the lives of her parents continue to provide. These things enable her to view the upper-class world in which she works differently, sometime with annoyance, and offer some perspective on her own “problems” as an academic. She makes clear that she sees this perspective as important and as an asset.

Kris – a community college professor – was going through a divorce at the time of the interview and had gone through some rough days, understandably feeling bad for herself during this difficult time in her life. Like Kathy, she drew on her experience growing up to offer some perspective on what she referred to as her “wallowing”:

I’m sitting here writing this crappy like love poem on my computer listening to my iTunes with my central air in 80-some degree heat with a fridge that’s stocked and a car that has gas and I could drive at any minute, and I just stopped myself, and I literally wanted to like smack myself and say, “Kris, who the hell are you?” Like, “You’re done wallowing, because your life is still pretty freaking amazing compared to almost everyone else in the world.” (Interview, June 17, 2012).

As Kris mentions, many in the world struggle to provide the necessities for survival, and she draws on times in her own background when her family did not have enough food or could not afford to put gas in the car to help remind her of this perspective. Though her concept of “necessity” has shifted due to her comfortable salary ($70,000), she draws on
her experiences from the past to recall the “habitus of necessity” with which she was raised.

Sometimes, it is a person’s commitment to this perspective that ultimately leads them to the work they do. Brady, for example, a doctor in his thirties, has chosen to practice emergency medicine because “you are more in touch.” He plans to engage in international medicine as well, since international issues are “something that’s real.” And while he doesn’t think that he is going to “fix it,” he knows that his commitment to that kind of “real work” has something to do with his background as it relates to his experience in an elite college:

I think that I should be doing something to try to make it better. I guess it has something to do with how horrified I was by going to college and seeing the girl who just threw out her clothes and bought new clothes. I can’t say that that disparity doesn’t, is not a part of my consciousness. It sounds cliché in some aspect, but, I think it’s definitely something do with that. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

Drawing on this perspective offers an insight that many in the study valued, enabling a “moral advantage” based on “real life experience” (Lehman, 2009) with which to understand the world and gain valuable perspective. In some cases, this perspective from childhood alongside the perspective they gained through their education and exposure to middle class culture has enabled upwardly mobile individuals to be more successful in their work. Specifically, participants consistently draw on the perspectives with which they were raised for inspiration to work hard, to connect with patients or students, to clarify and strengthen academic work or to work from and perform cross-cultural awareness, each of which seem to support their success in the workplace.
Not surprisingly, one aspect of this benefit involves “hard work,” which is mentioned consistently across interviews as an important strength, and was described by Lehman as “strong work ethic” which led to advantages for the working class students he studied. Greg Ainsworth, the district-level education administrator mentioned earlier in the chapter, describes how the “grit to just plow through and get to the other end” (interview, August 15, 2012) that he learned from his working class, hard-working father is what makes him an effective administrator now. Since mobile individuals presumably started on a “lower rung of the economic ladder” (Pew Study, 2012), hard work is no doubt an important factor alongside talent and ability. This was a consistent frame throughout the interviews.

Larry, a professor from the Midwest with a Ph.D., also mentions this “hard work” mentality and how it has benefited his work and success as a scholar. More than his focus on “hard work,” however, is a “resistance mentality” that he attributes in part to his class background. He describes his mother as “a fighter – a real stand-up kind of person for what was important for her” (interview, April 13, 2012), and for her what was important was education and school programs. “She wasn't afraid of the school superintendent [pause] so I grew up not being so afraid of authority – there is irreverence toward authority, a kind of anti-authority strain in me” (interview, April 13, 2012). This translates to the work Larry does when he compares himself to his colleagues. Though they also work hard, he discussed a “sense of entitlement that they have that I don't have” (interview, April 13, 2012). He describes himself as having “never been afraid to fail….I’ve never had any fear of losing, because, there’s nothing to lose, right?”
In a previous chapter, Larry expresses his sense that he lacks the right “moves” to successfully exist in the elite space of the university where he is a professor. Yet, in this realm that Lehman (2009) calls “morals” and Sayer (2005) calls “ethics,” his background has enabled his productivity, his confidence is clear, and his “irreverence toward authority” is an asset.

Brady Williams, now a doctor in his thirties who plans to do medical work abroad, draws on his need not to “waste the day” based on the work he did with his father when he was young. Brady describes working in his father’s carpentry shop as a child and, through that experience, learning “the value of work, the value of doing something” (interview, April 12, 2012). Brady is now estranged from his father due in part to his disappointment that Brady decided, after high school, that he would not take over the business and instead would become a doctor. Regardless, this desire for productivity Brady built in his youth has implications for his career path:

I think that’s part of the reason I have a hard time imagining myself being an accountant or being something else that’s not a physician. As a carpenter, you would get up and build houses. There was nothing. Then you worked for a day, and there was something. Then you would go home and say, “Oh, I did that…I did something. I didn’t waste my day today.” I think, if I were an investment banker or something, I was making someone else money, I don’t think I would get the same sense of accomplishment. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

Similarly, Stephanie Harper, also a doctor, explains how the chaos in which she was raised and the lack of continuity of her home context growing up really helps her to do her job well. She expressed that the idea of her “working a 9-5 is laughable”; it would “make her crazy”:

It was always something different happening. I didn’t really want continuity, on account of the fact that I didn’t, you know, grow up that way. I like meeting
different people doing different things. I don’t like working nine to five every day, it makes me crazy, it’s just too structured, because I’m not used to structure. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

Stephanie shared that the rhythm of a doctor’s day in her field is chaotic, with “something different happening” all the time, that she excels in the environment and that she believes that this is because of her background. Her experiences growing up have helped her to be well suited for this kind of work, including its structure and pace.

Connection with the real needs of her patients, which she believes is made possible because of her own personal background, also makes her better at providing service. Stephanie mentions how difficult it has been to connect with her colleagues since “they come from such different backgrounds than I came from…So many of my colleagues were given everything, they’ve like, never had a real job, never had to work for anything” (interview, April 12, 2012). She describes work-related drama in the department and how “petty” everyone seems: “It’s just evident that people have been given everything in life, and I’m really like, you know, I really appreciate where I came from. I really think I get a better sense of, you know, just being appreciative” (interview, April 12, 2012). This is again indicative of a “moral advantage” based on “real life” Stephanie feels she has when compared to her middle class colleagues. This “appreciative” aspect of her outlook also influences how she engages with her patients:

I always try to step back and, you know, think, this is someone’s mother, this is someone’s father, you know, and try to be courteous and nice to everybody, because everybody is somebody’s family. And I mean, I know my family, they’re like, blue-collar people, and I would want them to be treated well. (Interview, April 12, 2012).
When asked if she feels like her colleagues do that, she looked at me wide-eyed and stated emphatically, “No!” Thinking, nodding her head, she said “no” again. The way her colleagues treat their patients becomes an important realm in which Stephanie’s background positively influences the work she does and the service she provides. For this reason, the ways in which she witnesses her colleagues mistreat those from the lower socioeconomic class that she herself grew up in provides her with a clear sense of how her social class background provides her with the desire and ability to understand and connect with her patients.

This was evident in the realm of education as well. Hana describes herself as an orphan, moving out of her grandparents’ house at the age of sixteen. Prior to the work she does now in the business sector, Hana held a position as a school principal. Looking back to that time, Hana describes how important her own “difficult” background was as she attempted to connect with the parents and community of her urban school. This influenced how she engaged with her students as well, but it was more important in making connections with parents:

Parents would assume, initially, they were like, ‘You’re an Asian immigrant, your father and mom are probably doctors or something,” like, “What, you grew up in some suburb, and you’re coming in here, you know, like in your high heels, telling us what to do with our children.” And I’m like, “Let me tell ya!” I’m extremely transparent about my background. So, I’m like, “I grew up on welfare, what are you talking about?” And then it just, that would melt away a lot of the, the barriers that were posed by the family members. (Interview, March 31, 2012).

Despite the outward “embodied” and “linguistic” cultural capital Hana demonstrates through how she presents herself and speaks, her background provides her some legitimacy with the parents of the students with whom she works and offers her the
chance to involve community members into the work of the school. Her “real life” experiences on welfare and growing up without the support of her parents becomes its own form of capital and a specific kind of credibility born out of real-world experience which she enacts in the context of her urban school.

Greg, an educational administrator, was told in high school that he was “just not college material.” He describes how important his experience as a student is to the work he now does in education. Drawing on his background, he says, “It helps me to understand and to appreciate, you know, it sounds corny, but absolutely, positively, never give up on a kid” (interview, August 15, 2012) since he, in many ways, feels like he was given up on. In both education and medicine, then, an awareness of the reality of the client’s situation offered insight to their work. This supports the findings of Stuber (2005), who argues that upwardly mobile individuals “use their lower- and working-class origins as an occupational asset” (p. 149), particularly in fields where “clients” are involved. This also supports Lehman’s (2009) assertion that “maturity” and “real life experiences” become advantages for working class students. Though also a “liability” in some cases, these aspects of their lived experiences, enacted from the habitus they inherited or developed as children, can also emerge as useful or insightful for the work they accomplish and how they feel about that work.

This ability to connect with students and maintain high expectations also translated in higher education, as professors mentioned working with and seeking out first-generation students, advocating for their support and explicitly teaching some of the cultural capital necessary for success that has been described across chapters. Kris, a
community college professor, talked about her first day of school, when she shares her own working-class background, and ends with her earning a master’s degree from an Ivy League institution. She calls on her students to embrace the opportunity before them, and encourages them to work hard, as she did. In addition, she actively teaches them some of the cultural practices that she has found are necessary for success:

I explicitly teach code switching. You know, I talk to them about how they need to write versus how they can speak, and I give examples, and I really teach all of that. I teach them how to negotiate class I guess. I think that’s probably the coolest thing about what I get to do now is that I teach them that skill set that I have. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

This aspect of her work is why she loves her job so much, and it would not be possible if she had not traversed these different class locations herself. She sees her own ability to “negotiate class” as a “skill set” she possesses, and that knowledge directly translates to the support she can provide her students who might be in similar situations.

Tom, a professor with a Ph.D. who works at a private university, views the teaching he does as “what makes it worthwhile” so that he can “stand in front of the classroom, or stand in front of a variety of different groups, and teach, and really teach, right, not just teach because you read something but teach because you felt something” (interview, May 3, 2102). Having experienced many of the concepts he teaches, the passion of that perspective bleeds into his lessons and inspires his work. He also describes the work he does with first-generation college students:

I work in a private university and a lot of students here are sort of middle class but the working class students I tend to find, or they find me, and so I end up doing a lot of work – especially independent and thesis work – with them. Again, that’s interesting, that somehow we find one another, and I tend to work well with those students. Especially around issues of, you know, cultural capital, and the discomforts that they feel here. (Interview, May 3, 2012).
Like Kris, Tom is able to work with those students who need support beyond the learning of content in order to be successful. Each draws on their own experience with “negotiating class” or “discomforts” they feel in the university to support their students. In some cases, professors become advocates for their students when they perceive them as being treated unfairly. Tom shares one story in which he intervened on the behalf of a low-income student who was as part of an elite “Scholar Program.” Midway through the semester at a meeting with the board of the program, the student needed to demonstrate how much work he had accomplished thus far on a final research project associated with the program. The student did not realize the gravity of the meeting and how he was supposed to perform. Tom shares what happened:

He finds himself sitting in a room with eight faculty, all sitting around in a circle, who are gonna ask him questions. And he freezes. He doesn’t know how to perform in that situation, he’s uncomfortable, he locks up, and he’s, he’s unable to answer their questions. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

The student is kicked out of the program, and Tom works to advocate for the student and pushes the decision, calling the head professor on the committee:

I spend literally two hours on the phone, giving him a lecture on cultural capital and who this student was and who were they; did you ask for any of his writing material, before you made this decision, did you consult with me to find out what he’s done before you made this decision? Who are you guys to sit around in a room and make a determination of this guy’s future and how dare you do this? And this was really, as you can tell, this was peaking my, my history. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

The committee agrees to give the student another chance, but expresses their skepticism to Tom that he will be able to succeed, arguing instead that Tom is setting the student up to fail. The story ends with Tom and his student working tirelessly and creating a
“fantastic final project” with “these heart-wrenching and emotional interviews” which led 
“some of the members of the committee to cry.” Tom describes how well his student 
performed on the day of the final presentation:

I didn’t even recognize him, he walks in with a tie and a shirt, and his hair is all 
greased back, right? And I kind of look at him….and he just gives this fabulous 
performance. The chair of the committee comes right over afterwards and shakes 
his hand and comes over to me and apologizes to both of us. (Interview, May 3, 
2012).

Tom has explicitly taught this working class student the need to perform as he learned 
through his own education trajectory. Tom advocated for this student early in his career – 
just three years into his assistant professor position – and he marvels at the audacity he 
had to challenge the established committee members as he did. He frames this, though, as 
an important part of the work he does stating clearly that it is informed by his background 
and the perspective he has as an upwardly mobile individual.

Beyond working directly with their students, for some academics, their interest 
and insight into their field of research is often correlated with the perspective offered 
from their family members. In many cases, personally knowing the spectrum of social 
class and inequality has led to a heightened awareness of the meaning behind one’s work 
and its potential. Jeremiah Bruno, an economist, mentions this experience as he draws on 
the miners on his mother’s side of the family and the small business owners on his 
father’s:

So, on my father’s side it was a very aggressive respect of workers’ business. On 
my mother’s side it was oppressed miners, and so you kind of get the message. 
And, I think that kind of impacts. I think that, coming from a progressive family 
business helps me understand that you actually can treat people well, and you 
know, make money. I think I don’t easily forget about people at the lower end of
the power, prestige and money ladder because of my background. (Interview, April 26, 2012).

This enables Jeremiah to view traditional notions of economic relationships differently and has inspired his successful academic career. It also informs the passion with which he engages in his work. In constructing the arguments he does, there is a way in which he is advocating not just for those who are dominated in an unfair economic system, but for past family members who have been treated unfairly. This inspires his work and offers an important perspective for Jeremiah, so that he does not “easily forget about the people at the lower end” of the ladder.

As Tom articulates above, his background influences his ability to advocate for and support first-generation students. It has also informed Tom’s research and provides fuel for the “fire in his belly” to keep on doing the work he does:

So when it became a little less about performance and vulnerability and more about the mission – and the mission really was about the pain and suffering of class and knowing what it’s like to grow up with that – then that became my intensity, right. It was really realizing that all that discomfort was about this different place that I grew up and that this different place was what I had to preserve in order to help drive my work and who I was becoming. So that, that intensity survives, it continues. (Tom, interview, May 3, 2012).

Tom draws on his direct experience with the “pain and suffering of class” to provide the intensity he needs to continue his work. Central to this insight and inspiration, however, is the need to “preserve” this perspective. As Tom mentions in other chapters, preserving the perspective is not always easy, as he tries to find balance – or “the grey area” – in his class performance and appreciation of the “joys money can provide” without getting lost in the “pretention” (interview, May 3, 2012).
Tom also mentions the benefit of his “bi-cultural” identity, through which he can “move through different groups and see the world” (interview, May 3, 2012). This speaks to another area in which participants mention their background – and their working class habitus – as a benefit; a critical eye. Though developing a critical eye, mobile individuals view their surroundings and the dynamics of the workplace and the world with intention and understanding. Tom describes what this “eye” provides: “clarity, it provides you with the ability to see and feel different social locations and understanding” (interview, May 3, 2012). Kathy – also a professor – also mentions the importance of this perspective. Though she expresses “getting it wrong” often, dressing “incorrectly” and not possessing the “right” cultural knowledge the way her middle class husband does, she still sees this perspective as an asset through the lens it provides her:

I feel like where I’ve come from is a secret weapon in this world because I notice things and see things that people do not see, that people who are not from this suburb world, they just don’t see. Likewise, just as there are things that are impossible for me to know to do, there are things that I see that they are blind to in exactly the same way, and it helps me, I think, to notice more about the dynamics of how things work and are operating. (Interview, May 3, 2012, emphasis added).

This “secret weapon” is based on the perspective provided when individuals traverse a number of social or cultural contexts, learning to perform well in each. It seems an aspect of habitus that is newly acquired through upward mobility. While the performance is not always “quite right,” as Kathy indicates, the perspective gained remains. This experience, then, provides insight across a variety of contexts, creates inspiration to accomplish goals, and enables better service or work.
While much of this project explores the costs associated with this experience; costs that are largely unknown in the dominant “American Dream” discourse, the insight and “appreciations” explored throughout this section represent the benefits to this experience that remain outside of the dominant narrative of improved economic outcomes and which might be further considered. These benefits also support Lehman’s (2009) assertion that working class students evoke “moral advantages” based “in their class habitus. He found that these advantages “were reflected in [working-class students’] beliefs that they possessed a stronger work ethic, higher levels of maturity, responsibility, independence, and first-hand experiences in the ‘real world’” (p. 639). Even for the adults in this study, the concepts of hard work and experience with the “real world” continued to offer insight and “appreciations” based on their own background. The assumption, then, that acquiring cultural capital and taking on the “dominant class habitus” is preferred might be challenged in some dimensions of cultural capital acquisition as the perspective gained through real life is viewed as an asset. This is particularly true when habitus shifts without awareness of intention, as in the case of consumption practices explored in the previous chapter.

Conclusion

An important dimension of cultural capital includes individuals’ habitus – in this case, their tastes, dispositions and lifestyle. The knowledge and beliefs that go alongside these cultural practices – in the form of objectified capital – are also significant. With exposure to upper or middle class contexts, largely via entry into college, upwardly mobile individuals must make sense of new cultural practices and preferences. One
aspect of fitting in to the “different world” of college involves learning the cultural knowledge associated with the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1984). However, data in this study suggest that maintaining both a “dominated habitus of necessity” while also acquiring a “dominant habitus of freedom” is difficult. These conflicting ways of being and knowing can lead to internal conflict, wherein a mobile individual does not feel comfortable with the changes they are experiencing, as in the case with consumption practices. These shifts in tastes and knowledge can also lead to distance or tension with family members, which for some participants was incredibly painful. Each represents an additional example of the symbolic power of culture as it informs the behavior of classed individuals through the cultural arbitrary and leads to the enacting of symbolic violence on mobile individuals and their family members.

The data within this dimension of taste expose an important aspect of cultural capital acquisition. In some dimensions, cultural knowledge or practices learned in the home are actively replaced by the dominant habitus. For example, though individuals can continue to visit family, their “horizon” is now larger as they have experienced a broadening of their world that is difficult to unlearn. Exposure and access to travel, then, provides an important lens through which to view the complicated process in which cultural capital is learned. In this case, once one’s world is expanded in this way, their family is now seen as “smaller.” The perspective one once held has been displaced. Some mobile individuals, with exposure to this new “horizon,” view their family as lacking the practices desired and so middle class norms and expectations are then enacted again, in a cyclical, reproducing, process. The concepts of “performance” or “code-switching” –
attempts to integrate habitus – are seemingly impossible within this dimension. One learns to develop tastes and dispositions that are based on “freedom” rather than “necessity” (Bourdieu, 1984).

An alternative response involves a “moral advantage” perspective, in which mobile individuals, though still acquiring particular tastes and behaviors in order to exist in their elite context, also draw on their habitus from childhood as a tool, a resource and an advantage. From knowing what it means not to have food in the refrigerator, to explicitly teaching cultural capital to first-generation students or considering the perspective of the working-class through one’s research or service provision, mobile individuals attempt to maintain some foundational aspects of the habitus of their childhood and the perspective is offers. The benefits of the integration of these perspectives offer an important addition to the ways in which this experience is discussed in popular education writing – which frame the cultural practices of the working class as creating barriers to students’ success (Tough, 2008).

As research like the Pew Study on Social Mobility (2012) makes clear, the benefits of the experience of mobility are largely described via improved economic outcomes and potential earnings. Data in this study suggest, however, that increases in income – while providing added financial security and many opportunities and comforts associated with that security – caused a shift in perspective and lived experience that created more conflict with and even estrangement from family. Considering the benefits of upward mobility, however, outside of the realm of improved economic outcomes, enables a more nuanced understanding of this experience. Evidence suggests that mobile
individuals draw on their “bi-cultural” (Steve, interview, May 3, 2012) perspective to inspire hard work, enable them to better support students or patients, inform their research, and provide insight others cannot have. Reframing the benefits of upward mobility in this way creates space to consider the costs associated with this experience, including restraint, silencing, vigilance, feeling like an outsider and distance or tension with families of origin. To date, the “costs” associated with mobility are largely ignored. As is attention to the strengths and assets gained by growing up in a working class family, of which there are many.
CHAPTER 7
The Influence of Cultural Capital on Parental Involvement, Support and Pride

They’re proud of me, but in general terms.
They don’t want to know the specifics.

- Jacqueline Sandoval, Ed.D.

Many scholars, across disciplines, are interested in college access and the role parent involvement plays in a student’s academic success and pathway to college. Incredible effort and knowledge go into the college process, including a predisposition to apply, the search for the right college, and making the decision for which college to attend (Hossler, Schmidt & Vesper, 1998). Given the “highly competitive climate for admission into the ‘best colleges,’” (Smith 2009), children of low-income families who lack the economic, social and cultural capital necessary to compete for entry into college are at a clear disadvantage (Berger, 2000; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Lareau, 1987; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001; Walpole, 2003). In response, many studies have focused on the differences in socio-economic status and parental involvement as indicating potential success in the college environment and beyond (McCarron & Ikelas, 2006, Reay, 2004a; Reay, David & Ball, 2005). Some argue that offering knowledge (Vargas, 2004) and direction to parents in these areas in order to support their negotiation of the process will lead to larger numbers of low-income students attending college (Smith, 2009). Others, however, argue that the role cultural capital plays in a student’s college choice process (McDonough, 1997), college attendance and odds of college
completion (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985) indicates the import of cultural capital to higher education as well. This connection between cultural capital and college experience has implications for parental involvement as well. This body of literature outlines the structural difficulties overcome by the upwardly mobile participants in this study. However, while the important role that parents’ cultural capital plays in the college admissions process is made clear, the implications of limited cultural capital on relationships between upwardly mobile individuals and their parents has not yet been considered. Exploring this aspect of college attendance adds to an understanding of the profound significance of cultural capital and knowledge as one aspect of the difficulties associated with upward mobility, and the symbolic power associated with cultural aspects of class.

For most upwardly mobile individuals in this study, college marked initial entry into elite culture, and “exposure” to “dominant class habitus” (Bourdieu, 1984). In some cases, initial entry was a scholarship to a private high school (Jon, interview, July 13, 2012), membership to an elite religious organization (Jeremiah, interview, April 26, 2012), or access to an elite graduate school after college (Ronnie, interview, March 1, 2012). Despite these differences and given the popular and political focus on college access, a mobile individual’s path to college is important to consider. This is particularly true in light of the significant role cultural capital plays in success in institutions (Lareau, 2003) and in the lived experiences of the mobile individuals in this study, as explored in previous chapters.
The cultural capital parents possess is another important factor when considering the difficulties associated with this experience. Due to an emergent difference in “values” or lack of knowledge about the life their children lead or the work they do – each of which are aspects of “habitus” as described by Bourdieu (1984) – working class parents do not demonstrate the kind of involvement and pride in the accomplishments of their children as evident in middle class individuals also interviewed for the study. For the upwardly mobile individuals in this study, this lack of involvement and explication of pride leads to difficulty in maintaining a close relationship with family members. This chapter argues, then, for the need to deconstruct the hidden, yet assumed role of parents (and the cultural capital and knowledge they possess) in one’s mobile trajectory and the implications on familial relationships when external expectations for parental involvement are not met. The areas of involvement considered include: encouragement and expectations to attend college, the pride parents express to their adult children at what they have accomplished, and descriptions of sharing aspects of their work with their parents and siblings.

This chapter looks across both the upwardly mobile group, whose experiences have been described in previous chapters, as well as a middle class sample of participants, individuals with an advanced degree whose parents also have an advanced degree. The experiences of the middle class comparison group are introduced for the first time and explored in this chapter. Across forms of cultural capital explored in previous chapters, including in the body, language practices and taste, the contrast between mobile individuals and the middle class participants was clear and somewhat uncomplicated.
While mobile individuals described the myriad ways they felt (and feel) out of place or uncomfortable in their educational institutions or in the workplace due to shifts in cultural capital, not one middle class participant described this feeling. Rather, each mentioned feeling like they fit in or felt comfortable in college. Data, therefore, support the finding that middle class participants did not need to shift their habitus in the way that mobile individuals did. Rather than outline this distinction, I focused on the complicated way in which these forms of cultural capital are embodied, performed or learned by upwardly mobile individuals to better understand the complex experience of upward mobility. In comparing the two groups, however, the role parents played in the college process, as well as the career trajectories of individuals, emerged as an important distinction. Through this difference, it is clear that the cultural capital of parents plays an important role in an upwardly mobile individual’s trajectory and in determining the potential closeness mobile individuals might feel to their parents as adults. This represents the focus of this comparative chapter.

Jay MacLeod’s (1987) ethnography with the Brothers and Hallhangers of Clarendon Heights in *Ain’t No Makin It* illustrates the profound importance of ambition, and the role “leveled aspirations” plays in the reproduction of social class. The primary population that was interviewed for the current mobility study are examples of the “restricted number of individuals of lower and working class origin [who] overcome the barriers to success” (MacLeod, 1987, p. 148). Multiple factors helped position the

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53 All ten middle class participants responded “yes” when asked if they felt comfortable in college. In some cases, they expanded on areas of discomfort due to their own choice not to drink, social awkwardness or ethnic differences. However, in areas related to cultural capital as explored in this study, such as speaking up in class, eating, clothes they wore or the experiences they had had, they mentioned feeling comfortable, and that they did not have to change themselves to fit in.
participants in the study for college and beyond. Some mention the importance of a caring teacher (Victor, interview, March 14, 2012), the example set by older siblings (Mark, interview, February 12, 2012), or the influence of middle class peers (Hana, interview, March 31, 2012) as important factors for why they went to college. Many participants also mentioned hearing from an early age “you are going to college” from their parents as a factor.

This verbal support for college looks differently across class groups. The upwardly mobile participants were verbally supported but without advice on the college application process, where to go, or how to pay for it. In contrast, knowledge about and financial support for college are important factors to which the middle class participants had access. Moving beyond parents’ knowledge base and means marks the start of an upward trajectory that can lead to difficulty in connection later on. This is evident as the upwardly mobile individuals describe the pride their parents exhibit for their accomplishments, which is often broad, non-specific and in some cases, lacking. This distance is also evident in their ability to share details and examples of their work as adults with their parents, either because the content is too complex or specialized to understand, or because the family actively rejects the work they produce. These areas of disconnection are in part due to the cultural capital associated with college and work that parents do not possess or have not developed. As in other dimensions, this lack of expression or existence of pride and inability to share one’s work with their family can lead to distance. In looking across participants, the initial involvement of a parent, including making sacrifices for their child’s education, becoming involved in their
schooling process or demonstrating interest and support in what they do, helps to alleviate this potential distance that occurs once mobility is achieved.

The focus of this chapter, then, involves the role of parents in a mobile individual’s education and considers the implications of that role into adulthood as individuals settle into careers and lives of their own. Through marking the entire trajectory, this chapter considers the possibility of parents’ involvement, the growing and shifting of relationships with family members over time, and the lasting impact of mobility, starting on a trajectory that begins at college.

**Planning for and Expecting Success**

Like the upwardly mobile individuals in this study, the middle class participants come from a variety of contexts, geographic locations and careers. Important consistencies did exist, however, related to parental involvement in their education and career path. Across interviews, middle class participants mentioned the expectation that they would attend college and have a career, sometimes assuming education beyond college. Financial support for college, and in some cases graduate school, was also expressed across interviews.

The assumption that participants would attend college was consistent across this group and the role of parents through the college search process was central. Participants describe the assumption that they would attend college as “kind of natural....there was nothing outward about it” (Doug, interview, August 17, 2012). Doug, a talkative and good-natured education administrator, had earned his J.D. while working full-time. He recently decided to shift to the education sector as an administrator. His parents, also in
education, were excited about this shift in his career, in part because the Ed.D. he earned was from an Ivy League institution. Again describing why he went to college, Doug clarifies the “natural expectation” that he would attend college:

I don’t ever recall a time it being talked about, I don’t ever recall any discussions about, ‘you’re going to college,’ It was just a natural expectation… I wouldn’t even call it an expectation; it was just like - in the same way if you’re in 5th grade, the next year you’re going to 6th grade, it was like that. (Interview, August 17, 2012).

The implicit expectation – like moving from elementary to middle school – was so clear to Doug that his parents did not necessarily express it “outwardly” but the sentiment and assumption was a significant part of his education as a child and young adult.

Ari Lipshultz, a White Jewish architect, discussed each stage of his schooling with his family and describes that, while not overtly mentioned and without too much academic pressure, it was obvious to him that going to college was an expectation. He described having visited ten schools on a college trip with both parents, his mother a lawyer and father a professor. He applied early decision and got into the small liberal arts school that he ultimately attended. When asked if he spoke with his parents about which colleges he had liked and what he was looking for, he said, “We talked about everything” and though his “folks didn’t put any academic pressure on me, I still did my work, and…grew up understanding that that was what I was supposed to do, and I did it” (interview, October 15, 2012). For Ari, then, academic success and attending college was just “what he was supposed to do” without being overtly told and was actively supported through conversation and a college trip.
In some cases, college was such an expectation that making a decision that did not involve college was looked down upon, as one of the middle class participants in the study found out the hard way. Alex, currently a professor, describes that there was “never a question that [he] would go to college”:

Absolutely…it wasn’t even discussed that I would do anything else, so much so that it never even occurred to me not to go. My brother had gone to college, no question, my two sisters; one of them had gone to college with no questions. Now, I do have one sister that basically finished high school, married, immediately had a kid, and had no interest in education. And….she was not looked upon very fondly by my family for that choice. (Interview, August 8, 2012).

His sister still does well financially as her husband makes a solid income with his job in wind energy, yet she was looked down on for not having followed the expectations for college attendance set out by their family. Despite the clarity with which Alex describes this expectation, as well as the examples offered by his siblings, he actually took some time to figure out what he wanted to focus on. It took him over 6 years to graduate with an undergrad degree across three different institutions. His parents were somewhat impatient and expressed concern and frustration as he meandered through colleges and programs, but have been more supportive recently: “now that I actually finished the Ph.D., my parents don’t look at me as a failure anymore, so that’s nice” (interview, August 7, 2012). Given the long road he took to complete his education, it was not until he finally finished his Ph.D. that his parents stopped seeing him as a “failure.” The high expectations many middle class parents hold for their children helps explain their involvement in the process throughout. Particularly when a tangible goal is in the mind of the parent – such as a Ph.D., an M.D. or graduate school in general – their involvement is
more targeted, specific and knowledgeable. This is contrasted with the general support upwardly mobile participants received, which, while valuable in many ways, represents an area of disparity in parental involvement and an example of class reproduction (MacLeod, 1987) – present even when individuals are on the path to social mobility.

In some cases, it seemed to participants that their admittance to a good college mattered more to their parents than it did to them. Ashley Voll, a biracial woman in her early thirties whose parents are both doctors, describes how it was assumed that she would go to college, sharing that her “parents cared about it a lot, more than I did.” Like Doug, they express pride that she had graduated from an Ivy League institution, and have the sense that she should go back to school again even though she earned her master’s degree. She knows she is not “quite done yet” with school and it seems clear that her parents would support – and be excited by – this decision as they ask her questions about her next plans in her career and where she might want to apply for further graduate work.

Katie Johnson also describes how important her academic success was to her parents, particularly her mother. A tall white woman with a gregarious laugh and curly red hair, Katie works in development at a large non-profit organization. She describes how different her mother and father are in terms of work. Her father, who works in corporate sales, ended up moving from the downtown corporate office and setting up his office in one of the company’s mills, located in a rural area. Katie says he loved this change because he could wear jeans to work and, as Katie described, “my bosses never see me and don't know what I'm doing’” (interview, July 27, 2012). In contrast, her mother, a “workaholic,” is a doctor and on faculty at a university-based hospital. She has
high expectations for Katie, yet Katie describes herself as having taken after her father, and “likes a challenge at work” but “like, I am never trying to work more than like, 45 hours a week.” She describes her college search process as having been far more important for her mother than it was her.

I think some kids are very, like especially if they're in a prep school it's like you've been thinking about this since your freshmen year. For me, I was just like, eh, college, maybe I'll do that, whatever. My junior year, my mom scheduled a college tour for me where she picked all the schools. I said I think I probably want to go someplace smaller and probably in the northeast and that was the only thing that I would like, give her, because I was like I don't really want to think about this or care about this, and so she planned a whole, like five college tour, and I went, with like my mom and dad for a week, in a car, driving around to all these places. And I hated it, it was just, like, so pretentious. And then I visited the last school, and it was like, such a cliché, but in a second, I was like this is where I'm going. I didn't apply to any other schools ‘cause I was like, I know this is where I'm gonna go. (Interview, July 27, 2012).

Katie definitely would not have gone to the elite liberal arts college she attended had her mother not begged for details about the kind of school she wanted to attend and planned an entire trip for her. Luckily, she liked the last school she visited and so it was the only one to which she applied. The kind of school she attended mattered to her parents as well. She had been dating someone who applied to a smaller, lesser-known private college near her home and Katie considered applying there as well. Katie describes her mother as being “horrified” that she would apply there and vividly remembers her saying, “You'll never get into medical school if you go to [small college].” It is clear that her mother’s involvement in the process was central and necessary for Katie to have gone to college, and her expectations of where was acceptable to go played a significant role as well. As MacLeod (1987) asserts, the role aspirations play in social reproduction is profound. Though Katie was a strong student and would have been successful, she may not have
made it to college after high school. Rather, had Katie been born to a family with less intense expectations for college, and knowledge for how to navigate the process and what to look for, her educational trajectory may have taken longer or looked quite different.

The expectation to apply to and attend college was at times more implicit for middle class participants, though clearly communicated in other ways so that each knew that they were going to college. Sometimes, these expectations were shared far before college is even a thought, as was the case with Lacey McMillen, a White woman in her thirties who is a writer and teacher with two master’s degrees. Her father, a lawyer, made clear to her the kinds of jobs she should be planning for, and, through that, his expectations for her education:

My dad had this secretary and her name was Betty, and I loved Betty because she was so nice; she always remembered my birthday, and would send me a card…and so when I was pretty little, I said that, because I liked Betty, that maybe when I grew up I’d like to be a secretary, and my dad was like, ‘No.’ Like, ‘You should want to be a lawyer, not a secretary.’ It wasn’t, like, a direct reference to college, but I understood enough to know that you had to go to special schools to be a lawyer, and that that was expected. (Interview, October 8, 2012).

That Lacey recalls this experience now, so many years later, is telling and represents another example of the implicit assumption that one must go to college, and then to further graduate school as well.

Like other middle class participants in the study, Lacey went on a college trip with her mother and talked with her about what she liked and did not like about each college. The process was not enjoyable, however, as Lacey describes: “I actually was very anxious about the whole process of looking at colleges.” She attributes this anxiety to the “high pressure” and “competitive” environment of her elite private school, which
she “hated.” She also went through the college search process without the support of her father, who had left their family with the divorce of her parents. This implicit reference to college and educational aspirations remained, however, so that even though the transition and experience was not easy, the parental involvement in terms of expectations and knowledge were evident, largely through the consistent support of her mother. Also present was the financial support for college, so that even though her father did not pay for tuition as he might have earlier, her grandmother was able to help financially. Each of these areas in which Lacey was offered support for college – despite the difficulties she also overcame – is contrasted with the experiences of the upwardly mobile participants. Even when parents were involved in the ways that they knew how to be – to encourage their child to go to college – the other factors of knowledge and financial support were not available and limited the extent to which they might be involved in and supportive of the process. This distinction in financial support offers the most significant contrast, as nearly every upwardly mobile individual worked in college to pay tuition themselves or to support their parents’ contribution in their financial aid package. Many also earned scholarships, or attended a less expensive school due to financial constraints. The financial support offered to middle class participants, however, was more consistent (and expected) as one participant mentions “money not being an issue” (Ashley, interview, August 1, 2012).

Ashley, a social worker with a master’s degree whose parents are both doctors, mentions how money was not something she needed to “factor in” due to “some support from my grandparents and funds my parents had saved for me for school and so, um, I
didn't have to worry about, you know, where I was getting a financial aid package” (Ashley, interview, August 1, 2012). This financial support continues in related areas as well, as Ashley mentions that her parents paid her rent throughout college and gave her an allowance each month. She described their financial support for her master’s degree as well, indicating that “if I had to pay for grad school completely on my own I definitely would have thought about it differently and probably worked while I did, even though I appreciate a lot that I could focus on grad school” (Ashley, interview, August 1, 2012). Ashley definitely recognizes the important benefit she received and knows that the decisions she made, particularly in relation to work, would have been different if she did not have her parents’ financial support.

Katie, who considered not going right to college much to her mother’s dismay, shared a conversation she had with her mother when considering graduate school: “I called her and I said if I go to graduate school will you pay for it and she said yes. Probably if she said no I actually wouldn't have gone” (interview, July 27, 2012). As with Ashley, Katie would have made a different decision had she not had the financial support of her parents to attend graduate school. This would have had a significant impact, however, since the graduate program Katie attended provided the skills and degree necessary for her first job. This decision would have long-term effects on her earning potential, and career trajectory, and the financial support she received from her parents was a central factor.

Talia, a Middle Eastern woman in her thirties, is from the Midwest and grew up with her mother, who stayed at home during her childhood, and her father, who is a
doctor. She is an artist and actress and attended an elite college a few states away from home for her undergraduate degree. When considering going back to graduate school in Fine Arts, a field that her parents were “not crazy about,” she approached their potential financial support with sensitivity: “I mean, my point of view on the whole thing had always been, you know, I don’t wanna put you guys out, so whatever you guys want to do, or can do, is most appreciated” (interview, October 15, 2012). She shares her expectation that she would have to take out some loans, and definitely applied to a number of scholarships. Since her parents “aren’t the best financial planners…they sort of just improvised as it came up, and were like, ‘okay, here’s what we can do,’” and they did end up helping her with a portion of her tuition. Due to the area in which she was studying, she received critiques and concerns from her family about the viability of her degree as translating to a career, yet they still offered financial support.

Ari, the architect who had visited ten schools for during his college search trip, describes his graduate school search in much the same way. He applied to nine schools and was able to decide between five of them for his master’s degree in architecture. He ultimately decided on the university where his father worked in order to receive tuition benefits, though had other financial support as well: “Through my dad’s tuition benefits, my parent’s financial planning for me, and my grandparents’ help; I was able to [pause] my academic life was paid for” (interview, October 15, 2012). At times, then, the support provided from middle class parents was about their connection to a particular university where they received tuition benefits as a professor.
In a few instances, the financial support the middle class individuals received from their family members was described with caveats: “it was clear that they had to attend a public university” (Heidi, interview, August 9, 2012) or that there “wasn’t any fund established, I applied to pretty much every scholarship” (Talia, interview, October 15, 2012). In one case, Doug decided to attend a state school because it was cheaper and then financially supported his sister for college during their parents’ divorce – maintaining the expectation of financial support from the family himself since his parents could not. Despite these variances, financial support for middle class participants was assumed and consistent across interviews, with the majority having most of their schooling paid for. In addition to financial support, parent involvement was evident in maintaining the implicit expectation that their children would go to college and beyond.

In contrast to this set of realities, the parental involvement that many upwardly mobile individuals describe receiving was far more explicit in nature, as participants mention hearing “you are going to college!” a lot when they were young. This support for college came with restrictions, however, of not knowing how to help get their children into college or explicitly stating their inability to provide financial support. In some instances, college was not mentioned at all and students stumbled their way into a local college or university. These distinctions in how families view and approach college going speak to the varying degrees of parental knowledge and involvement – and the associated differences in cultural capital – evident in different social class backgrounds. Against this middle class backdrop, the experiences of upwardly mobile participants are considered in the following section.
Enthusiastic, Yet Limited Support for College

Literature in the area of higher education and access often describe low-income families as possessing post-secondary educational goals for their children; goals which often include college. Though limited financial resources prevent the kind of support that middle class students receive (Moles, 2000), the support is present, particularly among low-income Latino and African American families (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Perez, 2000; Smith, 2008). This section draws on similar findings to help explain the distance that sometimes develops with families of origin through the experience of upward mobility. Though college was encouraged by many parents, even those not expected to go to college, participants describe their parents as generally thinking and caring about their future trajectory. The support provided, however, was non-specific due to the families’ limited knowledge about the college process (limited cultural capital) as well as financial constraints (limited economic capital). This more general involvement marks the start of a trajectory for many in which they struggle to connect with and share their experiences with their family members as adults, given the cultural shifts in knowledge and experience evident in a mobile trajectory.

As research suggests, many of the upwardly mobile individuals in the study were encouraged by their parents to go to college. Hoping to be in “the next generation is better category” (Mark, interview, February 12, 2012), or with the hope that their son “could work for himself” (Larry, interview, April 14, 2012), many parents expressed general encouragement to attend college. This encouragement was not necessarily toward
any particular end, however, and often without knowledge of how to get there or financial support.

Victor, a Mexican American man who is an environmental scientist, mentions how his father “put the idea in my head that college was an option” since his father had completed one semester of college, and “always talked about education and how he wished he could have finished” (interview, March 14, 2012). Despite the planting of this seed that college could be an option, Victor was not “planning to go to college until [he] hit junior year of high school” when he learned from the school counselor that his plan to become a veterinarian necessarily involved not just college but school after college as well. Though the “idea” of college was put in Victor’s head so that it seemed a possibility, the specifics of why, or how, were left for Victor to figure out on his own. He scored high on the PSAT and received a number of college brochures – one of which he decided he liked because of the area around the college. He got himself to college as well, taking a train 1000 miles and arrived ecstatic to learn of the meal plan since he did not know how he was going to eat.

When compared to the middle class group just described, it seems that Victor has received far less support from his parents; he had to pick his own college, travel there himself, and was ill prepared for what college actually entailed. He also had to work multiple jobs to pay the portion of his tuition left after financial aid. Despite these differences, he describes his parents as incredibly supportive, using the term “the wind behind my sails” to explain the “moral support” he receives from them (interview, March 14, 2012). Financial restraint, however, played a large factor in how they could offer
support or be actively involved in Victor’s education. They told him prior to applying for college:

We’ll support you in every way that we can, we just can’t pay for it. We want you to finish college, don’t worry about us, you know, we will do everything we can to help you do what you need to do. (Interview, March 14, 2012).

Their offer to “not worry about us” was an important support as Victor described other low-income students who felt pressure to send money they made in college back home. They also offered to buy his books, but support with tuition was outside of their reach. Due to their financial position, and lack of knowledge about what college entailed and how best to prepare him, they were not involved in the way that the middle class parents described earlier were, indicating the initial stage in a gap in experience between mobile individuals and their parents.

Brady Williams, a White man in his thirties who is now an emergency room doctor, also describes his mother telling him that he was going to college, but is unsure how important her saying that to him was:

She was always like, “You are going to college. I don’t care what you do but you are going to college.” I don’t know if it actually did a lot to make that happen but I certainly remember that sticking out in my head as something from being very young, but I never really felt like she necessarily enabled that. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

Brady points out an important distinction between the middle class and upwardly mobile participants, that though the verbal support to attend college seemed louder in the mobile context, where the expectation was far more implicit for the middle class participants, he is not sure the constant planting of the college seed helped him get there. He describes his mother as “not involved” since she worked all the time, and his father as “unsupportive”
since he wanted Brady to take over the carpentry business. In school, Brady also had to actively ignore the college counselor, who was telling him to take the full scholarship he had earned at the local state school. Instead he talks about one teacher in particular who “really encouraged me to go beyond [their small town],” and supported his application process. Brady had no idea on a map where his elite private college was, and arrived on his own without much knowledge as to what college would be like. Though the words were technically said to him that he would go to college, he does not think this had a large impact on his attending college, or to his continuing onto medical school. He also describes the relationship between his parents and himself as having suffered because their involvement with his life in general, and his education in particular, was so minimal, a reality of his experience that other upwardly mobile participants also described.

Another participant, Kris, had parents who made active decisions to keep her in a good school district, even as it remained a financial constraint for them. She describes “always moving” as a child:

First we were in an apartment when I was little. Then, they bought their first home – the only house they ever bought, actually. Then they sold that. Then we rented a house for a good chunk of my life and then they lost it and then we rented a townhome. And then it slowly got worse and worse. Then from that townhome, we rented a three-bedroom apartment, then a two-bedroom apartment, down to now they are living with my grandmother. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

Demonstrating her parents’ commitment to education, each of these homes remained in the same strong school district to ensure that Kris and her sister received a good education. This is why they continued to downsize. This translated in their interactions when she was growing up as well, when they would stay on top of her and make sure she was doing her work:
It was always just sort of said, like, “Did you do your homework?” They didn’t understand it, like they couldn’t help me with it once I hit a certain age because they hadn’t learned a lot of the stuff that I was learning, but early on through school – I mean my father would make me do book reports on books that weren’t even required. So I would like read the encyclopedia and write a paper on something. It was like heavily enforced in my family. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

Her parents actively sacrificed their living space and supported her education by providing a good school and making sure she did her work each day, but they did not have the knowledge to support the actual work she was doing. Their involvement, as central and significant as they could possibly make it, was limited in some way due to their lack of knowledge around the content she was learning.

This lack of knowledge also translated financially. Kris planned to skip her senior year in college since she had enough credits and describes enthusiastically applying to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) with big plans to become a screenwriter, but having to turn the acceptance away:

And I got in, which I remember I was so excited. And so I got in, and I was going to do that, and my family had no clue. We didn’t know anything about college, financial aid, nothing. And so we didn’t know financial aid existed, and I got in and I saw the money and it was just like I can’t pay so we have to turn it away. So I couldn’t go, and I remember being devastated. (Interview, June 17, 2012).

Resilient, Kris came back to her senior year ready to take on the process and said to herself: “alright I’m going to talk to guidance counselors and figure stuff out” (interview, June 17, 2012). She applied to numerous schools and decided to attend the local state school, which offered her an almost-complete scholarship. Like other participants, she worked all through college and paid her own living expenses and anything not covered by financial aid. Though Kris is incredibly close to her parents, their knowledge of the work she was completing in high school and how to navigate the college process limited their
ability to offer support. As will be explored later in this chapter, this same limitation translates into adulthood, as parents and family members express interest in their upwardly mobile children and siblings, yet struggle to understand the realm in which they work and sometimes live.

Karen, a White scientist from the Midwest, was encouraged to go to college more implicitly; she does not actually recall her parents ever telling her “You will go to college.” But she describes herself as a “straight-A student, so, never thought about anything else.” Like other mobile individuals in the study, paying for college was not easy, as she describes her mother needing to go back to work full time so she could help with the tuition not covered under financial aid. Though she paid for part of the tuition through her on-campus jobs, she remembers her mother’s resistance and annoyance: “She was like, “ahh I have to go back to work because Karen has to go to college. And, I’m like, well…” (interview, March 4, 2012). Karen imitates her mother’s inflection when saying her name, trying to express her mother’s annoyance. Karen was financially on her own by the time she started graduate school, and so any tension around paying for college dissipated. Though her family was able to provide this financial support, she felt that her mother was resistant to it through comments she made, like the one mentioned above.

Another group of mobile individuals did not actually receive the verbal support just described, and in fact were offered more open expectations for what do after high school. Leo, now a professor, describes his parents as being “very liberal in that they really did not care what we did so long as we stayed out of trouble and were productive”
(interview, March 30, 2012). He describes them as “not really hav[ing] any goals for us” and frames this liberalness in goals in positive terms, particularly when comparing his experience to his students at a small liberal arts college. He shared that his students often come into his office stressed about the expectations their parents have and that he feels lucky to not have had this expectation. This is not surprising given the experience of Alex in the previous section, who is just now no longer seen as a “failure” by his mother since he “finally earned his Ph.D.”

Similarly, Tom, a White professor, laughed when asked if he was encouraged to go to college when he was younger. Smiling and shaking his head, he said: “Oh no, no, no, no, it was never…no, not at all. No, my world was sports” (interview, May 3, 2012). Despite not talking about college at home, Tom mentions: “my mother was supportive of whatever I wanted to do. I went to college to play basketball, and so the family was supportive of that - it was a continuation of my sports career and, you know, that was something that the uncles and the aunts and the grandparents and everybody could celebrate and support” (Interview, May 3, 2012). His entry to college in an academic sense ultimately translated to activism and critical theory, with which they could not engage, but this initial transition, sports-related, offered an entry point for his family to remain involved in his education, at least for a time.

At times this lack of goals or expectations meant the initial entry to college was more difficult. Amy, a biracial woman from the East Coast who now works in higher education, describes her parents as “not caring what she did after graduating high school” — though high school graduation was a clear expectation. Amy is close to her family, and
has decided to live near them even though she has to commute a longer distance to work. Remaining close to home, and to her family, is important to her. Despite this, there are aspects of Amy’s life that her family does not quite understand, and she believes that some part of this is due to their limited support early on. She describes their involvement:

I had a unique experience in that they really didn't, they didn't care what I did. If I got a full time job that was fine, if I went to [the local community college in the area], that was fine, or the vo-tech school to become a hairdresser, that was fine, if I went to college that was fine. I just knew there would be no financial support for it. So they were just like, whatever you want to do - just work it out….I don't think I ever asked my dad, I mean, he would give me money here and there for, I don't know, ice cream or something like that, but as far as for college I don't think I even, I don't think I ever really even asked them I just knew that it wasn't an option.  (Interview, May 18, 2012).

So – what she “worked out” was to head to “thirteenth grade.” At the time, she recalls not even knowing “about a bachelor’s degree, I just thought you go for a while.” She describes never having visited the school first, she “just showed up” since “I got something in the mail about getting books and I just showed up and I went to classes and yeah…I just applied to one school, I got in, and I went on day 1 like it was grade 13 (interview, May 18, 2012). Amy now works for an Ivy League institution and, having earned her master’s degree, is taking classes toward her doctorate. Smiling, she shakes her head when considering how ill prepared she was when she entered college, particularly compared to the majority of students who matriculate at the university where she now works. The lack of knowledge base and financial support clearly influenced Amy’s path.

Like Amy, Claire received no support for college from her mother, the primary parent with whom she lived. She describes her childhood as “difficult” with her mother in
and out of abusive relationships. Though her mother always worked to support the family, she found it hard to make enough and there were times when they did not have enough to eat. Now a high school teacher with a master’s degree in her subject area, Claire wonders why her mother did not expect more out of her or offer more encouragement:

Never once did my mom say, like, “you should go to college.’” They always wanted us to graduate high school. She would be mad if we got like an F, but it wasn’t ever about going to college. If I wanted to do it, I have to figure it out. My mom was very, you know, like, it was okay to get a C, that’s great! You know, like, get a C, that’s awesome! You’re not failing, great! You know. So it wasn’t ever, like, shoot for an A. I really wanted…more, like, direction, and I guess…encouragement. (Interview, August 2, 2012).

Like other mobile individuals in the study, Claire needed to “figure college out on her own,” indicating a lack of knowledge for what was needed to get to and be successful in college. With Claire, the desire for more encouragement is also evident, as the expectation expressed by her mother to “not fail” did not translate to the work Claire was capable of and already accomplishing. Though she shares that she is in some ways close to her mother now, particularly now that she has her own daughter, she knows there is an aspect of her that her mother “doesn’t really get.” Laughing, she described how her mother “didn’t even know what my major was” and, looking incredulously, she says, “I mean, she still is like ‘what is you degree in again?’ She’ll ask me, ‘Like, what does a master’s mean?’ Like, she doesn’t really get it” (interview, August 2, 2012).

During the interview, Claire described her master’s work, and how it translated to the classroom, with enthusiasm and accomplishment, yet her mom still cannot remember which degree she holds or what her major was. Her experience represents a feeling
expressed by many upwardly mobile individuals in the study who feel accomplished and positive about their work and education in one context, yet with their families feel as if they are not understood, or that their families are not interested in or proud of them for who they are now. These implications are considered in the following section, as the trajectory that began with entrance to college seems to deepen a divide with their families of origin due to shifts in culture, knowledge and understanding.

“*I’m still sort of an odd duck*”: Seeking Understanding

Upon graduating from advanced degree programs and entering the professional workforce, mobile individuals are often living a life that is very different than the world in which they were raised, and making different decisions, many of which have been explored throughout the previous chapters. For some family members, the cultural shifts in lifestyle and perspective they have embodied mark the upwardly mobile individual as difficult to understand. One example of this discomfort involves marrying far later than is “normal” in their family (Amy, interview, May 18, 2012) or deciding to go onto graduate school, even though one has already earned a degree (Don, interview, July 8, 2012). As an example, one of Sequoia’s uncles asks at a family event: “well, how come all of my educated nieces don’t have men?” (Sequoia, May 23, 2012) and Jon mentions being seen as an “odd duck” with his family members on his father’s side of the family who “do not really know what to do with him…since he got married really late” (interview, July 13, 2012). In other examples, particularly with upwardly mobile women, the relationships with their parents improved greatly once they had children “so that they had something to talk about” (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012). In some families where adulthood comes
with the creation of one’s own family (Bettie, 2003), postponing that experience, or experiencing that in a different way than what is expected by one’s family of origin can lead to confusion around how to express pride, and what to be proud of. It can also lead to negativity and judgment about mobile individuals’ lifestyle choices.

Like the general support offered for mobile individuals to go to college, participants mention the pride their family members express as “general” or lacking in substance since often parents have limited understanding of the work accomplished or goal achieved. The following responses speak to this consistent finding across interviews for upwardly mobile participants:

There’s this general sense in which they’re proud, but they don’t get it. (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012).

In general, my parents were supportive, but weren't really aware of what I was up to. I think that my father was proud of me...even though he didn't know quite what to be proud of. (Wesley, interview, February 16, 2012).

I think they’re very proud of me, I think they’re very pleased with what I’ve done, but I don’t think they really understand it. I don’t think my father ever really understood the whole degree thing, he couldn’t understand the dissertation—I remember trying to explain it to him, and kinda what I did, the original research, and he just—he just didn’t quite get it. (Greg, interview, August 15, 2012).

Though parents are proud that their child is successful, the pride feels “general” since parents do not understand what their child has accomplished; they “don’t really get it.” As Greg tries to explain to his father what he has accomplished, knowledge about the “degree” he has earned, what a “dissertation” is and the concept of “original research” all act as barriers to Greg being able to discuss the content of his study on educational leadership. The assumption that they should be proud, however, is clear. This is evident in Amy’s story of her father who worked in a factory most of his life. Amy shares his
honest attempt to demonstrate pride with recognition that he does not quite understand of what he is proud:

My dad's funny, he's proud of me, but he has this different life culturally than I have. When I got my master’s, he said, "Amy, you know, I don't understand everything you did, and I didn't even help you but I'm really proud of you, I was talking to my friend, he's a principal in the schools and we fight chickens together and he just said what you do is so cool. It's really good. He said I should be proud of you." And he's like, "So I am!" (Amy, interview, May 18, 2012).

As evident in Greg’s and Amy’s quotes above, the accomplishments of upwardly mobile individuals – particularly further schooling – can be difficult for family members to understand. Amy’s father admits he had little to do with all that she has accomplished but was told by a friend that what she did was “cool” – so he shares with her that he is proud.

The pride is general, however. In some cases, even knowledge of the degree being earned was unknown or forgotten. This is demonstrated by Claire’s mother in the previous section when she asks: “what does a master’s mean?” and by Jon, who shares that “for a lot of my family I would have to describe what a Ph.D. was.”

Kathy, the professor who has worked very hard to stay close to her family, has decided not to talk at any length about the work she does. This is, in part, because she sees them as not being able to understand or value her work – a feeling that started very soon after college when she started graduate school. She describes them as feeling “bewildered” when she moved many states away for graduate school.

I think they felt like the whole time I was growing up, they were like, “Go to college. Go to college. You have to go to college.” So I did, and I went to a good place which I think they were really happy about and when I just kept going, they were kind of like, “Woah. You don’t have to keep-what are you doing?” like

54 Also known as “cockfighting.” Though illegal in the United States, this is a common pastime in Puerto Rico, where Amy’s father is from.
“You didn’t have to keep going.” Like, “What are you doing?” like “Why are you doing this? Can’t you just get a good job in [their city]? (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Unlike Lacey, whose father made it very clear that she should be a lawyer rather than a secretary, Kathy’s parents never imagined her deciding to study beyond college. They were unaware of those positions, and that kind of work. Where Lacey received the implicit expectation of education beyond college, Kathy was told overtly to go to college, but implicitly to always come back and stay closer to home. She has reached expectations far beyond what was set for her, and this leads to a mounting lack of knowledge or understanding. This affects the way in which her family can express pride in the work she does, and dictates how much they understand her.

Like Kathy, Larry is a professor who decided to continue his education past where his mother desired, or understood. He had taught in the town he grew up in and, upon returning from his service in the military, decided there was no way he could stay in the town and teach as he had been and instead went to graduate school. When asked how his mother felt about this decision, he said:

Not good, not good at all. My mom would have been very happy, most happy, if I'd have come back from the war and gone back to teach in junior high school in [my local town]. For her, that was what was right, and her dad worked really, really hard to help put me through college, and they were really proud of me. That, they could identify with. She did not, could not understand why I wanted to go to college any more, why I would want to do that. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

Larry frames her discomfort with the decision he made to attend graduate school as something she could not “identify with.” She and her parents were very proud of him for having achieved the teaching job in the town. His desire to move beyond that was outside of her understanding and deeply influenced their relationship and how she viewed her
son. He offers an example of her perspective, which occurred during a break from graduate school, during which he was visiting her in the small town where he grew up.

One time during graduate school, I was doing dishes, and, it was always a great time for my mom and I. I would wash and she would dry the dishes. And we had good conversations. And she said once, the problem with people like you, is, you know too much. (Interview, April 13, 2012).

He commented on her expression, “people like you” as something she often said. It did affect him when she used this term, he describes that it felt rather “otherizing,” but was the way she viewed him from that point forward. As mentioned in a previous chapter, this led to their closeness shifting in some ways. He remained a “faithful” son, speaking often and usually visiting for a week over the holidays and then again in the summer. This view of his position, however, remained a prominent aspect of their relationship, and meant that he spoke little about his teaching and nothing about his research. For that reason, he describes their closeness as “partial” since “you can't be close about your work life, your professional life, your occupational life” (interview, April 13, 2012). His trajectory was just too far a distance for some aspects of their relationship to stay current or close.

Larry based how much he would share with his mother on her apparent discomfort and frustration with “people like [him], who know too much.” In contrast, Don, a math teacher, mentions keeping his decisions away from his parents, particularly his father, since he was sure it would not make sense to him. Describing his decision to go back to graduate school, Don recalled not talking about it with his parents. “I suspect my parents, and maybe my dad more than my mom, thought it was kind of odd. Why are you still going to school, what is the point?” (Interview, July 8, 2012). When asked what caused him to suspect his father’s confusion at his decision, he said:
I think my father, you know, being in school was not part of his background at all, he didn't see that. I probably, I don't know if I ever articulated to them, here's what I'm doing, and here's why I'm doing it. Here's my goal. So I, I can see that it might have been mysterious, you know, like, what is this gonna get you. Um, but I don't, you know, I never had the feeling that they were particularly proud that I was in graduate school, that that was a big step. (Interview, July 8, 2012).

His father was a cabinet maker, and opened a cabinet shop with Don’s brother, which, according to Don, would have made much more sense to his father than his going to graduate school. As Don’s experience with his father makes clear, there was a lack of understanding of what they were doing and the decisions they were making. His feeling that his dad was thinking “what’s the point” as he entered graduate school helps frame some of the potential tensions discussed throughout each chapter. Don helps clarify a piece of why this is the parents’ response as well – that the decision to continue in school seems sort of odd – that it is outside of their knowledge or understanding, decidedly different than the experiences their parents have had. In addition, Don mentions not having sat down with his parents and talked with them about his plan, leaving the decisions he was making outside of their experience as well as mysterious and distant.

Dave, the CEO of one branch of a large company, mentions how complicated his work is and how much he wishes he could talk with his parents about it. Though his wife reminds him of how proud they are of him, he struggles to acknowledge it:

I don't think they understand the minutiae of [my work] as much. As my wife likes to say, my parents are very, very proud of me, which is nice, I guess I should take solace in that. I should take more comfort in that but I don't really acknowledge it as much, because it doesn't translate into specific conversations of work challenges and so we don't really get into that. Especially my mom just would never, she says, she wouldn’t understand it, so we don't really talk about those things. (Interview, August 6, 2012).
This lack of knowledge for what to be proud about, or discomfort parents might have as their children continue to move up the social ladder, widens the gap that started with college. This is particularly evident as individuals delve deeper into their careers and adulthood, and solidify new elements of cultural capital through increased “exposure” to the “different world” in which they live. Where middle class participants continue to gain insight and advice from their parents and share examples of their work, the divide between upwardly mobile individuals and their parents widens. It becomes difficult for the parents to be involved in their lives in a specific way.

Sharing Work and Seeking Advice from Family Members across Class

Just as middle class participants spoke with their parents about which college to attend, or in the case of Katie, planned her entire college search trip, career advice was consistently sought as well. Ashley, who is currently a social worker whose mother and father are both doctors, describes talking with her mother all the time: “I talk to her a lot about my work. She's a strong, resource and advisor for me and always has been” (interview, August 1, 2012). This is in contrast with the upwardly mobile participants, who seldom view their parents as a source for specific advice or direction since the work they do is outside of their parents’ experience. As Dave indicates in the quote which ends the previous section, he desires the pride his parents express in a general way to translate into more “specific conversations of work challenges.” This section explores the tendency to, and experience of, sharing aspects of their work life for both middle class and upwardly mobile individuals. Evidence across interviews suggests a continuation of the parental role during the college process in which middle class parents became an
asset, provided strategic advice and resources that are necessary for success. In contrast, mobile individuals mention receiving general support and advice when expressing concern about their work and resistance when attempting to share knowledge or writing. As with the college search process, the supports provided by parents in the middle class were often across multiple realms, and included particular content knowledge, targeted advice, and financial support.

Lacey McMillen, a teacher and writer from a middle class background, describes her mother as a close confidant. She offers an important example of the insight and support she receives from her mother during what was a particularly uncertain time in her career. She started in a Ph.D. program and expressed concern about the potential lifestyle it entailed, having spoken with a professor in her undergraduate institution who had to commute back and forth between cities since she and her academic husband could not find work in the same city. That really stuck with her, so she “talked to [her] mom about it” unsure what she was interested in and the kind of career that would be best for her” since “she always talk[s] to [her] mom during the process of making decisions” (interview, October 8, 2012). With the help of her mother, she weighed all her options and decided to quit the doctoral program in which she was enrolled. Back to the drawing board, her mother offered her a resource that significantly changed how she viewed herself and her career. Her mother had recently completed a psychological/career counseling session to determine her own placement and career. Her mother had found it helpful, and, since Lacey really did not know where to apply or what her next job might
be, her mother offered to pay for the $400 session to help Lacey make sense of the next step in her career path. She described the session:

I found this to be a really valuable process, and it’s the kind of thing that just…it takes a long time, it’s very in-depth, and you had to have people who were close to you, like, write things about you, and then you go, and it’s two days, it’s sort of a commitment. You also take some different tests, personality-type tests, and then compare your answers to the people in different fields who say they’re happy. It, sort of, gives you some thoughts about what might be a good fit for you. So she set it up for me to do that, she gave it to me, and it helped to shift what I was thinking about—not just what do I think is needed but what am I actually good at. I do want a job that helps me do something that feels meaningful, but that can’t be the only criteria. It also needs to be something that uses my gifts. Those two days that I spent with that woman stuck with me since. (Interview, October 10, 2012).

This experience provided for Lacey by her mother has had a lasting effect as she still considers the insight gained through the experience as it applies to her work and life today. For Lacey, her mother played a central role in finding her career path and continues to be a central source of insight and advice whenever Lacey needs it.

Other middle class participants mentioned talking with their family members before making a decision about graduate school (Ari, interview, October 15, 2012), or taking a particular job (Doug, interview, August 17, 2012). This advice is also offered even when not specifically requested, as in the case of Talia, whose father consistently attempts to dissuade her from her chosen career path in the arts. Her mother, though “unconditionally proud” as Talia says, “has high anxiety about the career path I’ve chosen” (Talia, interview, October 15, 2012). In Talia’s case, they want her to pursue a “more stable” career path, such as medicine, rather than the arts where she currently works. Heidi also mentions her mother’s constant concern that “she works too much” (interview, August 9, 2012) and needs to slow down. Even when not actively requested
or desired, this advice or perspective is consistently offered. This may be attributed to the involvement of their parents throughout major decisions in their life, including college, in which adulthood and career is just another phase. The implications for connection are evident as well, as involvement with particular decisions or concern associated with work leads to follow-up consideration and investment in the outcome. This is difficult to maintain or model if, as in the case with mobile individuals, the knowledge and realm of decision is outside of their “scope” or experience. Offering insight or even staying invested can be more difficult.

This insight and advice does look different among most mobile individuals and their parents in the study. While the intent to support and encourage is present, like with college support and pride, the specific engagement or investment can sometimes be lacking. This is particularly true when mobile participants need encouragement or support because they feel unsure of their ability to complete tasks associated with work. Jacqueline, now an educational administrator with an Ed.D. from an Ivy League institution, describes a conversation with her mother during which her mother offered vague support, but did not seem very interested:

I’m having a really hard time with this and I would express some stress I’m having with my doctoral work and she just says “It will be fine - you’re smart, you’ll be fine. Just go ahead and do it” and then we talk about something about the family or something else that is on her mind. (Interview, March 22, 2012).

She offers an example during the final semester when she was completing her dissertation and she was trying to gain some support and encouragement to get her through the writing process since she was still a bit nervous she would not graduate. Her mom interrupted her, asking: “Do you think I should wear blue to your graduation?”
Jacqueline responds with an eye roll, retelling the story: “I said, ‘sure mom, you look great in blue’….Meanwhile I’m worried about graduating or not” (interview, March 22, 2012). In the eyes of her mother, Jacqueline will be fine, she has always been so successful and certainly this experience is no different. For Jacqueline, however, she would prefer to express to her mom how she is feeling. Since her mother has no experience with what she is going through, empathy in this context is difficult to accomplish.

In addition to advice, sometimes participants just wish their families could know and understand what they do all day. Kathy – a professor at an Ivy League institution – mentions how painful it is that her parents have no idea what she is doing. She does not even know where to begin to try and explain to them the projects she is working on and content she is teaching:

They don’t know what I am doing. Like they don’t know what I’m doing in my research. They don’t know what I’m teaching. They don’t know if I’m having success with it or not, and they’ll be like ‘how’s it going.’ I’m like ‘it’s going; I’m getting stuff done.’ Like that’s the most we ever talk about. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Her parents will sometimes press her to share more about her work, in Kathy’s eyes demonstrating their care and interest, but the specific conversation leads to misunderstanding and makes clear how difficult it would be to explain the work she does:

My parents are like, ‘are you teaching right now?’ I’ll be like ‘no, I’m done and I don’t teach again until the fall.’ ‘Oh, so you’re off,’ and I’m like ‘no, I’m really working hard with all the papers and stuff, I’m under a lot of pressure.’ They’re like ‘but I don’t get it, like, what are you doing?’ (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Her parents do express interest, but to explain the particulars of her work, “to construct the entire world” (Hana, interview, March 31, 2012) can be too much and Kathy herself
chooses to keep the conversation non-specific and changes the subject. Greg Ainsworth, an administrator, described a similar experience when his father just “couldn’t quite get” the concept of his dissertation and research. Even when participants have attempted to bridge the knowledge gap, misunderstanding and confusion can still be the outcome.

Kathy’s parents, in response to her vague description of the work she is doing, offer broad praise as they did when she was young. She uses the concept of tenure, which she is about to go up for, as an example:

We haven’t talked about it in like six years but, you know, they were like ‘if anybody can do it, you can do it.’ Like, that was helpful when I was going to soccer tryouts in seventh grade, you know, but like this is different. Do you know the people who they’ve turned down, like you’ve gotta be kidding me. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

Kathy can leave these conversations feeling exasperated since their lack of knowledge in some ways devalues both the failure and achievement associated with her work. When she is not teaching, they see her as having the summer “off” and “not working that hard.” Further, they equate getting tenure with the same level of encouragement, in Kathy’s eyes, as when she made the soccer team. The intention on each end, however, is clearly one of longing for closeness and desire to encourage and support. Kathy deeply wishes her parents could offer encouragement that actually reached her and her parents clearly want to know more about what she does, but the gap of experience and knowledge seems too wide for authentic understanding or connection to emerge – at least in the realm of work.

In contrast to the general support Kathy receives from her family, she witnesses other colleagues who have more knowledgeable support from their parents, both in terms
of content, and in negotiating the structure and bureaucracy of academia, including tenure. It makes her angry and seems unfair:

I have a colleague who’s in anthro here who’s a cultural anthropologist. Both of her parents are famous cultural anthropologists at [an Ivy League Institution] and it's like you can’t tell me, right, that like her dad doesn’t read her papers and like - fuck you, you know? I have another friend who just got tenure like three weeks ago and whose father is the chair of his department at a different university who was, you know, instructing her on all the finer points of like if they deny you and it’s on these grounds, you know, you have a case to make if you want to sue. I’m like my parents would be like [pause] they just, you know, there’s nothing. (Interview, May 3, 2012).

In contrast with the detailed support some colleagues receive on their work, Kathy frames her parents as offering “nothing” in that situation and the distance between the work she does and the life of her parents seems and feels wider. Her need for them to know, in some way, the work she does feels particularly salient now as Kathy describes feeling “really out of her element” which she describes as “stressful and burn[ing] cognitive resources” (interview, May 3, 2012). The pressure of feeling out of her element while also needing to “be brilliant in the doctoral seminar” she is teaching is hard, particularly when no one she is related to knows what she is doing. She clarifies, considering her middle class husband: “My husband knows, but he only knows through what I tell him, like nobody knows what I’m doing” (interview, May 3, 2012). Kathy feels she would benefit if her family, which she loves and longs to be closer to, would understand at least in some small way, the work she does and the pressure she is under.

The benefits experienced by the middle class participants are evident throughout this section, as specific knowledge and advice for career advancement are offered. Considering the important role of parental involvement even into adulthood sheds light
on this additional area of inequality that those who achieve upward mobility must negotiate. This lack of understanding is also another cause for the distance that develops between family members and mobile individuals as failed attempts to share specifics about work cause pain and frustration. Moving beyond parents’ lack of understanding or knowledge, this distance is heightened when the expertise and writing produced by upwardly mobile individuals is actively ignored or rejected by family members, which represents the content explored in the following section.

**Sharing Knowledge and Writing from Work**

In addition to seeking advice and talking about work concerns with parents, middle class participants mentioned sharing knowledge gained or work produced as well. In some cases, particularly when the work they did corresponded in some way with the work of their parents, they would actively request information or knowledge their child could help with. This was the case for Katie, who mentioned her mother’s interest in her work, to the point of asking for advice:

> I think my mom is very interested. She's a doctor, and she works in admissions for the medical school that she works at, so I think, especially when I was working in higher education, there were a lot of similarities and obviously, you know, we have an admissions process, and she's not really involved in fundraising but she's sort of interested in it because she's very interested in getting scholarships for her students so she has to work with the development people there. So, we actually talk about it a lot and she does some volunteer things where, um, she's supposed to help raise money and different things with like boards and so she'll, you know, ask my advice on things. (Interview, July 27, 2012).

Katie consistently talks with her mother about her work, to the point that she is able to share knowledge when it pertains to the work her mother does in a different sector.

Similarly, Heidi Conner mentions sharing her expertise with a younger family member,
her nephew, since he was doing a project on content related to the work Heidi does as a consultant.

My nephew had to do, uh, a senior project on a not-for-profit organization and from kind of a financial accounting standpoint, so, like he interviewed me for that. So, I mean, we talk about it, and I think they, I think they get it, I think they know what I'm doing and, um, my sister who's a teacher, it's interesting cause I, I hear about her experience and she learns from me about some of the policy things I'm working on (Interview, August 9, 2012).

Like Katie, Heidi is also in the position to provide helpful information to her family based on the work she does. In some cases, then, the work or knowledge one produces has direct implications on the work and life of one’s family members and they have the opportunity to share relevant information with their family. This is not necessarily the case, however, for upwardly mobile individuals.

Given the acquisition of cultural capital and exposure to knowledge that many mobile individuals experience, the desire to share information with siblings also became as aspect of their relationship. This sometimes caused tension or distance, however. Amy Ramirez works at an Ivy League institution in support services for students, has her master’s degree and is currently working toward her doctoral degree. Though she described her undergraduate experience at a state school as “somewhat underwhelming,” stating “I didn't engage with the university,” she is enthusiastic about the work she does now in higher education and admissions. She expressed trying to share the information she has gained with one of her three younger sisters as she has a few children for whom insider admissions information might be really useful. Those conversations do not go over well, however, and she describes her relationship with that sister as “tricky”: “I think with family sometimes, even though I do what I do, I think she felt more like I was trying
to be manipulative or controlling or something and she really, like...“nope, she has a high school counselor.” (Interview, May 18, 2012). Despite the insight Amy might offer, her sister resists this potential support, seeming to view the advice as “manipulative” or “controlling.”

Amy has still tried to get her nieces and nephews into better schools with more supportive resources, particularly since she and her sisters were not given much help negotiating the college search process when they were young. She sees this lack of support reproduced in her sister’s child rearing strategies:

She doesn't have the experience of, like, knowing a lot of people that went to college and hanging around them and everything. She's pretty satisfied in retail, you know, so I think that translates into, as long as her kids finish high school and get some kind of a trade she's fine with that. So, it's just tricky territory, I don't know how else to say that without seeming too domineering because I'm so passionate about it. (Interview, May 18, 2012).

Amy mentioned trying to talk directly to her nieces and nephews – even the following Monday she was planning to see her nephew play in a baseball game and afterward bring up school, and “just kind of put it out there and offer it” (interview, May 18, 2012).

Amy is closest with her youngest sister who lives further away in the Midwest. When asked why they were the closest, she described how she and her husband had lived “all over” and she “sees broader” and was “exposed to a lot of people” whereas her other sister with whom the relationship is tricky, “has stayed in this area most of the time and she has a small circle of friends, she doesn't really, really see.” When Amy tries to offer advice in finding educational opportunities for her kids or preparing them for the college search, she does not really listen. The youngest sister, though, listens to Amy and lets her “tell her stuff” as Amy mentioned. In this situation, Amy desires to share information that
she has gained through her own educational trajectory and the work she does now that would be helpful for her nieces and nephews. This offer for knowledge and input, however, is met differently by each sister and influences the closeness she feels with her sisters as well.

In addition to talking with parents about specific work projects or major decisions, many middle class participants also described talking with and learning from their siblings. Ari, an architect, mentions his younger sister, who is now a city planner, who “always tells me what new restaurants are coming to [her town], cause she gets them through her office.” He describes further that they “talk about a lot of stuff, and send articles back and forth” (interview, October 15, 2012). Doug, an educational administrator, smiled when considering the conversations he has with his sister. He describes them as “close.” They “talk about her job and [his] exploits, in terms of academics” and goes on to share that she “proofread [his] dissertation” (interview, August 17, 2012). This is in addition to the common conversations he and his father have about being an administrator, since this a job they share. Through “sending articles back and forth” and “proofreading dissertations” it is clear that family members are actively involved in the work life of the participants interviewed. This was also demonstrated by the sharing of books and publications.

Alex, a professor, also speaks with his parents about his work, “just, you know, through conversation….they’re really interested” (interview, August 7, 2012). He describes the enthusiasm his mother expresses about his writing and her desire to share it with the “women at the beauty shop:
My mom famously complains that nothing that I ever do is on Amazon.com, ‘cause like, the books I’m published in are like $150 dollars for, like, a small little soft back, so—she’s mad about that. She always says, ‘when are you gonna publish something that I can buy so I can show the other women at the beauty shop the book my son wrote.’ I’m working on a paperback with a publisher right now, primarily for her. (Interview, August 7, 2012).

Her commitment to showing off her son’s publications is contrasted with the experience of upwardly mobile individuals whose attempts to share their work with their family members is ignored, rejected or misunderstood.

For example, doctors mention struggling to express the dynamic and difficult pressures offered in just one day in the emergency room, or lawyers share that most of the cases are boring with too much minutiae to make them remotely interesting. Some do mention, as Kathy does, both the difficulty they find in being close to their families since they cannot talk about work, and the benefit others must have who do have the support and knowledge of their family members.

Karen Green, a scientist with a Ph.D., laughed when asked if she talks with her family about her work. She clarifies:

I don't talk about my work that much because it's so specialized, people aren't gonna, like...you know, I clone things, and they think, like, I make mutant sheep or something. And it like, turns into this whole long explanation and sometimes it's just not worth it. So I try to keep it very vague and keep like a general description of what I do. (Interview, March 4, 2012).

Many participants mention their family members drawing on popular culture references that are tangentially related to their work: watching the TV Show, *ER* (Brady, interview, April 12, 2012), “A person [mom] saw on TV that was talking about trees” (Victor,

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55 While the potential for a parent to not understand, or to find boring, the work their child does is possible across social class backgrounds, the education of one’s parents does influence the likelihood of bridging this gap in understanding or knowledge.
interview, March 14, 2012), asking for unrelated law advice in a different state (Ronnie, interview, March 1, 2012) or, as Karen describes, “cloning mutant sheep” (interview, March 4, 2012). In each example mentioned, participants laughed or smiled at their parents’ seemingly ill-informed references to their work and seemed grateful for the engagement, however silly or unrealistic.

In some cases, understanding that mobile individuals are even working is a challenge for parents. This is true for Kathy and Larry – both upwardly mobile professors – whose parents learn about their academic work schedule and are left confused. Larry’s mom responds: “you sure don't work very much” (Larry, interview, April 13, 2012) and Kathy’s parents hear she is not teaching and assume: “so, you’re off… I don’t get it, what are you doing?” (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012). Due to the academic schedule and the difficulty in explaining the significance of publishing and research, parents struggle to understand the work their children do. This is explained by both Larry and Kathy, pointing to the fact that their parents lack the context to understand the work associated with academia. If someone “worked in a kitchen for all of her life” (Larry, interview, April 13, 2012) or “worked at a job where you are literally punching a clock” (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012), the concept of conducting research or writing articles becomes difficult to understand.

In order to bridge this understanding gap, or share with their parents what they have been working on, individuals who write or publish as an aspect of their work actively try to share their writing with their parents. Parents receive these efforts quite differently. Some family members laugh and respond with lack of understanding while
others ignore the attempt. In some cases, family members actively reject this offer in sharing their work. Each response yields different reactions for mobile individuals, and certainly has implications for their sense of closeness and support as well as curtailing future attempts at sharing their work with their family.

Karen, whose parents think she clones mutant sheep, responds to their more specific questions about how work is going by sharing her most recent paper: “I'll give them a paper or something I wrote, and they say, ‘We don't understand the first sentence,’ and that's that. So that's fine. I think that's just because my career path is so specialized.” When asked if her husband knew more about what she does, she again laughed, implying that he has to since “he gets to hear my presentations, like when I practice them, so, he knows more than most people. (Interview, March 4, 2012). For Karen, her husband, who is also upwardly mobile, is an important person with whom she can share the details of her work life. She describes that without him, intersecting her background and family in the Midwest with her work and social life on the East Coast would be much harder than it is.

Earlier in this chapter, Jacqueline, an administrator on the East Coast, was interrupted by her mother while she was expressing fear that she may not finish her dissertation. It seems that keeping in touch is also a significant concern of her mother’s as she often calls Jacqueline to complain that she has not heard from her and to “find out if she is mad.” At one point, her mother calls her and leaves a message, saying:

‘Your father is mad at you for this and this.’ So - then I emailed my father and sent him a few chapters of my dissertation with a message saying, you know, this is why I’ve been busy, here’s what I’ve been working on. Nothing. Then the next day I get a text message from my dad asking for [my daughter’s] size since they
were at the store, but no mention of my email and what I’d sent him. (Interview, March 22, 2012).

Jacqueline is reaching out, trying to share a bit of the reason why she has been so busy, yet is not met with interest or willingness to engage. When asked if this was difficult, Jacqueline responds that it once was, but that she has gotten better at just “letting my parents be who they are.” Acceptance of parents, and the times in which they do not express interest when content from or concerns about work are shared with them is a strategy employed by Larry as well.

Returning home for Larry was a consistent occurrence that was filled with nostalgia and contentment at spending time with his mother. To have this relationship, however, Larry shares that there are certain parts of his work life that just “don’t make sense to share.” He learns this early on when he attempts, like Karen and Jacqueline, to share examples of his work with his mother. He describes the story:

My first book came out in 1984 and I think I signed a copy of it for my mom, right. My second book came out a few years later…. And my wife, one time, she said, we were there, probably mom was out of the house or something. She said, you know, ‘none of your books are around here.’ And I went, ‘yeah.’ So we started looking. We started looking all the places where they should be, like, a few small bookshelves. My mom didn't have a lot of books, right, we looked every place where they could be. Her bed stand, you know, we didn’t find them. At that time, we didn’t look in the attic, but some time later, that's where we found them. And everything that I ever sent, um, sometimes an article that I'd written that I thought, you know, she might find interesting, she saved them all, and they were all in the attic. So I asked one of my cousins, one time, who lived nearby, who was in and out of the house all the time, and I said to him, you know, I reminded her that, you know, I'd written some books and, and I said, ‘Did Mom ever show you any of those?’ And she said, ‘no.’ And she didn't even know, well I said, ‘you know I've written these books,’ well, ‘yeah, I've heard something about that, knew something about that. But no, your mom, never…’ (Interview, April 13, 2012).
Then Larry stops the story to ask me, “Isn't that interesting?” In his own analysis, he considers: “A kind of, I don't know, maybe even embarrassment, about it. Kind of embarrassed that this guy went away and never came back” (interview, April 13, 2102). Contrasted with Alex’s mother who is mad at him for not having published affordable books to share with the “ladies at the beauty shop,” the difference is stark. Not only is Larry’s mother not interested in purchasing Larry’s books or showing them off to her friends, or his cousin in this case, she expresses signs that she is embarrassed of Larry’s publications, of the work that he has done.

This distinction between Alex and Larry speaks to a clear distance in cultural practices, and the conflict that emerges as Larry cannot possibly be both an academic and never “leave.” In his attempt to share his work with his mother, the tension between their differences in *habitus* and cultural knowledge prevent her from active involvement. The implications of this dynamic are painful, bringing Larry to tears during the interview. This is in part because, as is the case for Kathy and Greg in the previous chapter, they understand that they have made these changes in habitus that create the distance between themselves and family members. Though it is the parent who is rejecting one’s work or shared knowledge, it is their doing – their mobility – that has created the distance in the first place. It is not then surprising that family members cannot understand or appreciate the new knowledge mobility individuals have acquired, or the work they produce. It is still, however, described as difficult and painful.
Implications of Support and Distinctions across Parents

Support looks different within and across both groups interviewed and a consideration of the vast differences in supports offered to some upwardly mobile individuals, and the implications that has on their relationship with their family members, is compelling. While some individuals experience distance or even loss of consistent contact with family due to their lack of support, others have actively worked to remain close because of the support they received from their parents.

Sequoia King, an upwardly mobile African American woman, has been able to remain close to her family, drawing on the support she has always had from them as she continues in her career. She expressed the pride her parents have for her as central to her own success and as deeply important to her. Her parents made sacrifices to ensure their children received an education – working hard to send her to a Christian school for elementary school until they could no longer afford it. Sequoia mentions how proud of her they are, and the example she has set for her mother as she pursues her degree now:

It’s a beautiful thing when your mother wants to be like you. You know what I mean? It’s…um…I think it says a lot. And she was, she’s very proud of me and my sister, and she just felt like, “Okay, well now it’s my turn. I got my children through [college], and now it’s my turn.” (Interview, May 23, 2012).

Her father was also extremely proud: “For days after the defense, my father was answering the phone, ‘This is the father of Dr. King!’” (interview, May 23, 2012).

Sequoia’s mother and father view themselves as “having gotten her through” and have stayed engaged throughout her education. Sequoia also mentions how her mother “who used to be quite conservative…. has become more moderate over the years through my own sort of dialogue about political things and issues” (interview, May 23, 2012). Her
mother is willing, then, to learn from Sequoia and feels comfortable to express concern when she needs to, as in the case in her opportunity to travel to China that caused concern for her mother. Though conflicts still arise, Sequoia describes her ability to “come back home” as the most important and enjoyable aspect of her education:

The best thing has been coming back in multiple ways, so like physically, spiritually, and intellectually, being able to come back home, being close enough to my parents so that when I go walking in the morning, I walk by their house. There’s all these ways that I’ve just come back to myself, and so that has been the best. (Interview, May 23, 2012).

For Sequoia, coming back to herself involves coming “home” to her faith, and to her parents and the place she grew up. This closeness is difficult to achieve when individuals travel so far – both geographically and culturally – as indicated by many of the experiences shared.

The experience offered by Sequoia is contrasted with the experience of two men in the study, Brady and Anthony, who reject the moments during which their parents, for Brady his mother and Anthony his father, attempt to express pride in their accomplishments. When asked to describe his background, Brady starts with one word: “lonely.” He explains why:

I am an only child. For reasons I don’t think anybody understands, including my parents, both my mother and stepfather worked second shifts in the factory, so they worked from 3pm until midnight. I went to school from 8am to 3pm and went to bed before midnight, obviously. So pretty much my entire childhood I didn’t really spend much time with my mother or my father. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

Brady, who begins this chapter with his mother’s emphatic declarations that he would go to college, mentions how little he feels she actually enabled that to happen due to how little she was involved during his childhood. This has implications for how much he
shares with his mother, and how seldom he requests advice. This also means that he feels frustrated at moments when she does express pride at what he has accomplished, as he does not feel she “has the right to.” He describes a moment he remembers “very clearly” when this was the case.

When I was graduating from high school, my parents really hadn’t come to much, my mother came to graduation, but I remember one of my teachers coming up to my mom and being like, “Oh, you did such a great job. You raised your son, he’s going to college,” all this great stuff. I remember being so angry, because I was like “She didn’t do anything.” She gave me some books, but, other than that, she never did anything. I remember being very angry about it, at that time. It has always been one of those things, where there is a part of me that feels a little bit weird when I feel like they take credit for something that they didn’t, necessarily, have a whole lot to do with. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

For Brady, there is a clear correlation between the attention and time he received growing up and the extent to which he desires to share his life and accomplishments with his family. Feeling that they did not take much interest in his schooling while he was young, and did not support his desire to get to and graduate from college, he actively resists any expressions of pride or interest they now express. This continues even now as an adult:

I guess I never have really included my parents into the decisions that I make. I don’t ask them for advice, and if they give me advice, I generally don’t follow it. More so because I think we have very different lives, essentially. I am not really sure. I don’t really tell them a lot about the things I do. I don’t necessarily share with them a lot of stuff because, partly, I feel like I don’t owe it to them, partly they don’t really understand my life or what I do. (Interview, April 12, 2012).

In this reflection, the two reasons Brady offers for the distance with his mother each represent a focus of this chapter where conflicting knowledge and vague or unfelt parental involvement have created barriers. For Brady and his mother, these might be difficult to surmount.
Similar to Sequoia and in contrast to Brady, Anthony Vaughn describes with conviction the important role his mother has played in his success in school and beyond. She kept him out of trouble and knows that for her, the day he graduated from his Ivy League institution was “the best day of her life.” He enthusiastically accepts how proud she was and continues to be of him. This is not the case for his father; however, as he describes the pain he has encountered waiting for his father to be a more consistent presence in his life. He describes being told by his father that he would make it to graduation, and, smiling, said,

Now, you know Bernice [his mother] was there. My father said he was coming. Now graduation is not something that you don’t know about. He said ‘I’ll be there,’ and, he didn’t make it. He said he was coming and that was when I understood the importance of managing my expectations because you avoid the disappointments. Now keep in mind that my mother’s always been there. My mother had to sacrifice and my mother struggled, you know. Like I told you, I was the valedictorian of my high school class, and when I went on to college, my father never sent me one cent, not one cent but he was very proud, you see. He would tell people, but it’s like no, no, no, that was Bernice, not you. (Interview, February 9, 2012).

In addition to learning to manage his expectations in relation to a father who was not a strong presence in his life, Anthony also asserts who, from his perspective, is able to take credit for his success: his mother. Like Brady, when his mother attempts to “tell people” about his academic success, Anthony resists his father’s attempt to take credit for his success, saying, “that was Bernice, not you.” In each case, the profound impact a person’s perspective on support can have on the potential communication and overall relationship they might have with their parents is evident.

While there are a variety of reasons why a parent might not “make the sacrifices” Sequoia describes her parents making, the significance of parental support of – and
involvement in – education seems to influence the relationship they have with their parents in a significant way and can help to mitigate the difficulties felt by Brady and Anthony, among others.

**Conclusion**

A significant aspect of the mobility experience involves engaging with a world that is outside of the world of which your parents are a part. Bridging this gap over time gets increasingly difficult, starting with college and moving to adulthood. The college search process outlined at the start of this chapter is arduous and involves many resources that low-income families simply do not have. While, across mobile participants, parents do not possess the necessary knowledge or the financial support, many still offered moral support and made sacrifices in order to ensure their children might receive a good education. The support offered, and pride felt upon achieving mobility is described, however, as “general” or lacking “specificity.” Even though the intent is to be supportive and for mobile individuals to be successful, parents do not possess the necessary knowledge and cultural capital to ground their support in more specific pride, advice or interest. Therefore, the cause for parents’ “general” pride or interest is due to a lack of cultural capital and knowledge associated with particular fields of study, processes and experiences in which their children now engage – but which are outside of their own knowledge base, and what is familiar or comfortable. This experience affects the relationships between mobile individuals and their family members, each of which seem to experience a loss in closeness that is not felt by middle class participants. For many in the study, this distance caused by the cultural aspects of class is quite painful.
The college admissions process is considered by some to be a classed practice for which one needs knowledge and cultural capital to successfully traverse. Implicit in the college search process is active parental involvement and knowledge. This is the case for the middle class participants who received knowledge-based and financial support for college, and continue to receive support and interest about the work they do as adults. The knowledge and awareness their parents possess is an important factor. Studies in access, then, might also be informed by investigating the experience of upward mobility. Through positioning the experience of mobile individuals who gain access as central, the difficulties that emerge through the process might be realized and addressed. Studies that argue for encouraging parental support and involving parents more directly in the college process might also inform concerns with distance and lack of belonging individuals report experiencing. This supports further consideration of how to alleviate the distance in relationships that sometimes occurs when mobility is experienced, which has yet to be explored.

The shifts in cultural capital discussed throughout each chapter have real implications for mobile individuals. The changes in lifestyle and knowledge gained lead to distance with family members; a kind of distance that is real and painful as individuals are not able to share aspects of their life with their family. While in other ways closeness might remain, awareness of this distance and its personal and professional implications is important to consider and should inform conceptions of cultural capital and the power associated with shifts in culture that are a necessary aspect of the mobile experience.
CHAPTER 8
“Reshaping” Upward Mobility: Implications for Research, Theory and Practice

Obviously, everyone grows and changes, but my core personality, my core belief structure; the core way I look at the world has been pretty solid throughout.

Alex Fisher, Middle Class, Ph.D.

I have a very fragmented identity and don’t really know who I am because, depending on the situation, for survival, I’ve had to, you know, like a chameleon would, use part of my identity, and constantly change.

Hana Lee, Upwardly Mobile, MBA

This study is concerned with the experience of upward mobility and the cultural aspects of social class domination. Questions about the persistence of upward mobility, discussions regarding for whom this experience exists and how it is achieved, and the fear that the American Dream is “withering” away are each prevalent in economic studies and popular media. These support the assertion that the American Dream needs to be “reshaped” in the minds of Americans (McClelland & Tobin, 2010). The data from this study suggest that a “reshaping” of our nation’s conception of upward mobility – which includes a consideration of the costs associated with mobility, the complexities of the experience, and the tendency to view the dominated class as “in need” of middle class culture – is necessary.

The promise of social mobility, and the assumption that everyone should strive to attain it, comes at a cost, as indicated by the narratives of the individuals in this study. Across data, mobile individuals describe internal conflict as they restrain, silence and cover up aspects of themselves. Many express disdain for and struggle internally with
some of the changes they have made and undergone. The costs are also relational, as individuals express difficulty in maintaining connection with their families of origin and therefore feel distance from their roots and what once made them who they are. The costs are complex, multifaceted and real.

This concluding chapter recommends three ways in which conceptions of the American Dream, or the experience of upward mobility, might be “reshaped” to encompass a more complex view of the experience as indicated across the data for this study. First, the significant role cultural capital acquisition plays in achieving upward mobility is considered. Change, on many levels, is central. Second, the internal conflict and pain associated with the experience is explored as another aspect that should inform its “reshaping.” Third, the distance and tension that emerge with families of origin are mentioned as a significant aspect of upward mobility that, while explored theoretically, is not known in popular conceptions. Implications of these recommendations for “reshaping” upward mobility for research and practice are considered.

First, implications for both “cultural mobility” researchers and “new paternalism” schools are offered, including the call to reorient the view of low-income or working class individuals as “lacking culture” or “in need” of the cultural capital of the middle class. A second section on implications for educators, policy makers and popular media follows. Finally, concluding thoughts, including ideas for future research, are offered.

“Reshaping” Conceptions of Upward Mobility: Necessary Changes

The picture painted of upward mobility through the lived experiences of participants in this study is more nuanced that the often-celebrated version in popular
media and culture. Change in culture is a central aspect of this experience as evidenced by the quote offered by Hana – an upwardly mobile Asian woman with an MBA – that begins this chapter. A key finding, then, includes the necessity to learn, embody and perform the cultural practices of the elite, as Bourdieu (1984) argues. This consistent finding is explored through the dimensions of the body, language and tastes. The process through which this occurs across data varies, however. Within the dimension of language, as discussed in Chapter Five, some individuals actively take on the practices of the elite in order to “appear smart,” while others develop the ability to code-switch, maintaining the communication practices of their childhood. Others, like Sequoia, actively resist these expectations in communication, though they experience difficulty because of their resistance. In addition, while some individuals take on these new practices without question and speak up in work contexts, learn to eat healthy food and drink more expensive beer, other participants have spent an entire career in a professional location where they have never felt like they belonged and where they feel silenced or forced to restrain their impulse to laugh or express anger (as discussed in Chapter Four). Each of these responses speaks to the shifts in habitus individuals experienced across a myriad of dimensions. Many of these practices are also difficult to unlearn, since, as discussed in Chapter Six, the cultural practices achieved are at times in opposition to the cultural milieu from which mobile individuals come. One cannot, for example, limit their “scope of horizon” once a broadening of perspective by exposure to college attendance or middle class peers has already occurred. Knowledge about health, food or political beliefs
becomes difficult to unlearn once it is gained through the lens of evidence-based research or best practices.

Data also speak to the lack of agency inherent in the changes individuals make. Though “choices” are evident at each stage (i.e., to go to college, which college to attend, where to live, the earning of graduate degrees, the practice of traveling, what to eat and drink), the pathway towards upward mobility – and the particular decisions associated with being successful – are largely mapped out for individuals based on the cultural arbitrary. Particular behaviors, practices and interests are applauded and hold more currency toward the eventual goal of mobility; therefore these are the choices individuals make. These “choices” often lead students away from home communities and practices and enforce cultural changes. This study argues that the dominant narrative should be “reshaped” to include these more difficult aspects associated with moving up the social ladder and altering one’s culture through the “choices” that are made in the process of change.

“Reshaping Conceptions” of Mobility: Internal Conflict

The myriad ways in which the dominant culture is learned and embodied by members of the dominated class is important, and sheds light on some of the difficulties associated with this experience, such as being silenced, restraining oneself or experiencing internal conflict due to the changes undergone that are less desirable, such as consumption practices or lacking perspective on what “real problems” are. Though participants describe ways in which they broaden their perspectives on the world through exposure to new people, places and knowledge as explored in Chapter Six, these changes
can also lead to discomfort with the person one has become and ambivalence or disdain for aspects of the life one leads. This tension with the mobile experience has been explored through autobiographical writing and memoir. The findings of this research, however, provide a more systematic framing for the internal costs associated with this experience.

In some cases, this internal conflict is felt because one cannot unlearn this newly acquired knowledge, or these shifts in tastes and disposition. Rather, it seems that losing or modifying some aspects of one’s habitus to incorporate the habitus of the dominant class is sometimes difficult and can lead to loss, as evident in the internal conflict associated with consumption practices and money (as described in Chapter Six). Defined by Baxter and Britton (2001) and Lehmann (2007) as “habitus dislocation” or by Bourdieu (1999) as a “cleft” or “fractured habitus,” the evidence of this experience in the lives of those interviewed for the study demonstrate pain and internal conflict. This loss is particularly true when the changes are within this dimension of taste, knowledge and beliefs, where the new habitus developed, learned or performed seems more difficult to “code-switch,” “unlearn” (Sequoia, interview, April 22, 2012) or “turn on and off” (Anthony, interview, February 8, 2012).

The internal conflict is also around issues of belonging, in which participants can be part of two very different worlds, yet do not necessarily feel comfortable in either. This was the focus of Limbo, in which journalist Alfred Lubrano (2004) considers the experience of mobile individuals whom he calls “straddlers.” He describes the ways in which they live in “limbo” culturally, straddling the worlds of their blue-collar families
and their white-collar worlds of education and work. He closes with the peaceful reconciliation that might come from “meld[ing] the two people we are” together (p. 227). Some in his study, however, indicate that they are always in limbo: “You can’t be the total person you are with family, and you don’t fit in among the brownnosers at work” (p. 196). This was true for some participants in this study as well, as they express consistently feeling like a “visitor.” Jon Salvador is a successful manager at a large corporation who owns a beautiful home overlooking a large body of water. He makes over $750,000 a year and yet still manages to call his mother “once or twice a week.” Despite these accomplishments, he describes his own experience in “limbo” with sadness:

> I do still feel a little transient, like I'm in limbo between worlds. I think one of the costs of that is feeling like I don't have a people. You know, I don't have a group, a tribe, that I call my own. And, I often feel like I'm going with my wife’s friends or I'm going to work to be with work friends, but I always feel like I'm visiting all of these different populations and that, if I focus on it, is sort of sad and disconcerting. (Jon, interview, July 13, 2012).

Drawing on the indices often used to measure success, Jon has accomplished them all. He has a beautiful wife, two children (a boy and a girl), and earns a large salary; enough to afford his home, any travel he would like to do, and give charitably to organizations across his city, which he does. However, the “American Dream” version of Jon’s life misses this important aspect of belonging to “a people” of having what he calls “a tribe.” Data from this study suggest that the conception of upward mobility should be “reshaped” to include the internal conflict caused by changing one’s habitus, and the pain associated from living in “limbo.”
“Reshaping” Conceptions of Mobility: Distance with Family

Each chapter represents a dimension in which the cultural capital of the dominant class was “performed,” embodied or taken on, including: within the body (Chapter Four), language and communication (Chapter Five) and shifts evident in taste, interest and knowledge through exposure to the “dominant class habitus” (Chapter Six). Data suggest that these shifts are necessary for success. The importance of these aspects of culture, which were changed or modified to incorporate the cultural capital of the dominant class, has implications on relationships with family members. These relationships can suffer or become more distant as an aspect of the cultural capital mobile individuals have taken on and embody in order to be successful, as was explored in Chapter Seven on parental involvement and the cultural capital of parents.

For example, where mobile individuals once spoke in ways that made sense to their parents, cared to discuss the goings on of their neighbors or accomplished work during the day that made sense to their families – they now use vocabulary their family does not understand, have traveled to places their family members cannot point to on a map and work in a realm that their parents know little about. Additionally, parents who are used to clocking in and out at their jobs or being paid by the hour cannot understand the concept of knowledge creation or the writing and reading of books as “work.” As was stated by one participant, the construction of an “entire world” must sometimes happen for connection to be maintained (Hana). For many individuals in the study, that connection has not been maintained. For others, the commitment to maintaining connection takes a tremendous amount of work. While varied, the outcome of these
conflicts in culture, in many cases, leaves participants more distant from their families of origin.

The work of Sennett and Cobb (1972) is useful to frame the potential conflict that emerges between parents and their mobile children through drawing on class-based tension found in their seminal text, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. They draw on class anger and indignity to explain this conflict, viewing the perspective from an upwardly mobile son:

That image of transformation across the generations gives a clue to a hidden class anger implicit in this personal resolve...what this transformation invites the child to do is to desert his past, to leave it and the parents who have sacrificed for him all behind. And if he does that, if he becomes a man of a rank where he can command the respect of anyone, isn’t he in a way betraying them, by having risen above them? Isn’t betrayal the inevitable result when you try to endow your life with a moral purpose greater than your own survival?” (pp. 130-131).

The paradox is defined by Sennett and Cobb, in which parents on a low rung of the economic ladder work hard to ensure their children do better than they did, yet find their children “unrecognizable to them” (Kathy, interview, May 3, 2012) once mobility has been achieved. This creates pain, loss and guilt and represents a significant cost to mobility not yet theoretically developed or popularly understood, yet evident through the lived experiences of many of the participants in this study.

Bourdieu (1999) also considers the potential costs associated with upward mobility in his chapter “Contradiction with Inheritance” in *Weight of the World*. He describes the shame and guilt associated with class dominance, yet considers the experience through the perspective of the father, whose son has experienced mobility. He describes the father, who:
Occupy a dominated position, whether economically, socially (such as a manual laborer or lower-level employee), or symbolically (as a member of a stigmatized group), and is therefore inclined to be ambivalent about his son’s success as well as about himself (divided as he is between pride in his son and the shame in himself that is implied by the internalization of other people’s views of him.) At one and the same time he says: be like me, act like me, but be different, go away. His entire existence is carried in a dual injunction: succeed, change, and move into the middle class; and stay simple, don’t be proud, stick close to the little guys (to me). He cannot want his son to identify with his own position and its dispositions, and yet all his behavior works continuously to produce that identification, in particular the body language that contributes so powerfully to fashioning the whole manner of being, that is, the habitus (p. 510).

The pain experienced for both mobile individuals and their parents as classed beings in a larger structural system that dominates them is evident. That this occurs through culture implies further distance – as the father desires the son to be like him, to “stick close” to him, yet knows to wish something “better” for his child. He is, at once, dominated by both the social class structure that deems him invaluable and by his son, now a member of that structure. As evident across data for this study, this practice played out in profound ways as mobile individuals held their parents to “middle class expectations,” longing for more for them. The symbolic violence enacted on individuals through this experience is evident. These aspects of the experience of mobility are seldom considered in research and unknown in dominant discourse about upward mobility or the American Dream. The lived experiences of these individuals, framed as they are by Sennett and Cobb and Bourdieu, should inform the popular notions of how mobility is framed and understood.
Implications for Research in “Cultural Mobility” and Reform Efforts Targeting “Character Education”

The stories told and analyzed across these chapters provide tangible examples for the significant role that culture plays in both defining and moving across social class location. Evidence for the reproduction of class as culture (Bourdieu, 1984) and the taking on of culture through “cultural mobility” (Dimaggio, 1982) are each substantiated across the diverse experiences explored through this data. The study argues, however, that a more nuanced view of the taking on of cultural capital must be considered in order to enable a more complete view of this experience. Important to this more nuanced view is a disruption of the deficit orientations that research agendas and reform efforts focusing on middle class culture acquisition hold toward low-income or working class students and their families.

The unquestioned and ubiquitous assumption that low-income individuals need to change who they are is emblematic of a larger societal framework wherein those in power dictate what is considered normal or desirable through the cultural arbitrary (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This is evident in a variety of contexts, in the nation’s policies, the missions of schools, the pedagogy of teachers, research on urban education and education reform efforts. The message is clear: something is wrong with “them” and “we” need to come in and give them the skills, tools, behaviors or capital for advancement that they do not have on their own. The data imply that while the message “works” for some, as it did for many in this study, it is damaging.

Freire (1970; 1998) offers an important critique to the consistent framing of the teacher as the “knower” and the student as the “learner.” Critiquing this “banking
method” of education, Freire discounts the notion that students are empty vessels who are simply filled with information from their teachers. Rather, he argues for a reciprocal relationship between student and teacher, and deep consideration of what students bring with them to the classroom, to their teachers and to the world. Similarly, in the preface to *Learning to Labor* by Paul Willis (1977), Stanley Aronowitz (1981) writes: “people cannot be filled with ideology as a container is filled with water” (p. xiii). Willis (and others) offers a much more complex understanding of what is entailed when classed (or raced or gendered) individuals interact with a reproducing structure. This nation’s persistent focus on social mobility, on improved economic outcomes and on the American Dream implies a similar construct, and so calls for a similar critique.

The upwardly mobile individuals in this study did not come to college as empty “cultural” vessels in need of the cultural capital of the dominant class. They had ways of speaking and expressing their emotions; they had tastes and interests defined by the habitus with which they were raised. Because of the dominance of the cultural arbitrary, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) describe, individuals who do not come from a middle or upper class background need to change many of these cultural practices with which they were raised in order to fit in, move up, and be successful.

Due to the persistent call for improvement and the overwhelming need to move up the social ladder as is dictated by the dominant narrative of the American Dream, this tendency is widely accepted and prevalent in every area of society. This is evident in “cultural mobility” research which positions cultural capital as a set of skills or interests which might be explicitly taught to students who lack them (DiMaggio, 1981; DiMaggio
& Mohr, 1985; Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan & Shaun, 1990; Mohr & DiMaggio, 1995; Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1996; De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000). This tendency is also evident in recent studies that position habitus as an aspect of individual’s character which might be modified (Horvat & Davis, 2011).

Schools have also taken up this strategy. For example, “new paternalism” schools (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013) explicitly teach “middle class” behaviors, coded in “character strengths,” which are actively and systematically taught and assessed. David Levin, co-founder of KIPP, resists the notion that KIPP’s character-strength approach is an attempt to “instill middle class values,” rather believes the approach is “fundamentally devoid of value judgment” (Tough, 2012, p. 60) unlike approaches which focus explicitly on “values-ethics.” While the intention may not be, as Levin argues, to teach middle class values, many of the “character” traits that the model focuses on support the assertion by Whitman (2008) that middle class ways of behaving and thinking were explicitly being taught.

This explicit teaching of cultural capital or “character traits” by these “new paternalism” schools is celebrated as a well-funded reform strategy in educational policy. McDermott and Nygreen (2013) argue, however, that little is known about the experience of this kind of pedagogy or the long-term results of these approaches since the only research conducted has been by journalists (Matthews, 2009; Tough, 2006, 2008, 2012; Whitman, 2008). Focused on “character education” through the teaching of traits such as “self-control, patience, adaptability, and openness” (Tough, 2006, p. 69), this brand of schools has gained popularity among education reformers and parents, many which have
long waiting lists. Implicit in their approach, however, is the additive conception of culture, in which disadvantaged students “need” the cultural capital of the elite not just to be successful in school, but as “a reliable path to a good life” (Tough, 2012). They ignore the rich lives, experiences and complex “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) students bring with them to any schooling context.

While this study cannot speak directly to the practices of this brand of school given its goals and research design, there are implications for the approach these schools (and others) take and their foundational assumption that cultural capital might just be added or deposited into a student. Paul Tough (2012) unpacks the “hidden power of character” and argues for a “better way” to support students through “interventions [that] will help children develop those strengths and skills.” This is the very strategy, Tough explains, through which KIPP has been so successful. Tough describes that as he “spends time with young people growing up in adversity” he both “feels a sense of anger for what they’ve already missed” and “admiration and hope” as he watches “young people making the difficult and often painful choice to follow a better path, to turn away from what might have seemed like their destiny” (p. 197). The assumptions inherent in this description are related to those outlined, in which students without the dominant culture are viewed as “in need” of the right “character” to support their “choice to follow a better path” – i.e., to begin on their upwardly mobile trajectories. The approach of the “new paternalism” schools, building indirectly on research in cultural mobility, offer an overt example of what Bourdieu framed as a way in which the school system, through institutionalized cultural capital, legitimizes the cultural arbitrary (the culture of the
dominant class). In fact, this framing of success is consistent across educational institutions in a variety of contexts. Missing from this positive conception of mobility is the “reshaped” or more nuanced view of this complicated experience as has been explored throughout each section of this chapter. The costs of mobility, implicated by the findings in this study, might inform the attempts made across a variety of disciplines to “raise students out of poverty.”

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

When much is done to provide college access to “disadvantaged” students and “diversify” college campuses and private schools, better information regarding what it means for individuals from a non-traditional background to enter these upper class spaces would be beneficial. The findings of this study are worth consideration at a broader level, and, in addition to the implications for the “new paternalism” schools just outlined, have significant practical implications at the classroom level across schooling contexts, in higher education policies and support services, in educational policy and professional development for teachers, school and guidance counselors, and in media accounts of what “works” in urban education. At each level, reconsidering the consistent framing of low-income or working class students as “in need” of the culture of the middle class, and in need of “reform” is an important first step toward lessening the difficulty associated with this experience.

First, however, an important barrier to these implications is worth stating. That is, the dominance of the cultural arbitrary is an aspect of a larger educational and economic structure that maintains and perpetuates inequality. The learning of cultural capital is
therefore a mechanism through which *individuals* achieve mobility, even as the dominant structure is maintained. To argue that fewer students should experience mobility because it is difficult is far from the intent of the study. Rather, awareness that this experience does *not* mitigate inequality in any structural way as some researchers and reformers argue is the intent. Unless the dominant structure changes, however, few implications associated with the findings of this study have the potential to evoke shifts on the larger dominant structure that the study critiques. Instead, working within this unequal structure, the goal is to develop awareness of the pain, disorientation and loss caused by the process of mobility and, through developing understanding and awareness around this experience, to develop strategies to support individuals through the process. Disentangling cultural mobility from reform efforts, in which “disadvantaged” students are viewed as “in need,” is also important. In addition, while this study describes the symbolic violence enacted on those who do traverse social class lines and gain for themselves financial, social or emotional freedom, others are not so “lucky,” and significant violence, both symbolic and overt, is enacted on numerous populations of individuals that are not part of the dominant class. This represents just one exploration of a kind of domination that occurs in myriad ways. Awareness and consciousness raising across a number of sectors, then, represents the largest implication of the study. Building awareness and developing strategies to mitigate (or at least constructively mediate) the difficulties experienced within the specific sectors of K-12, higher education, educational policy and the media are considered below.
Though creating a “college-going culture” is central to “new paternalism” schools (McDermott & Nygreen, 2013), this attention to and focus on college as the ultimate measure for success is ubiquitous across schools in every context. Instead of dominating conversations of success only around college-going and test scores, educators (including teachers, school counselors and administrators) might talk explicitly about the ways individuals are asked to change through mobility, or the ways in which they have already changed due to their education. Building a critical consciousness (Freire, 1998) around the need to learn and perform the cultural practices of the dominant class, students might be empowered to engage more authentically with, or even resist, the practices that dominate and change their culture. Educators might, in concert with students, develop strategies through which distance with family members – a consistent finding – might be mitigated in some way; planned for and actively and supportively dealt with and resisted. Sensitivity to culture and difference, already discussed across sectors in education, might be supported through this lens of connection and maintenance of culture.

Though much attention is paid in higher education to the experience of first generation students in college, the focus of this research is often on how low-income or working class students fare or perform in the context of college or what might be done to ensure they graduate. Less is known about the implications of their experiences on relationships and interactions with their home communities (Lee & Kramer, 2013). The data in this project suggest, as mentioned, that much of the taking on of cultural capital disrupts dispositions, behaviors and beliefs that individuals already possess. In some cases, as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, habitus gained is in conflict with habitus
developed in the family. Paying particular attention to the interactions with the family and community during college, and actively attending to the changes in habitus as they are occurring, might provide valuable support for students as they traverse the changes and difficulties described throughout this study. This is done by Lee and Kramer (2013), who find evidence of “habitus dislocation” among first generation college students in their study. More attention might be paid in higher education research to the tensions that emerge with the home communities of first generation students. Anticipating and negotiating these tensions and the distance that begins to emerge early on may preemptively support these relationships into adulthood.

Policy makers are largely focused on measurable outcomes. More attention should be paid at the national level to the experience of education broadly, and education toward upward mobility specifically. If policy makers were able to consider the actual experience associated with their construction of success, more attention might be paid to other ways in which the culture students bring with them to the education system can be supported and encouraged, rather than systematically changed, in order to be successful. The narrow definition of success asserted within the world of policy, and the power given to that conception through funding, might be reoriented given this study’s findings.

Finally, reorienting the ways in which this concept of the American Dream is viewed popularly is of paramount concern. The pervasiveness of the assumption that individuals not born into the dominant class must change themselves in order to be successful is fostered by the media accounts of poverty and urban schools. They are also continued through the celebratory accounts of individuals who make it out of poverty, or
programs such as the “new paternalism” schools which make upward mobility their sole mission. Mobility is an aspect of our nation, yes, but the difficulties associated with it, and the misinformed notion that upward mobility somehow mitigates inequality, each need to be unpacked in popular conception. The media have an important role in reframing how those not born into the dominant class are portrayed, and the kinds of reform efforts that offer support with more sensitivity and care to the cultures and identities of students.

Future Research and Concluding Thoughts

Additional perspectives that would inform and expand on the data in this study include the perspectives of the parents, siblings and extended family members of upwardly mobile individuals. Their own conceptions of what this process entails, and their perspectives of any changes they have witnessed in their upwardly mobile family member(s) would be insightful and offer complexity and nuance to this already complicated process.

As indicated by Bettie (2003), the implication of race on upward mobility, and middle class performance, is significant. While outside the scope of this study, attention to the race and its influence on the experience of upward mobility would offer important insight toward the “reshaping” of the American Dream. Framing Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1977) concept of reproduction through culture within the terrain of race and ethnicity would speak to the important intersection between race and class domination by the cultural arbitrary.
Finally, as McDermott and Nygreen (2013) assert, little academic research exists on the practices and pedagogies of the “new paternalism” schools and the potential implications and outcomes of their approach. Data, to date, involve test scores exclusively. Academic data, by way of test scores, say little about the long-term success of students, and, more importantly, the experience of “character education” – both on students’ identities and their relationships with family members. Further research considering the actual practices of this approach within Bourdieu’s critical framework would offer direct application of the findings of this study.

Through learning from those individuals who have experienced social mobility, we might come closer to “reshaping” not only who can achieve mobility, but also what this experience actually means to those who experience it and how one is changed through the process. The findings from this research indicate that there are difficulties associated with the American Dream that are not yet known or understood in popular discourse. Awareness of these many-layered “costs” might better support individuals experiencing the trajectory. In this way, understanding the changes in personality or behavior that individuals experience might enable “cultural mobility” researchers and “new paternalism” reformers to reconsider their conception of low-income or “disadvantaged” students as possessing culture that is in need of change. Finally, the way that mobility is currently framed in popular culture, education reform, and some fields of research, seems to lack an awareness of how social mobility – and the continual, unchecked belief in it – enables the perpetuation of social class domination through
preference to and support of “dominant class” culture. It is the goal of this study to make this evident.
APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

Protocol for Interview (revised March 29th)

Background and experience:
1. Please describe your family background and how you grew up.
2. How would you describe your current situation? How did you get there?
   a. Education trajectory, degrees earned and where, job history, etc

Relationships:
3. Describe your relationship(s) with members of your family. [Probe for sibling?]
4. Have these relationships changed over time? How? What accounts for these changes?
5. Describe your current (or previous) spouse, partner, boy/girlfriend, or dating situation.
   a. How did you meet them?
6. What is that person’s family background?
7. If children: Please describe your strategies for child rearing.
   a. How would you describe the way your parents raised you? How do these compare?
8. How did you develop these strategies?
   a. What role does your partner play in this?

Cultural Knowledge
9. Describe a moment when you were Confident/Not confident at work
10. Do you ever feel like an outsider? Tell me more about that.
11. We are interested in learning more about how things are different for people from the way that they grew up and the way things are now.
   a. Differences in how people present themselves?
   b. How people talk, joke, curse (probe for politics and race)
i. Language and vocabulary

   c. Food and drink (including alcohol)

   d. The Body: Weight and Exercise

12. Are there any things that you felt that you just didn’t know that other people knew as you moved from your world of your family and the current world?

13. Comfort/Discomfort: Can you describe a moment in your life in which you have felt uncomfortable or out of place when entering a new setting for the first time?
   At what point did you notice being [different] from others around you? [use lang. they use] How did you respond, or what did you do?

14. Have you noticed any changes about yourself?
   a. In what ways? Can you recall an incident when you noticed that?

Concluding Questions: Change, Difficult and Enjoyable:

15. In what ways have you changed (draw on what is discussed in the interview to find out from when).

16. What has been difficult about this transition/experience/journey? [use language they use to describe]

17. What has been enjoyable about this transition/experience/journey? [use language they use to describe]

18. If needed: In the previous response, you discussed [___] issue or positive aspect. Can you offer a story that illustrates that [issue]? (use language they use)

Income

19. What you think your family made a year (generally) while you were growing up.

20. What you and your partner currently earn.

21. What do you think accounts for this disparity in income.

Be sure to get the following survey questions if they haven’t already come up throughout the interview:

22. Participant identity:
a. Race, ethnicity
b. Age
c. Where did you grow up?
d. Profession/Job history
e. Educational background (where and when)

23. Parent identity:
   f. Race, ethnicity
g. Profession/Job history
   h. Educational background (where and when)

24. Sibling identity:
   i. Race, ethnicity
   j. Profession/Job history
   k. Educational background (where and when)
APPENDIX B: Protocol for Group II Interviews

Background and experience:
1. Please describe your family background and how you grew up.
2. What work do you do now?
3. How did you get there? Ie: What is your education trajectory?
   a. degrees earned and where, job history, etc
   b. Did you always know you would go to college? When did you first decide to go?
   c. Did you talk to your family about college when you were there?
   d. What about graduate school?
4. What about your parents? What do they do and what is their education history?

Relationships:
5. Describe your relationship(s) with members of your family. [Probe for sibling?]
   a. How often do you talk to them? What do you talk about?
   b. How do they feel about the work you do?
6. Have these relationships changed over time? How? What accounts for these changes?
7. Describe your current (or previous) spouse, partner, boy/girlfriend, or dating situation.
   a. How did you meet them?
8. What is that person’s family background?
9. If children: Please describe your strategies for child rearing.
   a. How would you describe the way your parents raised you? How do these compare?
   b. Do you and your partner raise children in the same way?

Cultural Knowledge Protocol (if using):
10. Describe a moment when you were Confident/Not confident at work.
11. Do you ever feel like an outsider? Tell me more about that.

12. Describe your friend group – have you changed at all in order to be friends with them?
   a. Food, drinks, jokes, body/exercise/health, etc?

13. Comfort/Discomfort: Can you describe a moment in your life in which you have felt uncomfortable or out of place when entering a new setting for the first time?
   At what point did you notice being [different] from others around you? [use lang. they use] How did you respond, or what did you do?

**Concluding Questions**

14. How do you feel about what you’ve accomplished and where you are at in life?
   How do your parents feel about that?

**Income**

15. What you think your family made a year (generally) while you were growing up.

16. What you and your partner currently earn.

17. What do you think accounts for this disparity in income.

Be sure to get the following survey questions if they haven’t already come up throughout the interview:

18. Participant identity:
   1. Race, ethnicity
   m. Age
   n. Where did you grow up?
   o. Profession/Job history
   p. Educational background (where and when)

19. Parent identity:
   q. Race, ethnicity
   r. Profession/Job history
   s. Educational background (where and when)
20. Sibling identity:
   t. Race, ethnicity
   u. Profession/Job history
   v. Educational background (where and when)
Greetings,

I am Heather Curl, a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania and a lecturer at Bryn Mawr College. I am writing in the hopes of finding participants for a qualitative study about the experience of upward mobility. Despite how important the promise of the American Dream remains in the United States, little is known about what individuals actually experience through this process. I hope to learn more about this experience through interviewing individuals (over the age of 30) who are the first in their family to go to college and earn an advanced professional degree (JD, MD, DDS, DMD, PhD, MBA, etc.) or the highest degree in their field. Do you know anyone who might fit that category and who would be willing to be a part of a small qualitative study?

This study represents my dissertation research project, and involves one face to face interview that would last between 1½ to 2 hours. It will then be transcribed and become data from which I would gain further understanding about the experience of upward mobility. I am unable to compensate participants for the interview, but there are no risks associated with the study, whereas the potential benefits to social class and mobility research are great. I hope you’ll consider passing this info along to people who might be interested and/or becoming a participant yourself if you match the criteria. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Heather Curl

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