

Abstract

“The Price of the Ticket: Exploring the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility”

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