

Abstract

“Breaking The Glass Ceiling? Social Mobility into the British Elite”

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The main aim of this article is to explore the internal differentiation of the contemporary *British* elite, and in particular the place of the upwardly mobile within it. In doing so, we draw upon Savage et al's (2013) dual analysis of the BBC Great British Class (web) Survey (GBCS) and parallel GfK face-to-face survey, which identified a clearly distinguishable British 'elite' set apart by its vastly superior stocks of not only economic capital, but also cultural and social capital. While the self-selecting nature of the GBCS web survey means it cannot be treated as a nationally representative sample, the skew was heavily directed toward the highly-educated, occupationally successful and economically well-off. This means that members of the elite were highly overrepresented in the GBCS, providing a unique opportunity to probe the upper reaches of the class structure. Drawing on this unusually large sample of the British elite (N = 35,194), we aim to answer three main research questions. First, we examine the degree of social closure in this elite, and whether mobility is more restricted in some occupational sections than others. Second, we look at whether those who have been upwardly mobile into the elite are significantly different from those situated there from childhood. More specifically, we ask - does a glass ceiling prevent the mobile from achieving the very highest levels of economic, social and cultural capital? And finally, we switch our focus from the different capitals of the mobile to the more experiential aspects of their upward trajectory. Drawing on a number of attitudinal measures, we explore whether entering the elite has been a smooth and straightforward experience or whether it may be associated with hidden injuries or costs.