The London School of Economics and Political Science

Psychological Essentialism in the Socio-economic Domain: Integrating Social Representations Theory with the Cognition and Culture Framework

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Abstract

Research on psychological essentialism has focused predominantly on either the folk-biological domain or on social categories in which membership is often believed to be genetically determined. Meanwhile, studies of essentialist representations of socio-economic categories are scarce, and have typically been conducted in cultural contexts where meritocratic ideals are pervasive and the subject of social stratification and categorisation on the basis of 'class' is less prominent than elsewhere, or by contrast where class categories are confounded with beliefs about 'caste' and therefore tend to be explicitly naturalised.

However, the concept of 'Belief in Social Determinism' as a specifically social or cultural dimension of psychological essentialism has suggested promising avenues for the study of representations of socio-economic categories, particularly in the UK, where 'class' remains a salient topic; and though it may seldom be perceived in biological or natural kind terms, it nonetheless often appears to be understood as an ascribed rather than achieved form of category membership or identity.

This thesis builds on previous strands of research in cognitive, developmental, social and cultural psychology and cognitive anthropology, in which essentialism is argued to be neither modular nor unitary, but rather a domain-general cognitive bias arising from fundamental psychological mechanisms and comprised of several related but conceptually distinct components. Combining the perspective of Social Representations Theory with the broader Cognition and Culture framework, three studies examine the ways in which these components are invoked in this particular domain and some of the key relationships between them.

Study 1 analyses social representations of socio-economic categories and of the potential for movement between them (i.e., social mobility) in the UK public sphere, specifically within

the mainstream news media; Study 2 explores experiences of and perspectives on social mobility and socio-economic category membership through semi-structured interviews with socially mobile individuals themselves; and Study 3 tests individuals' intuitive beliefs about socio-economic categories and the crossing of socio-economic category boundaries with an experimental survey, specifically designed to capture social determinist beliefs.

Together these studies provide some compelling evidence of the co-existence of forms of individual and category essentialism in the socio-economic domain in the UK, along with a detailed qualitative insight into examples of social determinist representations that are clearly incongruous with much of the prevailing political rhetoric concerning social mobility.

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Introduction

In this thesis it is argued that modular or unitary theories of psychological essentialism, along with the common tendency to conflate essentialist thinking with the representation of a category as a natural kind (whose members' observable features are determined by a form of shared innate potential), fail to account for significant variation within and between differing contexts and domains, and according to different developmental stages. They also overlook its many other manifestations, for example with regard to non-living natural kinds, artefacts, individuals, beliefs about interactional or relational essences, and specifically cultural or social determinist forms of essentialism. Cognitive and developmental studies strongly suggest that, rather than emerging autonomously, essentialism arises from a number of more primitive psychological processes – such as a predisposition to distinguish between superficial appearances and underlying reality, to attend to causal information, and to attribute causality to inherent features (Gelman, 2003) – and is comprised of a number of distinct but logically related components, of which naturalness, or the assumption of innate potential, in fact appears to be neither necessary nor sufficient. Social psychological research has provided evidence that essentialist thinking may be structured in terms of two independent but often overlapping dimensions particular to social or cultural and biological or otherwise natural domains, for example in the form of 'natural kind-ness' beliefs and 'entitativity' (Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2000) or Belief in Genetic Determinism and Belief in Social Determinism (Keller, 2005; Rangel & Keller, 2011).

Entitative and social determinist beliefs may be of particular relevance to folk-sociological representations of socio-economic categories or 'classes', which have largely been neglected in research on psychological essentialism in favour of those social categories, such as race and gender, which are more liable to be perceived as biologically determined. However, this absence is also reflective of a paucity of research on representations of socio-economic categories in psychology more broadly, where they are often either treated simply as categorical variables informing various aspects of social cognition, or presumed to constitute reflexive identities, bounded groups, or even relatively discrete cultures. This tendency towards entitativity or 'groupism' (Brubaker, 2002) is also a conspicuous feature of much sociological research, which even within an explicitly relational epistemology frequently depicts socio-economic categories and class membership in strongly substantialist and realist terms. It is also evident in studies on the subjective experience of social mobility, which often employ a highly simplistic, singular and deterministic conception of habitus to explain the psychological and emotional challenges sometimes involved in moving between classes. However, cross-cultural sociological research has shown that the experience of social mobility and its effect on the individual's sense of self is strongly influenced, amongst other factors, by pervasive culturally-specific representations of the boundaries between socio-economic categories and perceptions of the commensurability of different class-based lifestyles. While in both the overtly meritocratic and traditionally caste-bound societies of the United States and India respectively, socially mobile individuals are typically able to retain a sense of coherent identity by reconciling the fields of origin and destination, or by remaining exclusively loyal to the former, in the comparatively class-conscious context of France they are more likely to experience a feeling of internal division and dislocation (Naudet, 2018).

For the most part, the few existing studies of essentialist representations of socio-economic categories have been conducted in those societies where the concept of class is either significantly less salient (e.g., Kraus & Keltner, 2013), or where it may be inflected by the explicitly naturalising logic of the caste system (Mahalingam, 2003), and in both cases are predominantly focused on capturing natural kind-like intuitions, which are evidently not irrelevant to this domain but may provide only a very partial understanding. As a dimension of psychological essentialism based on an assumption of the profound and permanent effects of certain forms of socialisation, social determinist beliefs offer an additional and potentially highly illuminating conceptual lens for the examination of folk-sociological beliefs about socio-economic categories in the UK, where class boundaries are often perceived to be relatively rigid, where class membership is usually thought to be largely determined by background, and where class itself is traditionally believed to be the object of a characteristically national 'obsession' (Cannadine, 1999).

Social Representations Theory (SRT) has generated a small number of qualitative analyses of psychological essentialism in other social domains, yet these have primarily focussed on the discursive, ideological and pernicious aspects of essentialism and have largely neglected to consider its socially ambivalent nature – for example, its deployment as a means to promote in-group inclusion and solidarity, as well as out-group enmity and exclusion – and have done little to enrich an understanding of essentialist thinking itself. However, Cognition and Culture approaches have demonstrated how qualitative research can be both enhanced by experimental studies, and utilised in order to refine experimental procedures themselves, and thereby develop a better insight into essentialist representations at both implicit and explicit levels. As a distinctively anthropological approach to social psychology, attuned to the mutual influence of lay and scientific representations, and to the coexistence of different modalities of thinking according to their own pragmatic functions, SRT is therefore an ideal theoretical perspective to integrate with the Cognition and Culture framework in examining folk-sociological beliefs about socio-economic categories in a domestic cultural setting, and exploring further the relationship between social and mental representations.

In Chapter One, the arguments summarised above are introduced and developed in detail through an extensive critical assessment of the existing literature on psychological essentialism and both psychological and sociological research on socio-economic categories, social mobility and habitus, and the primary research questions guiding the empirical content of this thesis are outlined. Chapter Two then briefly introduces the different methods employed in the three studies that follow: a qualitative analysis of social representations of socio-economic categories and social mobility in the UK public sphere, specifically in the mainstream news media (Chapter Three); in-depth semi-structured interviews with 'upwardly' socially mobile individuals themselves (Chapter Four); and in the final empirical study (Chapter Five), an experimental survey examining individuals' intuitive beliefs about socio-economic categories and the crossing of category boundaries. The key findings from each of these studies is then summarised, and their contribution to the literature and to future research on psychological essentialism is discussed in the General Conclusion.

Chapter One: Theoretical Background & Literature Review

1.1. Psychological Essentialism: an evolving concept

'Psychological essentialism' refers to the common tendency to perceive and represent particular forms of identity and category membership as constituted by deep, non-obvious, and largely immutable core characteristics, or 'essences', which are typically assumed to inhere in each and every individual member of a given category and understood to causally determine their outward appearance and behaviours (Gelman, 2003; Rhodes, 2020). The term was first introduced in cognitive psychology over 30 years ago to account for evidence that similarity judgements and intuitions concerning category membership are not influenced exclusively by superficial properties or other perceptual data, as prototype and exemplar theories of concepts had generally presumed (Medin & Schaffer, 1978; Rosch, 1973; Rosch & Mervis, 1975), but in many instances are in fact often implicitly theory-driven and rely on beliefs involving hidden, intrinsic features (Medin, 1989; Medin & Ortony, 1989). Developmental and cross-cultural research has since demonstrated manifestations of this tendency in children as young as 4 years old, lending strong support to the claim that psychological essentialism appears to be either an innate or early-emerging and ubiquitous cognitive bias, although one that may be significantly influenced and constrained according to the particular social and cultural context (Astuti, Solomon & Carey, 2004; Gelman, 2003, 2004; Hale, 2015; Machery et al, 2021; Moya & Boyd, 2015).

Since its inception, an extensive body of theory and research has developed, primarily within the fields of cognitive, developmental, social and cultural psychology, and cognitive anthropology, exploring the operation of similar inferences and representations in many different societies and cultures, and across a wide range of distinct domains – for example, natural kinds and biological taxa (Atran, 1990; Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1989; Medin & Atran, 1999); human social categories, such as race and ethnicity (Gil-White, 2001; Hirschfeld, 1996, 2007; Kanovsky, 2007), caste (Deschenaux, 2019; Mahalingam, 2003), ancestral groups (Astuti, 1995, 2001; Regnier, 2015), religious affiliations (Moloney, Holtz & Wagner, 2013), nationality (Hussak & Cimpian, 2019), and culture (Soylu Yalcinkaya, Estrada-Villalta & Adams, 2017; Verkuyten, 2003); categories based on gender and sexuality (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Prentice & Miller, 2006; Skewes, Fine & Haslam, 2018); and even categories of emotions and psychiatric disorders (Barrett, 2006, 2017; Haslam, 2000; Haslam & Ernst, 2002). However, essentialist inferences are not limited to reasoning about categories or kinds, but have also been shown in many cases to be implicated in thinking about individual identity, often involving the notion of an immutable 'true self' (Christy, Schlegel & Cimpian, 2019; Horne & Cimpian, 2019; Oyserman, 2019), and the uniqueness and authenticity of specific artefacts (Gelman, 2013; Hood & Bloom, 2008), while common beliefs concerning contagion, contamination, fetishes and blessings, for example, have also been understood as 'relational' or 'interactional' forms of essentialism, dependent on contact between humans or with the properties of particular objects (Franks, 2011). Although individual and category essentialism tend to be studied in isolation, they are nonetheless believed to draw on the same underlying cognitive mechanisms and often involve very similar or cognate intuitions (Gelman, 2003; Newman & Knobe, 2018), and may be seen as roughly analogous with the ancient and medieval philosophical concepts of *quiddity* and *haecceity*, pertaining respectively to questions of the 'what-ness' and the 'this-ness' of an individual or entity (Hood, 2014).

As a metaphysical doctrine or ontological theory, essentialism evidently has a long history, dating back at least as far as the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, and – largely due to the revived interest in the subject instigated by the highly influential work of Kripke (1980) and Putnam (1975) in the philosophy of language – continues to have its advocates even in the present, in the philosophy of biology, of natural kinds and of personal identity (e.g., Austin, 2017; Devitt, 2008; Ellis, 2001; Madell, 2014; Oderberg, 2007). And yet the general consensus (perhaps with the exception of cases of paradigmatic natural kinds, such as chemical elements and compounds, as opposed to biological species, for example) is that essentialism, or 'typological thinking' (Mayr, 1968), is fundamentally erroneous, and has been demonstrably falsified by Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection – or in Dennett's striking phrase, the "revolutionary discovery that living things were not eternal, hard-edged, in-or-out classes, but historical populations with fuzzy boundaries, islands historically connected to other islands by vanishing isthmuses …" (Dennett, 2017: 10).

Essentialism, therefore, is not only considered to be antithetical to the elementary principles of evolutionary theory (Dennett, 2017; Dupré, 2002, Hull, 1965; Lewens, 2012) but, along with teleological 'design'-based explanations, also continues to present a conceptual obstacle to an adequate comprehension of them (Gelman, 2003, 2019; Gelman & Marchak, 2019; Kampourakis, 2020). Psychological essentialism, on the other hand, as "a psychologically plausible analogue of the logically implausible doctrine of metaphysical essentialism" (Medin & Ortony, 1989: 183), does not entail an explicit ontological commitment to essentialism, nor even any specific knowledge or intuition about what the putative essence of a category or individual or artefact might consist of exactly, but instead serves as a 'placeholder concept' whose content may be subject to revision. Though in many instances this content is supplied by particular domain-specific cultural representations (e.g., 'blood', or a 'soul', or a nebulous common-sense conceptualisation of 'genes'), in other cases it may be a far more inchoate or ineffable notion or implicit assumption of an essence, and/or the belief that whatever it is can only be discovered or understood by scientists or other experts. Therefore, while psychological essentialism may be 'bad metaphysics', Medin (1989: 1477) states that it is nevertheless potentially 'good epistemology', and that a general essentialist heuristic prompting the expectation that certain entities with similar perceptual properties will also share deeper, non-obvious, intrinsic similarities is very often correct, across many different domains. Similarly, Gelman (2003) suggests that as well as enabling useful category-based inferences, it also signals the developmental origins of a more scientific approach to thinking about categories in the natural domain, as opposed to forming inferences based on superficial similarity alone. Indeed, the systematic and ostensibly spontaneous tendency of preschool children to search for hidden, non-obvious properties as sources of explanation and categorisation, and their intuitions concerning innate potential and immutability of category membership in spite of superficial transformation, may well be key foundations of a disposition towards an essentialist construal, yet in themselves are often broadly consistent with an evolutionary account (Kampourakis, 2020). However, the frequently accompanying assumptions of historical invariance with regard to species, sharp category boundaries and minimal or non-existent intraspecific variation are clearly inconsistent with this view, and the application of such simplifying heuristics to the perception of human social categories, particularly race and gender, is regularly associated with stereotyping, prejudice, and reduced inter-group contact (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Miller & Prentice, 1999; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008; Yzerbyt, Judd & Corneille, 2004).

While Hirschfeld (1996, 2007) has argued that the adaptive function of essentialist reasoning in folk-sociology is the extension of in-group inclusion and solidarity, rather than out-group enmity, it is rather these negative consequences that are typically the focus of social psychological research on essentialism, often demonstrating the ways in which dominant social groups sometimes explicitly employ essentialist representations as an ideological strategy to maintain and reinforce their own dominance and the perceived inferiority of subordinate groups. For example, Mahalingam (2003, 2007), argues that while social constructionist accounts of essentialism tend to ignore cognitive research on concepts and individual mental representations of categories, psychological accounts, on the other hand, tend to overlook social or cultural representations of social groups and questions of unequal power relations. He therefore makes a distinction between 'cognitive essentialism' and 'social essentialism'[1] – the former referring purely to an ostensibly universal cognitive bias, on the one hand, and the latter to the explicit and strategic deployment of essentialist representations as a form of motivated cognition, on the other. Similarly, Yzerbyt, Judd & Corneille (2004) distinguish between more or less 'active' and 'passive' forms of category representation, but also point out that essentialism, as well as other related psychological processes, can have both negative and positive consequences, and, broadly echoing Hirschfeld's argument, that it may also be deployed by in-groups to facilitate social identification and collective action (see also Wagner, Holtz & Kashima, 2009). Research on 'cultural essentialism' in a multi-ethnic social context has demonstrated that essentialist representations may be used to resist coercive assimilationist ideas, and have often been a feature of anti-racism, while anti-essentialist rhetoric may be employed in turn to undermine such attempts (Verkuyten, 2003). And a recent study has even suggested that in some cases, when combined with perspective-taking, essentialism may in fact help to resolve intergroup conflict (Yao, Chao & Leung, 2019). This socially ambivalent nature is reflected in Allport's (1954) commentary on the essentialist aspects of stereotypes, long before essentialism became an independent focus of research in psychology:

> "There is an inherent 'Jewishness' in every Jew. The 'soul of the Oriental,' 'Negro blood,' Hitler's 'Aryanism,' 'the peculiar genius of America,' 'the logical Frenchman,' 'the passionate Latin' – all represent a belief in essence. A mysterious mana (for good or ill) resides in a group, all of its members partaking thereof." (Allport, 1954: 169)

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[1] Elsewhere (e.g. Rhodes, 2020; Rhodes & Mandalaywala, 2017; Rhodes, Leslie & Tworek, 2012), this term is used to refer more generally to psychological essentialism in respect of social categories, at either an implicit or explicit level.

Early research on psychological essentialism was primarily concerned with its role in folk-biological thinking, in relation to which it was commonly understood to be a domain-specific modular adaptation enabling the cognitive processing and categorisation of biological taxa (Atran, 1990, 1998). The essentialisation of social categories, for example, was therefore believed to be a form of analogical transfer or an exaptation of the operation of such a module from the folk-biological to the folk-sociological domain (Gil-White, 2001); though Hirschfeld (1994, 1996, 2007), on the other hand, posited the existence of an autonomous evolved modular competence specific to folk-sociological reasoning. However, both hypotheses arguably fail to account for essentialism with regard to non-living natural kinds, asymmetries and inconsistencies in the essentialisation of biological and social categories across and within different cultural contexts and according to different ontogenetic stages, or to essentialist reasoning about individuals, artefacts, and relational or interactional phenomena, such as contagion and contamination, for example (Franks, 2011; Gelman, 2003; Kanovsky, 2007). Gelman, therefore, offers an alternative domain-general theory of psychological essentialism that aims to account for all forms of essentialist thinking, but is invoked somewhat differently in each of these different domains, and arises from the convergence of several basic-level psychological mechanisms – for example, the capacity to make distinctions between appearance and reality; to form inductive inferences from property clusters; to attend to casual information; to track the identity of individuals and objects across time and space; and a tendency to privilege information from ostensibly expert sources – i.e. a 'linguistic division of labour' (Putnam, 1975) – such as parents or teachers (Gelman, 2003). The latter, which might also be understood as a form of 'prestige bias' (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), is compounded by a sensitivity to specific kinds of language use, particularly noun labels and generic statements, which promote an assumption of intra-category uniformity, rich inductive potential and causal explanatory-power (Gelman, 2003; Gelman & Roberts, 2017). A rival – or perhaps complementary (Gelman & Meyer, 2014) – domain-general hypothesis is that essentialist intuitions in fact emerge from an ‘inherence heuristic’ (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014), an intuitive disposition to interpret perceived regularities in terms of the inherent features of entities, and which is also argued to underpin other internalist or realist biases, such as the fundamental attribution error and nominal realism – the latter referring to the apparently universal tendency in early childhood to assume an inherent, objective and non-arbitrary identity relation between words and the objects which they designate (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014; Gelman, 2003).

However, both of these views support the idea that, rather than being a single mode of construal (Keil, 1994) or ‘unitary syndrome’, as modular accounts appear to suggest, psychological essentialism itself is in fact multifaceted and structured by a number of related but conceptually distinct components (Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2000, 2004). Highlighting the lack of conceptual analysis and any systematic approach to understanding the structure of essentialist beliefs in prior social psychological research, and – in an effort to encompass all of the relevant aspects of essentialism – drawing on a wide-ranging review of the relevant literature in the philosophy of language, biology and natural kinds, Haslam et al. (2000, 2004) identified nine different components that were common across these traditions. Subjects were then asked to rate 20 different social categories – including those based on gender, age, race, occupation, politics, religion, intelligence, and social class, for example – on each of these components of essentialism. Significant correlations were found between their ratings according to two independent but sometimes overlapping dimensions: 1) a ‘natural kind’ dimension, comprised of the components, *discreteness* (sharp category boundaries and ungraded membership), *naturalness* (in contrast with ‘artificial’), *immutability* (of category membership), *stability* (historical invariance of the category itself), and *necessity* (of characteristics for membership); and 2) an ‘entitativity’ dimension, formed by *uniformity* (of category members), *informativeness* (inductive potential of category membership); *inherence* (defined as possessing an ‘underlying reality’ in terms of the category and 'underlying sameness' of category members); and *exclusivity* (of other category memberships). While the 'natural kind' dimension is understood to closely resemble folk theories of biological species, the 'entitativity' dimension is thought to capture a combination of the typical associations between the concept of entitativity and group coherence, homogeneity and common fate, in the social psychological literature, and the notions of intrinsic similarity and naïve categorical realism implied by the concept of 'reification' (Haslam et al. 2000, 2004)[2]. Therefore, whereas previous research had often assumed an equivalence between essentialism and the naturalisation of social categories (e.g. Rothbart & Taylor, 1992) – and in fact regularly continues to do so (e.g., Boyer, 2018) – this study firmly corroborates the view that not only is it entirely possible to naturalise a category without essentialising it (Haslam, 1998), but that it is also possible to essentialise a social category without necessarily naturalising it (Haslam, et al., 2000). Contrary to what is often asserted or simply taken for granted in much of the literature, biological inheritance and innate potential, for example, are neither necessary nor sufficient constituents of essentialist thinking (Kanovsky, 2007). Gelman (2003: 105) observes that putative essences may be believed to be transmitted by a range of different processes, but that these beliefs are united by three particular features: that the essence is understood to be transferable; that this transfer takes place early in development, so that category members acquire their characteristics during a formative period; and that once this transfer has taken place it is very difficult to either remove or change. Meanwhile, Franks (2011) suggests that folk-biological and folk-sociological essentialism, although both ostensibly involving autonomous, independent essences, may in fact be instances of beliefs that have been decoupled from the notion of interactional or relational essences, since both involve the sharing and transfer of identity. And Wagner et al. (2009) point out that in any social group in which membership is ascribed rather than voluntary, where the feeling of belonging is based on either:

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[2] Demoulin, Leyens & Yzerbyt (2006), however, differentiate essentialism from both 'natural kind-ness' and 'entitativity'. See also Yzerbyt et al. (2004).

> … a shared habitus or shared biological body features […] whether the features distinguishing the categories are seen as biological, as in the case of the two sexes or race, or whether they are socially constructed in the course of many generations, as in the case of culture and ethnicities, does not make much difference for the individual. Biology is inescapable and culture is unavoidable as long as a child lived within its ethnic "ecology" long enough for cultural imprinting to occur. Both appear as a natural given not by "nature's doings" but by conditions falling outside of an individual's sphere of influence. Such categories are spontaneously represented as natural kinds or as entities justified by a divine will. (Wagner et al., 2009: 371).

Self-evidently social and cultural processes therefore may well be 'naturalised' in this broader sense and might also be represented using explicitly naturalising or even biological metaphors, however in the absence of such representations an automatic conflation between inevitability and immutability of category membership and 'naturalness' arguably preserves the misleading assumption that the social or cultural is by definition free from these constraints.

Developing this distinction between independently social or cultural, and biological or otherwise natural forms of psychological essentialism, Rangel & Keller (2011) have proposed the concept of 'belief in social determinism' (BSD), as an alternative or complementary form of the essentialisation of social categories to 'belief in genetic determinism' (BGD) (Keller, 2005). While the latter has been demonstrated to constitute a specific aspect of essentialising folk-biological representations of social groups, social determinist beliefs consist of the notion that an individual's fundamental character is profoundly and permanently shaped by exclusively social factors, usually pertaining to their background, upbringing and socialisation, which are perceived to be features deeply rooted inside them. This idea, strongly resonating with the arguments and research discussed above, neatly exemplifies what has previously been referred to as a 'social mode' of essentialism, by which different social group identities "are perceived to be transmitted through socialisation but become an essential part" (Mahalingam, 2003: 737). It also has a clear parallel in the concept of 'cultural essentialism' (Verkuyten, 2003), which documents similarly deterministic, immutable and even quasi-biological representations of the influence of socialisation within a specific cultural setting. And BSD shares similarities with individual and artefact essentialism, in that the essential non-obvious causal feature is understood to be a particular historical path (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014; Gelman, 2003). Rangel & Keller (2011) claim that social determinist beliefs have hitherto been overlooked within research on psychological essentialism, due to the overwhelming focus on genetic and other biological forms of essentialism or naturalisation, yet they show evidence that BSD is significantly correlated with conventional measures of essentialist thinking, and is associated with many of the same socio-cognitive and epistemic motives, such as 'need for cognitive closure' (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), and similar negative outcomes, e.g., stereotyping, prejudice and in-group favouritism (Rangel & Keller, 2011).

Haslam (2014), however, has suggested that the evidence supporting the hypothesis that psychological essentialism arises from an inherence heuristic indicates that BSD lies outside of its conceptual boundaries, since if "we take inherent causal properties to be essential for essentialism, then this belief [that a person's "character is shaped by extrinsic factors"] – which involves seeing a group more as an artifact than as a natural kind – does not seem to qualify." (Haslam, 2014: 492). And yet there are a number of problems with this objection, some of which have a significant bearing on Haslam's own earlier research, and which appear to have been entirely overlooked. If, as he proposes, inherence is an 'essential' component of essentialism – which, indeed, has been convincingly argued elsewhere (e.g., Kanovsky, 2007) – then this raises the question as to why inherence was found to be significantly correlated with only three other components – informativeness, uniformity, and exclusivity – on the 'entitativity' dimension in his highly influential study (Haslam, et. al., 2000), and yet only weakly, or even inversely, correlated with the other five components – discreteness, naturalness, immutability, stability, and necessity – on the 'natural kind' dimension. This would suggest, somewhat counter-intuitively, that only entitative beliefs constitute essentialism, while folk-biological or other naturalising beliefs do not. One answer to this might be that either naturalness or category stability, for example, already strongly imply a form of inherence, however these happen to be the only two components with which inherence is in fact inversely correlated in the study (Haslam et al. 2000: 119). It seems that whatever Haslam et al.'s small sample of undergraduate respondents understood by the term "underlying reality or sameness" (Haslam et al. 2000: 118), might not be entirely consistent with what Haslam himself takes it to mean, which, as is illustrated in the quote above and elsewhere (Haslam, 1998), he explicitly associates with necessary natural kind properties.

Cimpian & Salomon's (2014) definition of inherent features is also considerably more inclusive than Haslam's and is not synonymous with or limited to internal characteristics, nor does it necessarily fit the description of a putative essence itself, but rather refers to stable and enduring features that characterise the constitution of an entity, extending even to its shape. And although they speculate that essences themselves will typically be conceived of as physical and internal properties, this assumption is not unanimously shared; Strevens (2000, 2014), for example, favouring a 'pure' (versus 'insides') form of psychological essentialism[3], argues that causal essentialist beliefs do not require the notion of an internal essence, and that those holding such beliefs may be entirely agnostic as to its location. And although the vast majority of the psychological and anthropological literature is concerned with causal essentialism, recent research has demonstrated across various domains that a more abstract, value-based, ‘ideal’ or ‘Platonic’ form of essentialism may be another manifestation of the very same underlying psychological phenomenon, a ‘general essentialism’, encompassing both causal and abstract, non-causal forms (Newman & Knobe, 2018). In any case, while Haslam’s (2014) critique clearly shows that he understands social determinist beliefs to be concerned with purely extrinsic factors, Rangel & Keller (2011) explicitly state that BSD does not refer to beliefs about the influence of relatively transient contextual features of the immediate environment. Therefore it cannot merely be equated, for example, with the concept of ‘culture as situated cognition’ (Oyserman, 2011; Oyserman, Sorensen, Reber & Chen, 2009), in which situational cues simply activate relevant context-specific representations, and cognitive and behavioural schemata; nor is it a form of structural explanation based on stable external constraints acting on a particular social category and its members, with which essentialist beliefs might often be confounded (Vasilyeva, Gopnik & Lombrozo, 2018; Vasilyeva & Lombrozo, 2020). It is instead both a causal and thoroughly internalist account, since an individual’s behaviour and identity are believed to be strongly determined by the circumstances of their socialisation which continues to shape their thoughts and actions ‘off-line’ regardless of their current situation, thus suggesting that these factors – a person’s class or socio-economic background, for example – have been fully internalised.

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[3] Strevens himself, however, advocates a 'minimal hypothesis', arguing that apparently essentialist inferences are in fact the outcome of 'kind-laws' in which certain features or behaviours are simply understood to be caused by category membership itself, which may or not involve the further intuition of an essence mediating between them (Strevens, 2001).

1.2. The Socio-economic Domain: psychological approaches

Describing some of the negative consequences of an essentialist bias, Gelman (2003: 296) notes that it often “perpetuates the assumption that artificial distinctions (such as caste or class) are natural, inevitable, and fixed.” Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schadron (1997: 41) mention the fact that people’s “commitment to the unalterability of group membership plays a role in many contexts where categories are clearly the consequence of social definition. In Europe, working class people always seem to remain working class people, even if they become successful and rich business people.” And Wagner et al. (2009) discuss the notion of ‘blue blood’ in the self-representations of European aristocracies, with which they sought to naturalise their exceptional status and essentialise their distinctiveness from ordinary society – the success of which, the authors suggest, may be perceived in the corroboration of this image even in others’ out-group representations of the aristocracy, and in its persistence in sections of the popular press even today. These references are notable due to their scarcity, since research on psychological essentialism concerning socio-economic categories (e.g., Davoodi, Soley, Harris & Blake, 2020; del Rio & Strasser, 2011; Haslam, et al., 2000; Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Mahalingam, 2003, 2007; Pereira, Estramiana & Gallo, 2010: Räty, Mononen & Pykäläinen, 2017) has been very scant, and has overwhelmingly focussed instead on domains in which representations are more likely to be characterised by forms of biological or genetic essentialism, such as race and gender (Rangel & Keller, 2011). One reason for this may be the common tendency of researchers to conflate essentialism with natural kind and folk-biological beliefs, as discussed earlier, however it also happens to be reflective of a general dearth of research regarding socio-economic categories in psychology more broadly.

Until relatively recently, the subject of socio-economic stratification was largely overlooked by psychologists (Argyle, 1994; Hodgetts & Griffin, 2015), and it is perhaps ironic that a sudden increasing attention to the topic has emerged primarily in the United States, where the salience of ‘class’ has traditionally been submerged within a strongly egalitarian and meritocratic ethos, encapsulated in the ideal of the ‘American Dream’ (Fiske, 2010; Fiske & Markus, 2012). These studies, however, predominantly analyse socio-economic status purely as a categorical variable, measuring its impact on various socio-cognitive phenomena, such as attribution processes (Grossmann & Varnum, 2010), empathic accuracy (Kraus, Côté & Keltner, 2010), self-evaluation (Kraus & Park, 2014), and prosocial behaviour (Piff, Kraus, Côte, Cheng and Keltner, 2010), to mention just a few examples. As well as highlighting average differences in terms of cognition, affect, and behaviour, this research also frequently conceptualises classes as more or less distinct cultures (e.g., Grossman & Huynh, 2013; Kraus, Piff & Keltner, 2011), echoing the common dichotomous distinction in cross-cultural psychological research (e.g. Masuda & Nisbett, 2006; Nisbett, 2004) between analytically-minded, individualistic, independence-orientated Western societies and holistically-minded, collectivistic, interdependence-orientated Eastern societies, and indeed Grossman and Varnum (2011) actually combine these two research areas, providing evidence that in both an Eastern and Western cultural context (Russia and the United states, respectively), lower social class is associated with more holistic cognition and more interdependent self-construal, and vice versa. Cultural psychologists and anthropologists (e.g., Bloch, 2012: Cole, 1996; Strauss & Quinn, 1997) have frequently pointed out the significant shortcomings that are often attached to such a superficial, mechanistic and simplifying treatment of culture, and Fiske and Markus (2012: 10) themselves acknowledge the potential perils of applying a similar approach to socio-economic categories: "Labelling people in our studies as 'middle class' or 'working class' inevitably encourages the essentialist idea that people in different classes have different attributes or qualities that impel their behaviour[4] … Labels such as 'people engaged in middle-class contexts', although less convenient, can highlight the importance of analysing people as responsive to the normative ideas and practices of their contexts."

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[4] Savage (2021) highlights a similar tendency in sociological research: "the delineation of variables cannot but slip into imparting agency – causal properties – to such categories as if they have some kind of independent existence outside the specific measurement tools and context in which they are elaborated."

This further emphasises the importance of analysing how different socio-economic categories themselves, and socio-economic stratification in general, are represented within and across different cultures and societies (Mahalingam, 2003). Research on lay beliefs and stereotypes has in fact revealed a number of interesting differences between people's expectations and the actual findings of social cognition studies on specific traits in this domain – namely contextualism, conformity, collectivism, empathy, honesty and certain personality traits, such as openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness – and has shown that several of these representations appear to be logically inconsistent (Varnum, 2013). For example, while higher socio-economic status individuals were accurately perceived to be higher in subjective well-being, health, and average intelligence relative to lower socio-economic status individuals, in some instances they were also believed to be higher in both individualism and collectivism, dispositionism and contextualism, and conformity and uniqueness. Findings such as these clearly highlight the inadequacy of exclusively quantitative methods for illuminating the varying and ostensibly contradictory modalities of thought that evidently guide respondents' judgements in these experiments; Varnum (2013) speculates, for example, that people may associate wealth and high status with etiquette and conformity to tradition, on the one hand, but also with greater self-expression and creativity, on the other, yet this remains an open question.

Nonetheless, Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu's (2002) Stereotype Content Model (SCM), in which perceptions of warmth and competence are understood to be universal dimensions of social cognition (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2007), has repeatedly demonstrated across a wide range of different cultural settings that people high in socio-economic status are perceived to be high in competence but low in warmth, while those of low socio-economic status are believed to be either low on both, or low in competence but relatively higher than high socio-economic status individuals in warmth. The authors suggest that these stereotypes may have a meritocratic or system-justifying rationale, since individuals who endorse the existence of group hierarchies and score higher on 'belief in a just world' measures also tend to make stronger associations between status and competence, and Durante, Tablante & Fiske (2017) have shown that judgements of warmth and competence are also significantly affected by levels of income inequality; in more unequal countries competence ratings for low socio-economic status individuals were lower, while warmth ratings for high socio-economic individuals also declined. The SCM broadly corroborates earlier research on people's judgements in response to hearing typically working-class and middle-class accents in the UK (Argyle, 1994), and a recent developmental study has found very similar class-based attributions of warmth and competence in young children, suggesting that such stereotypes may be inculcated relatively early in development (Vandebroeck, 2020).

Previous cognitive-developmental research on children's understandings of class and socio-economic inequalities, rooted in a Piagetian stage-theory model of conceptual development, charted their progress from a focus on the observable, peripheral or superficial features of category members to internal, psychological and emotional ones, and finally (but not necessarily) to socio-genetic or structural explanations (Leahy, 1983). At the internal stage, children perceive different social strata to be "occupied by different kinds of people, not simply people with different possessions or different behaviour." (Leahy, 1990: 119). These results are understood to be consistent with development across conceptual domains in general, however this assumption of 'organisational unity' has since been strongly undermined by the developmental research on psychological essentialism and other 'theory-theory' accounts of concept acquisition, which have shown that children's beliefs in various domains are in fact often constrained by intuitive internalist theories even from infancy (Carey, 2009; del Rio & Strasser, 2011; Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1989). Emler & Dickinson (1985, 2004), drawing on the perspective of Social Representations Theory (SRT) (Moscovici, 2000), also challenge the universalist assumptions of the cognitive-developmental approach, demonstrating that children's representations in fact differ significantly according to their family's socio-economic status.

SRT has also been used in combination with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) in a study of the in-group and out-group representations of privately educated and state-educated schoolboys in the UK, locating their differing representations within the pragmatic functions and affective motivational projects of their own perceived group memberships (Hewstone, Jaspars & Lalljee, 1982). As is also clearly demonstrated in a more recent study on the experience of poverty in Turkey (Akfirat, Polat & Yetim, 2016), Social Identity Theory undoubtedly offers a useful lens through which to analyse the psychological ramifications of social stratification, with its attention to the circumstances in which individuals might attempt to achieve or maintain a positive self-image, or sense of 'valued distinctiveness', by pursuing alternative 'identity management strategies' according to perceptions of their own status relative to others, of the permeability of group boundaries, and of the stability and legitimacy of the prevailing social structure (Reicher, 2004; Tajfel, 1981). For example, social mobility, which in the particular idiom of Social Identity Theory refers specifically to the physical and/or psychological transition of an individual from one social group to another, may be contrasted with social change, or 'collective competition', describing a group-level struggle for equal or superior status, while 'social creativity' involves the reconceptualization of relative status differences in order to promote a more positive social identity.

However, analysing social representations simply as a function of social identities in general, and examining representations of socio-economic categories and stratification according to membership of these categories themselves in particular, faces a number of significant problems. Notwithstanding the demonstrable persistence of certain forms of explicit class discourse in the UK, not only are there the numerous cases of so-called class 'dis-identification' or 'mis-identification' – i.e., mismatches between 'objective' class position and subjective identification – that have been well-documented in sociological research (Argyle, 1994; Evans & Mellon, 2016; Friedman, O'Brien & McDonald, 2021; Skeggs, 1997), but despite several of these same sociologists' claims to the contrary, relatively few people actually spontaneously identify with a social class category or automatically appear to consider their objective class position constitutive of a social identity. To substantiate their assertion that "class identities remain widespread", Friedman, et al. (2021: 3), for example, cite the fact that in survey data collected in the UK between the 1950s and 2007, only 10% of people or less refuse to assign themselves a class identity (Savage, 2007). However, as they partially acknowledge in a footnote, significant proportions of these respondents in fact only define themselves in class terms when pushed to do so by the survey researcher. In more recent survey data, collected from a nationally representative sample, Savage, Silva & Warde (2010: 116) find "strikingly limited amounts of overt class identification", in which only 33% of respondents thought of themselves as belonging to a class. They conclude that "people are generally reluctant to identify themselves unambiguously as members of social classes and class identities do not necessarily seem highly meaningful to them." (Savage et al., 2010: 115). Their qualitative interview data also revealed very few explicit references to class, and only rarely did individual interviewees introduce the term themselves in discussion, and even then used it predominantly as an adjectival qualifier, referring to certain locations, or to particular kinds of music, for example. In focus groups, however, the term was employed more frequently, as a means of describing differences in behaviour, but was still used in reference to others rather than to oneself.

Moreover, the relationship between shared representations and social groups or social identities may often be dialectical; representations do not only emanate from particular groups and identities, but can also be constitutive of them, or may serve to consolidate already existing commonalities and affinities (Brewer, 2001; Duveen, 2001; Markova, 2007; Kronberger & Wagner, 2007). And in the relatively pluralist and open public spheres of contemporary 'WEIRD' societies (Henrich, 2020; Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010), representations are often emancipated from the specific circumstances in which they are produced and circulate beyond the domain of particular in-groups, contributing to a general "pool of knowledges", or a repertoire of "thinking resources" for society more broadly (Jovchelovitch, 2019: xxii). Evolving forms of social media also increasingly bring representations into closer contact and confrontation, in many cases perhaps simultaneously entrenching their differences and yet weaving them ever more tightly together in the form of recursive meta-representations, or 'alternative' representations – i.e., those that consist of or are orientated towards other competing and antagonistic representations (Gillespie, 2008). The communicative and representational processes that bear most heavily on socio-economic categories, for example, and thereby enable, constrain or coerce specific forms of group membership and social identity, might not be those that stem from these putative groups or identities themselves, but may be more readily reducible to other nebulous formations based on relatively loose moral or political affiliations which traverse them, or alternatively to the particularities of the wider cultural contexts in which they are embedded (see Naudet, 2018).

The roots of Social Identity Theory lie in the attempt to discover and describe the conditions under which a consciousness of shared group identity may be instigated and progressively crystalised, leading to a sense of common purpose, and eventually motivating collective action (Reicher, 2004). However, Duveen (2008) has argued that the increasing dominance of the theory since its inception has led to the homogenisation of the social psychological conception of the group, and a lack of attention to the ways in which different forms of representation and different communication processes do not simply serve pre-existing social identity functions, but also sustain different kinds of social affiliation. In fact, many social scientific descriptions of groups fail to make even more fundamental distinctions, for example between self-reflexive groups or collectives, in which there exist actual relations between members, and aggregates or serials, based simply on the similarities between them or their common situation (Brubaker, 2002; Harré and Moghaddam, 2015; Young, 1994; see also Epstein, 2019). Reicher (2004) has pointed out that such imprecision and inattention on the part of psychologists and other social scientists to the particular nature of different social categories often results in their reification:

> Psychological theory is not only a commentary on the world and how we behave within it; it is also part of our world and serves to shape our own self-understandings. Those models that serve to reify social categories in theory may also help to reify categories in practice. They tell us that there is only one basis of defining ourselves, only one way of perceiving others, and only one form of intergroup relations. (Reicher, 2004: 942)

In a similar vein, the sociologist Rogers Brubaker has illustrated that the common tendency towards what he terms 'groupism' (Brubaker, 2002) – corresponding very closely to the social psychological concept of 'entitativity' – in conjunction with a vague, incoherent and promiscuous deployment of the term 'identity' across the social sciences, conflating folk and analytic understandings and awkwardly amalgamating strong social constructionist argumentation with aspects of essentialism, often leads to a representation of social and cultural diversity as a juxtaposition of sharply bounded and internally homogenous blocs, and of society as a whole as "a multichrome mosaic of monochrome identity groups" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 31). Strauss & Quinn (1997) express many of the same concerns in an anthropological context, noting the difficulties involved in discussing cross-cultural heterogeneity without simultaneously conjuring the illusion of a world populated by discrete and homogenous cultures. Gillespie, Howarth & Cornish (2012) argue that such views often promote the idea of increasing globalisation as the inevitable catalyst for a 'clash of cultures', and thus urge researchers to recognise that many of the social categories they study are not fundamentally discrete and ontologically objective, mind-independent entities, but are rather historically constituted, alterable and often permeable and overlapping formations, demarcated not only by the pragmatic functions, objectives or prejudices that motivate the categorising processes of lay actors, but also those of social scientists themselves, and are therefore regularly reconstituted in the very act of describing them. However, as Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 6) suggest, this is not always simply a matter of unconscious intellectual oversight but is in fact often reflective of the dual nature of "many academic identitarians as both *analysts* and *protagonists* of identity politics."

1.3. (Folk-)Sociological Perspectives

It is in this sense that it may be argued, therefore, that social categories are themselves social representations (Augoustinos, 2001) – indeed, this is precisely the position that has been taken with regard to the concept of social class by a number of philosophers of social science (e.g., Gobo, 1993, 1995; Jarvie, 1972, 1989; c.f. Skeggs, 1997). Tracing the etymology of the term from its earliest military, juridical and folk-sociological uses, via its adoption (and thus scientific 'consecration') by Linnaeus in the field of botany, and then subsequent application within the positivist and scientistic disciplines of the emerging social sciences, Gobo (1995) has claimed that, in the absence of any thorough epistemological analysis, 'class' remains a folk-concept without an empirical referent. Lay understandings of class in the UK, since the early eighteenth century, have typically oscillated between three different conceptualisations of social structure, according to different purposes and perspectives: that of a continuous and seamless hierarchy;

a triadic system consisting of upper, middle, and lower or ‘working’ classes; and a dichotomous, adversarial model, divided between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Cannadine, 1999). Each of these, however, are argued to be significantly misguided and misleading simplifications, and yet the three-tiered structure in particular, with its suggestion of internally homogenous strata separated from each other by sharp discontinuities, persists as a recurrent feature in popular stereotypes of class, apparently lending support to the assertion that it may be cognitively easier to order representations of society in terms of discrete categories rather than variations along a continuum (Emler & Dickinson, 2004). Alternatively, according to Savage (2021), the tendency of social scientists and lay people alike to think of inequality in terms of bounded groups has become so progressively ingrained as a mindset over the course of modernity that it simply makes other ways of conceptualising it appear counter-intuitive.

However, sociological definitions of class are by no means less heterogeneous than lay representations and are often the subject of vigorous debate and disagreement (Atkinson, 2017; Wright, 2005). Although some sociologists have argued that the term no longer has relevance (Pakulski, 2005; Pakulski & Waters; 1996), mainstream class analysis continues to be dominated by an approach rooted in the social theory of Max Weber, which distinguishes classes from status groups (and closely related questions of cultural behaviours and consumption practices, for example), and determines the former on the basis of differences in life chances, which are believed to be predicted most accurately by varying levels of occupational status and types of employment contracts (Goldthorpe, 1980). This hierarchical model, characterised as a vertical, ‘unidimensional stack of boxes’ (Atkinson, 2017: 12), constitutes the official, governmental measure of social class in the UK, the Office for National Statistics’ Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), which replaced the Registrar General’s map of occupational classes, originally designed to measure birth, death and fertility rates. However, while other approaches have instead conceptualised stratification in terms of a gradational ladder, utilising continuous occupation-based scales, or as a set of occupational and social network clusters (Atkinson, 2017; Bottero, 2004; Grusky, 2005; Lambert & Griffiths, 2018), the dominant rival to Goldthorpe's NS-SEC schema, informing a large proportion of contemporary sociological research, is the perspective developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Here, classes are understood in multi-dimensional terms, determined by their possession of a number of different types of capital – primarily economic, cultural, and social, e.g., income and wealth; education and familiarity with legitimised forms of culture; and social networks and connections (Atkinson, 2017; Bourdieu, 1987). In reconciling the material, economic aspects of class with the symbolic dimensions of each of these forms of capital, this approach is arguably far more successful in capturing the way in which socio-economic differences are perceived and experienced in everyday life, and while the NS-SEC schema typically employs seven or eight numbered class categories, Bourdieu specifies only three – 'dominant', 'dominated', and 'intermediate' – each composed of different class fractions, depending on the volume and composition of the relevant capitals. These capitals in turn function to secure different forms of social recognition – or rather, in Bourdeusian terminology, 'misrecognition' – by which certain socially esteemed characteristics are mistakenly perceived to be indicative of inherent superiority (Atkinson, 2017). However, as is also typically the case with the NS-SEC categories, this model of social structure is often described or translated, even by many of the sociologists who employ it, in terms of pre-theoretic lay categories, such as 'working class' and 'middle class', and in fact in some cases these two different analytical approaches have been amalgamated (e.g., Friedman & Laurison, 2020).

Yet Bourdieu's epistemology is a fundamentally relational one – in which stratification is defined by the contours created through social proximity or distance, rather than by the different locations of individuals situated within an externally pre-determined structure (Bottero, 2004) – and these 'classes' are entirely theoretical and analytical constructions, more accurately described as 'clusters' whose boundaries are similar to those of "a cloud or a forest […] or a flame whose edges are in constant movement" (Bourdieu, 1987: 13). Rejecting the 'substantialism' implicit in both realist and purely nominalist accounts of the ontology of social classes, Bourdieu argues that those who posit the existence of a hierarchy of objectively constituted, 'ready-made' categories, and equate what are merely 'classes on paper' with real, self-reflexive social classes, conscious of their shared situation and common interests and ready to mobilise in pursuit of them, confuse "the things of logic with the logic of things" (Bourdieu, 1987: 7). In a manner that appears to be very similar to Hacking's (1986) concept of 'dynamic nominalism', real social classes are believed to arise only when the individuals designated by a particular class category come to believe in the existence of that class themselves – for example, as a result of a conscious, political effort at 'class-making' – and therefore transform what was previously only an analytical construct into a unanimously shared 'folk category': "that is, into one of those impeccably real social fictions produced and reproduced by the magic of social belief" (Bourdieu, 1987: 9; Weininger, 2005). Nonetheless, since these purely theoretical constructs are in fact well-founded in reality, Bourdieu regards the likelihood of this fallacy to be proportional to the accuracy of their construction, which is based on the principles of maximum inter-group difference and maximum intra-group homogeneity in respect of each of the different forms of capital. Those socialised in similar conditions of existence will therefore develop and share similar dispositions and representations, on the basis of which they will usually tend to preserve relations of proximity with each other, whilst maintaining distance from those who have been socialised in markedly different conditions, and thereby reinforce these points of resemblance and difference. Thus, those "who occupy the same positions have every chance of having the same habitus, at least insofar as the trajectories which have brought them to these positions are themselves similar." (Bourdieu, 1987: 5). While classes refer merely to those who occupy a similar position in social space, therefore, the simultaneously homogenising and differentiating effects of socialisation within these positions ensures that class in fact becomes "inscribed deep into mind and body" (Atkinson, 2017: 3). In support of this general idea, many of Bourdieu's followers in the UK (e.g., Friedman & Laurison, 2020; Hey, 1997; Lawler, 2008; Reay, 2005; Sayer, 2002; Skeggs, 1997) have each quoted in their work the following passage by the feminist scholar, Annette Kuhn:

> Class is not just about the way you talk, or dress, or furnish your home; it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it […] Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being. (Kuhn, 1995: 98)

Bottero (2004) claims that Bourdieu's approach came to greater prominence partly as a result of the desire to protect stratification analysis from the encroachment of postmodernism, and that, like other relational accounts, it is also less susceptible to the charges of determinism and essentialism that have been levelled at structural models. However, as Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have suggested, these tendencies are not always so easily avoided, and in the effort to evade one of them researchers may find themselves inclining towards the other; the concept of 'dis-identification', mentioned above, is a case in point.

One particularly notable and conspicuously incoherent example of research on this topic, which illustrates well the intertwining of sociological and folk-sociological understandings of class and therefore merits detailed discussion here, is Skeggs's (1997) widely cited ethnography of white working-class women enrolled on community care courses at a further education college in the north-west of England. The author states that the research is partly motivated by the vogue for post-modernist theories of identity and performativity, that exaggerate the possibilities for the unconstrained movement of individuals through social space, and by the apparent retreat from class analysis in academia, which she claims is being enacted by those who merely seek to deny and abdicate responsibility for their own privilege. The study is therefore an attempt to 're-nuance' the concept of class in order demonstrate how it is in fact a "major feature of subjectivity" (Skeggs, 1997: 7); indeed, she argues that the women's subjectivities are, in fact, 'produced' by class. The evidence that Skeggs provides for this often-repeated claim, and which is very clearly corroborated by the quotations she uses to substantiate it, is the fact that her participants very seldom employ or even allude to the term 'class' at all, and that when the concept is explicitly introduced during interviews by the researcher herself they refer only to its inadequacy to capture the complexity of their own lives and identities: "Class is absolutely central to how these women live their lives, exemplified in this chapter by their constant refusal to be fixed or measured by it." (Skeggs, 1997: 75) These allegedly 'strenuous' and 'enormous' efforts at resisting categorisation, and the women's evident aspirations towards 'respectability' and for particular forms of typically middle-class cultural capital, are variously described not only as a reluctance to identify as working-class, but as 'dissimulation', 'denial', 'performance', and 'passing'. The author acknowledges in a footnote that by using the term 'passing' to refer to something that one is not, rather than simply in the ethnomethodological sense, this implies that there must be something that one already 'is', and thus declares that this "something is the occupation of a class position" (Skeggs, 1997: 96). However, this clearly conflates a relational epistemology with a substantialist one, and while the author recognises that categorisations themselves often reinforce the social positions they are intended to describe, there appears to be no consideration at all of her own involvement in this process, and in the maintenance of sharp conceptual boundaries between putatively working-class and middle-class 'cultures'.

Many of Skeggs's subjects are clearly engaged in efforts to achieve a form of 'upward' social mobility, either through their educational participation and acquisition of cultural capital, or simply via their self-presentations, or indeed both. And yet these attempts at 'passing' are destined to fail in Skeggs's view because the women do not possess and cannot access the requisite knowledge and history in order to get things 'right', and nor therefore can they hope to even understand what 'getting it right' actually means. In fact, this is also confessed in another footnote as a "pertinent methodological problem for the researcher who does not have the middle-class history and cultural understanding to know what 'getting it right' really means" either, but is nonetheless in a position to mentally juxtapose her subjects with her own middle-class colleagues, "who do get it right all their lives", and assess how well the former 'measure up' (Skeggs, 1997: 96). Subsequently, however, she claims that it is only an imaginary middle-class identity that the women want to assume for themselves, since they evidently have no interest in acquiring the 'whole package' of middle-class dispositions, before finally submitting to the conclusion that "they cannot pass as completely middle-class because they do not want to." (Skeggs, 1997: 93). While the stigmatising and degrading representations of working-class people that are understood to motivate these efforts to 'dis-identify' are discussed at great length, only in passing does Skeggs refer to the negative sanctions and ridicule that often attend such 'pretensions' and does not elaborate on which direction they might come from. And yet she makes no attempt to conceal her own disappointment with her subjects' aspirations: "The problem with the desire to pass as middle-class is that it presents absolutely no challenge to the class system and reproduces the hierarchies and evaluations which regulate, devalue and delegitimate the working class" (Skeggs, 1997: 91); and later she laments that it "seems unlikely that the actions of these women are likely to lead to class politics, to class organisation or even to class consciousness of a directly articulated form." (Skeggs, 1997: 95).

But as Savage, Silva & Warde (2010) point out, 'dis-identification' is far from being an exclusively working-class phenomenon – when prompted by survey researchers to assign themselves to a class category, significantly more than half the population of the UK continue to identify as working-class, and in more recent work on the related concept of 'mis-identification', Friedman et. al. (2021) emphasise that in response to the latest British Attitudes Survey (Evans & Mellon, 2016), 47% of people in 'middle-class' professional and managerial occupations in fact identify as working-class, more than half of whom – approximately 3.5 million people – also happen to be from professional and managerial backgrounds. In this instance, rather than stigmatisation, the key explanation offered for such an apparently remarkable statistic is that it appears to reflect a (potentially unintentional and unconscious) desire to deflect class privilege. However, what seems to be largely overlooked in both of these examples is the possibility that what is being both identified *with* and 'dis-identified' *from* in these cases is not a clear and precise measure of an individual's current or past 'objective' class position, whether defined according to either the NS-SEC schema or Bourdieu's multi-dimensional model, for example, but is rather a far more nebulous complex of shared social representations – variously demeaning or dignifying – that are commonly associated with the folk-concepts being exchanged between these researchers and their subjects, indicated by the terms 'working-' and 'middle-class'. As Skeggs herself reports:

> … the definitions of working class-ness were by no means straightforward. When they did attempt to identify themselves they first had difficulties finding a discourse of class, and second had problems with the method of classification used to define it. This was paralleled in the academic accounts of class where no clear meaning is agreed upon and where classification systems are strongly contested. (Skeggs, 1997: 94)

Which perhaps raises the question, on what particular authority are Skeggs or Friedman et al., able to make assertions about the veracity of their subjects' 'class identities' – which, in any case, are rarely elicited spontaneously, and are in many instances entirely rejected – beyond the fact that they are often not especially well-aligned with their 'objective' class positions according to a number of different sociological models, or with various other observable indicators that are typically correlated with those positions? In his own analysis of the ontological status of social classes, Bourdieu (1987) argues that any theory of social reality must include the representations that agents themselves – including both lay actors and social scientists – have of that reality, and the contribution they thereby make to its construction. He also warns against the temptation of the social scientist to endow themselves with the authority of an adjudicator between rivalling folk and scientific theories and forget that the criteria they employ are also instruments, 'weapons' even, in "the classification struggle which determines the making and un-making of the classifications currently in use." (Bourdieu, 1987: 9). On this understanding, Skeggs and her subjects appear to be engaged in two different, opposing strategies of social positioning, according to their contrasting objectives; the latter may lack the social and symbolic power to make their self-presentations accepted, but these efforts are undermined not only by the anticipated refusal of recognition from those whom they are sporadically alleged to be unsuccessfully imitating, but also by Skeggs's own accusations of 'passing' – or what Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 33) term "policing the 'exit option'" – with its insinuations of both fraudulence and betrayal.

Finally, to the extent that identification and dis-identification are both active processes, Skeggs's sceptical stance regarding the performative dimension of self-presentation arguably leads her to ignore the ways in which individuals may be said to perform their own class identities, at varying levels of consciousness. This is implicit not only in the normative value that appears to be attributed to a straightforward congruence between objective classification and subjective identification, but also in the mystification with which she cloaks the notion of 'getting it right', as if such dispositions were only passively inculcated and then thoroughly petrified during an individual's early socialisation, rather than actively developed and strengthened through prolonged and repeated performance. The dramaturgical metaphors that illustrate Goffman's theory of self-presentation and impression management (e.g., Goffman, 1959) are often taken to suggest that such performances in public life conceal a 'true self' which re-emerges only when the actor returns backstage, however it is also a theory of how selves are actually constituted in the first place, and maintained or developed over time (Hacking, 2004; Lawler, 2015). In this respect, and in spite of the fact that symbolic interactionist approaches in general are commonly accused of ignoring the internalisation of social structures (Lahire, 2011), there is a clear point of intersection here with the concept of habitus. And yet, along with other aspects of Bourdieu's own writings – e.g., on the processes of distinction and the pursuit of social recognition (Atkinson, 2016; Bourdieu, 1984) – Goffman's emphasis on the symbolic value that typically accrues to displays or representations of particular forms of authenticity, and the ways in which these may be perceived to be indicative of differently evaluated inherent qualities (Daloz, 2010; Goffman, 1951), suggest reasons why an exclusive focus on internalised pre-reflexive dispositions is not only insufficient, but may also inadvertently reproduce precisely the deterministic and essentialising implications it is intended to overcome.

1.4. Habitus and Social Mobility

Like essentialism, the concept of habitus can be traced back to the thinking of Aristotle, from whom it was appropriated and developed many centuries later in Scholastic philosophy, and then eventually imported into the emerging social sciences through the work of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. While Weber's use of the term echoed the ancient and medieval definition of consciously acquired virtuous habits, Durkheim, and subsequently his nephew, the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, employed it to refer broadly to the internalised psychological and somatic effects of socialisation within particular social and historical contexts (Sapiro, 2015;

Wacquant, 2016). Since its acquisition and development is understood as an inherently social and dynamic process, habitus and essentialism are therefore typically counterposed, as in the work of Norbert Elias, who distinguishes the concept of a continually evolving national habitus from the essentialist notion of a fixed 'national character' (Sapiro, 2015). According to Bourdieu's definition, habitus refers to:

> Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations … (Bourdieu, 1990: 53)

Or, in somewhat less abstract terms:

> … a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of *long-lasting* (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action. (Bourdieu, 2005: 43)

Bloch (2012: 150) comments that, notwithstanding the indubitable efficacy of the concept, the term itself "illustrates the vagueness which hinders analysis. Its Latinate form barely hides the fact that it does not mean much more than what habit produces." However, a key component of Bourdieu's interpretation of habitus is that it doesn't merely reproduce in a mechanical fashion the psychological and behavioural habits from which it may be constituted, but is in fact 'generative' – i.e., capable of spontaneous improvisation within the familiar bounds of the fields in which it has been formed (Atkinson, 2016; Bourdieu, 2005). And yet the more substantial criticism, that – in spite of the significant influence of Piaget's work on schemata (Lizardo, 2004) – Bourdieu's use of the concept lacks a clear and precise psychological dimension, echoes those made by other cognitive anthropologists, as well as by sociologists advocating a programme of 'psychological sociology' (e.g., Lahire, 2011; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Where habitus is employed purely as means of conceptualising the reproduction of macro-level social processes, Wagner and Hayes (2005) have suggested that such criticisms may be misguided, however much recent sociological research explicitly attempts to utilise the concept in order to describe psychological and behavioural phenomena at an individual level. Therefore Bloch's (2012) argument that social anthropologists often mistakenly infer and make pronouncements about their subjects' implicit beliefs and tacit knowledge from their explicit reflective statements may apply equally well to many contemporary sociologists, who frequently offer tenuous (and sometimes entirely unsubstantiated) speculations concerning the habitus of their interviewees simply on the basis of their verbal responses – responses which in fact often have little obvious or significant bearing on habitus itself, at least insofar as the latter is understood to refer to internalised, pre-reflexive cognitive and behavioural schemata, rather than simply interpreted as synonymous with 'self', 'identity', or 'character', for example (Atkinson, 2016).

While there have been a number of detailed empirical studies conducted by sociologists examining the nature of habitus itself (e.g., Lahire, 2011) – in some cases even employing participant observation in order to document the acquisition of cognitive and behavioural dispositions from a first-person perspective (Wacquant, 2004) – habitus has increasingly become a focus of sociological research exploring the subjective experience of moving between socio-economic categories, i.e., social mobility. Studies of social mobility in the UK have traditionally been rooted in a Weberian perspective, generating predominantly quantitative data detailing either the total rate of intergenerational mobility between socio-economic categories or classes (known as *absolute mobility*), as defined by occupational status according to the NS-SEC schema, or a ratio of the relative chances of individuals from two different classes of origin occupying a particular destination class at a specified age (*relative mobility*) (Payne, 2017;

Lawler & Payne, 2017). However, the dominance of this approach, and its convenience within the context of an ostensibly broad political consensus that often equates greater socio-economic equality with the pursuit of ever-increasing rates of social mobility, has been paralleled by a neglect of research attempting to understand how social mobility is actually experienced by individuals themselves, and the factors that continue to determine income inequalities for those from different socio-economic backgrounds even within the same occupations (Friedman & Laurison, 2020). Much recent research (e.g., Friedman, 2014, 2015; Giazitzoglu, 2017; Ingram, 2011; Mallman, 2017; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009) has therefore adopted a Bourdieusian framework, using in-depth individual interviews to explore the experience of mobility trajectories along cultural as well as economic dimensions of capital accumulation, and has shown several ways in which being 'upwardly' socially mobile may not always resemble the uniformly positive image with which it is typically represented in mainstream political discourse (Lawler & Payne, 2017). Often drawing upon and attempting to refine Bourdieu's own undeveloped notion of 'habitus clivé' (Friedman, 2014, 2015; Ingram & Abrahams, 2015; Mallman, 2017), a number of these studies refer back to and aim to re-conceptualise the neglected 'dissociative thesis' elaborated in some of the very earliest qualitative research on social and cultural mobility, in which mobility was said to produce in the majority of cases a profound and permanent psychological tension in individuals, whose "nervous systems crumble under the burden of great strains required of them. Hence arises the increase of mental disease and nervousness, psychosis and neurosis" (Sorokin,1927/1998: 515). Building on the psychoanalytic conception of a 'splitting of the ego' or the 'divided self', Bourdieu referred to habitus clivé – a 'split' or 'cleft' habitus – as the result of successive or simultaneous socialisation in two contrasting fields (Friedman & Savage, 2017; Lahire, 2011), producing "a habitus divided against itself, and doomed to a kind of double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities." (Bourdieu, 1999: 511).

As a number of sociologists and anthropologists (e.g., Atkinson, 2016; Lahire, 2011; Strauss and Quinn, 1997) have very convincingly illustrated, habitus – clearly defined and understood, and examined using appropriate research methods – is undoubtedly a highly useful, if not indispensable, concept for understanding both the internalisation and externalisation of the cognitive and behavioural dispositions that are particular to specific social and cultural contexts, and the significant challenges that are often faced in attempting to traverse them. Friedman (2015), however, who claims to highlight both the strengths and limitations of employing the concept within social mobility research, is perhaps more successful in demonstrating the latter, and provides a good illustration of the imprecision and confusion that often characterises sociological discussions of habitus, especially when the concept is superimposed upon the data without obvious justification (Reay, 2004), as well as the more specific inadequacies and significant impediments this may entail for research in this area. Analysing the impact of social mobility on the 'ontological coherence of the self' – and using the terms 'habitus', 'self' and 'identity' interchangeably throughout – Friedman (2015) describes the 'hysteresis effect' that is said by Bourdieu to follow from a significant mismatch between the habitus an individual develops in primary socialisation and that which may be required by a new, unfamiliar field, such as might be encountered at school or university, for example, whereby "practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment to which they are objectively confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted" (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977: 78). As an example of this phenomenon, an extract is highlighted in which an interviewee describes the ridicule she was initially subjected to as a child by the other residents of her housing estate when she returned home each day wearing the uniform of her new elite private school, and the ostracism she experienced from members of her extended family, who perceived her to be 'getting above herself'. These negative sanctions are explicitly associated by the author with the hysteresis effect his interviewee experienced while her "habitus desperately tried to respond to a profound change of educational field" (Friedman, 2015: 138); however it is patently obvious, not least in what the interviewee actually says, that they were directed at her from other individuals within the field of origin in response to superficial tokens or aspects of behaviour that are understood to be symbolic of an alternative, contrasting and apparently antagonistic field, rather than from the occupants of the latter. Conversely, another interviewee is quoted describing the feelings of guilt that are induced by her own private, involuntarily 'snobby', appraisals of her mother's aesthetic and sartorial tastes, and which indicate to her the extent to which she herself has changed and become estranged from her family. Referring to the moment at which the interviewee then begins to cry, Friedman (2015: 144) states: "the two sides of her habitus had suddenly and unexpectedly collided" – yet, as is mentioned only a few paragraphs earlier, this is presented as an example of a case in which there is a mismatch between habitus and field of *origin*. The dispositions that have been adopted and apparently internalised during the course of secondary socialisation, throughout adolescence and adult life, appear to be in conflict with her emotional affinities and sense of loyalty to her family because they are demonstrably antagonistic towards her mother's aesthetic choices – which may or may not be guided by her own internalised aesthetic dispositions, or might instead be simply the consequence of a relatively superficial process of conformity to specific social or sub-cultural norms; there is not sufficient evidence in this study to privilege either one of these claims with any confidence.

Similarly, in another example of research on habitus clivé (Ingram & Abrahams, 2015: 144), one of the authors describes her own academic work as involving a painful process of "forcing my habitus to confront itself and all its contradictions." But unless 'habitus' is mentally replaced in this sentence with 'sense of self' or 'identity', for example, it is extremely difficult to fathom what this might actually refer to, since the capacity of a habitus to confront itself would seem to rely on it being precisely what it is not, i.e., conscious and self-reflexive. The tendency to depict habitus as some kind of anthropomorphised entity or homunculus is rife in this literature, with frequent gnomic descriptions of habituses independently ‘travelling through space’, giving themselves ‘time to get a feel for the game’, ‘protecting themselves’, or their hosts, from disruption and dislocation, for example. However, these objections are not simply a matter of semantic pedantry, but rather point to the fact that, like Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of social class itself, habitus is a fundamentally relational phenomenon and yet, once again, is commonly interpreted by sociologists working within the Bourdieusian perspective (and, in fact, not uncommonly by Bourdieu himself) in strongly substantialist terms.

The concept of habitus clearly reveals the explanatory insufficiency of theories of action and behaviour – such as rational-choice theory, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology, for example – that focus almost exclusively on the external, contextual factors of the present moment, but in appearing to treat everything as if it were simply either the product or producer of internalised pre-reflexive psychological and behavioural dispositions, and by entirely ignoring the explanatory power of situational factors in the present tense, including the more or less deliberate, more or less consciously motivated forms of intersubjective communication in social interaction, this insufficiency is merely inverted (Atkinson, 2016; Lahire, 2011; Reay, 2004). A large proportion of the examples across this research that are intended to support the various authors’ speculations about habitus itself, or about a clash of two incommensurable systems of pre-reflexive dispositions, in fact clearly demonstrate instances of either actual or perceived snobbery and prejudice (i.e., negative sanctions) from individuals attached to different typically class-based fields – for example, in specific educational or occupational contexts – or instances of actual or perceived hostility and resentment from the socially mobile individuals’ own family members, urging them against ‘appearing to be something they are not’, that is, “not authentically from ‘birth’” (Friedman, 2015: 141). The incommensurability of certain dispositions is evidently not intrinsic to those dispositions themselves but is rather made to appear so by a continuous process of symbolic representation, which is both implicitly and explicitly intersubjectively reiterated and objectified, whereby they are actively accorded different, often contrasting, yet potentially alterable and therefore potentially compatible, values. A certain characteristic way of thinking, speaking, or behaving, for example, may acquire prestige if adopted by individuals of high social status, or may become 'vulgarised' if diffused widely amongst the population (Bourdieu, 1984: Goffman, 1951; Sapiro, 2015). But the notion that an internalisation of dispositions acquired in two contrasting fields might occasion a division or fragmentation of the overall structure of an individual's cognitive and behavioural schemata – whether this may be described as their habitus, or even their 'self' or 'identity', rather than simply their 'sense of self' or their feelings of individual coherence – is not only a function of a marked difference in status or of a mutual antagonism between those fields, but may also be significantly influenced by representations of the nature of both individual and social identity itself. Lahire (2011), for example, points out the fact that Bourdieu initially developed the concept of habitus in his analysis of a traditional and weakly differentiated society in Kabylia, and argues that the idea of a singular, coherent self is to a large extent a 'socially maintained illusion' – strengthened by the common tendency to study individual action and behaviour in single, isolated contexts – which obscures the internal contradictions and inevitably heterogeneous dispositions of those socialised in all but the most extraordinarily unified and homogenous circumstances. As Wacquant (2016: 64) states: "habitus is never the replica of a single social structure, but a dynamic, multiscalar, and multi-layered set of schemata … not necessarily coherent and unified but displays varying degrees of integration and tension." And nor is it "static or eternal: dispositions are socially mounted and can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces" (Wacquant, 2016: 66). Friedman (2015) acknowledges the limitations that Bourdieu's more deterministic descriptions of habitus pose for understanding the experience of social mobility, but elaborating and expanding the conceptual reach of 'habitus clivé' does not help to overcome these limitations as he suggests it might, nor does it contradict or lend significant nuance to the frequently homogenising, monistic, autonomous and decontextualised treatments of habitus that ascribe a 'crushing weight' to the influence of an individual's primary socialisation (Lahire, 2011); in fact, it arguably reinforces the normativity of these assumptions by simply cracking the image of a singular, uniform habitus in half and presenting this equally facile duality as a type of pathology.

Indeed, beliefs about 'identity disruption' are a common focus of psychological research on individual essentialism (Chen, Urminsky & Bartels, 2016; De Freitas, Tobia, Newman & Knobe, 2017; Newman & Knobe, 2018). On this view, the notion that certain forms of social mobility may be likely to produce a 'cleft habitus' or 'split identity' would suggest that in such cases an individual's socio-economic background is assumed to be a causally central or constitutively necessary feature of their own individual identity; the rending of this identity in two implies that the dispositions acquired via socialisation in different class-based fields cannot co-exist or be combined within the same individual, but instead must be accommodated within separate selves altogether. However, as Lahire (2011) argues, the objectification of beliefs of this kind by social scientists and their employment as a conceptual lens through which to make assertions of an ontological nature about habitus or identity, for example, places too much emphasis on the individuals' own subjectivity – which may be inclined to focus exclusively on the most salient sources of contradiction in their sense of self (or that suggested to them by the researcher), and overlook many other examples of internal heterogeneity – and on widely shared representations regarding the singularity and coherence of individual identity. For many of those who wish to stress the thoroughly social constitution of an individual's identity, it is the idea of an inner 'true self' that somehow precedes or exists beyond the reach of society that represents a form of essentialism (see Lawler, 2015), but Lahire's point is not that the self, or some part of it, is free from social determinism, but rather that individuals are 'multi-socialised' and 'multi-determined'; indeed, typically to such an extent in contemporary Western societies that it is precisely this multitude of social influences that produces the illusion of their essential autonomy.

Recent cross-cultural research on the experience of long-range 'upward' social mobility (Naudet, 2018) has in fact shown that a significant factor in the individual's sense of maintaining a coherent identity is the various nature of the representations, ideologies, 'narrative resources', or 'cultural repertoires' (Lamont, 1992), concerning the relationship between different socio-economic categories – and therefore of what may be involved or required in moving between them – that predominate within different national contexts, and the degree to which these representations may be congruent between the fields of the individual's family background and those of their subsequent social, educational and occupational environments. Using in-depth individual interviews to compare the experience of social mobility in India, the United States, and France, Naudet (2018) found that whereas socially mobile Dalits (traditionally stigmatised members of the lowest caste in India) tended to remain highly loyal to the social group of their origin and rejected 'Sanskritization' (i.e. the adoption of practices and behaviours typically associated with the dominant Brahmin caste), individuals from low socio-economic status backgrounds in the US, on the other hand, were able to draw upon a highly pervasive meritocratic ideology and the relatively greater significance attached to economic rather than cultural forms of capital, in articulating a self-narrative that minimised any tensions or incongruities between origin and destination groups. In France, however, where, in spite of similar levels of social fluidity, class boundaries are nevertheless perceived to be far more rigid, and where greater importance and prestige is accorded to forms of embodied cultural capital, those individuals whose social mobility trajectories were not encouraged or supported by a legitimising meritocratic ethos during their upbringing were more likely to experience a strong sense of internal conflict, and of being 'between worlds' while not quite belonging to either (Naudet, 2018). Naudet's account does not deny the significance and symbolic value of internalised dispositions, but he argues that the hypothesis of a 'split habitus' is based on a presumption of the immutability of the dispositions acquired during primary socialisation, and makes a clear distinction between the tensions caused by a strong social and economic pressure to assimilate and develop mastery of the valorised schemes of action and perception in a new social context, and those caused by a desire or feeling of obligation to maintain a loyal attachment to the social group of origin, and avoid accusations and/or feelings of betrayal and inauthenticity. Arguably, this work strongly suggests, therefore, that those approaches that seek to understand the subjective experience of social mobility through the conceptual lens of habitus alone are not only insufficient, and do not only thoroughly obscure the processes of representation and social interaction that confer meaning and value and impose the various conditions that might enable or actively constrain the malleability and plurality of an individual's repertoire of internalised dispositions. But in treating habitus as a largely inflexible repository of the cognitive and behavioural schemes instilled by membership of ostensibly discrete and homogenous class cultures, they also contribute to a system of representation that may influence or exacerbate precisely those feelings of estrangement, internal conflict, incoherence, and 'split identity', that the concept is being employed to examine.

It has often been assumed in the social sciences that the most effective strategy of redressing essentialist beliefs regarding the category-typical characteristics and behaviours of certain groups has been to expose the fallacy of attributing to them a biological or genetic basis and emphasise instead their exclusively social origin (Haslam, 1998; Rangel & Keller, 2011). Indeed, in its uncovering and demystifying of the processes by which social class differences and socially transmitted forms of symbolic capital often become naturalised (Bourdieu, 1984; Lawler, 2008; Lawler & Payne, 2017), the concept of habitus itself – understood as "embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu, 1990: 56) – is usually believed to be antithetical to essentialism (Meisenhelder, 2006). However, in proposing BSD as a dimension of psychological essentialism, Rangel & Keller (2011) are not the first to have observed the fact that strong social constructionist accounts which oppose biological reductionism often simply replace it with social determinism (see Sayer, 1997); and the notion that an individual's subjectivity may be 'produced' by their class position (Skeggs, 1997), and the regular conflation or confusion of group and individual levels of analysis that results in the implication – arguably identical to the 'typological thinking' that characterises an essentialist understanding of species (Mayr, 1968) – that a single, specific individual may possess a purely abstract, generalised, prototypical 'class habitus', both indicate an exceptionally deterministic view of socialisation that is not only profound and permanent in its effects, but also decidedly singular and homogenous. As Wagner et al. (2009: 376) point out, in spite of continuous efforts, both in the realm of social science and in the political sphere, to de-naturalise and de-essentialise social categories, "mental segregation re-occurs in yet different guises", and essentialism very often returns 'through the backdoor'.

1.5. Returning to Essentialism

The concept of Belief in Social Determinism, as a dimension of psychological essentialism arising from intuitions and beliefs concerning the depth and permanence of the effects of socialisation, therefore appears to offer a particularly promising avenue for research on folk-sociological representations of socio-economic categories in the UK. Not least since the very few studies that have been conducted in this domain have largely been undertaken in cultural contexts in which shared representations of socio-economic groups are significantly different, and have typically assumed a model of essentialism based on innate potential and natural kind beliefs. For example, despite the fact that class is traditionally believed to be a peculiarly British 'obsession'[5] (Bauer & Marsh, 1997; Cannadine, 1999), and that – as Naudet (2018) has also shown in France – efforts at increasing social mobility are commonly perceived to be impeded by rigid class distinctions (Payne, 2017), this research has predominantly taken place either in India, where representations of socio-economic differences may be conflated with the explicitly naturalising logic of the caste system (e.g. Mahalingam, 2003, 2007), or, by contrast, in the United States, where they tend to be obscured or subsumed by a strongly meritocratic ideology (e.g. Davoodi, et al., 2019; Haslam, et al., 2000; Kraus & Keltner, 2013).

The experimental literature on psychological essentialism frequently employs a number of different reasoning tasks and thought experiments – based on 'switched-at-birth', 'adoption', or 'transformation' paradigms, for example – to elicit respondents' intuitions concerning one or two individual components of essentialism in isolation, such as the perceived innateness, immutability, or inductive potential of category membership, or its members' possession of inherent, causally-determining properties (e.g. Astuti, Carey & Solomon, 2004; Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1989). The simultaneous involvement of other conceptual components in these intuitions – e.g., of discreteness, uniformity, mutual exclusivity, and permanence of the category itself – may also be (and in fact commonly are) inferred from studies of this kind, however, as Gelman (2003) is careful to point out, these experiments do not in themselves provide direct evidence of essentialism per se, but rather provide strong, converging evidence of several forms of intuitive reasoning – which in many cases are utilised by children from a very early age – that are individually consistent with an essentialist construal. Nevertheless, such qualifications are extremely rare and the vast majority of researchers in this field regularly assume a synecdochical relationship between essentialism and the individual components that are the focus of the thought experiments and reasoning tasks used in their studies; often resulting in the somewhat questionable suggestion that an innate or early-emerging tendency to believe that species membership, for example, is determined by inherent features and is not altered or in any significant way affected by purely superficial, cosmetic modifications is self-evidently an illustration of essentialist thinking.

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[5] "This undoubted British preoccupation may be varyingly regarded as admirable, appropriate, essential, inevitable, regrettable, unhealthy, ignorant, snobbish, petty, small-minded or mean-spirited. But whichever of these it is, or whichever combination of these it is, most British thinking about class is not only obsessional, but also vague, confused, contradictory, ignorant and lacking any adequate historical perspective." (Cannadine, 1999: xi-xii)

As Haslam (1998) and Kanovsky (2007) have both argued, due to the common practice of conflating essentialism with naturalisation, this 'pars pro toto' fallacy is frequently committed in studies designed to test for intuitions regarding the naturalness or innate potential of particular social categories. The persistence, well into the twentieth century, of biologically deterministic accounts of poverty in the UK, often used to justify support for eugenicist policies (Bottero, 2004), and the concept of 'blue blood', which continues to be invoked in representations of European aristocracies (Wagner et al., 2009), strongly suggest that natural kind beliefs are far from irrelevant in research on essentialist representations of socio-economic categories. And yet Mahalingam (2003) inadvertently highlights precisely what may be overlooked when focusing exclusively on naturalising manifestations of essentialism, even when representations of class are examined within the context of the Indian caste system. Aiming to reconcile and thereby overcome the individual insufficiencies of purely cognitive accounts of psychological essentialism, on the one hand, and descriptions of strategic, motivated, ideological essentialisation, on the other, Mahalingam (2003) uses a 'brain transplant' paradigm to investigate whether essentialist inferences may be influenced by differences of power and status. Finding that a significant proportion of Brahmin respondents believed that a brain transplant from a 'rich man' to a 'poor man' would affect the latter's behaviour but that, conversely, a transplant in the opposite direction – from a 'poor man' to a 'rich man' – would have no effect, the author therefore concludes that, consistent with his original hypothesis, “Brahmins essentialised the rich person’s identity […] but not the poor person’s identity.” (Mahalingam, 2003: 742). The Dalits’ responses, however, displayed a more mixed pattern: roughly equal numbers answered that the brain transplant either would or would not affect behaviour in both scenarios, or in the author’s terms, either ‘endorsed’ or ‘rejected’ an “essentialist notion of social class” (Mahalingam, 2003: 744). The author’s explanation for these differing response patterns, which is very similar to that typically offered by a Social Identity Theory perspective, is that while the Brahmins’ answers are reflective of a self-serving ideological motivation to preserve a system of social distance and starkly unequal status and power relations, the Dalits’ responses display an ambivalence between two alternative forms of identity politics: ‘rejuvenation’ – the celebration and reassertion of traditionally stigmatised Dalit culture and identity – and assimilation or ‘Sanskritization’ – the adoption of Brahmin behaviours, practices and values – which is explicitly associated here with the Marxist concept of ‘false consciousness’.

However, there are a number of arguments that may be raised against these conclusions, not the least of which is that the experiment does not in fact necessarily reveal evidence of essentialism at all, but instead demonstrates perhaps the rather more prosaic and tautological fact that Brahmins were significantly more likely than Dalits to perceive the brain of a rich man to be causally central in relation to behaviour, and significantly less likely than Dalits to attribute equal causal power to the brain of a poor man. One possible reason for this is provided by the author himself when he explains that Brahmins are stereotypically associated in folklore and popular culture with intellectual prowess, while Dalits are commonly associated with strength and athleticism. It is entirely possible therefore to deduce that the results simply reflect differing degrees of belief or endorsement between Brahmins and Dalits with regard to caste-based mythology and stereotypes, and that a different transplant or transformation scenario, focussing on bodily features that are more likely to be associated with Dalit identity for example, would reverse the asymmetrical pattern of Brahmin responses, or that a 'blood transfusion' task – such as that used by Regnier (2015) in the context of examining essentialist beliefs about the descendants of former slaves in Madagascar – would instead produce a more even pattern of responses between the two conditions. It is also equally possible that it is in fact those responses indicating that a brain transplant from a rich man to a poor man *would not* affect the latter's behaviour that are guided by essentialist intuitions, since it may be believed that a rich man's brain is insufficiently powerful to overcome the causal force contained by the putative essence or essence placeholder of a poor man, which is understood to be located elsewhere in the body. Indeed, in Mahalingam & Rodriguez (2006), in which the only notable difference is that the caste labels 'Brahmin' and 'Dalit' are substituted for the socio-economic category terms 'rich man' and 'poor man' used in the earlier experiment, the very opposite pattern is reported – a significantly larger number of Brahmins believed that a Brahmin receiving a brain transplant from a Dalit would behave like the latter, but that a Dalit who received a brain transplant from a Brahmin would not behave like a Brahmin – and yet a very similar self-serving ideological rationale is implied to account for the assertion that in this instance "Brahmins attributed a distinct and more potent essence to Dalits that could change the behaviour of a Brahmin recipient and yet [be] impermeable to any change when receiving a Brahmin brain" (Mahalingam & Rodriguez, 2006: 461). But beyond these unsubstantiated speculations and puzzling, yet unacknowledged, inconsistencies, a further significant drawback to this research is that in spite of the author's hypothesis that members of marginalised groups "are likely to invoke social (non-biological) essentialist explanations of group differences" (Mahalingam, 2003: 737), the brain transplant paradigm appears to provide no means of capturing these intuitions – or at least of distinguishing them from 'non-social', biological explanations – and thus the notion of a 'social mode' of essentialism is entirely forgotten about and omitted from the analysis, and is not even referred to in attempting to account for the ostensibly 'essentialist' responses of around half of the entire sample of Dalit participants.

Pereira et al. (2010) also adopt this paradigm to test, across three different countries (Brazil, Spain, and England), whether 'easily naturalizable' social categories – race, sex, and age – are essentialised to a greater degree than those they presume to be 'entitative' ones, such as nationality, religion, and economic status (again, 'rich' or 'poor'). Unsurprisingly perhaps – assuming that brains might be commonly believed to be more strongly differentiated according to other biologically-based differences (see O'Connor & Joffe, 2014), rather than socially determined factors – they conclude that they are. However, it is never made explicit whether an 'essentialist' response refers to one in which the brain transplant (from a dominant to a non-dominant category member – e.g., from a 'rich person' to a 'poor person' – and vice versa), is believed to affect the behaviour of the recipient or not affect it; it is clear that the authors believe essentialism to be indicated by either one or the other of these responses, and often seem to suggest it is the latter, yet at other times imply that it is actually the former. But, as in Mahalingam's (2003) study, these results could be interpreted either way, depending on where (if anywhere at all) the essence of the category may be assumed to reside and the extent to which the brain itself is understood to be causally central in relation to category-typical behaviour. And, in fact, their results are rather more complex than their conclusion suggests: the only categories that receive a roughly equal (or non-significantly different) frequency of response types are race, sex and economic status, while for all other categories a significant majority of respondents believed that a transplant *would* affect the recipient's behaviour. Interestingly, they also note that although their English participants "mostly adopted a clearly defined position opposed to essentialism, this changed in the condition where a rich person receives the brain of a poor person." (Pereira et al., 2010: 814); however, given the extremely diminutive size of this particular sample, and the various faults, weaknesses, confusions, and obfuscations already touched upon, unfortunately it is impossible to know what significance can be attributed to this statement, or even how to interpret it exactly.

In a study on essentialism in children's reasoning about poverty in Chile, del Rio & Strasser (2011) highlight the limitations in an example of related research (Diesendruck & haLevi, 2006) of examining only a single manifestation of essentialist thinking – in this case, inductive potential – and therefore design four separate reasoning tasks in order to also include intuitions regarding inherent, non-obvious properties; stability of category membership over superficial transformation (immutability); and innateness. However, whether their more pluralistic approach succeeds in overcoming these limitations seems highly debatable: for example, some of the supposedly non-obvious, dispositional traits that they use to serve as a potential basis for categorisation (including the most frequently chosen: 'he/she is unclean') might just as easily be construed as observable, superficial and accidental features. And the examples of external transformation provided are extremely trivial and communicated in the form of a transparently leading question: the children are shown an image of a man and are told that he is poor. They then learn, for example, that he has been given expensive clothes or has 'won a trip on an airplane' and asked whether he is now rich or poor. The fact that the children's responses in this task were not significantly different from chance arguably appears to lend far more support for a Piagetian view than it does for an essentialist account.

While these authors suggest that essentialist reasoning about poverty might be promoted or exacerbated by high levels of social inequality, segregation and a lack of social mobility, Kraus & Keltner (2013) argue that social mobility itself might by constrained by essentialist beliefs about class, which can be invoked to explain or justify existing inequalities. Employing an alternative experimental procedure, which is often used to measure correlations between essentialist beliefs and other response variables or particular demographic data, Kraus & Keltner (2013) have developed an 'essentialism scale' specifically tailored to capture beliefs about social class which, in the US, they found to be significantly (although not strongly) positively correlated with measures of high subjective socio-economic status (but not with 'objective' measures, such as income and education), with system-justifying and conservative political beliefs, and with endorsement of punitive rather than restorative policy decisions in response to unlawful behaviour. One potential advantage of scale-based measures over vignettes and thought experiments is that they permit the simultaneous inclusion of multiple components of essentialism within the same study, however since the scale items are invariably employed to derive a single mean rating, in the interests of internal consistency this potential usually remains underexploited. Of the ten items included in Kraus and Keltner's (2013) scale, which is adapted from an earlier study on folk-biological conceptions of race (Williams & Eberhardt, 2008), four of the questions are specifically designed to test for intuitions about innate potential and constitute a 'biological beliefs subscale', while the remaining six are all concerned with categorisation and are grouped together to form a 'discreteness beliefs subscale'. Nonetheless, several of these items implicitly involve other components, such as inductive potential, uniformity, immutability and stability, and are also capable of capturing social determinist responses, but without providing any means of identifying and distinguishing them from intuitions based on biological determinism, or indeed from structural or even fully extrinsic explanations.

Using a slightly modified version of this scale in a Finnish context (in which two items from the biological subscale were ultimately excluded due to poor correlation with responses to the other eight statements), Räty et al. (2017) found that although essentialist beliefs about social class and high subjective socio-economic status were both significantly associated with endorsement of fixed notions of intelligence – as a form of 'natural giftedness' – they were not significantly correlated with each other; in fact, as they point out, the actual strength of the association between essentialism and subjective SES in Kraus & Keltner's (2013) original study was rather more modest than the authors intimated. Räty et al.'s (2017) research, however, is perhaps more notable for the fact that it is a very rare, if not unique, example of a quantitative study of essentialism that is explicitly rooted in the theoretical framework of Social Representations Theory. Interest in psychological essentialism from an SRT perspective remains rather minimal, however a small number of studies in this field have examined essentialist representations of race, ethnicity, nationality and culture, employing a variety of qualitative methods, such as individual interviews (Buhagier, Sammut, Rochira & Salvatore, 2018), textual and visual analyses of newspaper articles, political cartoons, and transcripts of radio broadcasts (Augoustinos, Hanson-Easey & Due, 2015; Moloney, Holtz & Wagner, 2013), and analyses of website comments and internet forums (Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Kadianki & Andreouli, 2017; Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012); and there has also been a degree of contact between a general SRT approach and psychological essentialism in studies of media representations of neuroscientific research on sex and gender (O'Connor, Rees & Joffe, 2012; O'Connor & Joffe, 2014).

This body of work is predominantly concerned with explicit manifestations of essentialism in intersubjective communication and social interaction, and the deployment of essentialist discourse in the service of group-based representational projects and identity politics. Wagner et al. (2009), for example, lucidly illustrate the ways in which this 'representational tool' can be used very effectively for the purposes of both self-, or in-group, and other-, or out-group representation, and can often be highly advantageous to individuals and groups, not only at an intuitive, relatively automatic, cognitive level, but also in the form of more or less reflective, strategic, motivated cognition, for the purposes of establishing a strong sense of identity and solidarity. However, like the majority of social psychological research on essentialism more broadly, SRT approaches have typically focused exclusively on the pernicious, derogatory, and often de-humanising functions of essentialist representations. Aside from augmenting a relatively impoverished and myopic understanding of essentialist reasoning and representation, this work also often appears to have a tendency – precisely as Reay (2004) has suggested in relation to the frequently tenuous and superimposed applications of the concept of habitus in sociological research – to dilute and distort the conceptual clarity and utility of essentialism altogether. A number of recent studies cite Haslam et al.'s (2000: 113) observation that the concept of psychological essentialism suffers from a lack of precise definition (e.g., Augoustinos et al, 2015; Buhagier et al., 2018), however not only do these examples of SRT research neglect to actually incorporate or build upon the significant theoretical contributions made by Haslam and his colleagues, or indeed acknowledge any of the other advances in cognitive, developmental and cross-cultural research during the intervening years, they even potentially undermine these developments by way of the vagueness and imprecision that characterises their own approaches, and the exceptionally weak evidence that is sometimes marshalled to support assertions that conspicuously tendentious and even prejudiced representations of marginalised groups are, ipso facto, illustrations of essentialism. It is a recurrent trope in several of these studies that cognitive research ignores the ideological dimensions of essentialism and the profound influence of particular social, cultural and historical contexts, but in many cases – including even those that are specifically referred to in this capacity (e.g., Rothbart & Taylor, 1992, cited in Augoustinos et al., 2015) – this is demonstrably false, and appears to be symptomatic of a general reluctance to productively engage with the cognitive and developmental literature, which then only serves to significantly constrain the contribution that social psychological research can make in this area.

As Wagner et al. (2009: 378) argue, the pervasiveness and efficacy of essentialist or naturalising rhetoric would be difficult to account for "if there were no widespread cognitive tendency in the human mind that the rhetoric can appeal to." However, certain inconsistencies and contradictions persist even in far more stringent and comprehensive analyses such as this one: for example, in spite of their description of 'naturalisation' and 'entitativity' as alternative forms of essentialism comprised of different clusters of components, the authors subsequently state that the terms 'natural' and 'essence' are co-extensive and that neither can be thought of independently of the other. But if natural categories, such as biological species, can be represented in non-essentialist terms then it is not entirely clear why 'naturalised' social categories cannot be, and this alleged equivalence is clearly at odds with their own claims about entitativity and would also appear to rule out the many other manifestations of essentialist thinking.

Nonetheless, SRT research can yield a number of very valuable insights in these areas, not least for a social determinist understanding of essentialism; Wagner et al. (2009) themselves give the example of the essentialist rhetoric often deployed by elite military formations, such as the US Marine Corps, who explicitly promote a representation of homogenous group membership effected by an exhaustive and immutable process of individual transformation. And Kadianaki & Andreouili (2017), in their study of essentialist representations of national citizenship, similarly demonstrate how the possibility of identity change does not always signal an absence of essentialism, as is often assumed, but can sometimes be represented as a non-volitional acquisition or transformation of essence which cannot subsequently be modified.

1.6. Integrating Social Representations Theory with Cognition and Culture

Cognition and Culture research, bringing together the methods and perspectives of cognitive science, psychology and anthropology, has demonstrated that qualitative studies of psychological essentialism have more to offer than simply identifying its strategic and ideological manifestations in an ever-expanding array of different social and cultural settings.

They can also help to shed light on the particular nature, structure, and logic of essentialist thinking itself, at both explicit and implicit levels, and may be employed to develop and refine innovative experimental studies; and, likewise, experimental findings can also be used to further an understanding of qualitative data. This is well illustrated by an example of cognitive anthropological research in a context which, ironically, appears to provide some of the most compelling cross-cultural evidence of aspects of essentialist thinking, in spite (or perhaps rather *because*) of the fact that the prevailing cultural representations of social group membership are explicitly non-essentialist. The Vezo, of the west coast of Madagascar, hold what Astuti (1995, 2001, 2007) describes as a 'performative theory of identity', meaning that group membership is not ascribed at birth but is achieved by the successful acquisition and performance of specific skills and activities that are adapted to the particular environment in which they live, such as a certain method of fishing or sailing, or a distinctive manner of walking across the sand, for example. However, just as children and adults can only become Vezo through a process of socialisation, they can also 'un-become' Vezo by no longer performing the relevant activity criteria or by moving away to a different region; Vezo social identity, therefore, is not an inherent state of being, but is attained and maintained by action and behaviour alone:

> Vezo-ness, in other words, is not "instilled" or "infused" in the person; Vezo-ness is better thought of as a shape that people take – a shape that nonetheless never hardens […] Vezo-ness shapes people's bodies, leaving deep, albeit impermanent, traces on them. (Astuti, 1995: 472)

This description resonates with Wacquant's (2016: 66) characterisation of habitus, quoted earlier, according to which even relatively deeply-inscribed dispositions may eventually be "eroded, countered or even dismantled" by disuse or exposure to alternative social influences, and stands in stark contrast to some of Bourdieu's own rather more deterministic or identity-defining depictions, e.g.:

> "What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is." (Bourdieu, 1990: 73)

And yet, aspects of essentialism are not absent from the Vezo's reasoning: natural kind-like concepts are used in reference to biological taxa, which are categorised according to their intrinsic features, and membership of Vezo ancestral groups, or 'raza', and burial within particular ancestral tombs, is determined by descent and cannot be acquired or changed. Also, while a roughly equal majority of Vezo adults reasoned in an adoption task that a child born to neighbouring agriculturalist (and ethnically related) Masikoro parents, and a child born to town-dwelling, and predominantly Muslim, Karany immigrants of Indo-Pakistani descent, would both become Vezo if adopted by Vezo parents, in the latter case Vezo children's intuitions actually appeared to be significantly more nativist.[6] Meanwhile, in their explicit verbal statements the Vezo do not seem to clearly distinguish between biological and social or cultural factors in the transmission of bodily traits or behaviours, skills, and beliefs, typically refusing to acknowledge physical resemblances between parents and their offspring, while claiming, for example, that a baby's facial features in fact resemble those of someone whom the mother either happened to spend a lot of time talking with or perhaps even took a strong disliking to during pregnancy. This might be understood to constitute evidence that the Vezo do not recognise a dualistic nature-nurture distinction – as, allegedly, many other non-Western peoples do not (Ingold, 1991) – however, in a separate adoption task, the vast majority of the Vezo adults' responses, and their spontaneously offered verbal justifications, clearly refute this theory (Astuti, 2001, 2007). Astuti's point is that by focusing exclusively on the content of their informants' explicit representations, and ignoring their implicit intuitive reasoning, anthropologists are not only seduced into making misleading and mistaken claims about their subjects' underlying cognitive faculties, but also fail to recognise the full significance of those representations and the particular interests that motivate them – in this case, the socialisation of parenthood amongst the Vezo.

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[6] This understanding of the data is suggested by both Gelman (2003) and Kanovsky (2007), based on the fact that 73% of Vezo children displayed a 'birth parent bias' on this task. Astuti (2001), however, interprets their responses somewhat differently and does not perceive this result to be significant, but rather the product of a random and inconsistent application of the children's knowledge, arguing that their reasoning is not yet theoretically coherent and integrated. Thus, while they are able to apply the Vezo theory of identity in the familiar Masikoro case, they are apparently unable to extend it to the entirely unfamiliar example of Vezo-Karany adoption.

But if analysing implicit intuition and cognition can illuminate the meaning of explicit cultural representations, a similar claim might perhaps also be made for the opposite process; indeed, it is partly on the basis of an examination of Astuti's ethnographic data, as well as that of other cognitive anthropologists (e.g., Gil-White, 2001; Hirschfeld, 1996), that Kanovsky (2007) formulates his arguments regarding the centrality of inherence and the non-necessity of innate potential in essentialist thinking, and has developed a series of reasoning tasks that are specifically designed to capture socially determined forms of causal essentialism.[7] In contexts or domains where aspects of essentialist thinking are actually explicitly represented, qualitative methods – including those employed in the few existing SRT studies mentioned above – may be used not simply in a facile diagnostic fashion, but also to enrich an understanding of psychological essentialism itself, for example by analysing the logical relationship between certain components in these representations and assessing their relative weight and significance.

Developing the differing theories of 'collective representations' that were conceptualised by Durkheim and the anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in their analyses of the belief systems of traditional societies, SRT is understood to be a distinctively societal and anthropological approach to social psychology, adapted to the analysis of contemporary cultural contexts and the dynamics of highly differentiated modern societies (Markova, 2012; Moscovici, 2000; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Viewed in this light, SRT arguably mirrors and complements the theoretical and methodological impetus of both cognitive anthropology, and that of a programme of 'psychological sociology' focused on the multi-socialised individual (Lahire, 2011); indeed, through Durkheim and Piaget, it shares important theoretical ancestors with the concept of habitus, and there are obvious similarities between the processes of internalisation of cognitive and behavioural schemata – with their 'built-in inertia' due to the fact that "each of [habitus'] layers operates as a prism through which later experiences are filtered and subsequent strata of dispositions overlaid" (Wacquant, 2016: 67) – and the anchoring of nascent social representations in pre-existing structures of social knowledge (both of which are based on the Piagetian mechanisms of 'accommodation' and 'assimilation'), and between the externalisation and objectification of those schemes and representations. Through these processes, both concepts aim to articulate the interdependence and co-construction – and thereby transcend the duality – of the individual and the social, and at a broad macro-level there may be a significant degree of overlap between them; for example, what could be termed a collective or 'hegemonic' social representation in one research tradition (Farr, 1996; Moscovici, 2000) might be described as a regional or historical habitus in the other (Sapiro, 2015; Hillier & Rooksby, 2005). However, while social representations are often embodied and expressed or constituted implicitly in the actions and interactions of individuals or groups rather than always explicitly and consciously communicated by them (Flick, Foster & Caillaud, 2015; Howarth, 2006; O'Connor, 2017; Wagner, 2015), conceptually they are "located across minds instead of within minds" (Wagner, 2017: 27) and are not necessarily internalised or pre-reflexive, nor even bound to the particular individuals and groups who originate or reproduce them, and indeed are often studied in their socially emancipated and explicitly externalised or objectified manifestations, such as in various forms of media (Jovchelovitch, 2019; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). As Deuax and Philogène (2001: 6) put it: “once representations are created, they are autonomous to the extent that they lead a life of their own and evolve beyond the reach of individuals.”

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[7] Kanovsky (2007) claims that while Astuti's (1995, 2001) data clearly demonstrates that the Vezo's theory of identity is not based on inheritance of innate characteristics, it does not rule out the possibility that it is essentialist in a socially acquired sense. His analysis, however, relies heavily on attempts to refute certain statements concerning the transience of Vezo identity – e.g., "Vezo-ness […] is made anew and from scratch every day, through every act performed in the present" (Astuti, 1995: 477) – while apparently entirely disregarding the significance of the "frequently mentioned fact that individuals who leave the coast to move to the interior cease to be Vezo and become Masikoro" (Astuti, 1995: 465), which is clearly inconsistent with his definition of an essence as an inherent causal quality that is difficult to remove once it has been acquired (Kanovsky, 2007). Nonetheless, his own experimental tasks, conducted in the Ukraine, show some evidence of essentialist beliefs about socialisation.

Situated between the level of individual mental representations and Durkheim’s strictly sociological conception of collective representations, and symbolically mediating between social subjects and the objects of their attention (Jovchelovitch, 1996, 2019), a social representation is defined as:

> … a system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function: first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history. (Moscovici, 1976: xiii)

In contrast to the unilinear and evolutionist assumptions of Durkheim and Piaget, it is their fundamentally pragmatic function that ensures that lay representations do not spontaneously gravitate towards more objectively veridical beliefs and are not simply replaced by some ultimately immaculate and unadulterated version of scientific knowledge. Instead – as some of the foregoing discussion on the relationship between sociological and folk-sociological notions of socio-economic categories has already attempted to highlight – lay and scientific understandings regularly impact on and influence one another, both in the ‘reified and consensual universes’ of science and common-sense knowledge, and therefore a multiplicity of such (often contradictory and incoherent) knowledges, logics, rationalities, or modes of thinking typically co-exist not only across shared public spheres, or within individual groups or communities, but also even inside individual minds (Jovchelovitch, 2019; Moscovici, 2000). These instances of 'cognitive polyphasia' may be captured and overtly demonstrated within a single level of analysis and using only a single methodological approach, such as in interview studies examining representations of health and illness amongst members of the Chinese community in England (Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999), and representations of psychiatric concepts held by educated, middle-class citizens in India (Wagner, Duveen, Themel & Verma, 1999), or in the use of experimental reasoning tasks revealing the co-existence of natural and supernatural explanations for the transmission of disease in South Africa (Legare & Gelman, 2008), for example. But in some cases they may also be revealed only by a combination of methods or in the simultaneous analysis of different levels of representation, communication and interaction, as is illustrated in Jodelet's (1991) ethnographic study of social representations of madness in a community in France, in which participants explicitly rejected notions of the contagiousness of mental illness and yet organised their domestic arrangements so as to avoid physical contact between themselves and the psychiatric patients who were lodging with them. The co-existence of essentialist and performative theories of identity, and the evidently contradictory relationship between the Vezo's explicitly shared representations concerning the nature of biological and cultural transmission and their implicit intuitive beliefs, along with the verbal justifications given for them (Astuti, 2001, 2007), appears to constitute another vivid example of cognitive polyphasia; as, indeed, does the co-existence of folk-biological, typological thinking and forms of genetic essentialism with 'Darwinian' evolutionary explanations in contemporary Western cultural contexts. The apparent difficulty involved in either fully comprehending or accurately representing the fundamental principles of evolution by natural selection – in some cases demonstrated by university students and even scientists themselves – has been conjectured to be a consequence of the fact that an essentialising cognitive bias simply makes it seem strongly counter-intuitive (Gelman, 2003: Kampourakis, 2020). While this may well be the case, the perpetual anchoring of scientific knowledge within other forms of lay representation and the continual fusion, rather than substitution, of different modes of thinking pertinent to different pragmatic functions, offers an alternative, or perhaps even additional, explanation.

And yet it is precisely these aspects of the theory that have been claimed to be symptomatic of a strong social constructionist epistemology and therefore incompatible with the naturalistic foundations of the Cognition and Culture framework. Franks (2011) argues that, with its emphasis on multiple rationalities and different ways of knowing, and its apparent refusal to grant privileged status and greater objectivity to forms of scientific knowledge, SRT appears to endorse a relativistic 'doctrine of Equal Validity' (Boghossian, 2007); and while the mechanisms of accommodation and assimilation involved in the anchoring of social representations suggest a degree of universality in terms of cognitive processes, the content of representations themselves are assumed to be entirely free from any evolved and innate constraints, and shaped only by prior social construction. Perhaps this might explain the fact that, in spite of its incorporation of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches from cognitive, developmental, social and cultural psychology and social anthropology – and notwithstanding Moscovici's (2000: 286) insistence that social representations are fundamental to cultural psychology and his hope that the theory would enable social psychology to become "a kind of anthropology of our culture" – SRT otherwise appears to have been entirely ignored in Cognition and Culture research. From its inception, the public understanding of science and the relationship between scientific knowledge and lay representations has been a cornerstone of the theory, and yet in their expansive cross-cultural survey of folk-biological thinking, Medin & Atran (1999: 11) state that "there has been little systematic study of the input conditions and processes by which scientific concepts are assimilated into lay thinking", and nowhere in their discussions of 'cultural representations' do they acknowledge the existence of SRT; nor indeed does Sperber (1996) in his exposition of this concept and his own epidemiological theory of representation, yet traces its roots back to the same theoretical origin in Durkheim's notion of 'collective representations'. And such indifference or obliviousness has been firmly reciprocated; as Lahlou (1996, 2015) has observed, Sperber's 'cultural representations' are seldom cited in the SRT literature despite their obvious similarity with the concept of social representations. Sperber's account, however, is grounded in a commitment to massive modularity, while those situated within the SRT framework have typically been highly dismissive of computational, 'information processing' models of the mind, and largely disinterested even in the subject of reconciling social representations with cognition at an individual level (e.g., Markova, 2003, 2012).

Nevertheless, neither of the objections raised by Franks (2011) constitute insurmountable obstacles to the integration of SRT with the Cognition and Culture approach; for example, the philosopher John Dupré's notion of 'promiscuous realism' is an illustration of a pluralistic conceptualisation of knowledge that is opposed to relativism (Dupré, 1999, 2002), and – leaving aside questions of the context-sensitivity and cultural flexibility permitted by massive modularity, and therefore the extent to which 'strong adaptationist' accounts themselves may be commensurable with this approach (Franks, 2011; Sperber, 1994, 2005) – SRT appears to be entirely compatible with a naturalistic theory of cognition and representation based on an evolved, species-typical capacity for shared intentionality (Tomasello, 2014). The 'shared intentionality hypothesis' substitutes a broader, more dynamic and flexible conception of evolved adaptations and intuitive heuristics for the relatively narrow and static terminology of cognitive modules, and is based on a Vygotskian socio-cultural understanding of cognitive development that is highly amenable to SRT, and thus may serve to ground the theory's traditional concern with ontogenesis and sociogenesis within a coherent and fully articulated phylogenetic account (Jovchelovitch, 2019).

As Medin and Atran (1999) have argued, however, productive cooperation between cognitive and cultural levels of analysis also requires a degree of commensurability in their accounts of individual, mental representations and shared social or cultural representations. To the extent that they may be equated with concepts, the structures of mental representations are evidently not impervious to contextual factors (Machery, 2009; Weiskopf, 2009); in fact, research from an SRT perspective has described how the perceived status of a social category may influence whether it is mentally represented in the form of exemplar, prototype or 'Aristotelian' (i.e., sortal essentialist) conceptual models (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2001), and as is indicated by much of the numerous cross-cultural research (e.g., Astuti et al., 2004; Atran, 1990; Gil-White, 2001; Kanovsky, 2007; Machery et al., 2021; Mahalingam, 2003; Medin & Atran, 1999; Regnier, 2015), psychological essentialism itself appears to be a perfect illustration of a seemingly ubiquitous intuitive heuristic or bias that can both strongly influence, and be powerfully influenced by, shared social representations. But it should also be emphasised that, far from being universally representative populations, or even 'culture-free' control groups, modern 'WEIRD' societies are themselves in many ways very particular, and often even very peculiar, cultural contexts (Henrich et al., 2010). And yet:

> … the more we implicitly or practically know about a social world, the less we tend to question things and relations, or make them the subject matter of scientific research. The closer we are to an object, the greater the necessary effort becomes to get it into focus as a research problem […] What immediately catches the eyes of anthropologists in a foreign culture, hits the blind spot of their theoretical eyes in the researcher's own culture and society. The task for a psychology of social representations does not differ practically from that of anthropology. (Wagner & Hayes, 2005: 129)

In a domestic cultural setting where the concept of 'class' is traditionally considered to be almost uniquely salient – to such an extent that both its historical tenacity and its purportedly esoteric intricacies are often claimed to be impenetrable to those not native to the UK (Cannadine, 1999) – SRT is therefore an ideal theoretical framework within which to examine folk-sociological beliefs about socio-economic categories, and to integrate with the Cognition and Culture approach in order to further an understanding of psychological essentialism at both implicit and explicit levels of representation.

1.7. Research Questions

Across three separate but closely related studies, the present research will explore folk-sociological representations of socio-economic categories and of the possibilities for movement between them, i.e. social mobility: firstly, at the sociogenetic level through an analysis of social representations in the UK public sphere, specifically in the mainstream news media; secondly, at a microgenetic level, using in-depth interviews with socially mobile individuals; and finally, at the level of intuitive beliefs, employing an experimental survey.

In turn, these studies will aim to address the following three primary research questions:

1) How are the individual components of psychological essentialism manifested in shared representations of socio-economic categories and of the possibilities for movement between them in the UK?

2) How are these shared representations reproduced, and in what other ways are the components manifested, in the experiences and perspectives of those who have crossed the boundaries of socio-economic categories themselves?

3) To what extent are these representations reflected in individuals' intuitive beliefs about socio-economic categories and the crossing of socio-economic category boundaries in the UK?

The first two studies are largely exploratory in nature, but with a focus on examining the particular logic of each of the individual components, their specific meanings within the socio-economic domain and the cultural context of the UK, and the different pragmatic functions or representational projects they might serve. The hypotheses motivating the third and final study are that intuitive beliefs about socio-economic category membership, according to each of the individual components of essentialism, will be influenced by the particular category label used; and that political orientation and socio-economic status itself will only have an effect on beliefs concerning innate potential or naturalness, rather than on social determinist beliefs.

Chapter Two: Outline of Methods

The three empirical studies in this thesis each seek to make a distinctive contribution in their own right to research on psychological essentialism in the socio-economic domain, however they are also sequential and their development is cumulative: for example, the representations examined in Study 1 significantly informed the construction of the topic guide employed in Study 2, while both of these qualitative studies were drawn upon to develop the survey items for the experiment in Study 3, and also provided a detailed qualitative framework which assisted in interpreting its results.

2.1. Qualitative analysis of mainstream news media

The first study intended to lay the initial groundwork for this research by examining in detail how the individual components of psychological essentialism are manifested in representations of socio-economic categories and social mobility in the UK public sphere, specifically in the mainstream newsprint media. Analyses of popular media have been a core element of Social Representations research from the outset (Moscovici, 1961/2008), and continue to be employed in exploring public understandings of science, for example – such as representations of neuroscientific research on sex differences, which bear closely on the subject of essentialism (O'Connor & Joffe, 2014) – and have also been used specifically to examine essentialist representations of social categories (Augoustinos et al., 2015; Moloney et al. (2013).

Aiming to capture representations from different sides of the social and political spectrum covered by the traditional news media in the UK, four major publications were selected: The *Telegraph*, a politically conservative broadsheet; The *Guardian*, a progressive, centre-left ‘compact’ (formerly broadsheet) newspaper; The *Daily Mail*, a traditionally right-wing tabloid; and The *Mirror*, a traditionally Labour-supporting, left-leaning tabloid. Using the Lexis-Nexis database, two separate datasets were generated, the first employing the search term ‘social mobility’, and the second using various permutations of the terms ‘class’ + ‘working’/‘middle’/‘upper’.

Two separate single-month time-frames, November 2016 and June 2017, were selected in order to limit the possibility of the overall dataset being dominated by a single news item, but during both of which class and social mobility were expected to be subjects of lively media discussion, stimulated by the release of the Social Mobility Commission’s annual report on social mobility in the former, and the UK general election during the latter, closely followed by the newly-formed government’s long-awaited announcement on the outcome of a report on the efficacy of expanding selective state education.

For both datasets, all articles generated were read through once to determine their relevance and any duplicates were excluded. The entire corpus (n = 308) was then imported onto the NVivo 12 software programme before being subjected to a detailed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) using the nine individual components of psychological essentialism identified by Haslam et al. (2000) as a deductive coding frame constituting the primary themes of analysis and using their definitions of each component as an initial guide to coding. Once this process was completed, a second stage of thematic analysis was conducted on the coded data extracts within each component, producing a large number of secondary inductive codes, which were then organised into a small group of themes constituting an independent, cross-cutting thematic grid by which the various manifestations of the components were analytically organised for discussion.

2.2. In-depth semi-structured interviews with socially mobile individuals

The objective of this second qualitative study was to build upon the findings of the previous one by exploring how socially mobile individuals themselves conceptualise socio-economic categories and the crossing of category boundaries in relation to the individual components of essentialism, and how these components are spontaneously manifested in the course of discussing their own experiences and perspectives. Again, semi-structured interviews are a common research method within Social Representations Theory, but with very few exceptions (e.g., Buhagier et al., 2018; Verkuyten, 2003) have seldom been employed in psychological studies of essentialism or utilised to examine the personal experiences and representations of those who have crossed the boundaries between different categories within a particular domain.

The topic guide for the interviews consisted of two parts, the first of which was developed with recourse to prior research on the subjective experience of social mobility conducted by sociologists (Friedman, 2015; Naudet, 2018), while the second part was based on both the descriptions of the individual components of essentialism provided by Haslam et al. (2000) and the findings of the previous empirical study, and a small number of the data extracts featured in that analysis were incorporated in the topic guide itself.

20 'upwardly' mobile interviewees (11 female, 9 male) were recruited primarily from three main sources: the alumni of a programme organised by a large educational charity in the UK which focuses on improving young people's prospects of social mobility; student members of a social mobility society at a university in London; and two separate organisations dedicated to fostering increased social mobility in the legal profession, which remains highly socially exclusive (Friedman & Laurison, 2020). Ages ranged from 18 to 58 years old, 4 interviewees were from ethnic minority backgrounds, but with only one exception all participants were born and raised in the UK. Interviews were conducted in London, Oxford, Cambridge, and the

Midlands, lasted between 50 and 95 minutes, and were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees and then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were coded using NVivo 12 software and, again, subjected to a thematic analysis, however on this occasion the first stage of coding was inductive, and key themes were generated which applied across the data as a whole, in many cases invoking several of the components simultaneously.

2.3. Experimental survey

The final empirical study in this thesis consists of an experimental survey designed to examine the extent to which the representations revealed in the qualitative research are reflected in people's intuitive beliefs about socio-economic categories and the crossing of socio-economic category boundaries in the UK. Much of the experimental literature on psychological essentialism employs reasoning tasks – such as 'adoption', 'transformation' and 'brain transplant' paradigms, for example (Astuti et al., 2004; Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1989; Mahalingam, 2003) – and questionnaire-based scales (e.g., Keller, 2005; Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Räty et al, 2017; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008) to test participants' intuitions about the nature of category membership or the acquisition of category typical features. However, even though a number of these examples have been used specifically to examine essentialist beliefs about social class categories, they are often focused on a very narrow range of components – often appearing to equate essentialism with naturalisation and the belief in a biological basis for category membership – or combine their measures into a composite score that obscures differences in beliefs according to the individual components.

This experiment therefore aimed to combine the comprehensiveness of Haslam et al.'s (2000) approach with the greater specificity of scale-based studies, by using an experimental survey designed to probe participants' beliefs about different aspects of each of the components with regard to socio-economic categories, and which is sensitive to a social determinist dimension of essentialism. Survey items were developed on the basis of both of the previous studies and the existing experimental literature, and the survey itself was designed and hosted using Qualtrics software. Participants (*n* = 150) were recruited via the Prolific data collection platform and randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions implemented to test the effect of different category labels: in the first, all items featured the label 'social class', while in the second, the term 'socio-economic status' was used instead. In all other respects the wording of the items was exactly the same across both conditions, however their order was also randomised across the sample. Participants rated their agreement for each of the 18 items on a 5-point Likert scale, after which they were then asked to indicate their subjective socio-economic status and political orientation on scales of 1 to 10. Once the data was collected, the responses to each of the individual component items and their associations with the different category label conditions and participants' subjective SES and political orientation was analysed using SPSS software (v27).

Chapter Three: Representations of 'Class' and Social Mobility in the UK Public Sphere

3.1. Introduction

The objective of this first empirical study is to provide a comprehensive and detailed qualitative analysis of folk-sociological representations of socio-economic categories in the UK public sphere, and of the possibilities for movement between them, i.e., social mobility. In doing so, it will also lay the initial groundwork for the following two studies by addressing the first primary research question guiding this thesis: *How are the individual components of psychological essentialism manifested in shared representations of socio-economic categories and social mobility in the UK?*

As has already been discussed at some length in Chapter One, existing research on essentialist thinking in the socio-economic domain (e.g., Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Mahalingam, 2003; Pereira et al., 2010; Räty et al., 2017; del Rio & Strasser, 2011) consists almost exclusively of quantitative experimental studies conducted in cultural contexts in which the concept of 'class' is either far less salient than it is in the UK or is enmeshed within the explicitly naturalising logic of caste. This research is also either predominantly or entirely skewed towards the biological or natural kind dimension of essentialism – based on intuitions concerning innate potential, for example – and is therefore largely unable to distinguish, or even capture, essentialist intuitions arising from beliefs about the profound and permanent effects of socialisation or enculturation (Kanovsky, 2007; Verkuyten, 2003). While naturalisation and biological essentialism may well continue to be a feature of representations in this domain in contemporary societies (Wagner et al., 2009), within the cultural context of the UK entitative and social determinist forms of essentialism could be of significantly greater relevance (Rangel & Keller, 2011; Yzerbyt et al, 1997).

As the present study intends to illustrate, qualitative research on psychological essentialism is not only a necessary accompaniment to quantitative approaches, helping to develop and refine more sophisticated experimental procedures and providing detailed contextual analyses with which to interpret or triangulate their results, it can also make a very substantial contribution to understanding both the logical and motivational aspects of essentialist thinking across various domains and contexts. However, aside from the detailed ethnographic accounts contained in the cognitive anthropological literature (e.g., Astuti et al, 2004; Atran, 1990; Deschenaux, 2019; Gil-White, 2001; Hale, 2015; Regnier, 2015), qualitative studies, including those from the perspective of Social Representations Theory, remain relatively sparse and often analyse essentialism solely in terms of its explicit and strategic deployment and focus predominantly on its pernicious motivations and consequences, for example in expressing forms of racism, ethnic exclusion and xenophobia (e.g., Augoustinos et al., 2015; Buhagier et al., 2018; Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Moloney et al., 2013; Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012). Very rarely is detailed attention given to its more implicit, less intentional and apparently innocuous manifestations, and the extent to which it may be invoked not only in the service of out-group exclusion and enmity, but also to facilitate forms of in-group inclusion and solidarity (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017; Verkuyten, 2003; Wagner et al. 2009).

Another significant limitation of this research is that although several authors acknowledge the multifaceted nature of psychological essentialism – i.e., that it is not a single, unitary phenomenon, but is comprised of a number of distinct but related components (Gelman, 2003; Haslam, 1998) – they nevertheless frequently resort to classifying it unambiguously on the basis of very partial evidence, sometimes consisting of the appearance of one or two components alone. For example, Augoustinos et al. (2015), in their analysis of putatively essentialist representations of Sudanese refugees in the Australian news media merely point to a number of somewhat tenuous and debatable examples of homogeneity and inductive potential; similarly, and also in Australia, Moloney et al. (2013) highlight several illustrations of superficial uniformity and informativeness in satirical political cartoons depicting Muslims, but are unable to convincingly demonstrate precisely what makes these stereotypes necessarily indicative of essentialism. However, studies of social representations in the news media such as these, or in other forms of naturally-occurring data, for example on websites and internet forums (Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017; Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012), have the advantage of enabling a more complex and nuanced examination of the particular logic of the various components of essentialism, and of the relationships between them, within the contexts in which they are actively reproduced. As Haslam et. al (2000: 123) observe: "people's representations of social categories are clearly embedded in explanatory theories – social ontologies – that are consequential for their evaluations of them"; yet their own questionnaire method can only sketch the vaguest outlines of these 'social ontologies' since the extent to which a social category is rated according to each component provides no information about how each component is specifically represented in relation to that category.

Beginning with Moscovici's study of social representations of psychoanalysis in different quarters of the French press (Moscovici, 1961/2008), analyses of popular news media have been a cornerstone of SRT research right from its inception (Farr, 1993; Flick & Foster, 2008) and continue to be a common method of research in this field in many diverse areas, for example in analyses of widespread representations concerning mental health (Foster, 2006), poverty (Chauhan & Foster, 2014), biotechnology and of the public understanding of science (Wagner, Kronberger & Seifert, 2002), as well as the diffusion of pseudo-scientific theories, such as the so-called 'Mozart Effect' (Bangerter & Heath, 2004); and SRT has also touched on the subject of 'neuro-essentialism' in media representations of neuroscientific research on sex differences, for instance (O'Connor, Rees & Joffe, 2012; O'Connor & Joffe, 2014).

As many of these studies demonstrate, a further advantage of conducting analyses of representations emanating from across the mainstream news media is that they can often be broadly identified with particular socio-economic and political positions or affiliations whose different, and sometimes competing, representational projects may be both significantly influenced by and reflected in their different representative sources (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). Representations of socio-economic categories themselves, however, have been almost entirely overlooked in SRT research, and their depiction in the newsprint media has been predominantly analysed from a purely sociological perspective, highlighting derogatory stereotypes of the working class, for example (Tyler, 2008), and ambivalent representations of the aristocracy in the British broadsheet press (Lawler, 2008), but inevitably omitting an examination of their conceptual structure. Meanwhile, notwithstanding a very significant increase in media coverage in recent years (Lawler & Payne, 2017; Payne 2017), representations of social mobility have principally been of interest to sociologists at the level of explicit political discourse only (e.g., Atherton, 2016; Littler, 2017; Reay, 2013, 2017), rather than in terms of how social mobility and socially mobile individuals themselves are actually conceptualised and represented in everyday communication; yet these lay representations may have an equally significant bearing on the subjective experience of social mobility, which appears to be the primary focus of qualitative sociological research in this area. As Brubaker (2018) illustrates, media representations of individuals who have traversed racial and gender categories often revolve around themes of authenticity and essence[8] (of both category membership and individual identity) and the notion of a 'true self', while of course folk-sociological beliefs about the crossing of category boundaries and the mutability of identity – measured by 'adoption',

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[8] Interestingly, on one occasion Brubaker uses the term 'historical essentialism', in contrast to 'naturalist' or biological essentialism, to refer to "lifelong history and experience as a criterion of authentic[ity]" (Brubaker, 2018: 26-27). This concept clearly resonates with a social determinist form of essentialism but is less focused on the impact of early socialisation rather than the entirety of an individual's 'lived experience' as a member of a particular social category.

‘switched-at-birth’, and ‘transformation’ tasks, for example – are a central concern of the experimental literature on psychological essentialism (e.g., Gelman, 2003: Kanovsky, 2007; Keil, 1989; Mahalingam, 2003). An empirical analysis of social representations of both socio-economic categories and of social mobility in the UK can therefore make a significant novel contribution to qualitative research on psychological essentialism, particularly in advancing an understanding of the social determinist dimension, and may also be used to develop further experimental studies particular to this domain.

In focusing attention on the individual components of psychological essentialism, rather than simply attempting to directly identify instances of essentialist thinking per se, this study aims to preserve and build upon the comprehensiveness, clarity and rigour introduced by Haslam et al. (2000) in their study of essentialist beliefs about social categories, while – not disregarding some of limitations of their approach, mentioned briefly in the first chapter – applying it to representations of a single domain within naturally-occurring data, so that these beliefs can be examined in detail and in context. Beyond providing a nuanced insight into the different ways in which these components may be manifested in this domain, this approach also enables an analysis of their relative significance and frequency, of the particular relationships between them – whether these conform to the independent clusters claimed by Haslam et al. and others to constitute natural kind and entitative dimensions, for example – as well as the various social and political perspectives and representational projects for which they may be utilised.

3.2. Methods

In order to capture representations from different sides of the social and political spectrum covered by the traditional mainstream newsprint media in the UK, four popular publications were selected for this analysis: The *Telegraph*, a politically conservative broadsheet newspaper; The *Guardian*, a progressive, centre-left 'compact' format (formerly broadsheet) newspaper; The *Daily Mail*, a traditionally right-wing tabloid; and The *Mirror*, a traditionally Labour-supporting, left-leaning tabloid. Using the Lexis-Nexis database of UK newspapers, two separate datasets were generated, the first simply employing the search term 'social mobility', and the second using the following permutations of terms:

'class' AND 'working' AND 'middle' AND 'upper'
'class' AND 'working' AND 'middle' OR 'upper'
'class' AND 'middle' AND 'working' OR 'upper'
'class' AND 'upper' AND 'working' OR 'middle'

Initial pilot studies found that the term 'social mobility' generated significantly greater results than related words, such as 'meritocracy', or more overtly value-laden descriptions, like 'social climbing', for example. And the labels 'working class', 'middle class' and 'upper class' – which, on the basis of these pilot studies and an earlier review of the sociological literature, still appear to be by far the most popular terms for describing different socio-economic strata[9] – produced substantially more relevant data than alternative social scientific categorisations, such as 'high/low/intermediate socio-economic status/background', or more explicitly evaluative lay terms, like ‘aristocrat’, ‘elite’, ‘posh’, ‘toff’, ‘bourgeois’, ‘pleb’, ‘common’, ‘hoi-polloi’, or ‘chav’, for example, and indeed several of the latter appeared within the articles that were generated by the ‘class’ and ‘social mobility’ search terms. The simultaneous employment of at least two ‘class’ terms (e.g., ‘working’ AND ‘middle’) was intended partly to limit the dataset to an appropriate size, since the quantity of articles produced by the labels ‘working class’ and ‘middle class’ alone was greatly excessive for the purposes of a qualitative analysis, but also with the aim of increasing the probability of eliciting more elaborate and detailed (and potentially comparative) representations of socio-economic categories than might be contained in single, isolated references to an individual’s ‘working class background’ or ‘middle class profession’, for example. And while it was anticipated that the term ‘social mobility’ would predominantly target articles that conceptualised movements between socio-economic categories in an explicit and relatively formalised, political or social scientific sense, the various ‘class’ terms were expected to produce a more diverse array of quotidian, informal, nebulous, and implicit references and allusions to socio-economic categories and the possibilities for movement between them, not only in the literal sense suggested by the concept of mobility, but also in more superficial or even metaphorical ways, for example in forms of self-presentation or perspective-taking across category boundaries.

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[9] The term 'class' also appears in the relevant sense in 43% of the final dataset of articles generated by the search term 'social mobility'.

Two separate single-month time-frames, November 2016 and June 2017, were also selected in order to mitigate the possibility of the overall corpus being dominated by a single news item or event, but during both of which class and social mobility were anticipated to temporarily become the subject of lively media discussion, stimulated by the release of the Social Mobility Commission’s annual report on social mobility in the former, and the UK general election during the latter, swiftly followed by the newly-formed government’s long-

Table 3.1. Description of datasets

Source	*'class'*		*'social mobility'*		*TOTAL*
	Nov 2016	*June 2017*	*Nov 2016*	*June 2017*	
Telegraph	37	37	21	15	110
Guardian	34	37	31	13	115
Mirror	13	6	7	3	29
Daily Mail	19	23	5	7	54
TOTAL	103	103	64	38	308
	206		102		

awaited announcement on the outcome of a report on the efficacy of expanding selective state education.

For both datasets, all articles generated were read through once to determine their relevance and any duplicates were excluded, resulting in a total combined corpus of 308 items – comprised of 206 and 102 articles in the 'class' and 'social mobility' datasets, respectively (Table 3.1). The entire corpus was then imported onto the NVivo 12 software programme, where each article was read through a second time before being subject to a detailed thematic analysis, at both semantic and latent levels (Braun & Clarke, 2006), using the nine individual components of psychological essentialism identified by Haslam et al. (2000) as a deductive coding frame constituting the primary themes of analysis, and employing their definitions of each component as an initial and rudimentary – since several of their descriptions were found to be somewhat vague, ambiguous or insufficient – guide to coding (Table 3.2). Items were coded which either explicitly illustrated or demonstrably implied one or more of the components according to their descriptions, and a large number of extracts were coded at multiple components. However, as the authors point out, the application of these components involve 'complex conceptual judgements' (Haslam et al., 2000: 117) and as the objective of this study was not simply to classify the manifestation of each component categorically, but to explore comprehensively their various meanings in the context of existing representations

Table 3.2. Component descriptions, from Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst (2000: 117-8)

Component	*Description*
Discreteness	Sharp category boundaries, membership is clear-cut, definite, either/or
Uniformity	Category members are very similar to one another, uniform, have many things in common
Informativeness	Category membership allows many judgements to be made about individual members, tells us a lot about them
Naturalness	Versus artificial
Immutability	Difficult for category members to become non-members
Stability	Category is stable over time, has always existed, characteristics have not changed much throughout history
Inherence	Category has an underlying reality or sameness; members have similarities and differences on the surface but underneath are basically the same
Necessity	Category has necessary features or characteristics, without which an individual cannot be a member
Exclusivity	Category membership excludes/does not allow individual members to belong to other categories

within this specific domain, the processes of coding and analysis themselves – with recourse, when further clarification or elaboration was sought, to the wider psychological and philosophical literature from which the authors derived their definitions – were employed as a means of developing and refining those definitions, as will be demonstrated in the following section. Therefore, rather than attempting to determine a measure of inter-coder reliability, the data extracts from the articles that were highlighted during the initial coding process were grouped together by their individual component codes and read through another time, and any extracts subsequently perceived to be coded incorrectly were either uncoded or assigned to a different component. Then, at a later date, every article was read in its entirety for a final time, enabling another opportunity to code any extracts that might have been overlooked during the first phase, and once again all the data extracts were then read together grouped within their individual component categories, and where appropriate were assigned to extra or alternative codes or were uncoded altogether. The average of the largest changes in the frequencies of items coded by individual components between these successive stages from the initial phase of coding was 12%, ranging from only 5% for 'naturalness' to 21% for 'stability' (see Appendix 1).

Once this process was completed, a second stage of thematic analysis was conducted on the coded data extracts within each component. Initially this analysis was intended to produce a series of descriptive secondary codes identifying the specific manner or context in which each individual component was manifested within the data (see Appendix 2), from which a number of inductive sub-themes would be generated pertaining to each main component theme. However, given the fact that many extracts were coded primarily at multiple components, there was a high degree of repetition of these codes across the different component themes, therefore the analysis was repeated in greater detail on all of the coded extracts together irrespective of their separate component categories, producing a large number of secondary inductive codes. These codes were eventually organised by their logical or referential commonalities into nine different themes, as shown in Table 3.3 below: *cultural*; *educational-economic-political*; *kinetic-dynamic*; *moral-evaluative*; *psychological-emotional*; *social*; *somatic-physical-biological*; and *spatial-temporal*. These themes are secondary in that the primary focus of the ensuing analysis is on the deductive component themes, however they are not sub-themes within any particular one of the individual components, but rather constitute an independent, inductively-generated and cross-cutting thematic grid by which the various manifestations of the components in general – invoked, for example, in references to individual change and motion; to questions of truth, identity or causality; to divisions in space and time; to particular social, cultural, moral or political differences, etc. – may be analytically organised and interpreted.

Table 3.3. Secondary themes and codes

Theme	Code	
cultural	*Accent-Dialect* *Appearance-Dress* *Behaviour-Norms* *Consumption* *Cultural Appropriation* *Cultured-Refined-Formal* *Gentrification* *Housing-Decor* *Leisure-Recreation*	
educational-economic-political	*Exclusive Professions* *Inheritance* *Educated* *Politics* *Power* *Private/State School*	
kinetic-dynamic	*Access-Opportunity* *Ascent/Descent* *Aspiration-Ambition* *Escape-Liberation* *Roots* *Static* *Struggle* *Travel-Journey*	
moral-evaluative	*Betrayal-Selling Out* *Deficient-Lacking* *Elite-Aristocracy* *Fairness* *Hard Work* *Impeccable-Pure* *Merit-Value-Status* *Ordinary/Extraordinary* *Respectable-Virtuous* *Safe/Dangerous* *Stigma-Prejudice-Bias* *Success*	
psychological-emotional	*Alienated-Displaced* *Anxiety-Insecurity* *Confidence-Arrogance* *Empathy-Perspective Taking* *Intelligent* *Mentality* *Warm/Cold*	
social	*Binary-Polarised Categories* *Community* *Connections* *Diversity* *Majority/Minority* *Masses* *Posh-Toff* *Private/Public*	

	Social Identity *White/Black*	
somatic-physical-biological	*Blood-Bones-Cells* *DNA-Genes* *Gender-Sexuality* *Health-Life Expectancy* *Physical/Intellectual* *Physiognomy* *Soft/Rough*	
spatial-temporal	*Areas-Ghettos* *Behind-Backward* *Divisions-Barriers* *Domestic/International* *Eternal-Permanent* *Gaps-Distance* *Home* *Ladder-Tree* *New/Old* *Progress* *System-Strata* *Tradition* *Urban-Metropolitan*	
veridical-identical-causal	*Authentic-Real-Truthful* *Background-Upbringing* *Determined by Origins* *Imitation-Fitting In* *Pretending-Faking* *Talent-Luck-Potential* *Transformation-Reinvention* *True Identity*	

3.3. Results and Discussion

3.3.1. Preliminary quantitative data

Beginning this analysis with a brief discussion of some of the quantitative aspects of the data, before commencing a detailed qualitative examination of how each of the components are represented in this domain, one of the first things that might be observed about the frequency of extracts coded by each component (Figure 3.1) is the relationship it bears to the composition of the 'entitative' and 'natural kind' dimensions found by Haslam et al (2000). With the

Figure 3.1. Frequency of extracts coded by each component across both datasets

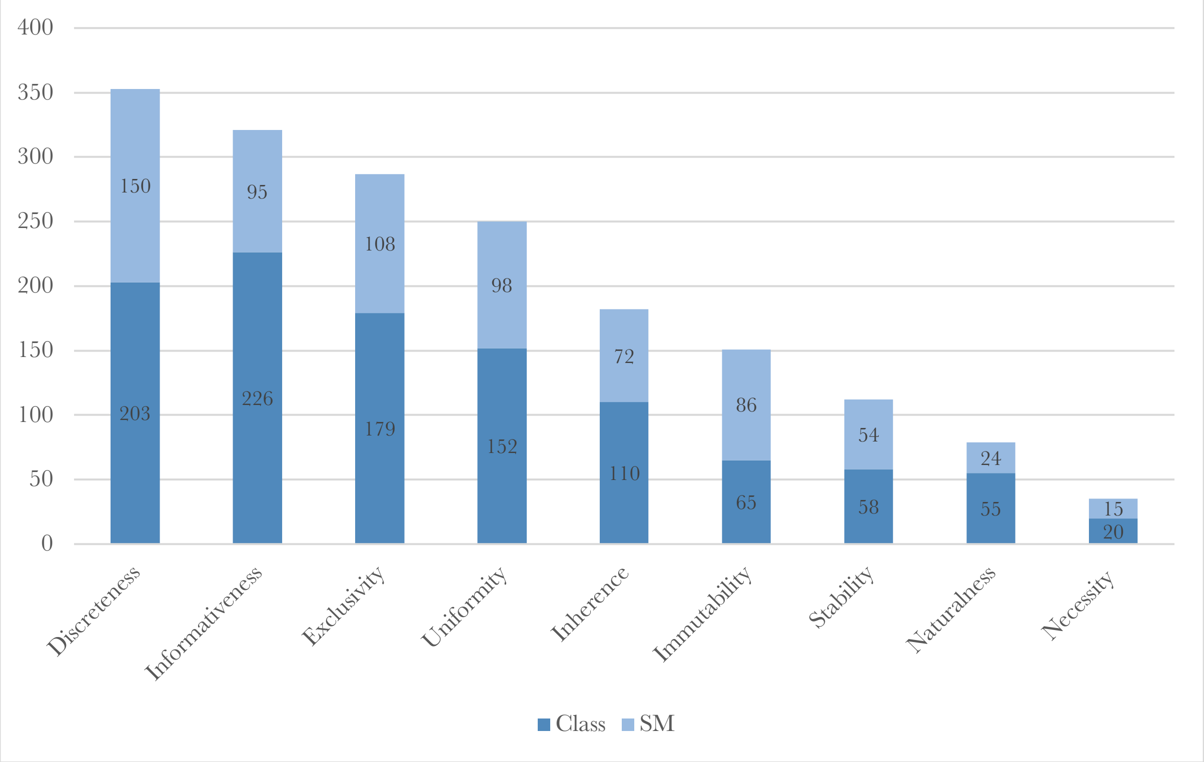
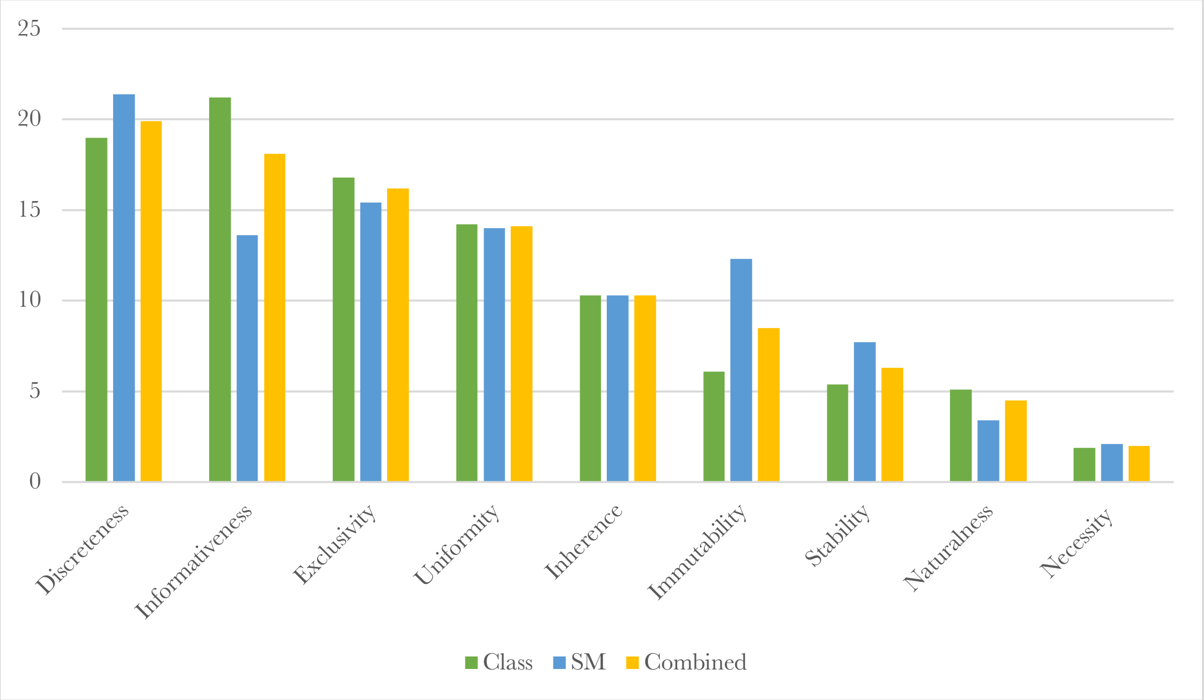


Figure 3.2. Percentage of coded extracts in each dataset composed of each component



exception of *discreteness*, which was the most frequently coded component in the 'social mobility' dataset and in both datasets combined, the remaining natural kind components – *immutability, stability, naturalness,* and *necessity* – had the lowest frequencies, while the four entitative components – *informativeness* (which was the most frequently coded component in the 'class' dataset), *exclusivity, uniformity*, and *inherence* – received the highest. But while *informativeness* figured less prominently than the other entitative components in the 'social mobility' dataset – comprising 13.6% of all coded extracts, as opposed to 21.2% in the 'class' data (Figure 3.2) – *immutability*, perhaps unsurprisingly, appeared significantly more frequently here (12.3%) than it did in the 'class' dataset (6.1%), and even more so than *inherence*, which was proportionally stable across both (10.3%).

However, this fact highlights one of the reasons why it is not possible to draw any simple conclusions from the statistical data presented here or use it as a reliable basis to make comparisons with other research; the advantage of identifying the components within naturally-occurring data rather than attempting to elicit beliefs about them simply from a questionnaire is that they can be analysed in the context in which they are actively represented, yet the specific nature of the context in question may have a significant influence on the probability of different components being invoked in these representations. Not only might it be the case that *immutability* is more likely to be an aspect of discussions about social mobility than of class itself, but it is also possible that *necessity*, for example, which accounted for only 2% of all coded extracts in the overall data, is a far more prevalent feature of beliefs about socio-economic categories than these statistics suggest, and yet due to its relative logical complexity – compared, for instance, with *discreteness* or *uniformity* – is significantly less likely than any other component to be spontaneously and explicitly represented.

Nevertheless, while the frequencies in this data of the individual components themselves may be insufficient evidence to form any clear judgements about the relationships between

Table 3.4. Matrix table displaying frequency of cross-coded extracts by components

	discrete	***informative***	***exclusive***	***uniform***	***inherent***	***immutable***	***stable***	***natural***	***necessary***
discrete	353								
informative	147	321							
exclusive	185	169	287						
uniform	161	142	129	250					
inherent	74	71	73	53	182				
immutable	65	53	77	40	62	151			
stable	59	42	43	36	26	46	112		
natural	29	34	25	21	57	30	17	79	
necessary	17	17	20	11	13	12	9	7	35

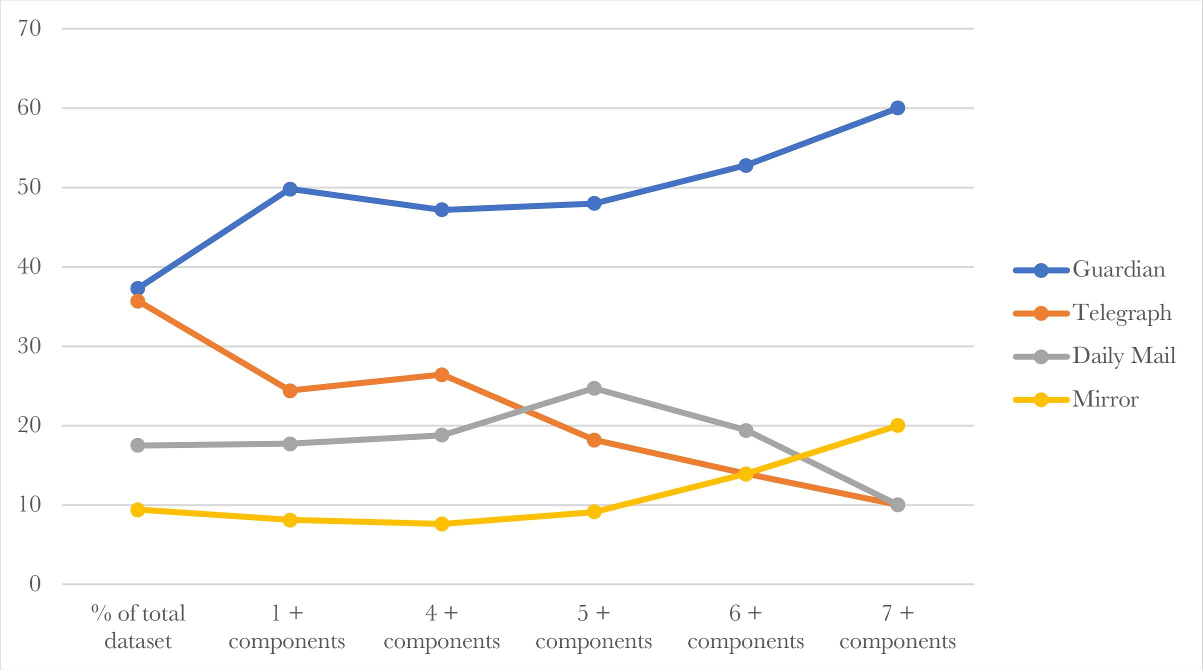
them, the frequency with which the extracts were coded simultaneously by particular components (Table 3.4) does at least appear to permit a small number of interesting superficial observations in this respect. For example, *immutability* and *necessity,* both of which form part of Haslam et al.'s (2000) natural kind cluster, were coded more frequently at the same extracts as *exclusivity,* which is on the entitativity dimension – 51% (77/151) and 57% (20/35) of their own total individual frequencies – than they were with any other component; and *naturalness* was coded in combination with *inherence* significantly more frequently than the former was with all of the other components (at 72% of the extracts that were coded by it in total), while *inherence* itself was cross-coded with both *naturalnes*s and *immutability* more frequently than it was with *uniformity*, which in Haslam et al.'s (2000) study was the component in the entitativity cluster that it was most highly correlated with.

In terms of the relationships between the components and the different media sources, as could be seen in the description of the datasets in the previous section (Table 3.1) the quantity of articles from the broadsheet newspapers significantly outweighs that of the tabloids, the latter contributing only just over a quarter of the entire dataset, and this is largely reflected in the composition of the coded data. The sources of the coded extracts, therefore, do not differ proportionally in a significant way according to each individual component, but broadly repeat the pattern of distribution in the coded data as a whole. However, while the Guardian and the

Table 3.5. Frequency of coded/cross-coded extracts by source

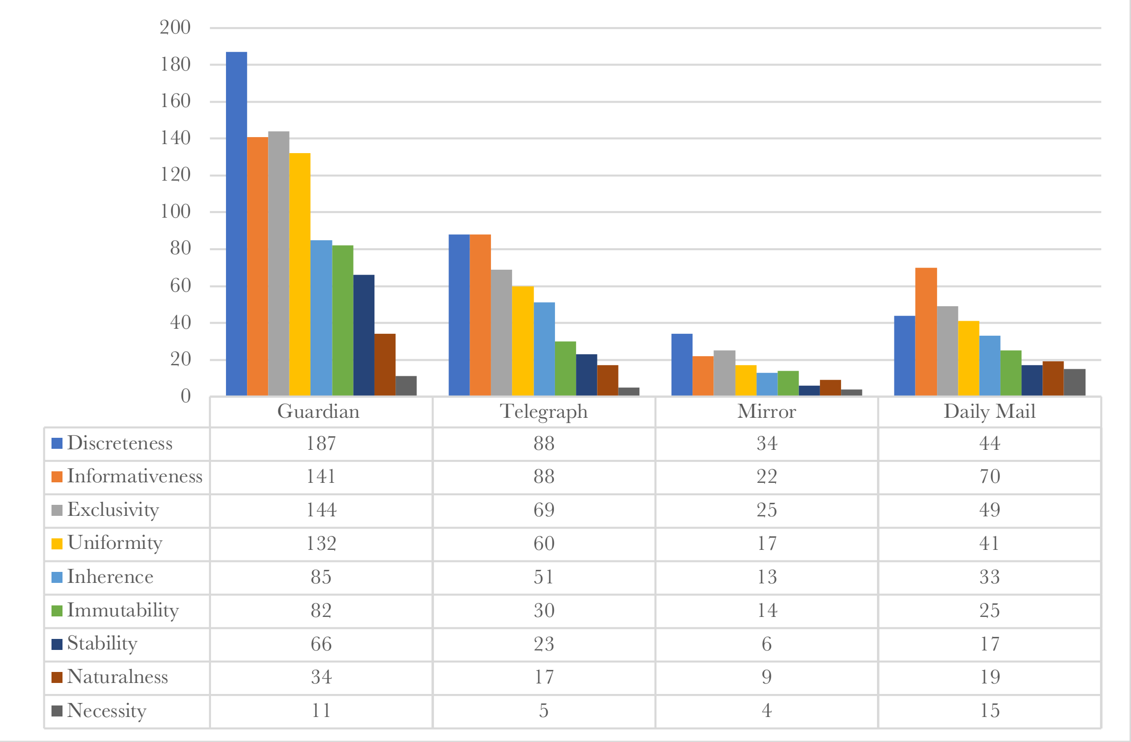
No. of extracts coded at	*Guardian*	*Telegraph*	*Daily Mail*	*Mirror*	*Total*
1 or more components	882	431	313	144	1770
4 or more	68	38	27	11	144
5 or more	37	14	19	7	77
6 or more	19	5	7	5	36
7 or more	6	1	1	2	10
8	1	0	0	0	1

Figure 3.3. Percentage of total dataset and coded/cross-coded extracts by source



Telegraph articles constituted roughly equal proportions of the total dataset – 37.3% and 35.7% respectively – the percentage of extracts coded at 1 or more components within these sources in fact differed considerably – 49.8% and 24.4% (Figure 3.3). Focusing on the extracts coded by at least 4 or more components and progressing up to those coded by at least 7 or more (4 being the smallest number of components on the independent dimensions identified by Haslam et al. (2000); and as is shown in Table 3.5, above, only a single extract in the present data was coded at more than 7 components), this divergence between the two broadsheet sources continues to widen very significantly; and although the proportion of extracts from the

Figure 3.4. Component frequencies by source



	Guardian	Telegraph	Mirror	Daily Mail
Discreteness	187	88	34	44
Informativeness	141	88	22	70
Exclusivity	144	69	25	49
Uniformity	132	60	17	41
Inherence	85	51	13	33
Immutability	82	30	14	25
Stability	66	23	6	17
Naturalness	34	17	9	19
Necessity	11	5	4	15

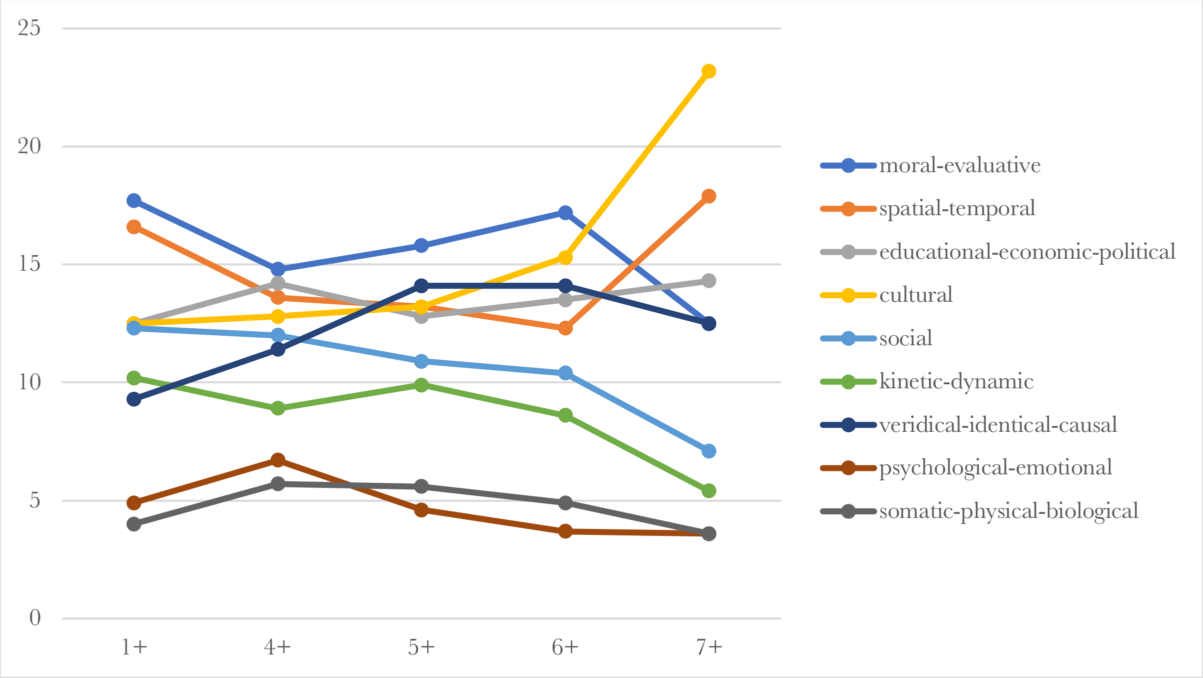
tabloid sources coded at both 1 or more and 4 or more components is roughly stable and very similar to the proportion of these sources in the overall dataset, in extracts cross-coded by 5 or more components onwards their frequencies begin to overtake those of the Telegraph.

The relative frequencies of the individual components within each source (Figure 3.4) broadly echo those within the data as a whole, although *discreteness* was clearly predominant only in the left-leaning broadsheet and tabloid sources; *informativeness* was equally as prevalent in the Telegraph extracts, while in the Daily Mail it was the most frequently coded component by a significant margin. It is also notable that in the tabloid sources *naturalness* not only accounts for a larger proportion of their frequencies overall, but despite the fact that the number of Daily Mail articles within the corpus is slightly below half that of the Telegraph, it was coded more frequently in the former, although this may be partly explained perhaps by the discrepancy in the relative contributions of the sources between the different datasets; the broadsheet articles proportionally outweighed the tabloids most heavily in the 'social mobility' data, where *discreteness* was significantly more prevalent than any other component, while in the 'class' dataset *informativeness* and *naturalness* were coded more than twice as frequently as they were in the 'social mobility' articles.

However, again, any interpretation based exclusively on the quantitative data presented here can only be tentative, and must take into account the following considerations: firstly, in many cases the extracts contain certain meta-representations or 'alternative representations' (Gillespie, 2008) – i.e., representations of other, often divergent and conflicting, representations – therefore the reproduction of a particular social representation within a source is not always necessarily representative of its own, or its readers', typical position, either socially or politically. Secondly, the definitions of the components provided by Haslam et al. (2000) are not only often rather broad, as has been mentioned already, but also fail to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic factors; a category may be perceived as discrete, uniform or immutable, for example, either due to inherent causes or simply as a result of enduring external or structural constraints (Vasilyeva et al., 2018). Yet, if internal or otherwise inherent characteristics are a necessary aspect of an essentialist construal, as some researchers have argued (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014; Haslam, 2014; Kanovsky, 2017), this distinction would appear to be paramount. Nonetheless, even if this is the case – and part of the aim of the following analysis is to investigate this assertion empirically rather than to pre-suppose it – both inherent features and external factors might not always, or even often, be referred to explicitly, and as is illustrated in the use of generic noun phrases (Gelman, 2003), this ambiguity may be sufficient to promote an essentialist intuition or representation, even if it is not demonstrably expressive of one in itself. A social determinist form of essentialism may also consist of the belief that inherent and immutable casual features or similarities between category members are in fact precisely the consequence of externally-produced and structurally-maintained conditions of discreteness and uniformity, for example, therefore while representations of the latter may not demonstrate essentialism without being explicitly associated with the former, the fact that they refer to extrinsic features or causes does not automatically refute it either.

Finally, returning briefly to the secondary themes, before their relationships with the primary component themes are revealed in greater detail, the graph below (Figure 3.5) shows the percentages of their relative frequencies at different levels of cross-coding by the individual components. This gives a very general indication of the representational content of the extracts within the coded data as a whole, as well as of those extracts that were coded at increasing levels by multiple components, and it may be noted at once that while the proportions of the two least prevalent themes in the coded data overall, *somatic-physical-biological* and *psychological-emotional* – which encompass references to blood, bones, genes, physiognomic features, intelligence, and mentality, for example – remain low even in those extracts coded at a large number of components, the next least dominant theme, *veridical-identical-causal* – including representations of authenticity and inauthenticity, true identity, and determination by origin – occupies an increasing proportion of extracts coded by a higher number of components, and at 5 or more becomes the second most dominant. However, the most prevalent theme at this level and in the coded extracts as a whole, *moral-evaluative*, is also comprised of a number of closely-related notions – references to betrayal or selling out, and to virtue, purity, and respectability, for example – as well as many other elements that do not appear to be directly relevant to an essentialist representation, therefore the significance of these themes in relation to the latter can only be revealed by a closer examination of what they broadly describe: the various manifestations in this domain of each of the individual components of essentialism, which will now be discussed in the order of their frequency within the coded data.

Figure 3.5. Percentage of extracts coded at different multiple-component levels grouped by each secondary theme



3.3.2. Qualitative analysis of components

Discreteness

Gelman (2003: 67) argues that essentialist beliefs do not necessarily entail that category boundaries are understood to be absolute, but rather that they are perceived to be "relatively more dichotomous (either/or, discrete, or nonfuzzy) than they truly are." The methodology of Haslam et al.'s (2000) questionnaire study, which asked participants to rate various social categories according to each individual component on a scale of 1 to 9, is well-equipped to capture this process of 'boundary intensification', rather than being limited to a conception of discreteness that is in itself dichotomous. The definition they provide (Table 3.2) is comprised of two logically interrelated aspects: categories are believed to have sharp boundaries, and membership is either/or, rather than by degrees; discreteness, therefore, automatically appears to imply a level of uniformity, if only in regard to the extent to which each individual is a member of the category.

Since 'classes', at least in Bourdieu's view, are constructed on the principles of maximum inter-group difference and maximum intra-group homogeneity (Bourdieu, 1987), discreteness (and, indeed, uniformity) might be considered to be a natural corollary of the concept of 'class' itself. However, as was discussed in Chapter One, even Bourdieu's conception is a continuous one, and other models that visualise social stratification in terms of 'clusters' or of a 'gradational ladder', for example, show that there are several alternatives to the perception of socio-economic categories as constituted by definite boundaries and unvarying degrees of membership; and indeed representations of discreteness occupied an even greater proportion of the coded extracts in the 'social mobility' dataset despite the fact that the term 'class' appeared in less than half of these articles.

Differences between socio-economic categories were most vividly represented across the data generally in terms of spatial metaphors that signify either definite (albeit sometimes imperceptible, and therefore deceptive) boundaries – *'divides', 'divisions', 'fences', '(invisible) barriers', '(glass/class) ceilings'* – or indicate significant distances between them – '*gaps', a 'gulf', a 'chasm', 'a million miles away'* – and sometimes were even characterised as constituting entirely different spheres of existence altogether, e.g. *'their own bubble', 'a different world'*. Alternating with a triadic vision of the social structure, these spatial metaphors were often structured by a number of dichotomous category labels that suggest oppositional and sometimes strongly antagonistic relations between these groups, polarised by their seemingly fundamental dissimilarities and internally unified by an absence of any significant or discernible distinctions within them:

> *Britain is strangled by barbed-wire fences of class …* (Guardian, 29/11/16)

> *An entire generation of young people is being left behind because of the 'corrosive' gap between rich and poor.* (Mirror, 16/11/16)

> *… let's shatter the glass ceiling separating the haves from the have-nots, that allows a London elite to fill their children's piggy banks to give them a leg-up in life, that conspires to halt the march of social mobility. Let's create a country where who you are and what you can do trumps where you came from.* (Mirror, 13/11/16*)*

While in some cases these binary labels may be intended to refer only to the opposite poles of an apparently widening spectrum rather than to the social structure in its entirety, the spatial metaphors in which they are most commonly inscribed illustrate two distinct yet interchangeable, and sometimes overlapping, representations of the relationship between socio-economic categories in the UK: a system of contiguous but sharply bounded groups, on the one hand, and of fully discontinuous and spatially separated groups, on the other. This logical ambivalence is captured by the symbolic distortion of the metaphorical 'socio-economic ladder', ordinarily an emblem of continuity and potential opportunity, and in the idea (expressed in another popular metaphor here, the '*social mobility treadmill*') that the various structural impediments to mobility simultaneously entail both permanent stasis and perpetual motion:

> *The rungs on the social mobility ladder are growing further apart …* (Daily Mail, 17/11/16)

> *My social mobility journey feels more like an exhausting, endless quest* […] *Working-class people are locked out of all types of career opportunities based solely on background. We are denied jobs for not conforming to invisible middle-class dress codes, such as wearing the right shoes. Our career progression*

> *is slower because of our accents* […] *Until the barriers to working-class people in this country are truly recognised, I don't want to be socially mobile. I am fed up of living a life in transit. I want to be there. I want to be middle class.* (Guardian, 16/11/16)

However, of course, these representations of spatial discontinuities are not merely abstract and arbitrary metaphors but are often tethered to accounts of actual physical segregation between socio-economic categories: across the occupational structure and between different systems of education, for example, and in its most literal, geographical form, in the distribution of housing. Reinforcing the sense of a neat topographical separation, frequent reference is made to ostensibly discrete socio-economically classed '*areas*' or even '*ghettos*', and depictions of stark contrasts between entire metropolitan centres, such as London, and the rest of the UK or between the north and the south of the country more broadly – as well as between some of the typical characteristics of the individuals residing in these locations, including for example, their warmth or coldness.

While the most conspicuous representations of discreteness in this data appear to be of a predominantly external or structural nature, implying that the boundaries between these categories are purely artefactual and therefore potentially alterable, it remains ambiguous as to whether the particular features that connote (and therefore often reproduce) class status or socio-economic background – such as accents, dress-codes, and other social or cultural norms – are understood as simply the relatively superficial manifestations of merely external, structural differences, or whether they are in fact perceived to be the signifiers of substantively and intrinsically different types of people:

> *Numerous reports indicate that the class ceiling is alive and well, with some employers using a 'poshness' test when recruiting, favouring well-travelled individuals with 'well-spoken' accents. How will the*

> *government tackle the invisible barriers that working-class young people face when seeking employment?"* (Guardian, 19/11/16)

Informativeness

The inductive potential of a category is usually an integral aspect of its function; categories based on merely peripheral or predicative features – 'being red', for example – tend to have far less inferential or pragmatic value, and are therefore less common, than those whose informativeness enables reliable prediction or explanation (Gelman, 2003). As was discussed in Chapter One, for sociologists the utility of socio-economic categories is often tied to the measurement of 'life chances', indicating not only their members' relative economic and occupational prospects, but also factors relating to health and life expectancy that result from their differing conditions of existence. However, as economic analyses of social mobility typically demonstrate (Blanden, 2008), the identification of these correlations is not reliant upon the construction of discrete categories, since they can also be observed using continuous measures of wealth and income, for example:

> *Smoking, obesity and high blood pressure all run higher the lower you sit on the socioeconomic ladder. Perhaps unsurprisingly, too, chronic diseases such as diabetes, osteoarthritis, cancer and even Parkinson's disease are all more common among the less well off than the wealthy and show a clear gradient from poorest to richest.* (Guardian, 10/6/17)

By contrast, as the following extract suggests, lay representations of the inductive potential of socio-economic status appear more commonly to invoke a conception of relatively discrete categories and typically refer (in less overtly probabilistic terms) to its more symbolic and evaluative dimensions:

> *Somehow, I suspect Tatler doesn't much mind how the election turns out. There will still be parts of society that define class as an inalienable indicator of status and politics, and they will still be up for the gossip.* (Guardian, 6/6/17)

However, beyond the media reporting of social scientific analyses, representations of informativeness were most evident in the data not in examples of predictive judgement or inductive inference on the basis of category membership alone, but rather in the form of inferences to category membership from particular characteristics and behaviours. Gelman (2003) emphasises this distinction between the processes of induction and categorisation and assigns relatively little weight to the latter since developmental research has shown that unless features are perceived to be essential they tend to be invested with significantly less predictive power than category labels, and given that essentialism usually operates as a placeholder notion the essence of a category itself is seldom explicitly theorised. This perhaps explains why informativeness is often equated with inductive potential alone, as it is in Haslam et al.'s (2000: 117) description, which focuses exclusively on the extent to which a category enables judgements about its members, and yet does not discriminate as to the significance of the various features that the category might be informative about specifically. But outside of a laboratory setting these reasoning processes might just as often occur in tandem, and inferences from category to features may be preceded by an initial inference from a particular feature to the category itself:

> *As soon as we saw their, and their respective husbands', cheekbones, we could pretty much predict everything about their class - and thus their diets, reading material, degree of Farage-love, level of taste in home decor and, surely, cleanliness of underwear. Or ... could we? Well, yes, as it turned out …* (Guardian, 18/6/17)

Since the irony in this extract (from a review of a TV documentary) is nevertheless neutralised in its final sentence, it therefore not only reproduces but also arguably reinforces the representation it sets out to satirise: that it is possible to make an immediate and reliable inference from the physiognomic characteristics of an individual to their social class membership and thence, for example, to their culinary, cultural and political preferences, and even their personal hygiene. But whether or not this representation of the inferential power of an individual's facial features is genuinely shared (even by the author of the extract themselves), inalterable physiognomic or other phenotypic characteristics are evidently not excluded from the contents of popular class stereotypes:

> *In our heads, archetypes of class remain crystal-clear and* [Conservative MP, Jacob] *Rees-Mogg fits the one marked "posh" to a T. Maybe it's the Cicero references or the pallor of his skin. Maybe it's his narrow features or his grandmatronly spectacles. Maybe it's the fact he used to go campaigning with his nanny. Perhaps it's just the name. But it's the case that Rees-Mogg not only is posh but seems posh.* (Guardian, 28/11/16)

The emphasis on the harmony in this instance between 'is' and 'seems' alludes to the fact that appearance and reality in this respect are frequently perceived to be incongruous, not least in the realm of politics and other forms of public life where self-presentations are subject to intense scrutiny and often suspected of being cynically motivated. In these cases, the 'real identity' of the individual is '*revealed*' or '*exposed*' not necessarily by any putatively essential features, but by a number of other relatively superficial or observable characteristics or ‘clues’, which either individually or in combination are believed to be more accurate or legitimate signifiers:

> *The society magazine is featuring the Labour leader as a secret toff - but this isn't an outbreak of Corbyn fandom, it's a cry of class betrayal* […] *Its website has written up the 11 clues that reveal the poshness of Corbyn, who is pictured wearing white tie.* […] *“Jeremy, brother of Piers, father of Benjamin and Sebastian, grew up in a seven-bedroomed manor house on a ducal estate in the shires, as such we recognise and defend him as one of our own."* (Guardian, 6/6/17)

> *Honey G's middle-class past exposed* […] *The X Factor rapper has vigorously denied claims that her persona is faked, but the latest revelation is hard to argue with. Despite being known for her garish tracksuits and gold chains, Honey once looked totally different. Pictures taken of the star as far back as childhood show a completely different side to her.* (Mirror, 5/11/16)

> … *all this dazzling bling may have blinded viewers to her rather incongruous background. For the 35-year-old is really a middle-class, grammar school educated, former county tennis champion with a penchant for ballet. And her real name is the decidedly more formal Anna Georgette Gilford.* (Daily Mail, 5/11/16)

In his analysis of symbols of class status, Goffman (1951) suggests that greater significance is attached to those features that are given to or forced upon the individual rather than chosen by them, and that are the most resistant to modification or manipulation. This might therefore direct attention not only to certain phenotypic characteristics – if indeed they are perceived to be indicators – but also to other ascribed features or aspects of an individual’s background that are not usually determined by their own volition, such as those emphasised in the preceding extracts, for example their name, education, the type of house or area in which they grew up, and their earliest forms of cultural participation. For behavioural characteristics, "symbolic value is given to the perceptible difference between an act performed unthinkingly under the invisible guide of familiarity and habit, and the same act, or an imitation of it, performed with conscious attention to detail and self-conscious attention to effect." (Goffman, 1951: 300). This would inevitably place a premium on those actions that appear to be conditioned by prolonged socialisation within a particular socio-economic milieu, however certain behaviours may be symbolically contested, and the performance of a particular action and its very opposite may both be construed as indicative of the same social background, according to different perspectives:

> *Imagine that woman believing this failure to request spaghetti per favore revealed her working-class origins and cost her the position* […] *it's not a social gaffe to order in English in an Italian restaurant in England with English translation on the menu. It would be rather Hyacinth Bucket*[10] *to do otherwise.* (Daily Mail, 23/6/17)

Shared representations of the informativeness of socio-economic categories or category-typical features are not always therefore shared representations of what these categories or features are informative about exactly.

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[10] Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced 'Bouquet') was a character in the British sitcom 'Keeping up Appearances', originally broadcast by the BBC in the 1990s, and has since become a byword for a snobbish social climber attempting to hide their lowly social origins behind a comically inept display of respectability and upper-middle class sophistication (Lawler, 2005; Lockyer, 2010; Walkerdine, 2003).

Exclusivity

Haslam et al.'s (2000: 118) description of exclusivity – namely, that category membership is perceived to exclude membership of other categories – may appear self-explanatory, however this simple definition in fact obscures an important difference in the relationships between various categories, failing to distinguish between those that belong to separate domains and are therefore notionally independent and potentially overlapping, and those which belong within the same domain and might therefore constitute logically adjacent and alternative categories or even binary opposites.

A clear example of the first type is the representation in Nazi and neo-Nazi ideology of mutual exclusivity between the categories 'German' and 'Jew' or 'Black' (Holtz & Wagner, 2009; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). Yet this type may be further divided into 'weak' and 'strong' forms: the latter referring to a totalising conception of category membership in which the ascription of a single social identity resists cross-classification by dominating or even precluding all others, while the former denotes merely a perception of weak correlation or an incompatibility between the stereotypes of different categories (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992), as may be illustrated in the following extracts concerning middle-class and working-class identities:

> *Janice was a middle-aged, middle-class housewife and I was surprised when she walked through the door at the drug dependency unit* [...] *'But I'm not an addict,' she would frequently tell me and I often wondered if it was me she was trying to convince, or herself. 'I mean, I can't be an addict. I pay my taxes and listen to Radio 4 for goodness' sake.'* (Daily Mail, 10/06/17)

> *The working class, apparently, consists only of straight white men: not women who want rights, not ethnic minorities, not migrants, not LGBT people.* (Guardian, 17/11/16)

However, ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ forms perhaps cannot always be so easily distinguished: the representation, alluded to sardonically in the last extract, of the limited intersections of working-class membership with categories of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, may be connected to a traditional representation of class categorisation more broadly – for example, as being determined by the occupational status of men, and as a peculiarly British (and therefore stereotypically ‘white’) phenomenon – yet, on the other hand, it might equally or alternatively be related to totalising representations of the categories it appears to exclude, or simply that socio-economic categories tend to be conceptually nested within them rather than vice versa.

The second type, pertaining to the mutual exclusivity of contiguous or oppositional categories within the same domain (e.g., ‘male/female’, ‘black/white’) is implicit in some of the representations of informativeness, discussed above – where in ambiguous or contradictory cases individuals are ultimately assigned (or re-assigned) on the basis of certain criteria to a single category – and is evidently intertwined with the logic of discreteness, since it is the common, insuperable boundaries that are perceived to form the contours of these separate categories that renders them mutually exclusive. In a very obvious sense, intra-domain exclusivity of a social-structural kind is a core aspect of explicit representations of social mobility, in which difference and discontinuity between socio-economic categories is both enacted and maintained by the ‘barriers’ or ‘ceilings’ which keep individuals from working-class backgrounds from entering prestigious and well-remunerated professions:

> *Only 4% of doctors, 6% of barristers, 11% of journalists and 12% of solicitors have working-class origins* […] *Young people without financial support from their parents are effectively excluded due to means not merit and potentially locked out from sought-after careers entirely.* (Guardian, 12/11/16)

To the extent that occupational groups may be equated with or serve as proxies for socio-economic categories, this exclusion thus illustrates the notion that membership of one category or class – usually determined in the first instance by an individual's background and their parents' occupational status – tends to preclude membership of another. Yet at the same time, as with external or structural representations of discreteness, it is also clearly implied that this exclusivity is an alterable rather than inevitable fact, and may simply be regarded as tautologous with a structural interpretation of Haslam et al.'s (2000: 118) definition of immutability; while the latter designates the difficulty, if not impossibility, of an individual category member becoming a non-member, exclusion in this sense simply refers to the prevention of a non-member becoming a member.

However, the less explicit – although scarcely less obvious – aspect of the logic of mutual exclusivity evident in these representations in fact positions it at odds with this understanding of immutability, since it is most clearly demonstrated in examples of mobility: although an individual may occupy more than one socio-economic category diachronically, they cannot occupy more than one at any given time; entry into a new category or class therefore automatically implies that an individual has left the original one behind. But although this logic may be analytically self-evident, the abstract spatial terms in which it tends to be couched obscure the fact that movements between these categories, like literal geographical migration, often significantly impinge on questions of identity and culture:

> *Natalie, is a 35-year old black woman who has left behind her working-class background to become a successful middle-class barrister …* (Telegraph, 14/11/16)

> *She has talked before of having once had two voices - the voice of her childhood and the voice she assumed on going to Cambridge - and how she "should have kept both alive in my mouth". Instead the voice of her past is constantly re-imagined in her work.* (Guardian, 6/11/16)

> *… to become socially mobile, one deliberately leaves things behind. The valorisation of the worst parts of working-class culture by public-school leftists is the worst kind of snobbery.* (Guardian, 28/6/17)

Whereas other mutually exclusive domains may accommodate 'hybrid' or 'in-between' or even transitional cases, without disrupting their own conceptually discrete structure, by placing them in intermediate categories, such as 'intersex', 'bisexual', 'transexual', 'transgender', or 'mixed-race'[11], for example, here no such comparable and commonly shared terms appear to be readily available. Insofar as socio-economic status is determined synchronically and by a single dimension, such as occupation or income, and is understood as a purely conventional, theoretical or analytical categorisation, mobility between discrete and mutually exclusive categories appears to be largely academic, but where socio-economic categories or classes are perceived or experienced as social identities then the logic of exclusivity may also be repeated at an individual and internal level. The notion of 'leaving behind' that mobility often appears to involve mirrors the representation of immobility suggested in the term '*left-behinds'* – which appeared several times in the 'social mobility' data, referring to those excluded from the stream of social and economic progress (Savage, 2021), or indeed '*the march of social mobility'* – however, in this case it is not only others who are perceived to have been abandoned or repressed, but often also important aspects (or even entire versions) of an individual's own self.

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[11] However, of course, historical mixed-race categories, such as 'mulatto' or 'quadroon', for instance, were ultimately assigned as 'black' by a principle of hypodescent. (Savage, 2021)

Uniformity

Uniformity was mentioned earlier in relation to the ungraded aspect of discreteness and is also intimated by the somewhat monistic implications of exclusivity: insofar as membership of socio-economic categories is represented in 'all-or-nothing' terms and as either overshadowing or even precluding potentially intersecting identities and category memberships, individual members may be perceived as relatively homogenous. This is sometimes an implicit, albeit inadvertent, feature of the social mobility discourse, in which criticism of socio-economic inequalities is often inscribed within a representation of intra-category uniformity and inter-category discreteness, such that the promotion of greater diversity sometimes appears to suggest simply a juxtaposition of more or less homogenous and discontinuous social identities, or to repeat Brubaker and Cooper's (2000: 31) phrase, "a multichrome mosaic of monochrome identity groups".

The concept of identity itself, even when referring to the uniqueness of an individual, is inextricable from a notion of sameness (Descombes, 2016; Lawler, 2015), but the simultaneous suggestion of difference and identicality is more immediately discernible in the form of a social identity and is perhaps most explicitly represented here in the use of generic statements, in which discreteness, informativeness, and uniformity appear to be combined, e.g.:

> *Middle class families have been left on a social mobility treadmill.* (Daily Mail, 17/11/16)

> *… the middle classes swung to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour while the working classes swung behind Theresa May's Conservatives ...* (Guardian, 20/6/17)
>
> *Working-class women are too busy for gender theory - but they're still feminists.* (Guardian, 25/6/17)
>
> *Why white working-class boys don't get to university …* (Guardian, 21/11/16)

Perceptions of intra-category similarity have been shown to exert a powerful influence on beliefs concerning a category's inductive potential (Gelman, 2003) – indeed, similarity is understood to be a necessary basis for induction (Quine, 1969) – and since sameness must always refer to a particular object or feature (Descombes, 2016), informativeness is often automatically implied in any example of uniformity. In the absence of logical quantifiers, generic statements such as those in the extracts above suggest that the relationship between categories and characteristics is not merely probabilistic or approximate, but rather definite and without exception, which may in turn promote a general expectation of informativeness beyond the features that are directly referred to (Gelman, 2003). Used in this way, generic category labels – even in relatively specified forms, such as '*working class boys/women*', for example – often appear to represent not simply analytic categories consisting of serials or aggregates of individuals, grouped together on the basis of broadly similar conditions of existence or life chances, but rather singular, monolithic entities, comprised of identical behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, interests, etc., united by a common voice, purpose, or fate, and acting, moving or thinking in concert.

Again, Haslam et al.'s (2000: 117) definition does not distinguish between beliefs about relatively superficial or structurally contingent features and non-obvious or intrinsic forms of uniformity, however representations of the latter are clearly an important aspect of their conception of entitativity since 'underlying sameness' is included in their description of inherence (Haslam et al., 2000: 118), which, as has already been discussed, is highly correlated with uniformity on the entitative dimension of their model of essentialism. Non-obvious or even inherent similarity is implied to some extent in the extracts illustrating distinctions between appearance and reality in representations of informativeness, above, where concealed features or hidden 'clues' are believed to reveal an individual's true class identity, suggesting that in spite of appearances they are ultimately more similar in kind to those who share their socio-economic background than they are to those who are considered to be authentic exemplars of the category or identity that the individual is perceived to be merely imitating or 'faking'. But the most conspicuous examples of inherent uniformity within the data are those that refer directly to a shared or identical subjectivity:

> … *this reincarnation of the Old Left is a sham* […] *It is a bourgeois fantasy that appeals to urban elites and middle-class students who know almost nothing about how working-class people see the world.* (Telegraph, 10/6/17)

> *Alan Bleasdale's comi-tragic look at unemployment in the north west was not only a polemic against Thatcherite politics but also a journey into the psyche of the white working-class male.* (Telegraph, 2/11/16)

The suggestion of an apparently discrete and homogenous 'working-class consciousness' draws attention, however, to a possible asymmetry in representations of the uniformity of socio-economic categories; consistent with Haslam et al.'s (2000) finding that lower-status categories within the same domain tend to be perceived as more entitative, notions of group solidarity, collective action, shared experiences or goals, and collective consciousness, etc., are typically associated with subordinate social groups (Brubaker, 2002; Young, 1994). At the level of subjective experience or 'mentality', therefore, perceptions of uniformity may vary according to socio-economic status, with working-class membership being represented as more informative in terms of intra-group similarity at a deep level, potentially as a result of greater in-group identification.

This asymmetry might also be supported by a pervasive representation of working-class or lower socio-economic status category membership involving a more collectivistic and interdependent mode of living – for example in the frequent reference in this data to exclusively working-class '*communities*', but also embedded in the terms 'common' or 'masses' (Lawler, 2015; Skeggs, 1997) – which, in contrast with a greater emphasis on individualism and distinctiveness in representations of middle-class or higher socio-economic category membership, arguably remains an implicit feature of much of the political discourse on social mobility, apparent in the opposition between '*the many and the few*', and the focus on '*ordinary people*'. Furthermore, unlike the labels 'working-class' and 'upper-class', which are seldom qualified in this way, the term 'middle-class' is often prefixed by 'upper' and 'lower'; depending on whether these qualifiers are understood to designate continuous gradations within a single middle-class, or rather discrete sub-classes in their own right, they might promote a perception of middle-class membership as more variable than other class categories. Therefore, while representations of uniformity evidently apply to socio-economic categories generally, their specific contents suggest that the perceived strength and depth of uniformity may vary in potentially significant ways between these categories.

Inherence

As was discussed in Chapter One and briefly touched upon again earlier in the current chapter, a number of researchers have suggested that inherence is not only an individual component of psychological essentialism, it is in fact a 'necessary ingredient', both the foundation and the very 'essence of essentialism' itself (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014; Haslam, 2014; Kanovsky, 2007; Newman & Knobe, 2018); and the distinction between beliefs based on the causal properties of inherent features as opposed to merely external or structural factors is argued to be key to the identification of an essentialist construal (Vasilyeva et al., 2018).

However, as the various commentaries on Cimpian & Salomon's (2014) proposal of an 'inherence heuristic' make clear, definitions do not always align: while the authors themselves define inherent characteristics as stable and enduring properties that characterise the constitution of an entity, including even its shape – and need not refer to whatever might be commonly believed to represent its actual essence – others have assumed them to be exclusively internal and causal features (e.g., Haslam 2014; Strevens, 2014). Haslam et al. (2000: 118), again somewhat ambiguously, define inherence as an 'underlying reality or sameness' that, notwithstanding certain superficial similarities and differences, ensures that "underneath [category members] are basically the same". This suggestion of both a shared and individually embodied inherent quality that determines or encapsulates the reality of a category is very similar to the conventional description of an essence itself – "the very being of anything, whereby it is what it is. And thus the real internal, but generally … unknown constitution of things whereon their discoverable qualities depend" (Locke, 1671, cited in Gelman, 2003) – compared with which the intrinsic forms of uniformity discussed above, such as the notion of a white, male, working-class 'psyche', might appear to be largely epiphenomenal and perhaps ultimately reducible to some other necessary core characteristic or experience.

However, where psychological features are actually perceived to have a causal role with regard to category membership, if only in ensuring its continuity or inalterability rather than necessarily determining membership a priori, then they may be understood to be relatively central. This is intimated to some extent in the social mobility discourse, in which ‘aspiration’, or the lack of it, is often represented as a shared psychological trait or ‘mentality’ that – seemingly independent of any other external or structural factors – may either facilitate or prevent access to ‘sought-after’ careers:

> *There is definitely a poverty of aspiration. It's a horrible thing. I think I had it, and all the people around me had it. "When I was growing up there wasn't one person who wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer, or certainly an MP. And that unfortunately is still the mentality of a lot of people."* (Guardian, 13/11/16)

The notion of ‘natural’ aptitude or talent is also frequently invoked as a potentially category-determining inherent feature in representations of social mobility, and like the very similar concept of ‘natural giftedness’ discussed by Räty et al. (2017), often suggests a ‘fixed mindset’ or ‘entity theory’ in which an individual’s various skills and intelligence are perceived to be immutable attributes (Dweck, 2000; Plaks, Levy, Dweck & Stroessner, 2004), therefore implying that those who do not possess the relevant characteristics may be incapable of acquiring them, whereas those who already possess them do so innately:

> *I heard one MP at a Tory conference meeting talk warmly of "picking diamonds from the rough" - and that's exactly what's wrong with the "social mobility" concept.* (Guardian, 17/11/16)

The metaphor of the 'diamond in the rough' seems to equate the 'upwardly' socially mobile with the image of a rare and precious natural kind, requiring only superficial polish once they have been removed from their relatively commonplace and inferior surroundings and redomiciled amongst specimens of their own distinguished nature. Innate potential may be expressed more explicitly, and perhaps less figuratively, in terms of DNA or blood, for example, however the former was demonstrated in this sense only as a potential cause or explanation for mobility – or, at least, for transcending the circumstances of an individual's socio-economic background against the odds – whereas blood, as Wagner et al. (2009) have discussed, is used in this domain exclusively in reference to aristocratic or upper-class category membership, and indeed appeared only in the right-wing tabloid press:

> *"Coming from a working-class background has helped keep me down-to-earth," he says. "I remember well not having any money, but now I'm older and I've got a foot in both camps. I've been very lucky all my life, always making money... Maybe I've got natural trading ability within my DNA."* (Mirror, 25/6/17)

> *Another attraction was that he had noble blood and connections with royalty going back generations.* (Daily Mail, 24/6/17)

> *The extraordinary lengths American heiresses went to snap up impoverished British blue bloods in cash-for-class deal that saved the aristocracy.* (Daily Mail, 02/6/17)

> … *if Theresa May ejected the last blue-bloods she might at least create a sense of radicalism.* (Daily Mail, 22/6/17)

The term ‘blue-bloods’, in a contemporary context, is perhaps little more than a flippant shorthand label, but nonetheless reproduces the representation of a natural, ascribed, exclusive, and immutable, if increasingly endangered, upper-class identity. Describing the notion of ‘white blood’ believed to be possessed by the nobility in a very different cultural context, Astuti (1995) explains that due to the invisibility of this putative substance its presence can only be inferred from a person’s conduct, for example in their bearing or demeanour; external characteristics are therefore understood to reflect an individual’s inner self. Since the literal sense of ‘blue blood’ (referring originally to the visibility of veins beneath the pale complexions of those whose privilege and status exempted them from outdoor labour) has been supplanted by its general metaphorical usage, like ‘white blood’ it may appear to allude instead to a hidden, invisible, or perhaps even immaterial quality. Yet the idea of an intrinsic superiority conveyed by embodied characteristics or behaviours is not exclusively confined to in-group or out-group representations of upper-class categories, but may also be perceived to be a strategy employed to mark symbolic boundaries further down the socio-economic hierarchy:

> *… middle-classness is not only about income. It is to do with the entitlement to a certain kind of life, and that life has to be defined as innately superior to that of the masses.* (Guardian, 28/6/17)

And neither are inherent, category-typical (and potentially even subsequently causal) properties limited only to ‘innate’ features; self-confidence, ease and poise, for example, which are commonly taken to be emblematic of elite social status (Bourdieu, 1984; Daloz, 2010) may be seen to be profoundly and permanently instilled during secondary socialisation, as the irreversible product of a private school education:

> *Oxford is a strange place with strange people pretending it's all perfectly normal* […] *it was the first time I'd really been aware of class distinctions, the first time I'd witnessed the unassailable confidence that a private education bestows.* (Guardian, 22/11/16)

The representation, implicit in some of the extracts illustrating informativeness, that beyond or beneath merely superficial characteristics or self-presentations, an individual's 'true' class identity may be revealed not by their current occupation or income, or their possession of other forms of capital, but rather by clues relating to their socio-economic background, suggests that the latter is understood to be embodied as an inherent feature. In which case, there appears to be a close resemblance between social determinist beliefs and instances of 'individual essentialism' where the essence is equivalent to a particular historical path: "people favour historical paths over outward properties when determining what something is. This tendency can be considered a version of essentialism: historical paths are nonobvious properties that take precedence over outward features, and historical paths have causal implications […] By privileging historical paths, people say in effect that an underlying, hidden reality determines identity." (Gelman, 2003: 151).

And, in fact, in a rather more extreme illustration of social determinism, such as the following description of the possible epigenetic effects resulting from deprivation, influences and outcomes of both a social and a biological nature may be understood as deeply intertwined:

> *The truth is, it gets inside you, this disadvantage, creeps into your cells and changes the very core of your being* […] *the emerging science of epigenetics shows life experiences can actually change the way a person's genes are expressed. Poverty in particular is emerging as a particularly important pathway through which enzymes are manipulated.* (Guardian, 10/6/17)

Immutability

Immutability, in a purely structural sense, is precisely what much of the social mobility discourse is predominantly concerned with; its frequent criticism of the various obstacles preventing movement between socio-economic categories automatically implies that, in theory at least, category membership is mutable. However, as the previous extract vividly suggests, in some instances these structural factors may be seen to be deeply internalised; in which case, whether or not external constraints are subsequently lifted, immobility has already been socially determined, and the notion of individual freedom and volition is believed to be largely illusory.

> *Increasingly, research shows that it's not enough to attempt to tackle inequality among adults: the seeds sown in early life alone can be enough to set some up to fail* [...] *These early life experiences of disadvantage were shaping their "choices" well into their adult life.* (Guardian, 10/6/17)

Conversely, the perception or personal experience of entrenched immobility and/or of significant divisions between social classes may promote the idea of an inherent individual constraint or fixed class identity which therefore determines immutability even when the boundaries of a different socio-economic category have ostensibly been successfully traversed, as in the following lengthy extract, in which the concept of an essence is – on the only occasion in this data – explicitly represented:

> *I have been writing about social mobility ever since I became socially mobile. Or published. Or bought off or changed class. Whatever you want to call it. The milieu I found myself in the late 80s was new to me then. It is often still new to me: the huge assumptions, the peculiar gradations, the tiny judgments, the painful self-imposed restraint of the middle classes make for a place that can never be my home. I squat there, on some temporary contract. For class as it is often lived can feel like an essence or even*

> *elixir, although this is denied. It is comforting to think that anyone can switch class, be mobile, that anyone can make themselves up. These days, however, class can feel less fluid than gender. There is a stuckness* […] *The country is deeply divided geographically, economically and generationally. Where you end up is absolutely tied to where you start out.* (Guardian, 28/6/17)

As with Haslam et al.'s (2000) definitions of the other components that have been discussed so far, describing immutability simply in terms of the difficulty, or even possibility, of category members becoming non-members, may capture only a relatively superficial understanding of people's beliefs in this respect. Elsewhere in the literature on psychological essentialism, particularly in experimental research, beliefs about immutability of category membership are typically measured in terms of stability over transformation: i.e., to borrow an example from Kanovsky (2007), not simply whether it is difficult or even logically possible for a Ukrainian person to become a Slovak in a technical sense, but whether or not in doing so they become a Slovak, or instead remain a Ukrainian, at a deeper level. Whereas category membership for natural kinds and biological species, for example, is usually understood to be fundamentally immutable, the relative permeability of social categories may be regarded in some domains – depending on what is taken to be the relevant 'authentic' criteria – as more or less equivalent to the entirely superficial transformations often described in scenarios used to elicit beliefs about the former, e.g., painting a horse to resemble a zebra, or altering gold to look like lead (Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1989). The comparison between class and gender in the extract above may be intentionally hyperbolic, but if social mobility is believed to be undermined by stability of class identity at some more fundamental level, then the implicit common-sense logic of these categories might not be very dissimilar in any case.

Once again, while an apparently structural form of immutability may be sufficient to promote an essentialist representation, in order to distinguish the latter from beliefs concerned only with external or structural factors, immutability appears to require some notion of inherence. Perhaps ironically, therefore, as with mutual exclusivity, beliefs about the mutability or otherwise of socio-economic categories may be more clearly or reliably revealed in representations of ostensibly 'successful' social mobility trajectories rather than where mobility is simply obstructed, or representations in which socio-economic or class boundaries are perceived to have been breached in other ways, for example by the purportedly inauthentic self-representations discussed earlier. As was seen in some of the extracts illustrating informativeness, when an individual is depicted as having transgressed class boundaries in this sense, they are often referred to explicitly in terms of their socio-economic background. However, this is also sometimes a latent feature of representations of both 'upward' and 'downward' social mobility, where it may be implied that the class of origin has nonetheless been preserved in some way:

> *Perhaps we should also give middle-class children the opportunity to be, for example, roofers, plumbers and chefs - like one of my middle-class sons - and pay them appropriately well for doing those jobs we all need to be done.* (Guardian, 21/11/16)

> *Just 4% of doctors and 6% of barristers have working-class roots.* (Mirror, 17/11/16)

The word 'roots' is ambiguous because although it may be regarded as synonymous in this context with 'origins' or 'background', unlike those terms it also simultaneously suggests continuity; likewise, as in the following extract, discontinuity may be symbolised by the severing or desertion of an individual's roots. And while the concept of 'roots' appears to be used exclusively in reference to working-class backgrounds, related notions of having 'sold out' or been 'bought off', or of being a traitor to one's class or background or true identity, may just as easily be applied in either direction, since if a person's fundamental character is believed to be determined in some way by their socio-economic background, then un-becoming of category membership also appears to imply an un-becoming of one's self:

> *… Noel is a sell-out: a working-class Mancunian who has deserted his roots, gentrified* […] *and generally become one of "the establishment" - and a bit of a ponce.* (Telegraph, 9/6/17)

> *Rather than an outbreak of Corbyn fandom among the upper classes, it is an oblique commemoration of the centenary of the Russian revolution, which is when the idea of class betrayal first gained traction (and usually a gun and a uniform too). Only with Corbyn, it is the wealthy, the upper classes, that is betrayed. The joke is predicated, like all allegations of class treachery, on the belief that accident of birth deprives everyone of choosing their future for themselves.* (Guardian, 6/6/17)

Stability

Haslam et al's (2000: 118) description of category stability defines it in a purely temporal sense but also extends to category-typical characteristics. The latter was seldom represented here explicitly but may be inferred to some extent from occasional references to different 'class cultures' or lifestyles, and the persistence of certain high-status markers, such as particular occupations and educational institutions, for instance. As Lawler (2008) has pointed out, in this context the word 'class' can be used both as a noun and as an adjective, which have two separate but often closely-related and sometimes overlapping meanings: the first, conventional sense of the term, designating either a system of socio-economic categories or a single category specifically; and the second, adjectival and more colloquial form, describing a kind of highly-esteemed property or attribute believed to be embodied by an individual or entity, and which is often more or less synonymous with a notion of sophistication, refinement, and good taste. In the following extract, the use of the word is ambiguous, but appears to capture aspects of both of these meanings simultaneously, alluding to the perceived stability and robustness of certain symbols of class distinction and therefore to the stability of class distinction and difference itself:

> *People who go there tell me teaching methods are somewhat old fashioned. Great, say the parents, we like old fashioned. It goes with 16th-century high streets, thatched cottages and Poldark; a reassuring reminder that form is temporary but class is permanent. The grammar school is class, whereas my comprehensive school is just going through a good patch.* (Guardian, 08/11/16)

At a more obvious level, category stability over time is implied by intergenerational immobility via the inheritance of economic and symbolic forms of capital (or lack of them) – i.e., immutability in a predominantly structural sense – but also by the idea of the biological inheritance of certain internalised physiological or epigenetic effects resulting from significant structural inequalities. However, critics of the mainstream political discourse on social mobility argue that, in any case, mobility interventions merely aim at randomising the beneficiaries and casualties of entrenched socio-economic inequalities while perpetuating them and preserving the current social structure intact:

> *No amount of targeted social mobility or anti-poverty policy can truly mitigate the ability of class privilege to perpetuate through generations.* (Guardian, 28/6/17)

> *These life experiences have been described by scientists working at the cutting edge of this research as creating a kind of "toxic stress", which embeds itself as "a physiological memory", conferring a lifetime risk of illness well beyond the initial insult* […] *These changes run all the way, in some cases, to the next generation* […] *the decisions we make about how much inequality to allow, about how much to spend on improving the lives of those at the very bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, could have health effects for generations to come.* (Guardian, 10/6/17)

And according to certain rather more pessimistic accounts these inequalities are expected to continue widening dramatically into the future, eventually dividing populations at a global level:

> *Especially chilling is Harari's forecast that humanity will bifurcate into "an algorithmic upper class owning most of our planet" and "a new massive class: people devoid of any economic, political or even artistic value".* (Guardian, 28/11/16)

As the last extract suggests, beliefs about the stability of categories may be manifested not only in a temporal sense but also in spatial or cross-cultural terms. In fact, one of the items on Kraus & Keltner's (2013: 4) 'discreteness subscale', in their study of essentialist beliefs about social class categories, appears to combine a measure of this form of stability with informativeness (via categorisation), by asking whether "A person's social class is easy to figure out even when they are from another country." Alongside representations of the peculiarities of the '*English class system*' or of the UK as a stubbornly '*class-based culture*' or '*class-ridden country*', a more general concept of class is sometimes projected outwards to other Western nations, with the assumption that the same category labels refer to similar kinds of people with broadly identical feelings and experiences, as a consequence of their common economic position:

> *If you look at the people, especially in the middle class all over the Western world, they are disillusioned, they feel they are being neglected …* (Telegraph, 11/11/16)

This cross-cultural or international dimension is significant because the belief that class is a historically stable category but only within specific cultural contexts suggests that it is at least partly socially constructed, whereas the representation of it as a more or less ubiquitous or universal social category, on the other hand, might imply a degree of inevitability or even promote a greater level of category realism in people's beliefs; i.e., that class is an objective, pre-existing, even quasi-natural category, which in turn may suggest a monistic conception of categorisation determined by a single, correct principle of division and identification (Dupre, 2002; Haslam, 1998; Lakoff, 1987). Indeed, if essentialism is defined in opposition to pre-Darwinian typological thinking, then category stability is arguably a better test of an essentialist bias – at least with regard to biological kinds and naturalised social categories – than immutability of category membership, which is typically consistent with an evolutionary understanding.

Paradoxically, it is often in arguments against the apparently ideological presumptions and motivations behind the political emphasis on increasing social mobility, rather than attempting to reduce wider structural inequalities, that the continuity of class is most evidently presupposed. Thus, the objection that an individual's class background is not something that needs to be 'escaped from', for example, sometimes appears to be paralleled by a common implicit assumption that – either as an empirically demonstrable feature of social reality, or simply as a well-founded and useful analytical concept – there is in fact no escape from class itself:

> *Being working class doesn't need to be escaped from, it needs to be made a more viable option again.* (Guardian, 21/11/16)

> *How fairly we all live matters more than exactly who gets the golden ticket. Oxbridge will have a fair share of entrants across the classes when there is more fairness between the classes.* (Guardian, 17/11/16)

Naturalness

Several manifestations of naturalness in some form have already been demonstrated in representations involving a number of the other components discussed so far, namely informativeness, inherence, immutability, and stability: for example, in references to physiognomic features, health and disease, life expectancy, innate potential, natural aptitude or talent, blood, DNA, and epigenetic effects, and naturalness of a metaphysical rather than biological kind may even be argued to be implicit in ostensibly realist assumptions about the existence of social classes, although there was not sufficient evidence here to support this fully.

Of all the components, naturalness is given by far the vaguest and most laconic description by Haslam et al. (2000: 117), who define it simply in contrast to the term ‘artificial’, which may be interpreted as denoting categories that are ‘created’ or ‘invented’, as opposed to those that are merely ‘discovered’. This binary distinction is evidently an intuitive one and is a common feature of the literature on essentialism, however many of the examples mentioned above in fact involve a complex interaction of social and biological factors; and while marked differences in terms of life chances and propensities to particular kinds of disease, for example, hardly suggest that socio-economic categories might be viewed as natural kinds, the idea that the effects of poverty may be biologically heritable, that members of different classes may sometimes be identified by certain phenotypic features, and that 'class' itself, or even 'noble blood', may not be acquired directly for oneself perhaps but for one's children instead, could all be understood to substantiate – irrespective of the actual veracity of each of these notions – a representation of social classes as more than merely 'artifacts' (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992):

> … *in such snobbery and desperation for a touch of class lay that fruitful trade in brides. Rich Americans craved aristocratic credentials. Impecunious British aristocrats* […] *were desperate for injections of capital. The result was a marriage market in which wealthy girls from the U.S. came hunting for titled toffs to wed, bed and breed from. Dukes were top of the shopping list, but a belted earl would do. The longer the pedigree, the better.* (Daily Mail, 2/6/17)

In contrast to the common association of 'class' in this sense with superior breeding, cultivation and refinement, those of low socio-economic status are frequently naturalised at a more figurative level, for example in representations of the working class as uncultured, 'earthy', or even animalistic. This is made explicit in the following extract by way of its inversion, which is intended to controvert associations of this kind, but also illustrates their pervasiveness:

> *That is not to say that people don't make crass class judgments, this is the land of the perma-prinked pinkie after all, but I know posh folks with table manners like pigs and working-class strivers who can speak Italian with the fluency and grace of a contessa. (*Daily Mail, 23/6/17*)*

However, a very closely related conception of naturalness may be invested with a positive value, precisely through its opposition to what is perceived to be 'artificial', by emphasising the relative ‘authenticity’, simplicity, informality, and warmth often celebrated as characteristic of working-class people:

> *The cast are proud of their characters' working-class roots. 'We want to show how people live and the struggles normal people go through* […] *They're real, honest people who are just trying to get by in life. They haven't got a lot but a lot of rich and middle-class people would love to have what our family has got - which is love.'* (Mirror, 10/6/17)

The concept of ‘roots’, touched on earlier, is often a key metaphor in the representation of working-class identity, which appears to naturalise self-evidently social relations – arguably mirroring the simultaneous negation and naturalisation of culture at the other end of the social spectrum (Bourdieu, 1993; Lawler, 2008) – and figuratively fixes members of the working class to particular locations in space and time (implying that ‘desertion’ or ‘deracination’ may be not only a form of betrayal, but also in some way ‘unnatural’), in contrast to the rootless, nomadic progress of the privileged:

> … *true to his straight-talking Brummie nature* […] *there was also a precious artlessness about him. For a start, he was not cut from starchy Home Counties tennis cloth, instead making his way as the son of an electrician and a nurse, pursuing tennis not because of family expectation but pure natural aptitude. He was also refreshingly connected to his roots. While his peers in the tennis stratosphere were perpetual wanderers, making their bed in Monaco or the Swiss cantons, Evans was a West Midlands boy to his bones* […] *Tennis in this country needs a working-class hero in the Evans mould, a figure who has made it to the upper echelons despite none of the traditional privileges* … (Telegraph, 23/6/17)

> *There are now dozens of books berating left-of-centre politicians for forgetting about the "left behind". To use David Goodhart's distinction, the values of the locally rooted and socially conservative people from "somewhere" have vanquished the rootless urban cosmopolitans who can live "anywhere".* (The Guardian, 04/06/17)

However, representations of naturalness in relation to socio-economic categories are not limited to those that concern the category itself but are also involved in beliefs about category membership at an individual level. Again, authenticity is contrasted here with deliberate 'cultivation', which is perceived as unnatural in the sense of being artificial, superficial, fake, inorganic; mobility is championed but not change – the inverse of stability over superficial transformation. The idea '*that anyone can make themselves up*' does not appear to be impeded by exclusively structural factors, but also by the extension or refusal of social recognition based on whether the individual is perceived to have met the relevant criteria for membership:

> *She also insists that she has not deliberately cultivated her working-class stage accent. She said: I spent a lot of time when I was younger on the underground club scene, and started going out at the age of 14 because I was tall and got in everywhere. It was all totally natural and I picked up street talk and the lingo and it became part of who I am. I'm not a fake …* (Daily Mail, 5/11/16)

Necessity

If essentialism involves the belief that a certain feature, or set of features, is necessary for identity or category membership (Gelman, 2003; Haslam, 1998), then by definition necessity, like inherence, appears to be a necessary feature of essentialism, and is indeed constituted by the inherent causal or ideal property itself (Newman & Knobe, 2018). And if all individual members of a category possess a necessary characteristic that is not shared by non-members, this also automatically seems to imply an underlying form of discreteness, mutual exclusivity, uniformity, and (particularly if the necessary property is believed to be causal) informativeness. However, as a placeholder notion, the specific nature of this necessary feature, or essence, is not necessarily known or made explicit – and sometimes remains a largely inchoate concept – but is often simply inferred or implied indirectly. Vagueness and inconsistency in representations, therefore, or even a lack of discernible references to necessary features altogether, do not necessarily suggest that category membership in a particular domain is assumed to be unexclusively permeable or that category-typical features are merely polythetic.

It is perhaps not surprising then that necessity should appear the least frequently of all the components within naturally-occurring data, especially given its relative logical complexity and the particular stringency of its definition – specifying not simply that a certain feature is considered to be sufficient for membership, but the belief that without it an individual cannot be a member (Haslam, 2000: 118) – which, as in the following example, is perhaps most likely to be revealed only by its absence:

> *"The expenses of life have almost doubled all of a sudden, while my income is the same. I don't consider myself middle class anymore. Now, I struggle to survive with my family"* … (Telegraph, 18/11/16)

From a purely sociological or demographic perspective, according to either the NS-SEC schema or, as in the extract below, the National Readership Survey (NRS) social grade, which is typically employed in market research, class is determined solely by occupation; therefore, very simply, an individual can only be a member of a particular socio-economic category if they (or the primary earner in their family) are employed in the requisite occupational group:

> *Class is no longer the dividing line in British politics with the Conservatives attracting considerable support from working-class voters according to recent polling. Some 43 per cent of C2DE voters - which includes skilled and unskilled manual labourers, casual workers and pensioners - said they intend to vote Tory in the upcoming General Election, rising just three points among ABC1 voters, who include managerial, administrative or professional workers.* (Telegraph, 5/6/17)

However, as has already been suggested, lay representations are not always so clear-cut, and often appear to attribute equal or even greater significance to the presence or absence of particular cultural and symbolic factors. Lay understandings of the necessary features for class category membership may also be inconsistent with what is popularly deemed necessary for individual social mobility – such as 'aspiration' or 'natural aptitude', for example – not least since political definitions of mobility, which are far more commonly reflected in the media than mainstream sociological classifications, tend to differ significantly from the latter (Payne, 2017; Lawler & Payne, 2017), often implying that it may be possible to be socially mobile without necessarily moving between socio-economic categories, or in some cases without even acquiring an occupation or earning an income at all:

> … *Michael Gove [the former education secretary] changed definitions for social mobility so that schools were no longer judged on how many students they supported to progress to higher education, but on the number of students who went on to study at this small sub-set of universities* … (Guardian, 18/6/17)

And yet a clear implication of representations of immutability is that – since '*where you end up is absolutely tied to where you start out*' – in order to be a member of a particular socio-economic category it is typically necessary to have been raised in it. Where individuals are understood to be '*excluded due to means not merit*', because of a lack of financial or institutional support, for example, mobility appears to be impeded only by purely structural factors; however, when they are believed to be '*locked out*' based on other circumstances relating to their background, such as their accent or a perceived lack of cultural capital, then necessity seems to be located in some form of embodied quality, and the examples illustrating stability of class identity – either in spite of ostensibly 'successful' mobility or apparently superficial transformation – suggest that this necessary feature is a product of socialisation.

3.4. Conclusion

In focusing attention on the individual components of psychological essentialism, this study has demonstrated several of the ways in which they are manifested in representations of the socio-economic domain in the UK public sphere, where – as many of the extracts in the preceding analysis have shown – social class or socio-economic status remains a highly salient object of representation, while social mobility has in more recent years emerged as a topic of vigorous debate. In the process of examining these representations it has also sought to illuminate, in context, the particular logic of each of the components themselves and of the relationships between them.

The various representations of social class and social mobility in the data, which either explicitly or implicitly invoked the individual components of psychological essentialism, frequently depicted socio-economic categories as either contiguous and sharply bounded or entirely spatially separated (and often antagonistically polarised and internally undifferentiated) groups, segregated by seemingly insurmountable structural barriers or significant distances, and therefore occupying ostensibly homogenous, topographically discrete territories. Membership of these groups was sometimes seen as being incompatible with other notionally independent category memberships, and within the socio-economic domain itself were commonly understood to be mutually exclusive categories, whereby individuals who might otherwise be assumed to straddle the boundaries between them are assigned, depending on their possession of the relevant characteristics, to one established class or another rather than placed within intermediate categories. In cases of successful mobility between social classes, therefore, membership of the category of origin (along with all that might pertain to it in terms of individual and social or cultural identity) is often presumed to have been inevitably left behind.

The categories were also taken to be reliably informative about – and more or less easily inferred from – many particular traits, such as individuals' names, accents, tastes, interests, behaviours, cultural pursuits, political orientations, education, clothing, and in some cases even their physiological and physiognomic features; and in several instances such characteristics or 'clues' (especially those that are understood to be ascribed rather than chosen, and indicative of an individual's socio-economic background) were believed to 'reveal' or 'expose' their 'true' class identity behind the semblance of their self-presentations. Not only were the categories often represented as relatively uniform on the basis of such features, but also in some instances as almost monolithic entities unified by a common voice, fate or purpose, and possessing a shared subjectivity or 'class consciousness', the latter being particularly associated with working-class category membership, which was also often represented as more communitarian and collectivistic.

While such shared psychological attributes may be understood primarily as accidental features, contingent on or reducible to some other category-typical characteristic or experience, elsewhere a more central or even causal role was suggested for seemingly inherent features, such as aspiration or natural aptitude, and sources of innate potential, for example DNA or blood. Although naturalisation and forms of biological essentialism are thus evidently still an occasional facet of lay representations in this domain, socially determined inherent features were more prevalent, represented for example in the notion of a permanently instilled confidence imbued by private education, or simply an embodied, underlying 'true' class identity; but most vividly through the representation of the potential epigenetic effects of socio-economic disadvantage – which '*creeps into your cells and changes the very core of your being*' – where in fact social and biological influences become profoundly intertwined, and the purely structural factors that are perceived to divide socio-economic categories are in this view deeply internalised, further preventing any prospect of mobility between them. However, (contradicting the notion of 'leaving behind' entailed by the logic of mutual exclusivity) immobility – or stability of identity over ostensible transformation – was often represented at a deeper level when apparent category change had already taken place, suggesting a fixed class identity that persists not only in spite of observable and relatively superficial differences, but despite the experience of social mobility in the literal, sociological sense of a movement between social classes. Whereas 'blood' was employed exclusively to refer to upper class category membership, the naturalising metaphor of 'roots' was used only in reference to working class identity in this domain and implies not only origin but also continuity. Determination of individual identity by social category membership of origin suggests that un-becoming of category membership entails an un-becoming of self.

References to the perpetuation of social immobility (and indeed the inheritance of its physiological consequences) at an intergenerational level clearly imply not only stability of category membership but also temporal stability of the categories themselves, as does the notion of particular 'class cultures' and the stubborn persistence of traditional markers of social status. In some cases, despite the common representation of class as a peculiarly British phenomenon, the existence of equivalent categories, comprised of individuals subject to more or less identical experiences and displaying the same outlook and feelings, was assumed at a cross-cultural level. And the apparent presumption that such categories would persist into the future, notwithstanding even the prospect of increased social equality, arguably suggests that they may be perceived as inevitable, if not in fact objective, mind-independent categories.

While allusions to forms of innate potential such as physiognomic and other phenotypic features, natural aptitude, DNA, epigenetics and blood, indicate a biological or genetic component to category membership, other forms of naturalness were observed in relation to working class identity, not only through the metaphor of 'roots', but by association with notions of earthiness, animalism, and a lack of cultivation, which in certain cases was presented in a positive sense as being synonymous with straightforward, honest and authentic, as opposed to artificial. Authenticity with regard to category membership in general was also presented as co-extensive with naturalness, conferred by seemingly necessary characteristics, without which individuals were not considered legitimate members of the category in question. These necessary features were very rarely articulated explicitly, but in many cases were often implicit in representations of stability over transformation, where they appeared to be constituted by some form of embodied, underlying, non-observable property, superficially indicated by accent, possession of cultural capital or other symbolic factors, but in fact conferred by socialisation within the relevant category.

Haslam et al's (2000) influential study of essentialist representations of social categories was employed as a guide for the present research due to its comprehensive, multi-component approach to the structure of essentialist beliefs. However, the process of analysis revealed a number of shortcomings in their definitions of several of the components, not least the fact that they make no distinction between inherent and external or structural factors, or between causal and contingent properties; the description of inherence as 'underlying reality' is perhaps somewhat ambiguous, and 'underlying sameness' suggests little more than a deep-level uniformity (and is therefore unsurprising that these components were the most highly correlated in their study); nor is there a distinction made between inter- and intra-domain exclusivity, which might elicit very different responses, and indeed certainly identify rather different representations; informativeness is concerned only with inductive potential and not categorisation, and predominantly with judgements in a quantitative sense, regardless of the significance of different features; immutability may capture only structural manifestations and potentially precludes examples of 'stability over transformation' by focusing too narrowly on cases in which category change is simply deemed impossible; stability is defined in purely temporal terms, overlooking beliefs concerning cross-cultural stability and category realism or objectivity; and finally, naturalness is described extremely vaguely and applies exclusively to the category itself, rather than to the nature of individual category membership, for example, and neglects other forms of naturalisation.

The relationships between the different components, often illustrated in their empirical manifestations in the representations described above, but in fact in several cases implicit in their own logical structure, also appear to cast some doubt on the efficacy of conceiving of essentialism in terms of the two independent dimensions identified by Haslam et al. (2000). The four most frequently coded components in this data, discreteness, informativeness, exclusivity, and uniformity, were often seen to be conceptually related. For example, the ungraded aspect of discreteness automatically implies a level of uniformity, and the notion of sharp boundaries strongly suggests mutual exclusivity. Informativeness may be related to both discreteness and uniformity in cases of high inductive potential, and uniformity is also suggested by the monistic or totalising implications of exclusivity. Yet, according to their study, discreteness is clustered together on the 'natural kind' dimension with the four least commonly appearing components in this study: necessity, naturalness, stability, and immutability. Aside from this discrepancy, the fact that the frequencies found in this data appear to conform to the pattern of these independent clusters, and in the order that might be predicted for this domain – with each of the 'entitative' components appearing more often than each of the remaining 'natural kind' components – might seem to support their findings, but in fact many other relationships between individual components, not least those involving inherence, contradict this view. Not only are inherent features often implicated in representations involving components on the 'natural kind' dimension, but in fact where inherence is neither also explicitly nor implicitly invoked, the majority of the other components – on either dimension – may merely refer to exclusively external or structural factors, and although in some cases representations of this kind may promote an essentialist construal, they are not obviously indicative of essentialism in themselves.

The foregoing has primarily sought to highlight how by engaging fully with a cognitive understanding of psychological essentialism – rather than approaching it as a predominantly motivated and ideological form of representation – a detailed qualitative perspective can provide further insights into the nature and structure of essentialist thinking itself; however, of course, this does not preclude a consideration of some of its ostensibly motivational aspects. Across the different media sources, the components were manifested in representations focusing on a wide variety of different objects: for example, inequalities of opportunity and outcome, and their consequences; the persistence of various forms of bias and exclusion; a lack of diversity in particular professions and educational institutions; the causes of both social mobility and of immobility; differences between socio-economic categories in terms of appearance, behaviour, experience, perspective, attitudes, tastes, and interests; and the crossing of class boundaries. As a relatively thematised object of public discussion and debate, representations of social mobility are often of a confrontational or 'polemical' nature, and broad differences of opinion can be observed between left-wing commentators and those of a more centre-left, centrist, or conservative position as to whether government policy should focus on reducing inequalities between socio-economic groups generally or on promoting individual mobility. Representations of the discreteness of socio-economic categories predominated in the 'social mobility' dataset, where broadsheet articles most significantly outweighed those of the tabloids, but also in the left-leaning publications overall.

The representations of 'class' in this data, on the other hand, were far more diverse in content and their significance was often located at a more implicit level; and while explicit references to natural kind-like inherent properties were found only in the right-wing tabloid press, representations involving both naturalness and informativeness constituted a higher proportion of extracts from the right-leaning publications and featured twice as frequently in the 'class' dataset. And while there was a disproportionate preponderance of *Guardian* articles coded in general and at increasing levels of cross-coding, allusions to a social determinist form of essentialism were found across the different sources, irrespective of their social or political position.

Finally, it may be of interest to note that several of the extracts discussed in this analysis either quote or are entirely written from the perspective of socially mobile individuals themselves. A small number of these refer to the more or less subtle class distinctions that act to impede the accomplishment or feeling of genuine mobility between socio-economic categories, but one in particular, referring directly to the notion of an essence, captures well the feelings of alienation and conflict sometimes experienced by the socially mobile, documented in recent sociological research on the experience of upward social mobility. However, while that research has typically relied upon the concept of habitus to examine and explain these experiences, attributing them to a clash of pre-reflexive dispositions internalised during different stages of socialisation, the next study in this thesis will instead continue to explore the role of externalised, socially shared representations of the nature of socio-economic categories and what may be involved in moving between them.

Chapter Four: Individual Interviews with the 'Upwardly' Mobile

4.1. Introduction

Having outlined in the previous chapter some of the ways in which the individual components of essentialism are manifested in representations of socio-economic categories and social mobility in the UK – and having now analysed in some detail the particular logic of each of the components and the relationships between them in the context of these shared representations – the aim of this second qualitative study is to examine further and in greater depth how socio-economic categories and the possibilities for movement between them are represented at a microgenetic level, and how each of the components may be illustrated and conceptualised in the perspectives and experiences of socially mobile individuals themselves.

Individual semi-structured interviews are a common research method for qualitative analyses in Social Representations Theory (Flick, Foster & Caillaud, 2015), yet in spite of the possibilities they may afford for probing the complexities of essentialist thinking in communication and representation – indicated by some of the ethnographic data in cognitive anthropological research (e.g., Boyer, 1993; Gil–White, 2001; Regnier, 2015) – they have very seldom been employed in research specifically focusing on psychological essentialism. One exception to this is Buhagier et al.'s (2018) study of cultural essentialism and its role in justifying arguments against the integration of the Arab community in Malta; however while the authors briefly introduce each of the different aspects of essentialist thinking that have been examined across the literature and identified by Haslam et al. (2000), their own analysis is constructed around a typology of purportedly essentialising argumentative strategies – reductionist, determinist, 'delineatory' (emphasising boundedness and inalterability), and 'temporal' (based on a presumption of yet-to-be-realised inductive potential) – in which the evidence for essentialism per se is in fact sometimes very weak, and indeed often far less compelling than the small number of examples of ‘unspecified’, ‘biological’ and ‘positive cultural’ forms of essentialism which they provide only at the end of their paper as an illustration of rare alternative manifestations. Beyond SRT research, Verkuyten (2003) offers a significantly more detailed and convincing account of cultural essentialism, in this case using group interviews with Dutch and ethnic minority participants in the Netherlands, showing how essentialist reasoning may be used as a “flexible conversational resource which is variously defined and deployed, depending on the interactional task at hand” (Verkuyten, 2003: 374), and clearly demonstrating that essentialist representations of social categories are not always necessarily a means of oppression, nor is anti-essentialist rhetoric by definition progressive.

Within the very limited psychological literature on perceptions of socio-economic categories, qualitative interview studies appear to have been employed almost entirely from a developmental perspective (e.g., Leahy, 1983; Weinger, 2000), while recent research on the experience of social mobility has been conducted exclusively by sociologists. As discussed in Chapter One, this work often utilises the concept of habitus as a means of explaining the sense of profound conflict frequently experienced by those who have moved from one socio-economic category or class to another. Friedman (2015: 12), for example, points out that this feeling of a lack of ‘ontological coherence’, or ‘habitus clivé’, is usually particularly pronounced when mobility is long-range and involves abrupt, rather than gradual, “upward trajectories into the upper left quadrant of Bourdieusian social space, where cultural rather than economic capital constitutes the more dominant currency” and where individuals “required a ‘naturally’ embodied cultural capital to be legitimately recognised”. However, Naudet’s (2018) cross-cultural research shows that the impact of social mobility on an individual’s sense of self is often significantly influenced by the particular cultural narratives that predominate within different national contexts, and the degree of consistency or dissonance of such narratives or representations – what he terms the level of 'instituted ideology' – between the different fields or social groups occupied by the individual, for example between their family and their subsequent social or occupational milieu. To recapitulate, his research found that in India socially mobile Dalits tended to remain loyal to the social group of origin and rejected 'Sanskritization', while in the US the upwardly mobile were enabled by a more 'legitimist' or meritocratic ideology to minimise differences between origin and destination groups; yet in France, where there is a strong tendency to believe in rigid class boundaries and a greater emphasis on cultural forms of prestige than in the US, interviewees commonly experienced a feeling of being 'between two worlds' while not quite belonging to either, and a much deeper sense of internal conflict. This was especially the case for individuals who experienced an abrupt and relatively late introduction into middle- or upper-class educational or occupational settings and social milieux, rather than a progressive entry during childhood; those whose families displayed a 'classist' or 'non-legitimist' attitude; those who worked in the public rather than the private sector; and younger interviewees who still had relatively strong ties to their background.

While one or two of these findings are broadly consistent with those of Friedman (2015), they also illustrate how an exclusive or excessive focus on internalised dispositions overlooks the crucial significance of social interaction, intersubjectivity and the symbolic resources that are available to socially mobile individuals in mediating their own experiences; for example, widely shared representations of socio-economic categories, of the relationships between them – and therefore whether mobility may be perceived as either a continuous or discontinuous and discordant process, involving a rupture within the self between past and present or future – and of the nature and formation of individual and social identity itself. However, the concept of habitus is not only insufficient for an analysis of the experience of social mobility, but in its more deterministic and monolithic or homogenising interpretations may reproduce particular representations of category membership and identity that exacerbate precisely the feelings of conflict – or of ‘inauthenticity’ or ‘betrayal’ – that it is often employed to explain.

A psychological approach that seeks to illuminate in detail how socio-economic categories and social mobility are commonly represented in the UK, both at a wider societal level and by socially mobile individuals themselves, can therefore make a much-needed contribution to an understanding of the subjective experience of mobility; but more importantly for the present research, analysing the experiences and perspectives of those who have moved or are in the process of moving between socio-economic categories can also significantly contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of psychological essentialism in this domain, particularly on a social determinist dimension. And just as this study attempts to build on the findings of the previous one, by combining social and individual levels of analysis these interviews may also provide a bridge between social representations and intuitive beliefs, which is the focus of the final empirical study.

4.2. Methods

4.2.1. Topic Guide

As shown below, the topic guide for the interviews consisted of two parts: Part A was designed to elicit responses regarding the interviewees’ own perspectives on and experiences of social mobility, and included questions specifically concerning the type of mobility trajectory involved (i.e., whether it was effected primarily by educational attainment or occupational status, for example, or by an accumulation of economic or cultural capital); the speed and range of the trajectory; whether it was experienced in isolation or with friends or other family members; the composition of their past and current social circles; and their sense of group belonging and identity. These questions were developed to reflect some of the most significant factors identified in previous sociological research on social mobility (e.g., Friedman, 2015) and partly with recourse to the topic guide outlined by Naudet (2018). Part B then focuses on each of the individual components of essentialism identified by Haslam et al. (2000), and the questions in this section were constructed directly on the basis of the analysis and empirical manifestations of these components in the previous study; indeed, three of the questions (Q16, 21 & 23), concerning informativeness, inherence and immutability, include quotations from extracts discussed in the last chapter:

PART A

1) When you think of the term ‘social mobility’, what normally springs to mind for you? How do you tend to visualise that?

2) And would you say that most people would probably agree with that, or do you think others might answer quite differently?

3) Do you think of yourself as being/having been socially mobile? … Or might be described as being/having been socially mobile, let’s say? … In what (other) ways, specifically? … (e.g., occupational/economic/educational/cultural/social, etc?)

4) Have any other members of your family (parents/siblings/partner) been socially mobile too? … What about friends you grew up with/were at school with?

5) When you were growing up, were all of your wider family and friends from a similar background to you/mostly from a different background, or was it quite mixed? … Did you know many people from other backgrounds?

6) How does that compare with your social circle now? Are many of your friends from a similar background to you/have had a similar experience? Or are most of your friends from a different background?

7) Do you feel a greater sense of belonging to one group or identity, or another?

8) Do you feel that you have travelled a long way from your background, or even your family, in this sense?

9) Do you feel that you have changed as a person in any particular or significant way? … (e.g., in terms of personality, sense of self/identity, behaviour, feelings, ways of thinking, etc?)

10) Do you think of yourself as having been different in any significant way from your parents or peers/friends when you were younger? … Not only because of your experiences perhaps, but also because of whatever it might have been that caused you to have those experiences in the first place?

11) Overall, would you say it's been a gradual process, or has it felt quite abrupt at times?

12) Would you say that 'class' is a meaningful term to you? … Do you think of yourself as belonging to or having belonged to a class? … If not, is there another term you might use instead?

PART B

13) When you think about different social classes/socio-economic groups in this country, how do you see the relationship between them? – do you think there are clear divides or gaps between them, or do you see them as more overlapping?

14) Would you say that a person can belong more (or less) to a particular class/socio-economic group than others? E.g., Within the working (or middle) class, some people

are more working (or middle) class than others? Or do you think it's just either/or, you either belong or you don't?

15) Would you say that a person can belong to more than one class/socio-economic group? (e.g., to be both/half working class and/half middle class?) … Or do you think that when you move into a new class or group you leave the original one behind?

16) This is a short extract from a newspaper article describing a TV documentary:

> *'As soon as we saw their, and their respective husbands', cheekbones, we could pretty much predict everything about their class - and thus their diets, reading material, degree of Farage-love, level of taste in home decor and, surely, cleanliness of underwear …'* (The Guardian, 18/06/17)

What do you think about this general idea, that you can tell a person's class/socio-economic status just from looking at their external, physical characteristics …? Do you think it would be possible to tell which class or what background a person was from even if everyone wore exactly the same clothes?

17) What about the inverse – do you think that knowing which class/socio-economic group a person belongs to can tell you a lot about other aspects of them, e.g., their personality, tastes, skills, interests, habits, feelings, thoughts, opinions, etc?

18) Would you say that people will generally have more in common with other members of the same class or socio-economic group than they do with other people in general?

19) Do you think it's easier to take the perspective of, or empathise with someone of the same class or socio-economic group than it is with others?

20) Even in cases where they might appear to be significantly different from each other on the outside, do you think that members of the same class or socio-economic group are nevertheless more similar to each other on the inside/deep-down than they are to others?

21) This is another short extract from a newspaper article:

> *'… class as it is often lived can feel like an essence* […] *It is comforting to think that anyone can switch class, be mobile, that anyone can make themselves up. Not many do, though.'* (The Guardian, 28/06/17)

What do you think about that idea of class as being or feeling like an 'essence'? … Is this an idea that resonates with you in any way?

22) Do you think that people are always permanently shaped in some way by the experiences of their particular class/socio-economic background? … Do you think it's possible for a person to ever fully change their class/socio-economic group identity?

23) One final newspaper extract, and then just a few more questions. This one is about an X Factor contestant called Honey G:

> *Honey G's past has finally been exposed. The X Factor rapper has vigorously denied claims that her persona is faked, but the latest revelation is hard to argue with … She also insists that she has not deliberately cultivated her working-class stage accent. She said: I spent a lot of time when I was younger on the underground club scene, and started going out at the age of 14 ... It was all totally natural and I picked up street talk and the lingo and it became part of who I am. I'm not a fake.* (The Mirror, 5/11/16)

What do you think about that? Would you say that a transformation like this can be 'authentic'? – she describes it as being 'totally natural', whereas the journalist seems to be presenting it as 'fake', where might you stand on this, do you think?

24) What if the transformation was 'upwards', would this make any difference? … And what if it had occurred at a significantly different age – at 7 years old, perhaps, or at 30?

25) Do you think classes or class systems, even if they're not referred to in those words exactly, exist everywhere? … Do you think they have always existed, and will always continue to exist?

26) Do you think there is any 'natural' basis to these groupings at all? – i.e., that people will tend to find themselves in the classes or socio-economic groups that they are most suited

to because of some internal characteristic they possess? Whether inherited or otherwise innate?)

27) Do you think that a system of successful social mobility or meritocracy in this country would enable a more ‘natural’ social structure in this sense?

28) Finally, do you think there is any single defining feature that is essential for membership of the different classes or socio-economic groups that we’ve discussed, without which a person would not be able to be a member?

4.2.2. Participants

Although the second half of the topic guide is concerned with representations of both ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ social mobility – indeed, as is the research as a whole – a decision was made to restrict the selection of participants exclusively to those who have experienced the former. This is consistent with the vast majority of qualitative sociological research in this area, but was also determined by the fact that since social mobility is often equated with ‘upward’ mobility alone (Payne, 2017), the ‘downwardly’ mobile are considerably more difficult to identify and may also be far less likely to identify themselves in this way; also, given the relatively higher social status of their background and the fact that ‘downward’ mobility is more typically associated with a decline in economic capital and occupational status rather than of embodied cultural capital, it may be less prone than ‘upward’ mobility to pose a challenge to individual identity.

Therefore, a total of 20 ‘upwardly’ mobile interviewees were recruited from three main sources: the alumni of a programme run by a major educational charity in the UK dedicated to improving social mobility; student members of a university social mobility society in London;

and representatives from two different organisations promoting social mobility in the legal profession, one composed of solicitors and the other of barristers. The latter was chosen not only due to the particular prominence and accessibility of both of these organisations, but also because the legal profession was very regularly cited in the data of the previous study in reference to highly esteemed, 'sought-after', but very exclusive occupations, and indeed this last claim continues to be corroborated by quantitative research on social mobility (Friedman & Laurison, 2020). The majority of individuals from each of these three main sources had online profiles and were able to be contacted initially via email or social media, and a small number of further interviewees were subsequently recruited by snowballing. 11 of the participants were female, 9 male; 6 were full-time students (5 undergraduates and 1 doctoral student), 7 lawyers, 2 academics, while the remaining 5 worked in secondary education, the arts, journalism, the charity sector, and the civil service; ages ranged from 18 to 58 years old; 4 interviewees were of ethnic minority backgrounds, but with only one exception– who emigrated from the Middle East to the UK as an infant – all participants were born either in England (in counties in the north-east, north-west, the midlands, the south-west, south-east and London) or Wales.

4.2.3. Data Collection & Analysis

Interviews were conducted in London, Oxford, Cambridge, and three different locations in the Midlands – either at participants' homes, places of work or study, or in various meeting rooms at the London School of Economics and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, nearby – and lasted between 50 and 95 minutes. Permission was requested to audio-record the interviews in advance and participants were supplied with an information sheet and asked to sign a consent form at the time of interview (Appendix 3 & 4). The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and anonymised, and the transcripts were coded using NVivo 12 software and analysed thematically as in the previous study, however in this case the initial stage of coding was data-driven. Since the objective of the analysis was not simply to scrutinise the interviewees' responses to each component-based question in isolation, but rather to examine the potential manifestation of all of the components across both parts of the interview in their entirety (and indeed it quickly became apparent during the interviewing process that answers to questions in Part B often implicitly or explicitly referred to other components beyond the one directly suggested by the question itself), this coding frame was applied across the transcripts as a whole. A large quantity of codes were generated which were then progressively revised, broadened and grouped together by their similarity and their relevance to the components to form a smaller number of key themes. These themes identify recurring aspects of representations in which the components were commonly manifested, and therefore served as a guide for the following analysis, which, as in the previous study, focuses primarily on each of the individual components themselves.

Table 4.1. Key themes in analysis of interviews

- *Actors-Imitators-Imposters*
- *Class as a Feeling*
- *Class as a Lens*
- *Colliding/Reconciling Worlds*
- *Deterministically Socialised*
- *Embodied Features*
- *Hidden/Revealed Backgrounds*
- *Human Nature*
- *Inimitability*
- *Inherently Different/Identical*
- *Knowing the Codes*
- *Recognition*
- *Separate Territories*
- *Single/Split Selves*
- *Stark Contrasts*
- *True Selves–Members*
- *(Un)Changing Identities*
- *Unnatural Transformations*

Table 4.2. Age, sex, and occupation/educational status of interviewees

No.	*Pseudonym*	*Sex*	*Age*	*Occupation/Educational Status*
1	Yasmin	Female	19	Undergraduate Student
2	Ciara	Female	18	Undergraduate Student
3	Aisha	Female	19	Undergraduate Student
4	Jane	Female	40	Lawyer
5	Samuel	Male	21	Undergraduate Student
6	Claire	Female	47	Lawyer
7	Matthew	Male	28	Third Sector Employee
8	Daniel	Male	21	Undergraduate Student
9	Richard	Male	38	Lawyer
10	Helena	Female	55	Lawyer
11	Alice	Female	44	Academic
12	Tom	Male	41	Lawyer
13	Sian	Female	36	Senior Teacher and Educational Leader
14	Martin	Male	53	Lawyer
15	Amy	Female	28	Civil Servant
16	Rebecca	Female	32	Arts Organisation Director (& Doctoral Student)
17	Michael	Male	38	Journalist
18	Ollie	Male	25	Doctoral Student
19	Anne	Female	57	Lawyer
20	Paul	Male	58	Academic

4.3. Analysis

Discreteness

Of those interviewees who expressed the belief that socio-economic categories are discrete, only a small number[12] – typically those who tended to endorse a unidimensional definition, determined by occupation or income, for example – perceived them to be ungraded. The majority believed classes to be internally continuous and described the boundaries between them as fuzzy, although a number thought this pertained predominantly to the middle portion of the social structure, and that the extremes are far less permeable.

Alice (44, professor at an Oxbridge college), Paul (58, university vice-chancellor and former professor), and Tom (41, barrister), all recognised that they occupy highly privileged positions (Paul and Tom in fact both acknowledged that they are probably within the '1 per cent') but claimed that there is nonetheless a vast gap, or 'chasm', between them and the very wealthiest and most powerful sections of society, which they believe to be impenetrable. Indeed, Paul argued that this constituted a much larger gulf than the one between him and his sister, who works as a cleaner.

However, some interviewees perceived there to be sharp boundaries between classes throughout the social structure. For example, Anne (57, barrister and Queen's Counsel[13]), whose father had worked as a coal miner, specified significant gaps between four distinct sections of society – the 'demonised poor', the 'just about managing', the 'middle class', and the 'very rich' – and said that she sees society as even "more fragmented and polarised" now than it was when she was younger. She described her current social circle as consisting largely, on the one hand, of individuals who are members of the Asian community in an area of the East Midlands where she spent a long time living as an adult, and, on the other, “white, upper-class, hunting, shooting, fishing people”, most of whom are her colleagues, but argued that although she herself is white, she has far more in common with the former because “they’re going through the same transition that I had to go through”, whereas the latter have “no concept of the disadvantage suffered by those who simply haven’t got the ability to do what they’ve done”. She claimed that she will always be working-class, but has “learnt to adapt to the new Martian society in which I live”:

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[12] Due to the often complex nature of interviewees' responses to the component-based questions and the fact that their judgements were not always consistently (or unambiguously) maintained throughout the entirety of the interview, it is not possible to quantify the range of answers in precise numbers. Approximate figures are therefore provided instead to give a general sense of the representativeness of the various representations under discussion.

[13] 'Queen's Counsel' (QC) is an honorific conferred on the basis of merit upon a senior barrister, who may apply for 'silk' usually after 15 years of practice or more.

> *I have learnt the language that is required to be part of that community. It is like learning a different language, and it's like coming from Mars. But you get there.* (Anne)

A number of others mentioned the ‘alienness’ of some of their peers’ experiences at university and the apparent lack of integration or even interaction between people from different socio-economic backgrounds prior to their matriculation, indicated in part by frequent expressions of surprise at the extent of this difference on both sides. For Ciara (18, undergraduate student in London), when she immediately arrived at university there appeared to be a stark contrast between those who had attended state schools and those who had been educated privately, something she first witnessed when she and a childhood friend were sent to different secondary schools:

> *… I have a friend from when we were babies, so we kind of grew up together. And she went to a private school, and then going to, like, her birthday parties and then meeting all of her private school friends, I'm*

> *like, woah, this is more of a thing than I thought it was, I didn't think that people could think so differently and, like, talk so differently.'* (Ciara)

This view was also echoed by Helena (55, solicitor), who in fact perceived it to be one of the main fault lines running through society, making it very difficult to 'cross over' the boundaries between different classes, because "there's this whole way of living that you have to try and learn otherwise you just, it's always obvious that you're different." She believes that those educated at public schools[14] have an 'innate' and in fact inimitable sense of entitlement and self-belief:

> *I see them as clear divisions. I think that which school you go to, whether you go to public school or state school is, makes a huge difference. I mean, if you go to a public school you have this – sorry, if you went to public school – people who went to public school have an innate belief – you can call it, in a nice way you can call it self-confidence, verging on arrogance – and inherent sense of, that the world owes them something, and that is something that you can't mimic. Doesn't matter how hard you try, never going to do it.* (Helena)

However, for Aisha (19, undergraduate student in London), the most profound differences between members of different classes are a consequence of their dramatically different experiences of socialisation more generally. Aisha, whose family are of South-Asian origin, grew up in a notoriously violent and extremely impoverished area of urban Lancashire, where she says her uncle was shot when she was a young child, and people she knew had even suffered from starvation; it is the vivid juxtaposition between these experiences and those of her relatively privileged peers that supports her belief in what she describes as "a lot of controversial things about the personalities of working-class people being very different to the personalities, generally speaking, of middle-class people":

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[14] In the UK, the term 'public school' generally refers to a prestigious, exclusive, and typically highly expensive, fee-paying independent school, rather than to a form of publicly funded education (see Turner, 2015).

> … *it's a traumatic thing to be working-class, really, when it means such economic deprivation, especially in Britain. So yeah, I think that very much shapes the working-class personality to be very, very different to the middle-class personality* […] *of course it makes different people, and of course there are personalities that are working-class in nature and, sort of, personalities that are middle-class in nature.* (Aisha)

Exclusivity

Over half of the interviewees agreed with the idea that it is possible to belong to more than one class simultaneously, either according to different dimensions or forms of capital – e.g., occupation, income, wealth, education, cultural pursuits and interests, attitude, outlook, or 'mentality' – or even simply in terms of alternative self-presentations adapted to different social contexts, and many continued to identify strongly with their working-class backgrounds, while acknowledging that their occupation and income now technically rendered them middle-class. Several also explicitly criticised the notion that a person's socio-economic status or background determines or prescribes the limits of their cultural interests or tastes. Though again, those who endorsed a unidimensional understanding of class tended to believe that membership is mutually exclusive, and several suggested that it would be 'ridiculous', 'disingenuous', 'fraudulent', or even 'disrespectful' to claim to be working-class now.

Sian (36, senior teacher and director of a research school), describes herself at one stage in her social mobility trajectory as being a mixture of working-class and middle-class, but now believes herself to be firmly in the latter category; she believes that these two identities can co-exist to some extent, but not necessarily without conflict:

> … *I would say, for a period of time I was definitely working-class with an element of middle-class, whereas now I'm very fixedly middle-class* […] *I do think you can potentially occupy – but I think there's always a tension between the two. I don't know if you, I think you are predominately one more than the other, but you acknowledge the other side of you. But I do think there's possibly a state of tension between them because sometimes it does come with clashes and, or mismatches of expectation, mismatches of language, mismatches of experience.* (Sian)

Sian, like a number of others, had experienced significant discouragement from members of her own family before going to study at Oxbridge, particularly from her father, who in fact had to be persuaded by her school to approve of her decision, and at one point hung up the telephone on an administrator from another university when they called to pursue their offer of a place, which Sian only learned about subsequently from her mother. She believes he initially regarded her academic success as a "reflection of where he was lacking" and a challenge to his authority. Similarly, Helena said that when she revealed to her parents that she was pregnant in her late twenties they expressed pleasure at the possibility that it would sabotage her plans to enter university as a mature student; when she eventually graduated with a first-class degree, instead of offering congratulations her uncle complained that she was "too good for the likes of us now". Both women described the feeling of having to 'dumb down' or 'contract' the range of their personalities in order to communicate and maintain relations with their families, However, while Sian has subsequently been able to make successful efforts at reconciliation, Helena instead made a conscious decision to leave much of her past life behind her, even changing her first name during her mid-twenties – though she says that this was partly at the suggestion of her parents, who felt that her given name no longer suited her and regretted calling her by it because, although it was ‘quite uncommon’ when she was born, it has since become associated with stigmatising working-class stereotypes – and concealed her background from friends and colleagues; indeed, she mentions ‘coming out’ as having been socially mobile only relatively recently:

> … *all of the friends that I had there had all been to university and I didn't mention that I hadn't been to university. And I never introduced my parents to anyone, I didn't take anyone home to my parents, to see my parents. It’s bad isn’t it really. So yeah, so I think from that point I knew that I wanted to – it was very weird for me to be, I didn't want to be the working-class girl from* [where she grew up] *with the white stiletto heels like all of my friends, and that made me different from a, as a child, and so to be, not to be that I had to move and change everything. And then you hide it because that's such a huge leap.* (Helena)

She says that her ‘biggest fear’ was always the possibility of people who know her by different names coming together in the same situation, and alluded to a number of awkward and embarrassing encounters between the very different social spheres she inhabited. Likewise, Anne described at length what she felt at the time to be an excruciating meeting between her mother and stepfather and one of her earliest employers over lunch, which revealed to her “the chasm between where I’d got to and where I’d started”. She says that she has nothing at all in common with her family, who in turn regard her as an entirely different person between her professional and personal life.

By contrast, Samuel (21, final-year undergraduate student in London), who had recently been admitted onto a postgraduate law programme at an American Ivy-League university, had received consistent and enthusiastic support from his family, who originate from

West Africa, but experienced each stage of academic achievement so far as "like an explosion of different identity" which sometimes created clashes in his relations with different social groups, between which he found himself having to 'code switch'; however, on the occasions these groups came together, rather than causing him embarrassment, he felt more keenly the difficulty of reconciling their different expectations of him:

> … *I will interact differently with different people, and when groups of different people who are normally separate, who I normally interact with separately come together, it creates a difficulty and I feel myself trying to appease both sides. And the people who haven't heard me speaking that way think, you know, who's this, this, almost like a completely different person, and so that also affects, it's like a little bias in my head, so it's like what's the middle ground here? What do I have to compromise in my conversations?* (Samuel)

In spite of this discomfort, both he and Sian appeared to demonstrate a high degree of versatility in their interactions with different social groups – the latter spoke of initially having a "very static sense of self" and of finding unfamiliar situations and experiences anxiety-inducing to begin with, which she sensed might be a fixed aspect of her personality, but that later "this idea of growth and change became the norm for me" – and like a number of other interviewees were very conscious of modifying their accents according to different contexts. While for Samuel and Sian this adaptability often seemed to be an asset, Anne attributed her own 'inconsistency' as a younger woman to her lack of self-confidence, sense of inferiority and her 'desperation' to be liked, whereas now that she is older and more confident, she sees herself as far more stable across different social contexts and interactions. Mirroring this perspective, Paul described himself as a naturally confident person and as relatively unconcerned by others' opinions of him, and while he believes that adapting and being able to mix with different kinds of people is a very important aspect of his job as university vice-chancellor, he also suggests that inconsistency across different social interactions could be the sign of a lack of authenticity, integrity and even honesty:

> … *I think being true to yourself and authentic is a really important part of what leadership is all about, in any organisation. I mean, you know, so, I think if people see you being two or three different people, depending on what company you're in, you know, that to me would send a signal of untrustworthiness. So, you know, I mean, it's not particularly, although if you're clever enough and Machiavellian, you can switch between those things, you know, I'm not clever enough to do that. So, I'm just sort of pretty much what I am all the way through and, you know, it's kind of Marmite, people, some people like, like it, others don't* … (Paul)

Finally, while the focus here has been on representations of mutual exclusivity between socio-economic categories alone, inter-domain exclusivity was also implied obliquely on a few occasions by the notion that those who are not born in the UK remain largely impervious to classification – Helena, for example, described her husband as 'almost classless' by virtue of his half-Nordic, half-Celtic parentage and early upbringing outside of England, and notwithstanding the fact that both sides of his family also happened to be, from her perspective, "very, very posh, what I would call posh, very middle-class, lots of money" – and although Aisha emphasised the importance of an intersectional view, she also believes class to be ultimately identity-defining:

> … *as someone who associates with many different identities and sort of has many labels, you know, in accordance to how we label demographics, class is the most important, in my opinion, as a determinant for who you will become or who you are.* (Aisha)

Informativeness

Very few of the interviewees stated that class categories are not informative at all, although some believed that they only have inductive potential at the extremes or in certain 'clear-cut' cases. Contrary to the view expressed by Aisha, above, Alice – who, as an academic historian, has in fact written extensively on the subject of class and endorses a 'Marxian' perspective – argues that class background is not deterministic and yet still has reliable explanatory power, even in instances where individuals might appear to differ significantly:

> *… I don't think that determines how you act, but I think it's an explanation of why people act in the way they do. So obviously you get people who are upwardly mobile, who then completely react against the place that they find themselves, you get people who negotiate it, and then you get people who absolutely embrace it and say "Oh, this is wonderful", yeah. I think if you talk to them though, their, those responses all have something to do with their background …* (Alice)

Rebecca (32, PhD student, and founder and director of an arts organisation in London), says that during her first year as an undergraduate at university she didn't notice that many of her peers, including some who quickly became (and remain) her closest friends, came from backgrounds that were "quite elite", "quite posh", and very different from her own. In fact, she says it wasn't until she began to "engage with sociology and theory and read people like Bourdieu" that she became fully attuned to those differences, until eventually "the more I became aware of class, the harder it was for me to let go of seeing that" and believes now that "I really need to let go of that, because it isn't helpful", in that it sometimes causes her to pre-judge people. Yet, for Alice, class has been a very important concept at a "kind of psychic, emotional level", often enabling her to make sense of other people's behaviour towards her that might otherwise have appeared irrational. For example, she believes that not being admitted to Oxbridge as an undergraduate, and, in more recent years, the opposition to her election in a senior role at her college, were both on the basis of her class background.

In terms of specific characteristics, socio-economic categories were generally assumed to be informative about – or more or less reliably inferred from – an individual's accent, clothing, hairstyle, level of grooming, the presence of tattoos, their tastes, interests, consumption, and political persuasion. In most cases these inferences were expressed generically and in probabilistic terms, however for Helena both category labels and features were understood to enable relatively accurate prediction at an individual level:

> *Coffee – do you like instant or do you not? So, when I go* [back to the area in which she grew up], *I drink instant coffee because it's, you know – I have some in the house, but I wouldn't even dream of drinking it in front of people, but when I'm there it's okay. And it's really only there for builders* [laughs]. *But yeah, you can, it's awful isn't it, you can tell whether they're going to, how many vegetables they're going to eat, whether they're going to cook for themselves or buy takeaway food – not take away, buy, you know, ready-made meals, whether they're going to know what wine to buy, how much money they're going to spend on wine …* (Helena)

Several also mentioned physical features, such as skin condition, weight, and height, to the extent that they may be visibly affected by health and diet, however Alice was one of very few interviewees to corroborate the notion that in certain cases physiognomic characteristics might also be informative in this way:

> *You know, the cheekbones thing is so interesting to me because my mum worked briefly as a probation officer, and I remember once when I was in my twenties having, holding a conference and a couple of women came to it who were from quite well-known political families, very, very affluent, and I said to my mum, 'Gosh, it was like being in the room with, like, thoroughbred race horses, you know, you could*

> *tell there hadn't been acne for generations, and she said, 'Oh my god,' she said, 'that's what it used to be like in court,' she said. She'd become a probation officer briefly in the early seventies, and she said the barristers would come in and she said, you'd just look at them like, woah, you know, the cheekbones, you know, it was like, yeah, yeah! And so, and you think, yeah, you know, generations of, you know, the right kind of leisure, enough sleep, the right diet. Yeah, it does, it does show on your person very often.* (Alice)

However, she adds that although her students are still usually 'carrying traces' of their upbringing when they first arrive at the university, aside from "the ones who come from upper-class or very wealthy backgrounds, and have done so for generations", she can't always distinguish their social origins, "partly because people from well-off backgrounds will sometimes, you know, dress down". And yet, some suggested that an individual's class background is sometimes clearly reflected in their bearing or gait; for example, Amy (28, government policy advisor), who is originally from Lancashire, referred to a 'Mancunian walk' which she associates exclusively with working-class men in Manchester, and speculates that it might be influenced by working in certain labour-intensive occupations, yet she also believes that the informativeness of particular 'micro-behaviours' is a consequence of a heightened preoccupation with class in the UK. And Tom vividly characterised (and physically demonstrated) the difference between the ways working-class and middle-class men cross their legs while sitting, and how they hold a mobile phone to their ear ("for the tape: working class is holding your elbow out pointed, middle class is having it parallel to your body.")

For Claire (47, solicitor), who also believed that class has a very strong influence on future life choices, even if that involves moving as far away from one's background as possible, class-based differences in embodied dispositions were seen as more likely to be reflective of different levels of self-confidence:

> *… I think sometimes it's just how people hold themselves in terms of their confidence. But I think that's very generalised and I think you couldn't, you couldn't very easily categorise people, but there may be some people, and it goes back to what I was saying about that sort of, to a certain extent, sort of working-class sort of lack of self-belief* […] *the idea of approaching a stranger and making conversation with someone you don't know and feeling comfortable to do that is something that I think is a skill, perhaps, that isn't as developed. So, I think if you walk in a room and somebody makes eye contact with you and smiles and comes over and, I think, or holds themself in a certain way, I think that tends to indicate a certain amount of, sort of, confidence and education …* (Claire)

Samuel mentioned that amongst his public school educated peers at university this "lack of confidence gets routed out, you know, they smell it from a mile away" and think less of people for it. Again, as was seen in the previous study, certain features or behaviours, however subtle, were sometimes believed to be capable of immediately and unambiguously revealing an individual's class background:

> *… there's still things that catch you out, that are annoying, whether it's that you don't know something or you don't pronounce something a different way or whatever it is, there's always those tell-tale signs* [laughs] *that you think you never quite get away from your roots. Not that there's necessarily anything wrong with that but, you know, you do, you are sort of aware that there are those, sort of, sometimes subtle differences – whether anybody else notices them, I don't know but, you know, you do.* (Claire)

Similarly, Helena spoke of, and in fact also demonstrated, continually 'catching' herself ("there's certain words, and I consciously make sure I don't call them bloody 'roundabouts', they're called – no, I don't, I do call them 'roundabouts', they're called, I don't call them 'islands'"), and referring to the famous George Bernard Shaw play – in which a professor of phonetics bets that he can teach a cockney flower girl to master Received Pronunciation and pass her off as a Duchess – she says "*Pygmalion* was absolutely right: if you really want to create a classless society, get rid of the accents. It marks you. So much, not just, you know, where you're from, but *really* what class you are." And while Claire expressed uncertainty as to whether others actually notice 'those tell-tale signs' that she is acutely aware of herself, Anne had no doubt; she claimed that on each and every occasion in the past that she committed what she subsequently believes to have been a breach of etiquette she "might as well have had a big neon sign over my head, saying 'I'm not like you'", and that although the internet might be consulted for "things like which knife and fork to use" or "understanding how to pronounce wine … what you can't look up is the things you don't know you don't know. And so, you're always marked out in some way or other. Things catch you out."

Uniformity

Most agreed, almost as a matter of course, that individuals of the same class or socio-economic status will have more in common with each other than with others – usually interpreted in terms of interests, perspectives, attitudes, and values, based on similar experiences and living conditions – and that they would also be more capable, on that basis, of empathising with each other than with members of a different socio-economic category. Uniformity was already clearly implied by the features that were understood to be reliably inferred from category membership but is also strongly suggested by the assumption of fully shared social norms or 'codes', the 'unknown unknowns' referred to by Anne, but which she firmly believed to be universally known to those of a different background. (However, Anne also said later that "there's an extraordinary range of personalities" within every class, and yet regarding those who are very poor “people don’t see it. They just see a homogenous group of people who are less than.”) Likewise, Helena alluded to particular aspects of practical knowledge that are possessed exclusively (and apparently instinctively) by middle-class families, for example: “nobody teaches you how to fill in a […] UCAS form, or how to send your kids to public school, you don’t know – if you are middle-class you just know these things.” Again, Helena described certain widely shared, class-typical attitudes as inimitable but also resistant to change, even in herself, and in a way that clearly conflicts with some of the attitudes expressed in her previous comments:

> *… working-class people have this thing, which I do still have, which is, ‘Well, that's good enough for me’, and anything above that is, ‘Why would you want that?’ So, we even do that with, you know, my husband likes really nice coffee, and I think, why is instant not good enough for you? That kind of thing.* (Helena)

Just as she perceived those educated at public school to have an ‘innate’ or inherent self-belief and sense of entitlement, on the basis of her own experiences she also, like Claire, typically associated working-class identity with a lack of confidence and ease in their social surroundings, often irrespective of context and even when this might appear to be contradicted by observable behaviours:

> *… I was driving around yesterday and there were these two guys and they were, you know, obviously working class, young men, they, just in their kind of shell suits, or whatever it was equivalent, and they were just so obviously – and they thought they were really tough, and I was sort of thinking, you know, I know what they're feeling inside, they're not feeling that tough. They're just feeling uncomfortable most of the time.* (Helena)

While Matthew (28, charity worker) and Yasmin (19, undergraduate student) – whose family emigrated to the UK from the Middle East when she was a young child, and who referred to 'collectivism' and 'individualism' as core values pertaining to the working class and middle class, respectively – both believed that having similar backgrounds would often unite people more deeply through a shared feeling of nostalgia, Aisha's convictions were rather stronger; she often characterised individuals of the same class as subject to the 'same experiences', which would therefore ensure a significantly more profound connection, even a kind of fraternity, as well as similar class-based personalities, due to the determining force of their shared background:

> *I think your experience, which shapes exactly who you are, when you can find people who have faced the same experience, of course you're going to have a deeper connection with them because they've sort of, they've existed the same way you've existed for so long, so that creates a sort of, a sense of sort of brotherhood …* (Aisha)

Inherence

Very few of the interviewees either spontaneously articulated or even agreed with the idea of inherent differences based on innate features, although Anne appeared to credit her social mobility to a degree of native intelligence – which she perceived to be both "a blessing and a curse" – and Daniel (21, undergraduate student in London) acknowledged that intelligence may be inherited to some extent and may significantly influence an individual's choice of or fitness for certain occupations, and therefore their income and socio-economic status, but argued that it's extremely difficult to tease apart nature and nurture.

Instead, a recurring theme in several of the interviews was the notion of an inherent confidence, which as has already been highlighted in some of Helena and Samuel's comments, was frequently associated with those who had been privately educated, and often assumed to be lacking in those who were not. In fact, Claire, eager to prevent her daughter from suffering the debilitating lack of self-belief that she often experienced herself and witnessed in her own parents, cites it as one of the primary motivations for sending her – against her own political inclinations – to a local private school, where confidence is built through encouragement and positive affirmation. However, as in Martin's description, the instilling of self-belief in traditional public schools is often characterised in rather more abrasive terms:

> *… what you won't get taught, which [those] who go through different, more orthodox and highbrow education establishments [do], is self-belief and how to comport yourself … You either have it, as part of the norms and the people who influence you as you grow up, or you don't. And if you're going to go through Marlborough or something, they're going to beat that into you maybe, but it's certainly going to be in you. If you've come from some comprehensive or other secondary modern type school, maybe not.* (Martin)

Many appeared to share Paul and Claire's belief that, as they respectively described it, there is a "certain fundamental-ness" to a person's class background, and that it constitutes "the building blocks of your character", and while it was only Aisha who referred explicitly to distinct class-based 'personalities', Helena often spoke of a seemingly internal, immutable, and, once again, inimitable, 'true' class identity:

> *… you never lose it, you know, you can take the girl out of [the Midlands], but you can't take [the Midlands] out of the girl. Really, it's still there. And that, yeah, you can't fake that.* (Helena)

> *…you can change the way you look and the way you talk, and the way you even interact with people, and you can change your job and even your levels of confidence can change, but somewhere inside us there is still that working class girl …* (Helena)

Helena, Claire, and Yasmin also agreed with the notion, stated explicitly in the newspaper extract from the previous study, of class as (or as feeling like) an essence, although in slightly different ways: Yasmin interpreted the concept in an ideal or 'Platonic' sense, captured in her view by the contrasting class-based values of individualism and collectivism, while Helena perceived it as something "intangible, it's untangible, it's like I said, it's a mixture of everything", but predominantly equated it with the deeply 'ingrained' and inimitable attitudes she had described earlier. For Claire, on the other hand, it was characterised by the feeling of class membership or identity itself, which she believed to have been inculcated by her formative experiences, and to have endured in spite of all the significant changes in her life since then:

> *… I would sort of say I'm both [classes] really. And probably that's because in my heart I feel more sort of working class, even though other indicators might say that, that I'd, you know, moved towards the middle class …* (Claire)

Matthew spoke in similar terms of continuing to identify, "in my heart", with particular working-class traits, which, although he "definitely wouldn't be able to describe myself as working class now", nonetheless made him feel reluctant to "remove that label" from himself entirely. In fact, he believes that your class background "modulates how you think then for the rest of your life" and that "you can never really escape how you interpret something because that's just based on whatever has come beforehand. It's always, kind of, you know, going to imprint itself on you".

Interestingly, Alice also interpreted the concept of an essence in terms of feeling, but immediately related it in this sense – by way of current popular debates concerning gender identity – to the notion of subjective identification and a voluntarist conception of category membership. Paradoxically, therefore, according to this perspective the idea of class as an essence is deceptive, not because it suggests that it is deterministic, but rather because it implies that class is in fact a choice:

> *… people have been encouraged to think about class in that way, that it's not about power, we're all equal now, it's about some kind of essence, so it's a choice. So, you get to make a choice about which class you are, which I think is really insidious* […] *I'm really suspicious of essences. I mean, generally, you know, it's like this kind of thing of like, oh, you know, well, I'm a woman because I feel female. Really? What does, what, what is that? You know, like, I always thought actually being a woman meant that you had, kind of, you know, about five sort of biological things that made you a woman, and gender is something that comes from a kind of confluence of social and cultural and political influences that are historically specific – to me class is the same.'* (Alice)

Immutability

Beliefs concerning category immutability have already been illustrated in representations of inherence, above, where it is the inherent feature (e.g., the internalisation of class identity, or of the influence of socialisation according to a particular class background) that is perceived to preclude members from becoming non-members, by continuing to determine either partial (i.e., non-exclusive) or full membership of the category of origin. As was seen in the previous study, representations of mutual exclusivity and immutability are therefore often implicitly contradictory.

Like Alice, Paul draws upon the example of another social domain – in this instance, race – to emphasise that there is "more ballast to it than just like an ephemeral thing, that class, you can just be […] I can be something I'm not because that's my right to be it, which is, I think, bullshit." He says that "being comfortable with yourself and where you're from, no matter what class, quote unquote, you're from is really important in life":

> *…you can get very confused if you start to fret too much about it, trying to fight your background, either – at any level in society – and I've seen people who've done, from both sides, have tried to do that and they just end up a bit, you know, with some mental health problems, you know, you just drive you round the bend in the end, trying to constantly be something that you're not.* (Paul)

Similarly, Martin argues that if you're "pretending to be something", you'll have a "stress problem" because "you've got to remember to wake up and put that face back on", otherwise you'll be 'found out':

> *You can't act, right – the world is a stage, but you can't act, you've still got to know what you are. So, the thing is, if people are trying to change because they're just becoming emotionally mature, if they're trying to change because they've built some self-confidence, belief, right, then they're still authentic, they're just becoming better versions of themselves. If what they're doing is aping the behaviours of what they think is someone else's success formula, that's shit. They've still got to be, at their core, "this is me and I know what I want from life, and this is how I've matured who I am, and this is how I've become stronger and a better version of myself."* (Martin)

Martin evidently places a high value on a form of stability over transformation, however in this case while the process of self-improvement he describes clearly involves more than merely superficial changes, they appear to represent neither a 'reinvention' of nor a departure from an individual's 'core', but rather the gradual development of a 'better version' of their ultimately stable 'authentic' self, as opposed to simply imitating or 'aping' someone else altogether:

> … *the most flattering thing people can say to me, which they still do, is 'Well, you haven't changed.' I have, but at my core I haven't had to reinvent myself, what I've had to do is take the weaknesses of me, my immaturity, my lack of social skill, my lack of emotional maturity, and fix it. And it's part of growing up, I mean, if there is a purpose to life, it's to become reconciled and comfortable in your own skin.* (Martin)

Unlike many barristers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who "tend to acclimatise, modify the way they speak and modify the things they're interested in, in order to fit in", Tom says that he has deliberately resisted this and still has "the same low tastes I've always had", and in fact, if anything, has "emphasised the plebeian or philistine nature of my interests, possibly as a defence":

> … *I think I, I personally have resisted changing personally. And I don't really know why* […] *at the risk of sounding quite immature and adolescent, it is this sort of idea of phoniness and selling out and those, sort of, Catcher in the Rye kind of ideas.* (Tom)

And yet, because he actually comes "from quite a boring class, you know, lower-middle class, provincial English", which he believes to have characterised the "default morality, the default culture" in the country for many decades, he says that he could probably have 'chameleon-ised' himself if he had wanted, but "almost perversely" decided not to; whereas a friend of his from the north of England has never been able to, and can't modify his accent because it is so 'hard-wired', implying that the further an individual's attributes deviate from certain social and cultural norms, the more deeply they are inscribed.

The majority of interviewees believed that there are limited windows for significant or authentic change during an individual's life – Tom, for example, quoted the Jesuit proverb, "Give me the child until he is seven, and I give you the man" – however, opinions varied considerably as to upper age limits, ranging from only five years-old to twenty-five. An important element in many of their intuitions regarding the authenticity of individual transformation was the question of choice. Claire's account was aligned with Alice's in terms of rejecting a purely voluntarist conception of class membership, but whereas Alice associated choice with the idea of an essence – based on subjective identification – in Claire's more conventional interpretation it is the essence that constrains or undermines choice in the first place, not least because choice itself is often one of the key factors that individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds are understood to be relatively deprived of, significantly restricting their potential for 'upward' social mobility, and therefore automatically rendering any ostensibly voluntary form of 'downward' mobility inauthentic:

> *… they may be living a working-class life, but the essence of them and their education and then their past experiences, et cetera, mean that actually they're not really, because as much as they may sort of adopt, whatever that looks like, a sort of working-class type life, they still have the education, and therefore the experiences, the mindset. They made a choice, is perhaps the point, and that choice is a consequence of having more privilege and more access, which is one of the whole problems of, perhaps, some lower-socioeconomic groups is actually not having choice and access, so I don't think it's a very authentic transformation* […] *It's never going to be a complete transformation is it, because you're carrying with you the essence of who you actually are.* (Claire)

Claire says that although she feels a 'merge' of both, she could never "authentically say I'm truly middle-class – no, I'd feel a faker if I said that. Because I'm, you know, because I'm not, I'm, I've got these other experiences, and these are the tastes and, you know, peccadillos that are working-class". However, in spite of the anxieties she has sometimes experienced in the past about being 'caught' or 'found out', like Tom, Martin, and Nick, she also says that her intention has never been to 'recreate' herself in anyway and has always been keen to maintain a strong connection with her background and her family; and in fact she thinks that if someone wanted to, and if they fully immersed themselves in a different social milieu, they could potentially feel 'in their heart' that they belonged to a different class from the one they were raised in. But for Aisha, who also believes that subjectivity is a fundamental aspect of class identity, this is impossible; referring to a conversation she had several years ago at a summer course with an eminent speaker, who had herself experienced a form of long-range social mobility, she says:

> *… the understanding I got from her was that it's even, you know, having been the head of a think-tank, even with the jobs and the money that she's had in her life, even the degree that she holds to her name, she'll never be, or she never has felt truly middle-class, and she never has been able to do that. And if she can't, you know, who is anyone else to play-pretend that they have? If I can't, who is anyone else to play-pretend that they have? I can't see any situation in which I could possibly see myself as fully middle-class, and I don't see how anyone could pretend to themselves that they are.* (Aisha)

If class is defined simply in terms of occupation or income, or indeed by any other purely objective measure, this notion of 'true' or 'full' class membership would appear to be incongruous, and yet it was shared by many of the interviewees. As mentioned earlier, despite being a QC, Anne believes she will always be working-class, and doesn't think "you can change the product of your childhood, you just add layers onto it and adapt a bit […] you don't shed one skin and go into another one, you're just the sum of your parts and those parts remain." Similarly, Ciara describes social mobility as a cumulative process; the transition between groups "adds to your identity", meaning that you're not in either completely or that you can ever entirely leave the original one behind. Again, this idea of an inevitably partial transition and hybrid identity is expressed vividly by Aisha:

> *I don't think it would ever be a full transition. It's like, it's like a half-way, sort of 75% at best. I mean, again, you could have everything, but until you can completely eradicate the experiences of your past and take those, like, out of your personality, you're never going to be fully middle-class. You can't, you physically cannot erase those memories.* (Aisha)

Finally, this emphasis on the weight of individual psychological continuity was also echoed by Paul, who believes that "unless you've had some sort of, kind of, total reset – what I mean by that is like some sort of, you know, you've been bumped on the head and you've sort of had a whole, there's been a physiological reason why you can't remember who you are," then an individual's identity will be "pretty much determined" by their class background.

Stability

Although some referred to category stability in predominantly structural terms – for example, as the product of a capitalist society or a monarchy – many of the interviewees believed that there have always been social classes in one form or another in all times and all places, but several also thought that the current system of classification is limited and outdated, and does not take sufficient account of certain sections of society, such as those without paid employment or on zero-hours contracts, nor to significant changes in recent years in the employment structure, or as Tom puts it, "the Uberization of the economy". A recurring representation was the inevitability of socio-economic stratification and social classes, either as a consequence of a universal competition or struggle for status, or, as in Yasmin's functionalist description, simply as result of specialisation and the division of labour:

> … *if we were to sort of think in terms of kind of socialist utopia then you can imagine a classless system but it doesn't exist because there are certain sort of – I'm taking a functionalist perspective here – you know, there are certain roles and sort of certain occupations in this world that have to be filled by someone, and those people will be naturally paid less than more, like, sort of managerial or more professional workers because they are, you know, it's a non-skilled job, like, for example, emptying bins, things like that, you know, we need that for society to function.* (Yasmin)

This view was echoed by Helena ("in sociological terms, you always need people at the bottom doing the donkey work"), who in spite of referring to the 'classlessness' of her husband and even her son, in fact believes that classes exist everywhere, and also strongly subscribed to a notion of the intrinsic or objective value of certain forms of symbolic capital:

> … *you have the people who are kind of nouveau riche. And they are, you know, they have no taste whatsoever, because they don't know what good taste is. That's something that you get from middle class. So, they think that – you, well, you see them a lot – that, kind of, you, they'd buy the wrong car or the wrong jewellery or, you know. It would just be wrong.* (Helena)

Alice and Ollie (25, PhD student at Oxbridge) both alluded to the subtle but stubborn persistence of symbolic markers of socio-economic status, which undermine the idea that class boundaries are eroded by the fashion for 'dressing down', for example, and while Amy perceived the propensity to categorise others by class to be particular to the UK, Paul regarded it as a specific manifestation of a more or less ubiquitous phenomenon:

> *… [people] like to sort of size them up really quickly and sort of get the position for, feeling for where they are in the social spectrum, I don't think it's just unique to this country, I think, I imagine for an anthropologist, you'd say the same thing about tribes in the rainforest or something.* (Paul)

And in clear contrast to the tendency to defer to expert opinion regarding categorisation – rather than folk knowledge – commonly found in relation to natural kinds and biological categories, Anne suggested that definitions of class membership based solely on occupational or income measures are in fact contradicted by 'reality', arguing that someone who had experienced exactly the same trajectory as her would be deluded if they were to describe themselves as middle-class:

> *I would accept that that's what they thought. I wouldn't accept that was the reality of the situation, because they might think they are, but everyone around them would know that they're not. So, I think you would fool yourself.* (Anne)

Naturalness

Naturalness has been touched on briefly already by the references to informative physiognomic features and innate intelligence, however these were very rare instances and the vast majority of interviewees rejected the idea that there is any natural basis to socio-economic categories or class membership, at least in a genetic or otherwise biological sense, and only a small number agreed that social mobility or meritocracy would enable a more 'natural' social structure;

indeed many questioned what this might even signify exactly. However, innate differences were not only dismissed in favour of explanations based on social or cultural factors – which Ollie argued significantly outweigh the impact of the former, rather than necessarily nullify them – but also by more individualistic arguments; Yasmin, for example, believes that your destination is "very much in your own hands as an individual" and that it is more a question of whether "your aspirations outweigh the constraints". Yet, representations of naturalness were often implicitly invoked in discussions of the stability of class categories, and sometimes even overtly by the description of social stratification as an inevitable consequence of human nature:

> … *I think it's human nature. It is, absolutely, human nature, and I think that sort of, whether it's a class system or not, the idea that, 'Oh, we're doing better than you …', that's human nature, we always want to create some divide to think 'Where am I in the pecking order? Am I doing okay?'* […] *I think there's always this idea of having a pecking order, knowing where you sit, 'am I doing okay', 'am I doing' – 'if I'm doing better than them', 'I might not be doing as well as them' – and then, therefore by definition, I suppose, it creates a system of some sort, doesn't it, a structure which is, we're, I think we're always going to have that.* (Claire)

Alternatively, Jane (40, solicitor) conceived of these divisions not so much as a product of competition, but rather an innate desire to group together on the basis of similarity, while Paul ascribed them to a natural inclination to imitate the members of one's family or social group:

> *I mean, it gets back to this tribal nature, isn't it?* […] *people copy each other about things. I mean, there's such, when you grew up as a baby, how would you know? You don't know anything, do you, just, you just kind of copy, you just, as nature probably intended, you just reflect what your parents do* … (Paul)

Prompted by the final extract from the previous study, naturalness was also discussed in relation to the subject of individual category membership, mutability, and authenticity. Yasmin's conception of what constitutes naturalness in this context is clearly not separate from social and cultural influences, but, like the notion of 'second nature', is intertwined with them throughout the process of primary socialisation, during which she believes an individual becomes "fully formed" and their class identity is determined, rendering any subsequent change 'unnatural':

> … *I think that your primary socialisation is what's key in terms of your, your class identity. And by the age of eight, seven, eight, I think you're fully formed. I think you know who you are in this world and you'll never forget the fact that there were times during the childhood where you wanted things and you couldn't access them. Or potentially that you were taught things that maybe your wealthier counterparts weren't taught, were taught differently. It just doesn't feel natural. And the reason why it doesn't feel natural is because it occurred during your primary socialisation which is how you formed as an individual.* (Yasmin)

Similarly, Aisha described the idea of an 'upwardly' socially mobile individual identifying as middle-class as "not a natural occurrence". For Samuel, this sense of 'unnaturalness' in his own social mobility trajectory is explicitly connected with the conscious and intentional modification of his behaviour, for example in the way that he now speaks, which he describes as being "cultured, in that I've really taken time to work on what I say and how I say it"; he acknowledges that this deliberate process of cultivation may mean that, however far it takes him, in the eyes of some of his peers he will never be recognised as a 'natural' equal:

> … *it is a conscious effort to break the mould of what you've previously been. I mean, even if I think of myself as an example, yeah, you know, I haven't naturally made a change from what I previously was, I've had, I have had to work on it, to act the way I am, and I recognize that even in a, let's say, so even*

> *in like ten, twenty, thirty years, I've, let's say, built a mass of career credit, you can say, or educational credit or whatever, there will always be some people who won't see me as a natural, their natural counterpart, their natural friend, and they will, they might see differently. Or maybe it's my own bias, maybe I also see it as a kind of, you know, I am the imposter here and I'm infiltrating the system* [...] *But I definitely know that, whether it's for me or for them, it's not, it doesn't feel natural, and it won't, and I don't think it will feel natural until maybe the, the next* [of his descendants to bear his name] *in a hundred and fifty years, you know, with the benefit of a large dynasty behind him, will feel like, yes, you know, Grandpapa got me here, or something like that.* (Samuel)

Necessity

Many of the interviewees, and not only those who endorsed a sociological definition of class, believed that economic capital and financial security is a necessary, although not necessarily sufficient, characteristic for category membership. For Samuel, this is reducible to individual choice, whereas from Alice's dichotomous Marxian perspective it is rather a matter of power in relation to others:

> *So, in terms of the upper-class, I would say if you don't have significant, a significant degree of control over other people, then no, you can't be a member of the, of the upper class. That's not my line, that was Beatrice Webb's back in the day* [laughs]. *And then in terms of, and then, like I say, you know, because my view is sort of a Marxian one, you know, that in terms of being, of not being upper-class, being, you know, whether you want to call it working-class or middle-class, I'd say having other people who have significant control over you is pretty much, you know, a definition of membership* ... (Alice)

Similarly, Tom had argued earlier in another context that "at the risk of sounding like a Marxist […] where you are economically is where you are in terms of class, because otherwise to use the term 'class' in a really sort of fluid way to basically mean what kind of social hats do you wear, that empties it of most use"; however, when considering the question of necessity directly, he noticed that he instinctively found himself thinking of class in the latter sense, according to which he then conceptualised necessary features in terms of a group-specific placeholder:

> … *thinking about the sort of people I went to school with, for them, they, I mean they wouldn't have used the word 'class', but they would have, they would have said, if you'd said to them 'Is that person like you?' or 'Is he, is he one of us?', or something like, you know, used that sort of language, they, they wouldn't necessarily have been able to identify it, what the features were, but there definitely would have been some* … (Tom)

In-group and out-group recognition was also perceived to be a very significant factor by Ciara, who in spite of disagreeing with the idea that there are necessary characteristics, and believing that category membership is largely determined by self-definition based on subjective identification, also admitted that she is "scared of the word ['class'] a bit because I don't want to label myself in a group that wouldn't want to, that doesn't think I belong with it", and therefore feels it would be "quite comforting if someone was like, if you fit these criteria then you belong here". And yet, as has already been illustrated, objective definitions are often rejected in favour of lay understandings in which notions of necessary features vary considerably – including characteristics such as accent or language skills, for example, according to Helena and Anne respectively – and, as appears to be the case in Aisha's description, may be represented by a conjunction of socially shared and subjectively formed prototypes:

> *I think to be middle class you need to have, you need to have encouraging parents, not necessarily in the most positive of ways, like I hear a lot of my friends talking about how their parents sort of force them into education, or force them to be good academically, but you need to have some sort of academic motivation from home. That's a very middle-class thing. And I think to be working-class you need to have trauma. You need to have faced quite a bit of adversity. You need to know what it's like to experience quite a few things and quite a few fears from a very young age, that other people don't experience.* (Aisha)

And, indeed, it is clearly implicit in several of the interviewees perceptions of the immutability of category membership – in Yasmin's belief that an individual's class identity is determined by their primary socialisation, and both her and Anne's conviction that they will always be working-class, irrespective of their occupation or income, for example – that without the relevant background and past experiences an individual cannot be considered, nor can ever become, an 'authentic' member of a different social class from the one they were raised in:

> *Like I said, when you go through working-class experiences, you develop a working-class personality and working-class traits, because it's a huge thing to go through. And so, no, it's never going to be authentic, unless you can, like, the night before cram sort of exam-style, you know, the experiences that I've had, which is very unlikely because it's going to be a hard night …* (Aisha)

4.4. Conclusion

The objective of this study has been to build upon the findings of the previous chapter and examine further how the individual components of psychological essentialism are manifested in representations of socio-economic categories and of social mobility, in the perspectives and experiences of socially mobile individuals themselves. In-depth, semi-structured interviews have very seldom been employed in research on psychological essentialism, however as the foregoing analysis has illustrated, this method not only enables an examination into how socially shared representations may be spontaneously reproduced, explicitly endorsed or rejected, and into the emergence of other representations at a microgenetic level that are not necessarily revealed by communication within the public sphere, but also provides an opportunity to probe further, and explore in far greater detail than is possible with naturally-occurring data, the logic of the components and the particular relationships between them within this domain and specific cultural context.

Notwithstanding the limitations of Haslam et al.'s (2000) definitions and, as has been discussed, the somewhat counter-intuitive nature of the independent dimensions they claim to have discovered, by maintaining the focus of this research on the individual components of essentialist thinking – albeit building on the more expansive and nuanced understanding of those components developed in the previous chapter – rather than attempting to directly identify examples of essentialism per se, this study also avoids the tendency to conduct analysis based on a vague and partial definition of essentialism that simply conflates it with one or two components alone, for example *naturalness* or *uniformity*.

Representations discussed in the previous study that were reproduced here included the depiction of vast distances, or 'chasms', between certain socio-economic groups, or that they in fact constitute entirely 'different worlds', along with the suggestion that their members are therefore significantly or even inherently different kinds of people; of a form of permanently instilled confidence, shared more or less exclusively by those who have been privately educated and lacking in those who have not; of specific class-based outlooks, mindsets and feelings; the possibility of making reliable inferences to or from an individual's physiological – and sometimes even physiognomic – features; the notion that social mobility often entails, or even requires, leaving one's past behind, and sometimes concealing it altogether; of being 'caught out', or having one's class background 'exposed', by certain behaviours, especially perceived breaches of etiquette; of pretending, imitating, or 'making yourself up'; of an embodied, underlying, and largely socially determined, 'true' class identity; the explicitly articulated idea of class identity as either being or feeling like an essence; the apparent universality or inevitability of socio-economic categories, and the seeming inescapability of traditional status markers; of limited ontogenetic windows for successful or authentic category change; and the necessity of socialisation within the category in order to be an authentic member of it.

Representations, on the other hand, that either emerged more strongly or were revealed uniquely in this study, were the notion of starkly different class-based personalities; the idea that class background constitutes the foundations or 'building blocks' of a person's character; that an individual is 'fully formed' during childhood, and that therefore their class identity is entirely determined by their upbringing within a particular socio-economic category, which 'shapes exactly who you are'; that a person's class background will profoundly and permanently influence the way that they think; the impossibility of successfully mimicking or faking the attributes indicative of different class backgrounds; the assumption of fully shared norms and codes of behaviour within different socio-economic categories; awkward or embarrassing encounters between socio-economic 'worlds'; of being or becoming a different person in interactions with members of different socio-economic categories; the idea of class as a feeling; as something that cannot be chosen; the significance of psychological continuity in determining (an immutable) class identity; the concepts of 'full' or 'partial' membership; the notion of self-improvement while maintaining a stable 'core'; of class identity as cumulative and multi-layered; as a feature of objective reality, in contrast to or undermining sociological definitions, and known by everyone; of social stratification as an aspect of 'human nature'; the perceived 'unnaturalness' of conscious and intentional efforts towards certain forms of social mobility or self-transformation or cultivation; and the positing of specific necessary features for category membership, such as choice, power, economic or cultural capital, family background, or even particular kinds of experience, such as 'trauma', for example.

Of course, these findings do not in any way contradict – nor do they intend to – the claim that the personal experience of moving between socio-economic categories can be significantly affected by an incommensurability between the pre-reflexive dispositions internalised during early socialisation and the unfamiliar social, educational and occupational fields, for example, encountered as a result of or in the process of social mobility, or indeed even from a clash between two contrasting sets of dispositions developed during different stages of socialisation. Nevertheless, they demonstrate clear evidence that the concept of habitus alone is not sufficient to account for these experiences, and that due consideration must be given to the ways in which socio-economic categories and social mobility are represented and communicated about at both an individual and sociogenetic level. There were strong indications in several of the interviewees' responses that an individual's class background is often believed to be identity-determining and that this identity is ultimately immutable, not simply in a superficial or structural sense but rather fundamentally and intrinsically. This was illustrated most vividly, for example, in the idea expressed by Yasmin that class identity is determined by primary socialisation and that any subsequent change appears 'unnatural'; in Aisha's notion of distinct and highly contrasting 'class personalities' and the impossibility of an individual achieving 'full' or 'true' membership of a class they were not raised in; and by Helena's belief in her own internal, inimitable and irremovable working-class self.

And yet it was also evident from very many of the interviewees' experiences that, whether the result of conscious adaptation or otherwise, 'upward' social mobility can sometimes involve significant modifications in an individual's observable behaviours and characteristics; a fact that therefore often brings it into conflict not only with the belief in a deep, non-obvious, and immutable class identity, but also with the high value that is commonly placed on the notion of a single, coherent and, above all, 'authentic' self that is impervious to context and the demands of different social interactions, and remains identical across space and time. This has been acutely observed by Lahire (2011)[15], but the inevitable tension caused by a simultaneous pressure towards change and stability that mobility often exerts is also particularly well-captured in these interviews by the experience of Martin, who evidently takes pride in both his own 'self-improvement' and the stability of his identity in the eyes of others, and reconciles them with each other through the idea of an aspirational but ultimately unchanging 'core', in contrast to merely 'acting' or 'aping' the behaviours of others, or in Paul's words, 'pretending to be something you're not'. Resonating with Friedman's (2015) findings about the sense of internal conflict experienced especially by those whose social mobility trajectories predominantly entailed or necessitated an accumulation of cultural capital, it is notable that Martin, Paul and Tom all spoke of their relatively 'low-brow' tastes, and all placed particular significance on maintaining a sense of authenticity and personal integrity.

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[15] "We well know how 'lunatics', 'weathercocks', 'opportunists' or 'chameleons', those who change their opinion and their behaviour depending on their interlocuter or the situation, are not well thought of: at the opposite pole are those whose behaviour is 'frank' and who proudly display their pride at not being moved ('influenced') by the most varied situations they encounter. Everything happens as if there were a specific symbolic and moral profit (as the very terms of inconstancy, versatility and unfaithfulness to oneself suggest) in believing oneself 'identical' or 'faithful' to oneself at every time and place, whatever the events experienced or tests undergone ('I've not changed'; 'I'm always the same'.)" (Lahire, 2011).

The difference, therefore, between the behavioural changes undergone or enacted by Martin, on the one hand, and Samuel, for example, on the other – who described deliberately altering the manner of his interactions with others according to the social context, consciously cultivating his speech and attempting to 'break the mould of what he had previously been' – is not perhaps the actual extent of these changes, or even whether they initially involve imitation (as opposed to being somehow purely and spontaneously self-generated), but rather the degree to which they are perceived to symbolise a change in category membership; if an individual's identity is understood to be profoundly shaped by their class background then any alteration in behaviour that is widely recognised to be symbolic of a different social class appears to signify a transformation of (or an 'inauthentic' and therefore futile attempt to transform) their own individual identity.

The very rich and vivid testimonies offered by Samuel, Yasmin and Aisha, clearly illustrate the fact that those from ethnic minority backgrounds are far from impervious to or unaffected by the particular salience and significance of socio-economic background in the UK. Nor was there any conspicuous pattern of differences in the representations or experiences of the interviewees according to age or gender, yet it may be of interest to note that five of the eleven female interviewees experienced varying degrees of discouragement, or even outright antagonism, either from their parents or members of their wider family, while nothing of this kind was reported by a single male interviewee. However, the very small sample size of this interview study does not permit generalisations to be made with any confidence on the basis of these differences, and the focus of this research is emphatically directed towards the qualitative content of the various representations discussed here in relation to the components of essentialism; the question of the prevalence of some these representations, meanwhile, will be the subject of the next and final empirical study in this thesis.

Chapter Five: Intuitive Beliefs about Socio-economic Categories and Social Mobility

5.1. Introduction

The previous two studies have aimed to provide a detailed qualitative insight into how the individual components of essentialism are manifested in representations of socio-economic categories and of the possibilities for movement between them, both in the UK public sphere in general and in the personal experiences and perspectives of socially mobile individuals themselves. They have also highlighted a number of instances where representations appear to illustrate a social determinist form of essentialism in thinking about socio-economic categories and category membership, yet they give little indication of the prevalence of these representations and the extent to which they may be reflected in individuals' intuitive beliefs; this is the focus of the experimental survey that comprises this final empirical chapter.

The experiment will continue to focus on the individual components identified by Haslam et. al (2000), however, as the previous chapters have argued and attempted to demonstrate, though the broadness of their particular definitions is well adapted to capturing the variety of ways in which each of them may be relevant to different social domains, they fail to distinguish between purely extrinsic or structural and inherent interpretations of the components. The former may be of interest to the extent that in some cases they might nonetheless promote an essentialist construal, yet they are not in themselves indicative of essentialism, which – whether in a causal or ideal (or 'Platonic') form – appears to require the belief in an inherent category-determining feature or quality (Newman & Knobe, 2018). Several of these descriptions – including that of inherence itself – are also rather vague and either combine different aspects of components into a single definition or focus on only a very limited conceptualisation of a component. All of which raises significant doubts as to the generalisability of their results to different category domains and different social contexts, as well as regarding the validity of their independent dimensions, which specify very particular (and arguably in some cases quite illogical and counter-intuitive) relationships between the components.

One of the most common experimental procedures in quantitative research on psychological essentialism, particularly within cognitive and developmental psychology and cognitive anthropology, consists of presenting participants with a series of vignettes and thought experiments designed to test participants' reasoning about category membership, usually in relation to a single aspect of essentialism at a time, for example naturalness, casual determinism, immutability or inductive potential (e.g. Astuti, Carey & Solomon, 2004; Gelman, 2003; Hale, 2015; Keil, 1989). Similarly, experiments based on scales of essentialist reasoning (e.g., Keller, 2005; Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Rangel & Keller, 2011; Räty et al., 2017; Soylu Yalcinkaya et al., 2017; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008) typically consist of items illustrating far more specific manifestations of different components than those described by Haslam et al. (2000), yet in the interests of internal consistency many of these scale items tend to be very similar in their focus and often exclude a number of other components, particularly in cases where essentialism is simply equated with naturalisation or biological determinism[16]. And given that the objective of these studies is usually to collapse participants' responses into a single mean score of essentialist reasoning with which to measure associations with several other variables of interest, the significance and contribution of the individual components often goes unexamined. This experiment therefore intends to combine the comprehensiveness of Haslam et al.'s (2000) influential study with the specificity of certain scale-based experiments, and alongside the insights gained from the qualitative research presented in the last two chapters, draws on both of these approaches in developing an experimental survey specifically tailored to the socio-economic domain and designed to test beliefs on different aspects of each individual component.

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[16] Gelman, Heyman & Legare (2007) use a questionnaire study specifically to examine the coherence of different kinds of essentialist beliefs, yet even here all nine questions refer only to naturalness, stability and immutability. See Hussak & Cimpian (2019), however – another rare example in the developmental literature where different aspects of essentialism are analysed independently and not aggregated into a composite measure – who employ a range of experimental and qualitative procedures to examine a slightly broader array of components.

For this experiment it will also be important to measure the effect of category labels, which have been shown to produce very significant differences in levels of essentialist reasoning (Gelman, 2003; Gelman & Roberts, 2017; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992). Rubin et al. (2014: 196) point out that although they are "often conflated with one another, social class and SES [socio-economic status] can be distinguished as separate constructs […] SES refers to one's *current* social and economic situation and, consequently, it is relatively mutable, especially in countries that provide opportunities for economic advancement. In contrast, social class refers to one's sociocultural *background* and is more stable, typically remaining static across generations" [emphasis in original]. To the extent that these distinctive meanings might be shared in lay understandings of socio-economic category membership, it may be hypothesised that the term 'social class' will be associated with a greater tendency towards essentialist reasoning than 'socio-economic status', especially since the latter term arguably suggests a more continuous conceptualisation of socio-economic differences, while in the UK 'social class' is frequently represented in terms of a system of discrete and internally homogenous categories (Emler & Dickinson, 2004).

Rubin et al. (2014) also emphasise the importance in social scientific research of including measures of subjective socio-economic status alongside objective indicators (e.g., occupation, income, level of education, etc.) since the latter may often be inconsistent with individuals' self-perceptions, and indeed subjective SES has even been demonstrated in some cases to be more reliably associated than objective measures with a number of health-related factors (Adler et al. 2000). In their study of essentialist beliefs about social class categories, Kraus & Keltner (2013) also found subjective SES scores, as well as conservative political orientation, to be significantly correlated with essentialism independently of objective measures; like Mahalingam (2003) they argue that individuals who perceive themselves to be of relatively high social status are motivated to endorse essentialist beliefs as a form of system-justification. Interestingly, however, Räty et al. (2017) – who replicated the same study in Finland – did not find an association between subjective SES and essentialist beliefs (and did not measure political orientation), yet they also excluded from their analysis the two items in Kraus & Keltner's (2013) scale that refer explicitly to biological or genetic determinism, since they were not significantly correlated with the others. Given that the latter have also been shown to be strongly associated with political conservativism (Keller, 2005), while by contrast those of a more progressive disposition may be inclined to emphasise social determinist explanations (Rangel & Keller, 2011) and that members of subordinate social categories are in fact equally likely to endorse cultural essentialism (Soylu Yalcinkaya et al., 2017), it may also be hypothesised that the most significant differences associated with either subjective SES or political orientation will be in cases where innate potential or naturalness is suggested, whereas judgements will differ the least according to these factors for social determinist forms of essentialism.

5.2. Methods

5.2.1. Participants

150 participants were recruited via Prolific, the online data collection platform, and pre-screening was employed to ensure that all were UK nationals and had a minimum approval

rating of 98% from their participation in previous research studies. All participants who completed the study were paid £1, however the data derived from those who failed a simple attention check or completed the entire study in less than 2 minutes was excluded from the analysis and further participants were recruited to maintain the original sample size. 87 of the participants in the final sample were female, 63 male; and ages ranged from 18 to 76 (*M* = 36.08, *SD* = 13.106).

5.2.2 Materials & Procedure

The survey was designed on and hosted by the Qualtrics software program, to which participants were automatically directed once they had agreed to take part in the study. They were first asked to read an information page and confirm their consent, before being randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions and presented with a randomised series of 18 survey items (1 per page) and asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point[17] Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = strongly agree*). In one condition, the category label 'social class' was used in each of the survey items (*n* = 74), while the other condition exclusively employed the term 'socio-economic status' instead (*n* = 76); in all other respects the wording of each of the 18 questions was exactly the same across both conditions.

The questions themselves were devised to reflect different aspects of each of the nine individual components of essentialism identified by Haslam et al. (2000), and were developed on the basis of both of the preceding qualitative studies in this thesis and with recourse to a number of relevant scale-based studies of essentialist reasoning, in particular Williams and Eberhardt's (2008) 'Biological Conceptions of Race' scale, Keller's (2005) 'Belief in Genetic Determinism' scale, Rangel & Keller's (2011) 'Belief in Social Determinism' scale, Soylu Yalcinkaya et. al's (2017) 'Cultural Essentialism' scale, and Kraus and Keltner's (2013) 'Essentialist Beliefs about Social Class Categories' scale. However, while these scales tend to address several different aspects of a variety of components rather than relying upon a single definition of each, as in Haslam et al. (2000), they usually include only a limited selection of them; and since the objective of these studies is typically to derive a single mean score of essentialist reasoning from the scale items as a whole – which is then used to measure correlations with other scale ratings or attitudes, for example – the relative significance of each of the components, and the different ways in which they might be manifested, remain largely obscured.

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[17] As Newman and Knobe (2018) argue, intuitions about category membership often have an ambivalent or 'dual character' nature. An analysis of such responses are beyond the scope of the present research, nonetheless it was considered preferable to enable these to be potentially accommodated within the mid-point of the scale, rather than eliminating them altogether by confining responses to a binary fixed choice.

The 18 items in this survey are therefore designed to represent two alternative forms of each of the nine individual components: *discreteness* is measured in terms of whether socio-economic categories are perceived to consist of distinctly different kinds of people, and whether there can be degrees of membership; *exclusivity* by beliefs about singularity of category membership both synchronically, in a logical sense, and diachronically, at a 'deeper' level; *informativeness* by whether the category is understood to be informative about individual identity, and can be easily inferred from embodied characteristics; *uniformity* in terms of both superficial and underlying, non-obvious similarity between category members; *inherence* is captured by whether individual identity is understood to be socially determined by category membership, and whether category membership itself is ultimately determined by an individual's inherent features; *immutability* by the belief in a fixed, inherent socio-economic identity and the stability of category-typical behaviours irrespective of ostensible changes in category membership; *stability* by perceptions of the objectivity or realism of socio-economic categories, and the temporal stability of category-typical characteristics; *naturalness* by the assumption of a shared genetic component underlying category membership, and the natural inevitability of socio-economic category differences; and, finally, *necessity* by the notion of an exclusively shared, category-determining placeholder feature, and the belief in socio-economic background as a specific feature or process necessary for 'true' category membership. Thus, for most of the components, at least one of the items (and in some cases both) presents that component in a sense that is directly relevant to an essentialist construal and clearly exceeds a merely logical, extrinsic or structural interpretation. The scores for each of these items were all orientated in the same direction, i.e. in every case '5' represents the strongest indication of an essentialist belief.

Having completed this randomised succession of items, participants were then presented with two final questions concerning their own socio-economic status and their political orientation. In the first instance, in line with other studies of essentialism in this domain that have employed the MacArthur scale of subjective SES (e.g., Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Räty et al., 2017), participants were asked to think of a ladder with 10 rungs representing people's position in society relative to others: *At the top of the ladder are the people who have the highest status, are the most educated, have the most prestigious jobs and the most wealth. At the bottom of the ladder are the people with the lowest status, are the least educated, have the least prestigious jobs or no job at all, and have the least wealth*. They were then asked to indicate their own position on this ladder, 1 being at the very bottom and 10 at the very top (M = 5.65, SD = 1.62). Finally, also on a scale of 1 to 10, they were then asked to indicate how they would describe themselves politically: 1 representing the most conservative position on the political spectrum, and 10 the most progressive position (M = 6.17, SD = 2.18).

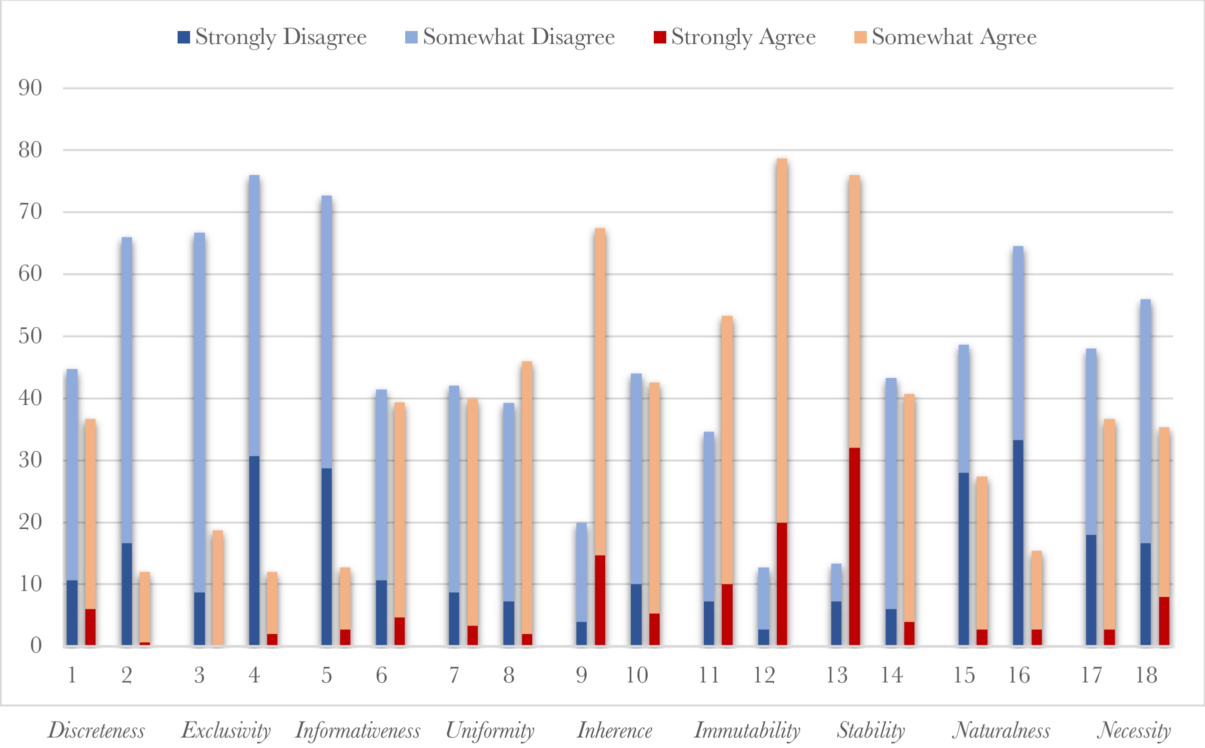
5.3. Results

Table 5.1. Item descriptions and mean ratings

	Item	*M*	*SD*
	Discreteness	**2.59**	**0.79**
1.	Individuals of different social class/socio-economic status are distinctly different kinds of people.	2.87	1.14
2.	People of a particular social class/socio-economic status can only occupy that social class/socio-economic status to the same extent as each other, rather than to varying degrees.	2.30	0.90
	Exclusivity	**2.25**	**0.70**
3.	When an individual moves into a different social class/socio-economic status they leave the previous one behind.	2.43	0.89
4.	In the course of an individual's life, they can never truly occupy more than one social class/socio-economic status.	2.07	1.00
	Informativeness	**2.53**	**0.86**
5.	Knowing a person's social class/socio-economic status can tell you who they really are.	2.14	1.03
6.	A person of one social class/socio-economic status will usually be identifiable within a group of a different social class/socio-economic status, even if they are dressed exactly the same.	2.92	1.13
	Uniformity	**2.97**	**0.86**
7.	People of the same social class/socio-economic status appear very much alike.	2.93	1.09
8.	No matter how different they might appear on the outside, deep down two people of the same social class/socio-economic status will be more similar to each other than either of them will be to someone of a different social class/socio-economic status.	3.01	1.07
	Inherence	**3.26**	**0.79**
9.	An individual's fundamental character is profoundly shaped by the social class/socio-economic status of their background.	3.58	1.05
10.	An individual's social class/socio-economic status is often ultimately determined by their own personal attributes.	2.94	1.15
	Immutability	**3.52**	**0.88**
11.	A person can take themselves out of a particular social class/socio-economic status, but they can't take that social class/socio-economic status out of themselves.	3.21	1.17
12.	Even when a person changes social class/socio-economic status, their behaviour will still be significantly shaped by the social class/socio-economic status of their background.	3.83	0.95
	Stability	**3.41**	**0.83**
13.	If no one ever used the term 'social class'/'socio-economic status' there would still be such a thing as social class/socio-economic status.	3.87	1.15
14.	Over history, the particular characteristics of people of the same social class/socio-economic status have not significantly changed.	2.95	1.07
	Naturalness	**2.37**	**0.94**
15.	People are likely to be more genetically similar to others of the same social class/socio-economic status than to people of a different social class/socio-economic status.	2.53	1.21
16.	Eliminating social class/socio-economic status differences means going against nature.	2.20	1.12

	Necessity	**2.72**	**0.95**
17.	Every individual of the same social class/socio-economic status has a particular feature in common with every other individual of that social class/socio-economic status that is not shared by individuals of a different social class/socio-economic status.	2.73	1.19
18.	In order to truly occupy a particular social class/socio-economic status it is necessary to have been raised in it.	2.71	1.26

Figure 5.1. Overall agreement/disagreement responses for each item (%)



Looking first at responses to the various component items alone, it is perhaps unsurprising that the relative significance of the individual components does not map neatly onto the division Haslam et al. (2000) found between ‘natural kind’ and ‘entitative’ clusters, given that the definitions they provide often differ substantially from the particular wording of the items used here (Table 5.1). In the present study, for example, both *exclusivity* items are concerned with intra-domain mutual exclusivity rather than exclusion from logically independent social categories, while both *immutability* items focus on stability over transformation (or stability of

Table 5.2. Responses overall and for individual category label conditions (%)

		Total (n = 150)		**'social class'** (n =74)		**'SES'** (n =76)	
Component	***Item***	*Disagree*	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Agree*
Discreteness	1	44.7	36.7	43.3	43.3	46.0	30.3
	2	66.0	12.0	64.8	13.5	67.1	10.5
Exclusivity	3	66.7	18.7	67.6	18.9	65.8	18.4
	4	76.0	12.0	75.7	10.9	76.3	13.1
Informativeness	5	72.7	12.7	74.3	10.9	71.1	14.4
	6	41.4	39.4	32.4	43.2	50.0	35.5
Uniformity	7	42.0	40.0	45.8	37.9	38.1	42.1
	8	39.3	46.0	37.8	50.0	40.7	42.1
Inherence	9	20.0	67.4	17.6	71.6	22.3	63.1
	10	44.0	42.6	44.6	44.6	43.5	40.8
Immutability	11	34.6	53.3	31.1	52.7	38.2	54.0
	12	12.7	78.7	10.9	82.5	14.4	75.0
Stability	13	13.3	76.0	6.8	86.4	19.7	65.8
	14	43.3	40.7	40.5	41.9	46.1	39.4
Naturalness	15	48.7	27.4	40.5	24.3	56.6	30.3
	16	64.6	15.4	66.2	13.6	63.2	17.1
Necessity	17	48.0	36.7	46.0	39.2	50.0	34.2
	18	56.0	35.3	43.3	44.6	68.4	26.3

social identity in spite of altered category membership) rather than the theoretical possibility of category members becoming non-members.

While the mean ratings shown in Table 5.1 (and the χ^2 comparisons below) are derived from the full range of responses, for the purpose of clarity Figure 5.1 and Table 5.2 display the percentage of 'agreement' and 'disagreement' responses only. The items which received a significant majority of agreement were those that targeted beliefs about a socially determined form of *inherence* (**9**) ($\chi^2 = 38.481$, $p = < 0.001$), *immutability* of inherent category identity (**11**) ($\chi^2 = 5.939$, $p = 0.015$) and of category-typical behaviours (**12**) ($\chi^2 = 71.540$, $p = < 0.001$), and category *stability* in an objectivist or realist sense (**13**) ($\chi^2 = 65.940$, $p = < 0.001$). But although levels of agreement for the items concerning categorisation from observable embodied characteristics (6), superficial similarity of category members (7), and inherent category-determining features (10) were all around 40% in each case, those for the other items pertaining to 'entitative' components – i.e., both forms of mutual *exclusivity* (3 & 4) and *informativeness* with regard to individual identity (5) were all very low, and in fact lower than the scores for the majority of 'natural kind' component items. More than a third of participants agreed that members of different socio-economic categories are distinctly different kinds of people (1), that the characteristics of these category members have not significantly changed over the course of history (14), that membership entails possession of an exclusively shared characteristic common to all category members (17) and that early socialisation within the category is a necessary feature for 'true' category membership (18), and over a quarter believed that category members are likely to be more genetically similar to each other than to members of other socio-economic categories (15).

Also, as is illustrated most clearly perhaps by the discrepancy in scores between the two *stability* items (13 & 14), responses to different aspects or interpretations of the same component are in many cases markedly different; in fact, the only components for which mean scores between the two items did not significantly differ were *uniformity*, *naturalness* and *necessity*. Nevertheless, along with *discreteness*, *informativeness*, and *immutability*, the paired items for each of these components were significantly positively correlated (though in almost all cases more strongly associated with at least one alternative component item – the strongest correlation, in fact, being that between socially determined *inherence* (9) and the *immutability* (or stability over category change) of category-typical behaviours (12) ($r = 0.45$, $p = < 0.001$) – while those for *exclusivity*, *inherence* and *stability* were also, albeit very weakly, correlated. (Appendix 5). Indeed, Cronbach's measure of internal consistency suggests that the survey as a whole would constitute a relatively reliable scale ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Preliminary testing established that there was no significant effect of subjective socio-economic status, however there was shown to be a modest but significant inverse association between political orientation and mean total scores ($r = 0.26$, $p = 0.001$), i.e., those who rated themselves towards the more progressive end of the political spectrum had lower mean total scores than those at the conservative end. In order to investigate interactions between the components, the alternative category labels ('class' and 'socio-economic status') and participants' political orientation, therefore, a composite score for each of the nine components was generated, combining the individual scores of the relevant paired items (Table 5.1). Meanwhile, dividing the entire sample of participants between a 'conservative/moderate' group (those who rated their political orientation between 1 and 6), and a 'progressive' group (those who placed themselves between 7 and 10) very conveniently yielded two groups with identical population sizes ($n = 75$). This enabled a 2 (*category label*) x 2 (*political orientation*) x 9 (*components*, repeated) MANOVA to be run. There were no significant outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot, and there was homogeneity of variances for each of the components as assessed by Levene's test of equality of variances. There was no significant three-way interaction between category label, political orientation and component, nor any significant two-way interactions between any of the variables. However, there was a significant effect of political orientation alone on mean scores ($F = 13.912$, $p = < 0.001$).

Further analysis revealed that all mean scores were higher in the 'conservative/moderate' group, and significantly so for five of the nine components: *discreteness* ($F = 7.591$, $p = 0.007$), *uniformity* ($F = 8.517$, $p = 0.004$), *inherence* ($F = 7.592$, $p = 0.007$), *naturalness* ($F = 16.062$, $p = < 0.001$), and *necessity* ($F = 4.375$, $p = 0.038$). For a more detailed view, the components were then disaggregated again into each of their paired items, and significantly higher mean scores in the 'conservative/moderate' group (Table 5.3, below) were shown to hold true for six of the individual component items: inherent *discreteness* (**1**) ($F = 6.483$, $p = 0.012$), diachronic *exclusivity* of 'true' category membership (**4**) ($F = 9.575$, $p = 0.002$), underlying, non-obvious *uniformity* (**8**) ($F = 11.001$, $p = 0.001$), category-determining *inherence*

(**10**) (*F* = 15.420, p = < 0.001), and both *naturalness* items (**15** & **16**) (*F* = 6.069, *p* = 0.015; *F* = 15.883, *p* = < 0.001).

Although there was no significant difference between category label conditions overall, mean scores were higher in the 'social class' condition for 13 of the individual component items, (Table 5.4, below) though significantly so for only two of them: category *stability* (13) (*F* = 8.832, *p* = 0.003) and *necessity* of background (18) (*F* = 4.840, *p* = 0.029).

Table 5.3. Mean scores for binary political groupings

		'conservative/moderate'		*'progressive'*	
Component	**Item**	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
Discreteness	1	3.11	1.03	2.64	1.20
	2	2.41	0.92	2.19	0.88
Exclusivity	3	2.36	0.83	2.51	0.95
	4	2.32	1.02	1.83	0.94
Informativeness	5	2.29	1.01	1.99	1.03
	6	2.97	1.11	2.87	1.14
Uniformity	7	3.04	1.10	2.81	1.07
	8	3.29	1.01	2.73	1.06
Inherence	9	3.57	1.16	3.59	0.93
	10	3.29	1.01	2.59	1.19
Immutability	11	3.25	1.20	3.17	1.14
	12	3.83	0.98	3.84	0.93
Stability	13	3.96	1.14	3.79	1.15
	14	3.08	1.05	2.83	1.08
Naturalness	15	2.77	1.20	2.29	1.18
	16	2.55	1.18	1.85	0.94
Necessity	17	2.92	1.09	2.55	1.26
	18	2.84	1.33	2.57	1.18

Table 5.4. Mean scores for category label conditions

		'social class'		*'socio-economic status'*	
Component	**Item**	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
Discreteness	1	2.95	1.2	2.80	1.08
	2	2.32	0.91	2.28	0.90
Exclusivity	3	2.43	0.89	2.43	0.90
	4	2.11	0.94	2.04	1.06
Informativeness	5	2.11	0.96	2.17	1.10
	6	3.09	1.06	2.75	1.17
Uniformity	7	2.89	1.08	2.96	1.10
	8	3.11	1.00	2.92	1.13
Inherence	9	3.68	1.09	3.49	1.00
	10	2.99	1.13	2.89	1.18
Immutability	11	3.20	1.12	3.22	1.22
	12	3.91	0.88	3.76	1.02
Stability	13	4.15	0.92	3.61	1.29
	14	3.01	1.08	2.89	1.07
Naturalness	15	2.64	1.07	2.43	1.34
	16	2.14	1.08	2.26	1.16
Necessity	17	2.78	1.20	2.68	1.18
	18	2.93	1.24	2.49	1.24

5.4. Discussion & Conclusion

To summarise the results described above, the beliefs that were most strongly endorsed in the sample as a whole were the notion that an individual's fundamental character is profoundly shaped by their socio-economic background (9); that a person can take themselves out of a particular socio-economic category but they can't take that category membership out of themselves (11); that even when an individual moves into a different category their behaviour will still be significantly shaped by their original socio-economic category membership (12); and that even if no one ever referred to particular socio-economic category labels those categories would still continue to exist (13). Each of these beliefs were shared by a majority of the participants across both category label conditions – indeed the most stable was item 11, the phrasing of which might have been expected to appear rather less intuitive when the term 'socio-economic status' was used – however there was a significant difference between these conditions for the last (13); while 65.8% of the participants assigned to the SES condition agreed that there would still be such a thing as socio-economic status if no one ever used the term, for 'social class' this figure rose to 86.4%. One explanation for the high level of endorsement for this item might be that it was commonly interpreted to mean that socio-economic inequalities themselves exist independently of how they are measured or referred to, rather than that the categories designated by these labels have a mind-independent existence of their own, however the disparity between these conditions still suggests that people in the UK might be significantly less likely to regard 'social class' simply as an analytical or conventional form of categorisation compared with 'socio-economic status'.

The fact that endorsement appeared to be higher in the 'social class' condition for the majority of the items may be thought to provide a superficial degree of support for the hypothesis that this category label has a greater tendency to promote an essentialist construal of socio-economic categories, however the only other item for which differences between category label conditions were significant was the notion that it is necessary to have been raised within a particular socio-economic category in order to 'truly' be a member of it (18). Political orientation, on the other hand, had a significant effect on more than half of the components and six of the individual items: the belief that members of different socio-economic categories are distinctly different kinds of people (1); that an individual can never 'truly' be a member of more than one socio-economic category in the course of their life (4); that members of the same category are inherently more similar to each other than to others (8); that an individual's socio-economic category membership is often ultimately determined by their own personal attributes

(10); that members of the same category are more likely to be genetically similar to each other (15); and that eliminating socio-economic category differences means going against nature (16). The scores for all of these items were significantly higher for those of conservative or moderate political orientation than for those who rated themselves at the progressive end of the spectrum. Higher endorsement for both *naturalness* items (15 & 16), category-determining inherent properties (10), and perhaps also inherent *discreteness* (1), appear to support the hypothesis that the most significant differences according to political orientation would be for those items that suggest innate potential and naturalness – as perhaps do the very small differences between these conditions for a number of items that are either of an explicitly social determinist nature or are ambiguous (e.g., 9, 11 and 12) – yet it should be acknowledged that this does not satisfactorily account for the significantly higher scores in the 'conservative/moderate' group for *exclusivity* of 'true' membership (4) and underlying non-obvious *uniformity* (8), which might equally have been perceived in a social determinist sense.

In attempting to combine the relative specificity of scale-based studies of psychological essentialism with Haslam et al.'s (2000) more comprehensive approach to the structure of essentialist thinking, this final empirical study has sought to discover the extent to which the representations highlighted in the qualitative research presented in the previous two chapters are reflected in individuals' intuitive beliefs about socio-economic categories and the crossing of socio-economic boundaries in the UK. The fact that two of the five component items that were most widely endorsed by the participants in this study – socially determined inherence and immutability of category-typical characteristics – are both of an explicitly social determinist nature, and that support for both of the naturalness items was relatively low (although that for genetic similarity was still somewhat higher than anticipated), arguably appears to corroborate the qualitative findings and lend support to the expectation that socio-economic categories are more likely to be essentialised along a social determinist rather than biological dimension.

Endorsement for early socialisation as a necessary feature may seem surprisingly low by comparison, notwithstanding the fact that this was one of the two items on which category label had a significant effect, given that even in the 'social class' condition, where the percentage of agreement was far higher than in the 'socio-economic status' condition, it still only marginally outweighed disagreement. Interestingly, however, the only other item concerned with 'true' category membership – diachronic exclusivity – received the lowest support of all the items, suggesting perhaps that this is a rather less pervasive concept than the qualitative findings might suggest. On the other hand, the notion that a person can take themselves out of a particular socio-economic category but can't take that category out of themselves – inspired directly by the comments of a single interviewee in the previous study – received a surprisingly high level of endorsement, particularly in the 'socio-economic status' condition, and yet the implicit logic of these two items is not entirely dissimilar.

The effect of the category label conditions was also far less significant than anticipated. As discussed in the introduction, Rubin et al. (2014) point out that whereas 'socio-economic status' is typically understood as mutable and referring only to an individual's current socio-economic position, 'social class' is usually interpreted as being more stable and strongly influenced by a person's socio-cultural background. Not only is it surprising therefore that endorsement is significantly higher in this condition on only two of the items, but also that on one of the few items for which agreement might be expected to be significantly higher in the 'socio-economic status' condition – that when an individual moves into a different socio-economic category they leave the previous one behind – there is in fact no difference at all between the conditions. Conversely, the effect of political orientation was greater than hypothesised, with 'conservative/moderate' participants showing significantly higher endorsement not only for those items suggesting naturalness or innate potential, but for a third of the individual items overall.

The fact that the paired items pertaining to each component received very different levels of endorsement, and were in the majority of cases only weakly correlated, highlights not only the significant variation in beliefs concerning different individual components and even different conceptualisations of the same component, which scale-based studies of essentialism typically obscure, but also provides a further indication of some of the intricacies that are almost entirely overlooked by Haslam et al.'s (2000) singular and more generic descriptions of each of the components, which are nonetheless used to support strong claims about the relationships between them in a very broad sense, such as "that beliefs in the inherence and immutability of social categories are unrelated", for example (Haslam, 2014: 492). This is argued to present a challenge to Cimpian and Salomon's (2014) definition of inherent properties as stable and enduring, but Haslam et al.'s (2000) description of immutability refers exclusively to category membership (which, as has been demonstrated, may be interpreted in a relatively superficial or purely structural sense) rather than to properties; and in fact, as mentioned above, the strongest correlation found in the present study was between socially determined *inherence* and the *immutability* (or stability over category change) of category-typical behaviours.

Finally, one limitation of this study is that due to the particular logic of each of the individual components, the majority of the items are concerned either with the nature of socio-economic category membership or that of the categories themselves, and only the exclusivity and immutability items assess beliefs about the possibilities for movement between those categories; and even those items do not address what some of the qualitative research presented in this thesis has intimated may be one of the most significant factors in people's judgments about the mutability of category membership, which is the socially mobile individual's age. Both of these issues could be addressed in future research by supplementing an experimental survey of this kind with a series of reasoning tasks or thought experiments, such as those described briefly in the introduction, but specifically modified to test social determinist beliefs.

Although a wide variety of experimental reasoning tasks have been developed and employed to test intuitive reasoning with regard to the acquisition of category membership or category-typical features – such as 'transformation' and 'discovery' paradigms (Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1989), 'adoption' and 'switched-at-birth' tasks (Astuti, 2001; Carey, Solomon & Bloch, 2001), and 'brain transplant' and 'blood transfusion' scenarios (Mahalingam, 2003; Regnier, 2015), for example – the majority of these are designed to examine intuitions about nature versus nurture or biological determinism, and the naturalisation of social categories. Even 'transformation' and 'discovery' tasks – describing the modification of an individual or entity such that it resembles a member of a different category, or the revelation that an individual or entity has the 'insides' or ancestry of a category very different from that of its appearance (Keil, 1989) – which may be of great interest and relevance to understanding beliefs about the nature of certain social categories and are well suited to capturing a social determinist form of essentialism, have seldom been used beyond developmental research exploring the differences in children's reasoning about natural kinds and artefacts.

A rare exception to this, however, is Kanovsky's (2007: 272) 'immutability task', designed to test "whether socialisation is a causal process of essence-acquisition" in people's folk-sociological reasoning about ethnic identity. By contrasting the results of this simple transformation paradigm – featuring a hypothetical individual's change of nationality during adulthood – with an adoption task, the author demonstrates strong evidence that ethnicity is believed to be determined not by birth but by early socialisation, and that this ethnic identity is subsequently immutable. Further experiments also revealed that although his informants believed an individual could have multiple ethnic identities in a relatively superficial or formal sense, at a deeper level ethnicity was largely understood to be mutually exclusive. This is consistent with the 'dual character' of many essentialist intuitions, whereby an individual or entity may be categorised differently according to superficial criteria on the one hand, and ostensibly deep non-obvious properties on the other (Newman & Knobe, 2018), and which might be of particular relevance to certain social categories – such as class, nationality, or even gender (see Brubaker, 2016) – where category membership or identity is perhaps generally agreed to be mutable in a technical or legal sense but nevertheless may often be perceived to be fixed and inalterable at a deeper level. As Hussak & Cimpian (2019: 1) conjecture with regard to nationality: "It is possible, however, that this understanding of national groups (i.e., as a formal, administrative way of partitioning the social world) is overlaid on an earlier concept according to which national groups reflect deeper, natural differences between people. Like other early concepts, this essentialist perspective on national groups (if present) may remain available to people throughout life and may even come to the fore under certain circumstances". Ambivalence about categorisation may appear to suggest belief in a potential multiplicity of memberships or identities therefore, but in fact might instead result from contradictory judgements based on different criteria; and while category judgements are often shown to be in conflict with perceptions of superficial similarity in essentialised domains (Gelman, 2003), they may be based on a notion of inherent, non-obvious similarity instead. Therefore, rather than simply comparing categorisation and similarity judgements in a general sense, it may be more revealing in future to analyse the relationship between the former and perceptions or intuitions of similarity at different (relatively superficial or deep) levels. And as both Kanovsky (2007) and Rangel and Keller (2011) have suggested, social determinist intuitions about category membership may be more complex than those based on innate potential or inheritance, since socialisation involves a large number of factors that are typically far more salient than the imperceptible mechanisms of biological transmission; thus, particularly for the socio-economic domain, it would be necessary to develop experimental procedures capable of examining intuitions about the relative impact of different socialisation processes, such as family background, peer-group, and education, for example.

General Conclusion

This thesis has sought to examine the role of psychological essentialism in representations of socio-economic categories and social mobility in the UK. In doing so, it has also attempted to glean further insights into the nature, structure, and logic of essentialist thinking itself, particularly of a social determinist dimension, through an analysis of the manifestations of the individual components of essentialism and the relationships between them. Much psychological research assumes a close, if not identical, relationship between essentialism with regard to social categories and naturalisation, however the present work intends to provide support for the argument (e.g., Kanovsky, 2007; Rangel & Keller, 2011) that unlike inherence, naturalness is neither a necessary nor sufficient component of essentialist thinking. Social determinist beliefs, far from referring to the influence of merely extrinsic factors (Haslam, 2014), in fact demonstrably conform to Gelman's (2003) description of the three features that unite essentialist beliefs: that the essence is understood to be transferable; that this transfer occurs early in development, such that the relevant characteristics are acquired by category members during a formative period; and that once the transfer has taken place it is very difficult to remove or change. Though Haslam et al.'s (2000) study of essentialist beliefs about social categories remains one of the most comprehensive approaches to the complex structure of essentialism, and has served as a very useful basis for all three of the studies in this thesis – from which to develop a more nuanced understanding of each of the individual components – many of the findings presented here, along with the arguments referred to above, appear to cast significant doubt on the validity of their independent dimensions, in which inherence is assumed to be an aspect of entitativity only and is weakly correlated with those components understood to constitute natural kind beliefs: namely discreteness, immutability, stability, naturalness, and necessity.

Rather than simply attempting to identify examples of essentialist thinking per se, by focussing attention on the manifestation of these individual components in social representations of socio-economic categories and social mobility in the UK public sphere, the first study in this thesis was able to develop a more specific insight into the logic of the components and some of the relationships between them in the context of mass communication regarding this domain, and then to employ this more nuanced understanding to capture a range of representations relevant to essentialism, and more specifically to a social determinist view of socio-economic category membership. These findings were then used to construct the topic guide for the second qualitative study, which employed in-depth semi-structured interviews with socially mobile individuals themselves, to gain a deeper and more detailed comprehension of these representations and the ways in which they may be reproduced, shared or contested at a microgenetic level, as well as to probe further into the specific logic of the components of essentialism within the context of the socio-economic domain in the UK. Together these qualitative studies identified a number of social determinist representations concerning socio-economic category membership and social mobility, the most vivid of which were perhaps not always the most widely shared; for example those concerning the development or inheritance of certain physiological or physiognomic features arising from – and unmistakably informative about – the experience of either a significant degree of privilege or deprivation; or the emergence of specific and highly-contrasting class-based personalities. However, far more pervasive than either of these was a more general representation of the determining influence of an individual's socio-economic background; the crystallisation, often at a very young age, of an ostensibly immutable and irremovable, underlying 'class identity'; and of the inherent inauthenticity or 'unnaturalness' of any conscious and intentional effort to alter this identity or category membership.

In turn, the qualitative findings were then used to develop an experimental survey to gauge the prevalence of several of these representations in a far larger sample, and the extent to which they may be reflected in individuals' intuitive beliefs. Endorsement was found to be strongest for beliefs concerning socially determined inherence, stability over transformation, immutability of socially determined characteristics, and category stability. The effect of alternative socio-economic category labels – 'social class' and 'socio-economic status' – was weaker than anticipated, while political orientation in fact had a greater effect than was hypothesised, with 'conservative/moderate' participants showing significantly higher endorsement for a third of the individual component items.

This thesis also hopes to make a useful contribution to sociological research on the experience of social mobility, which typically focuses on the concept of habitus to explain the alienation and internal conflict sometimes felt by socially mobile individuals. As each of the studies presented here have illustrated, this often misguided preoccupation with internalised, pre-reflexive dispositions is insufficient and overlooks the influence of pervasive socially-shared representations concerning the nature of socio-economic categories in the UK and the possibilities for movement between them. Consistent with much of the prevailing political rhetoric surrounding social mobility, one of the extracts quoted in the first empirical study enjoins readers to 'create a country where who you are and what you can do trumps where you came from.' Yet, from a social determinist perspective, the flaw in this meritocratic ideal is that who a person is and where they come from are often believed to be profoundly and inextricably entwined.

In attempting to integrate the perspective of Social Representations Theory with the framework of Cognition and Culture research on psychological essentialism, this research has sought to combine the advantages of a detailed examination of both the implicit logic and structure of essentialism understood as a ubiquitous cognitive bias – shaping, but also significantly shaped by, culturally-specific representations of different social and natural domains – and the contextual nuances illustrated in its empirical manifestations within a modern, domestic society, along with the various pragmatic functions or representational projects they may serve at both sociogenetic and microgenetic levels of analysis. For example, in facilitating the formation, solidarity, or mobilisation of specific social groups, or – as in the case of one of the interviewees in the second qualitative study – simply offering emotional and psychological relief by providing a lens through which to interpret the behaviour of others. This research has focused predominantly on how the logical and structural aspects of essentialist thinking are revealed in social representations, however future work could go much further in using the conceptual tools of SRT to investigate how novel representations are anchored in and thrive alongside pre-existing ways of thinking, which themselves appear to be shaped by an essentialising bias or heuristic. One example, intimated separately in both of the qualitative studies, is the increasingly popular notion of a gender identity that is fully decoupled from the concept of biological sex, and yet is often considered to be both innate and immutable. Meanwhile, further research into Belief in Social Determinism could potentially explore contemporary anti-racist discourse, which has been shown to touch on a form of closely-related 'historical essentialism' (Brubaker, 2018); both of these forms of representation – one focused on determination by early socialisation, the other by 'lived experience' – often appear to involve a complex combination of category and individual essentialism, which so far has received very little theoretical and empirical attention, as indeed has the relationship between causal and 'ideal' or 'Platonic' types of essentialist thinking, both of which may be relevant to these domains.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Frequencies of coded/cross-coded extracts by components in initial coding stages

1st	***discrete***	***exclusive***	***informative***	***uniform***	***inherent***	***immutable***	***stable***	***natural***	***necessary***
discrete	351								
exclusive	171	300							
informative	117	149	275						
uniform	154	141	121	272					
inherent	74	78	58	52	195				
immutable	65	75	51	42	77	178			
stable	79	64	48	43	39	54	141		
natural	30	22	29	21	54	40	24	83	
necessary	18	21	20	17	14	14	14	5	42

2nd	***discrete***	***informative***	***exclusive***	***uniform***	***inherent***	***immutable***	***stable***	***natural***	***necessary***
discrete	372								
informative	149	327							
exclusive	197	172	308						
uniform	172	141	140	260					
inherent	73	67	77	51	184				
immutable	65	50	78	36	62	153			
stable	65	44	51	36	28	51	120		
natural	28	57	26	19	56	30	20	82	
necessary	18	19	21	12	11	9	11	5	37

Appendix 2: Initial descriptive coding frame

COMPONENT CODE	SUB-CODE
Discreteness	*Categorical-Social*
	Cultural
	Economic
	Internal
	Physiological-Somatic
	Political
	School-University
	Spatial
	Temporal
Exclusivity	*Alternative Class*
	Characteristics-Culture
	Location-Residence
	Nationality-Ethnicity
	Occupation
	Perspective-Politics
	School-University
Uniformity	*Aptitude-Attainment*
	Background-Upbringing
	Characteristics-Culture
	Community-Group
	Fate
	Occupation
	Perspective-Politics
Inherence	*Aptitude*
	Aspiration
	Blood-Bones
	Confidence-Ease
	DNA-Genes
	Luck
	Mental-Psychological
	True Identity-Authenticity
	Warmth-Compassion
Immutability	*Constrained-Impeded*
	Deficient
	Innate-Inherited
	Socially Determined
	Stable over Transformation
Stability	*Categories*
	Characteristics
	Class System
	Determined-Inherited
Informativeness	*Characteristics-Behaviour*
	Culture
	Education-Intelligence
	Location
	Occupation
	Perspective-Politics
	Physiology-Health
Naturalness	*Aptitude*
	Biological
	Health-Lifespan
	Inheritance
	Real-Authentic
Necessity	*Accent*
	Cultural Capital
	Economic Capital
	Occupation
	Parents-Upbringing
	School-University
	Social Capital

Appendix 3: Information Form for interviewees

LSE Psychological and Behavioural Science

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

Participant Information Form

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Before deciding to participate it is important for you to have an understanding of why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take your time in reading the following information. If there is anything which is not clear or there are any questions you have, please feel free to ask.

What is this research about?
This research project is concerned with experiences of and perspectives on social mobility. The objective of this interview is to develop an understanding of the views, beliefs, thoughts and feelings of individuals who have experienced social mobility in some form – whether 'upward' or 'downward'; short- or long- range; and whether as a result of their employment, income, education or social and cultural activities.

Who is doing this research?
My name is Neil Carter (n.carter1@lse.ac.uk), I am a PhD candidate at the London School of Economics, conducting research in the Department of Psychological and Behavioural Science under the supervision of Professor Sandra Jovchelovitch (s.jovechelovitch@lse.ac.uk) and Professor Bradley Franks (b.franks@lse.ac.uk). My PhD is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

What will participation involve?
Participation will simply involve an individual interview lasting approximately 1 hour, during which I will ask questions concerning your own individual experience of social mobility and your views on a number of closely related subjects.

What about confidentiality?
With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded, however the recording will not be listened to by anyone other than myself; it is solely for the purpose of transcription, during the process of which any identifying details will be anonymised or removed. Once the interview has been transcribed and fully anonymised, the audio recording will be erased.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The LSE Research Privacy Policy can be found at: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.1.pdf

The legal basis used to process your personal data will be “Legitimate interests”. The legal basis used to process special category personal data (e.g., data that reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, health, sex life or sexual orientation, genetic or biometric data) will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes.

To request a copy of the data held about you please contact: glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk

What if I have a question or complaint?

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact the researcher, Neil Carter, at N.Carter1@lse.ac.uk. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the LSE Research Governance Manager via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk.

If you are willing to participate, please sign the Consent Form. You may keep this Information Sheet for your records.

Appendix 4: Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Project: Experiences of and perspectives on social mobility

Researcher: Neil Carter, PhD Psychological and Behavioural Science, London School of Economics, N.Carter1@lse.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Sandra Jovchelovitch, Professor of Social Psychology, London School of Economics, S.Jovchelovitch@lse.ac.uk

To be completed by the Research Participant. Please answer each of the following questions:

Do you feel you have been given sufficient information about the research to enable you to decide whether or not to participate in it?	**Yes**	**No**
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about the research?	**Yes**	**No**
Do you understand that your participation is voluntary, and that you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason?	**Yes**	**No**
Are you willing to take part in the research?	**Yes**	**No**
Do you consent to the interview being audio-recorded?	**Yes**	**No**
Will you allow the researcher to use anonymized quotes in presentations and publications?	**Yes**	**No**
Will you allow the anonymized data to be archived to enable secondary analysis and training of future researchers?	**Yes**	**No**

Participants Name:____

Participant's Signature:____________________________________ **Date:**____________

If you would like a copy of the transcript or research report, please provide your email address:

Appendix 5: Correlations between individual component items

	Discreteness		*Exclusivity*		*Informativeness*		*Uniformity*		*Inherence*		*Immutability*		*Stability*		*Naturalness*		*Necessity*	
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**
1	–																	
2	.174*	–																
3	0.008	0.046	–															
4	.236**	0.138	0.084	–														
5	.272**	.279**	0.145	.276**	–													
6	.237**	0.116	-0.025	.231**	.276**	–												
7	.354**	.255**	-0.029	.177*	.243**	.269**	–											
8	.337**	.218**	0.001	.274**	.425**	.213**	.232**	–										
9	0.123	0.056	-0.041	0.010	.222**	0.147	.243**	0.149	–									
10	0.040	0.069	0.045	0.004	.284**	0.058	0.093	0.093	0.018	–								
11	.282**	0.117	-0.128	.301**	.293**	.426**	.219**	.401**	.243**	0.010	–							
12	.326**	0.090	-0.080	.217**	.284**	.219**	.183*	.352**	.453**	-0.034	.371**	–						
13	-0.002	-.183*	-0.110	0.072	0.055	0.039	-0.050	0.100	.189*	0.060	0.080	.196*	–					
14	0.154	.174*	0.056	0.128	.183*	.169*	.228**	0.089	0.030	0.025	0.019	0.091	0.110	–				
15	.281**	.300**	0.151	.188*	.294**	.297**	.355**	.269**	0.145	0.157	.227**	0.060	0.058	.200*	–			
16	.241**	0.000	0.007	0.095	0.156	.205*	0.150	.195*	0.089	0.124	.178*	0.088	0.025	0.075	.302**	–		
17	.401**	.251**	0.021	0.084	.416**	0.125	.313**	.305**	0.152	.170*	.201*	.187*	-0.025	0.075	.235**	0.117	–	
18	.320**	.220**	-0.149	.305**	.255**	.292**	.161*	.363**	.181*	-0.054	.382**	.363**	0.044	.254**	.227**	-0.001	.204*	–

*. Correlation is significant at <0.05 (2-tailed)

**. Correlation is significant at <0.01 (2-tailed)