

Breaking The Glass Ceiling? Social Mobility into the British Elite

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Introduction

In a Hawaiian resort four well-groomed men puffing on expensive cigars and resplendent in white dinner jackets settle down to a nice glass of Chateau de Chassilier. Thus starts Monty Python's classic 1968 'Four Yorkshiremen' sketch about a group of working class men reflecting on their ascent into Britain's social elite. But rather than an exercise in self-congratulation, it is soon clear that this an exchange of childhood reminiscences – and one in which the stakes revolve around proving one's proletarian origin rather than privileged destination. 'We used to live in a tiny, tumble-down 'ouse with great 'oles in t'roof', John Cleese tells us in a distinctly ropery Yorkshire accent. "'ouse!', exclaims Graham Chapman in marginally improved dialect. 'You were lucky to 'ave an 'ouse. We used to live in one room. All 26 of us'. From here a ludicrous race to the bottom ensues, with boasted familial dwellings stretching from corridors to lakes to shoe boxes.

The sketch of course has the familiar ring of Python absurdity, but its enduring appeal (it's been repeated verbatim by countless comedians since) lies in the fact that it also carries a pertinent thread of social commentary. It highlights the complex and peculiarly British journey of long-range upward mobility, where things are not always as they seem. The four men's cultural accoutrements – their wine, cigars and clothes – give the initial impression of a very smooth adaptation into the ranks of the privileged. Yet this is soon disrupted by the conversation, which betrays an aggressive romanticisation of working-class roots. What is less clear, however, and what the Pythons leave open to interpretation, is whether this collective nostalgia is an expression of reverse snobbery or simply a reaction to feeling like perennial outsiders in their elite destination. But while this ambiguity may be a key ingredient of comic success, it also raises important social scientific questions about British elites, about their degree of social and cultural closure, and about the experiences of those who rise to join their ranks. It is precisely these questions that this article aims to address.

After a long period of neglect (Savage and Williams, 2008) the sociological study of elites is currently experiencing somewhat of a revival (Khan, 2012: 367). Fuelled by evidence that those at the top are increasingly pulling away from the rest of the population, a number of recent studies have sought to interrogate the 'super-rich' (Atkinson and Piketty, 2007; Majima and Warde, 2008; Volscho and Kelly, 2012), 'occupational elites' (Lebaron, 2008; Griffiths et al, 2010 Woljick, 2012;) and in particular a new 'corporate elite' forged around the financial services sector (Beaverstock and Hall, 2013; Savage et al, 2013). In these studies, researchers have typically focused on specific dimensions of elite power, ranging from economic income and wealth (Hills et al, 2010) to more opaque forms of cultural privilege (Khan, 2012) and social capital (Bond, 2012).

Notably absent from this recent resurgence in elite research, however, is enquiry focusing on movement *into* the ranks of the rich and powerful. In Britain, for example, despite a high-profile political interest in social mobility, attention has been largely restricted to scrutinising *general rates* of mobility or movement into generalized groups such as 'the service class' or 'the professions' (Goldthorpe and Mills, 2008; Milburn 2012). While this research remains illuminating, it elides the way in which social closure may be particularly strong at the upper echelons of the social hierarchy, and how in turn inherited capital may be implicated in the continuing reproduction of privilege and power (Giddens and Stamworth, 1974; Parkin, 1979; Useem and Karabel, 1986; Bourdieu, 1996). There *has* been some insightful research in this area, albeit elsewhere in Europe (Hartmann, 2000; Flemmen, 2012). Looking at the Norwegian 'Upper Class', for example, Flemmen finds that volume of inherited capital is the 'key line of division' within the elite. While those with higher origins occupy the most lofty positions in social space, those who have been upwardly mobile tend to have much lower levels of both economic and cultural capital.

Drawing inspiration from these findings, 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.

Social Mobility in Contemporary Britain

Over the last 20 years the goal of increasing social mobility has become one of the rare points of convergence among the UK's major political parties (Payne, 2012). This was underlined in 2010 with the setup of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, in 2011 with the establishment of a Coalition strategy to make 'improving social mobility the principal goal' of social policy (Cabinet Office, 2011: 5), and again recently with the 'State of the Nation Report' (2013) which reiterated the Government's commitment to increasing social mobility. At the root of these policy commitments is a widely-held anxiety that social mobility is declining in the UK. This has been fuelled by a group of high-profile economists (Blanden et al, 2004; 2005; 2007) whose work has pointed to a decrease in intergenerational upward income mobility. Drawing on data from the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 National Cohort Study (BCS), Blanden et al (2004; 2005) have found that income mobility has

fallen for those sons born in 1970 compared with those born in 1958. However, these findings have been strongly disputed by some sociologists (Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007; Goldthorpe and Mills, 2008; Goldthorpe, 2013). These authors stress the importance of measuring upward mobility in terms of occupational class rather than income, and using this approach find that absolute and relative mobility rates have stayed fairly constant over the same period, with Lambert et al (2008) even suggesting a small increase in social mobility over the longer historical period of 1800-2004.

While this heated debate over rates of mobility remains understandably central to political discourse, it is also restrictive. In particular, the focus has remained fixated on *general* rates of mobility (or inflow and outflow rates into the 7 main NS-SEC categories), rather than examining mobility into smaller groups such as the elite. Indeed, it is striking that no recent study of British intergenerational mobility (based on occupation *or* income) has reported mobility rates into elite groups – even when the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) clearly demarcates an elite occupational grouping (1.1) of ‘large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations’. One obvious reason for this is that the sample sizes of most standard nationally representative surveys are simply not large enough to adequately probe such inter-class differentiation (Savage, 2010).

In this way, the particular selection bias of the GBCS presents a unique opportunity to unravel relations within a sociologically significant but smaller ‘micro class’ such as the elite (Grusky, 2008). For example, while the initial latent class analysis (LCA) conducted by Savage et al (2013) on the GfK data clearly identified an ‘elite’ within British society - representing 8% of the population - when the GBCS data was appended to this GfK data it revealed that the proportion of the elite in the web survey was much higher at 22% (n = 35,194). This therefore provides a unparalleled resource from which to probe the internal makeup of the contemporary British elite.

It is important to reiterate that in their preliminary analysis Savage et al (2013) note that the main distinguishing factor of the elite is their superior stocks of economic, cultural and social capital:

Their mean household income is £89k, almost double that of the next highest class, and the average house price is £325k, considerably higher than any other class. Their average savings are also exceptionally high, well over double that of any other class. In terms of social and cultural capital, the elite have close to the highest number of social contacts, score the highest on 'highbrow' cultural capital, though by a less marked margin than for their economic capital, and have moderately high scores on emerging cultural capital – so it would be unwise to just see them as highbrow. Membership of the elite is associated with other social advantages. They have the lowest proportion of ethnic minorities and the highest proportion of graduates (Savage et al, 2013: 233).

Building on this initial discovery and preliminary description, the primary aim of this paper is to deepen our understanding of this elite group by investigating its internal composition. We therefore report not just general rates of mobility into the elite, but we also draw on the granular detail provided by the GBCS to examine whether mobility into the elite is more or less restricted in certain occupations and certain geographical areas of the UK.

An Enduring Glass Ceiling?

While existing literature may give us little insight into *rates* of mobility into elites, a number of studies do suggest that even when individuals are successful in joining such groups they rarely reach the very top. This is particularly evident in research that focuses on forms of economic, social and cultural capital, rather than occupational class. For example, Blanden, Gregg and Macmillan's (2012) work on income mobility has repeatedly illustrated the way in which potential gains in economic capital tend to drop off the further the upwardly mobile move up the income scale. Similarly, Li et al (2008) detect a similar trend in terms of mobility and social capital. They find that those who are upwardly mobile into the service class have lower levels of both 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital than those born into this class. The immobile thus

have higher status social contacts, their contacts span a larger status distance, they are more involved in civic associations, and they have higher levels of social trust. And finally, a number of studies (Denekindt and Roose, 2011; Friedman, 2012) have all highlighted how the upwardly mobile invariably lack the same resources of cultural capital as those born into privileged backgrounds. This is particularly acute in terms of aesthetic disposition and what Bourdieu (1986) terms 'embodied cultural capital'. Comparing the comedy tastes of the mobile and immobile middle-class, Friedman (2012) finds that the upwardly mobile display a certain 'cultural goodwill' (Bourdieu, 1984) toward highbrow humour, but this is tempered by a lingering sense of unworthiness – what Chan and Goldthorpe (2007: 1105) term 'status anxiety'. Thus although the upwardly mobile successfully develop taste for more 'legitimate' comedy, their expression of this taste is often tinged with a paralytic anxiety that they are not able to fully 'get' the humour and display a 'correct' understanding.

These studies all point to the way in which the inheritance of capital may allow intergenerationally stable elites to maintain their advantage over incoming ranks. In addition, they also highlight how some resources – particularly certain forms of cultural capital – are hard to simply 'acquire' and instead are inextricably linked to the embodied dispositions inherited by children from elite families. However, research in this area is limited and existing studies tend to be small or focus on only one form of capital rather than the relationship between all three. In this regard, again, the detailed measures on economic, cultural and social capital in the GBCS represent a unique resource. Thus the second research question this article aims to address is: in what ways are the upwardly mobile different from the stable within the British elite? Are they less likely to acquire the very highest levels of economic, social and cultural capital and, if so, is this due to a lack of desire or ambition, or because they face a glass ceiling?

The Experience of Social Mobility

It is striking that the political discourse surrounding social mobility is not only preoccupied with increasing mobility rates, but there is also an enduring assumption that upward mobility is an unequivocally progressive force. Mobility not only curtails the intergenerational continuity of

inequality, politicians argue, but most importantly its presence provides any inequity that does exist with “meritocratic legitimation” (Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007). Of course, there is nothing particularly controversial about this - a high rate of relative social mobility *is* generally considered one of the strongest indicators of an open and meritocratic society. However, the problem with a sole focus on ‘improving mobility’ is that it tends to reduce social mobility to a very narrow concept, one that collapses ‘achievement’ into measures of economic resources or occupational status and ignores the multi-faceted axes through which most people actually judge personal success and wellbeing (Pearce, 2012). Indeed, sociological interpretations of how mobility is actually *experienced* are highly contested. On the one hand, the more celebratory political discourse can arguably be traced back to the work of Goldthorpe (1980: 217-251), who concluded that the mobile were overwhelmingly content with the progress of their lives and rarely plagued by any cultural disequilibrium. The pivotal explanatory factor, he argued, was that these men - living in a period of fairly high absolute mobility - were invariably surrounded by others who had experienced similar trajectories and who acted as reciprocal forces of ontological security. This finding has since been echoed by Marshall and Frith (1999: 33) whose quantitative comparison of ten countries also found little evidence that mobility causes personal dissatisfaction.

However, there is also a long tradition of research that has challenged this understanding of the mobility experience. For example, a theoretical strand known as the ‘dissociative thesis’ (Sorokin, 1959; Musgrove, 1963; Stacey, 1967), which traversed both sociology and psychology in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, furthered the argument that social mobility had a largely “dissociative” effect on the individual, resulting in a higher incidence of social *and* psychological problems. Mobility, these scholars argued, usually implies a process of detachment from, and attachment to, particular class cultures. In turn, these processes may be particularly stressful because they’re often partial, leaving individuals with uncertain cultural and personal ties to two distinct social realms. Indeed, Jackson and Marsden (1962), Strauss (1971), Sennett and Cobb (1976) and Hopper (1981) all found that the upward mobile frequently experienced problems of isolation, vulnerability and mental disorder.

Although the 'dissociative thesis' was successfully challenged by Goldthorpe in the 1980s, some of the key ideas have lived on. Feminist writers such as Reay (1997), Walkerdine (1991; 2001) Skeggs (1997) and Lawler (1999) have all examined how upward mobility is particularly problematic for women, as "women's desires for, and envy of, respectability and material wealth" have long been portrayed as markers of "pretense and triviality" (Lawler, 1999: 12). These writers note that no female equivalent exists of the heroic tale of "the working-class boy made good" and instead find a widespread pain attached to female mobility. Other studies have reversed this focus, looking at the experience of upwardly mobile schoolboys. Reay (2002) and Ingram (2011) both underline the substantial psychic costs incurred by such working-class boys, who must produce an enormous amount of emotional, intellectual and interactive work to combat the misalignment between dispositions forged in the family and those needed for educational success. And finally there is also a substantial literature examining the mobility of ethnic minorities in Britain. Work here has focused on how ethnic bonds may actually act to inhibit (or present disincentives to) social mobility (Srinivasan, 1995; Peach, 2005). Rollock et al. (2011), for example, describe how upwardly mobile Black Caribbeans are often forced to abandon embodied markers associated with their 'blackness' in order to gain acceptance in the white-dominated middle-class.

Moreover, our own work (Friedman, 2014) echoes these findings. Drawing on 55 in-depth interviews with the socially mobile, we find that one's experience is heavily dependent on the *speed*, *range* and *direction* of social mobility. While those travelling at slow speeds, covering short distances, and moving towards the economic pole of social space – the children of middle management who gradually find themselves in upper management, for example - are more likely to experience psychologically smooth transitions, most in contrast experience mobility as a distinctly bumpy and non-linear ride. Indeed, among 10 long-range upwardly mobile respondents – the group most celebrated in prevailing political rhetoric – mobility was particularly emotionally difficult. Facing upwards in social space they routinely battled feelings of insecurity and inferiority, and facing downwards they were invariably met with a sense of guilt, estrangement and abandonment. Mobility, in short, brought with it a slew of hidden emotional injuries.

It's clear, then, that the subjective experience of upward mobility is highly contested. However, it is notable that none of this experiential analysis has looked at the specific experience of movement into *elite* groups. The third aim of this paper is therefore to tap this dimension using the GBCS. Of course it is not possible to capture the intricacies of the mobility experience using survey data. Instead, our more modest goal here is to focus on a set of attitudinal variables that may offer *indirect* insights into whether mobility (into the elite) has a destabilizing effect on the individual. In particular, we look at measures of class belonging, perceptions of social mobility and meritocracy, and one's own ability to 'effect change' locally and nationally.

The GBCS and an Outline of the Research

As explained in the introduction to this special issue, the data we analyse here consists of two separate surveys. The first is the *Great British Class Survey* itself, which was hosted on the BBC's Lab UK website from January 2011 to April 2013¹. The second is a follow-up nationally representative face-to-face survey conducted by the market research firm GfK. The use of both surveys is deliberate: it is the national representativeness of the relatively small GfK survey (N=1026) which allows the latent class analysis to be an estimate of the population from which it is drawn, and it is the considerable sample skew of the GBCS survey which allows investigation of the elite which the latent class analysis identifies.

It would be misleading to claim that the elite in the GBCS survey is reliably representative of the elite in Britain. Not only does Table 1 illustrate demographic discrepancies between the elite in the GBCS and the GfK – for example the elite in the GfK is considerably older – but the GBCS elite all share a common inclination to fill in an online survey, which of course is a subjective proclivity that we cannot benchmark against the GfK. However, no other survey offers such a large number of those in elite positions alongside details of their social backgrounds and an array of social and cultural questions. The most relevant analogue, for example, is the Labour Force Survey, which has only recently begun piloting questions on social background.

¹ Although we focus here on responses submitted until the date xxx

Table 1: demographic information about the elite in the GfK and GBCS surveys

	Elite: GfK	Elite: GBCS
Mean age	57	41
% female	50	38
% ethnic minority	4	10
% graduates	56	72
% with jobs in profs or management	63	71
% from prof of senior management families	52	80
% of the survey	6	22

It is important to explain how mobility into the elite is operationalized in this article. Social mobility is usually defined by looking at identical variables – usually occupation or education – that measure one’s social origin and destination. However, as we are examining mobility into an elite derived from Savage et al’s (2013) original LCA, identical measures for origin and destination are not available. In order to measure respondent’s social origin we therefore refer to the GBCS question asking respondents what kind of work the ‘main income earner’ in their household carried out when they were 14. Responses were then organized into NS-SEC categories I-VII. Respondents in the elite whose primary parental earner fell into NS-SEC classes I-II were therefore classified as intergenerationally stable members of the elite, those with parents in classes III-IV were categorized as short-range upwardly mobile members of the elite, and those with parents in classes VI-VII as long-range upwardly mobile. While we are aware that this operationalisation does not represent an ideal measure of social mobility into the elite – particularly as some respondents with parents in classes I-II may well have been short-range upwardly mobile, but also because a single question on parental occupation is likely to lead to substantial measurement error – we believe this categorization represent the best available means of investigating the major fault lines of mobility into the elite.

Results

Mobility and Closure within the British Elite

Table 2 shows the rates of social mobility into the British elite in the GBCS and Gfk surveys. It demonstrates that strong barriers to entry continue to restrict admission into Britain's most privileged groups, particularly within the GBCS sample where 80% of the elite are from families where the primary earner was in managerial and professional employment and only 7% where the primary parental earner worked in a routine or semi-routine job. Although the GBCS's lack of representativeness hampers us from comparing this finding with other studies of mobility, it is illuminating to contrast these mobility rates with those of the other classes identified in the GBCS. Here Table 2 demonstrates the disproportionately exclusive nature of the elite, which contains a significantly smaller fraction of upwardly mobile respondents than the established middle class or indeed any of the other classes.

Table 2: social origins of the latent classes from Savage et al (2013)

Latent classes	Parental class			N
	% I/II	% III/IV/V	% VI/VII	
Elite	80	13	7	35,288
Established middle class	69	20	11	69,917
New affluent workers	44	31	24	9,297
Technical middle class	70	18	11	15,382
Traditional working class	48	30	22	2,622
Emergent service workers	60	23	17	27,780
Precariat	32	28	40	1,114
Total	68	20	12	161,400

While the GBCS cannot provide representative rates of social mobility, the large sample size does allow for detailed investigation of certain pertinent dimensions of mobility. One of these concerns the way that mobility into the elite is patterned according to one's geographical location. Table 3 shows the percentage of the elite from professional and managerial backgrounds residing in individual local authorities, expressed in terms of the most exclusive 20

and the least exclusive 20. Figure 1 maps this analysis spatially, demonstrating the degree of exclusivity across the 88 local authorities (LAs) with at least 100 respondents in the elite². These analyses are highly illuminating. They demonstrate that the degree of social closure within the British elite depends significantly on where in the country one is situated. Strikingly, the elite appears to be most exclusive in central London and Oxford and Cambridge. This may illustrate that the elite is particularly hard to penetrate in areas where more is at stake, in terms of accessing and exercising political and intellectual power.

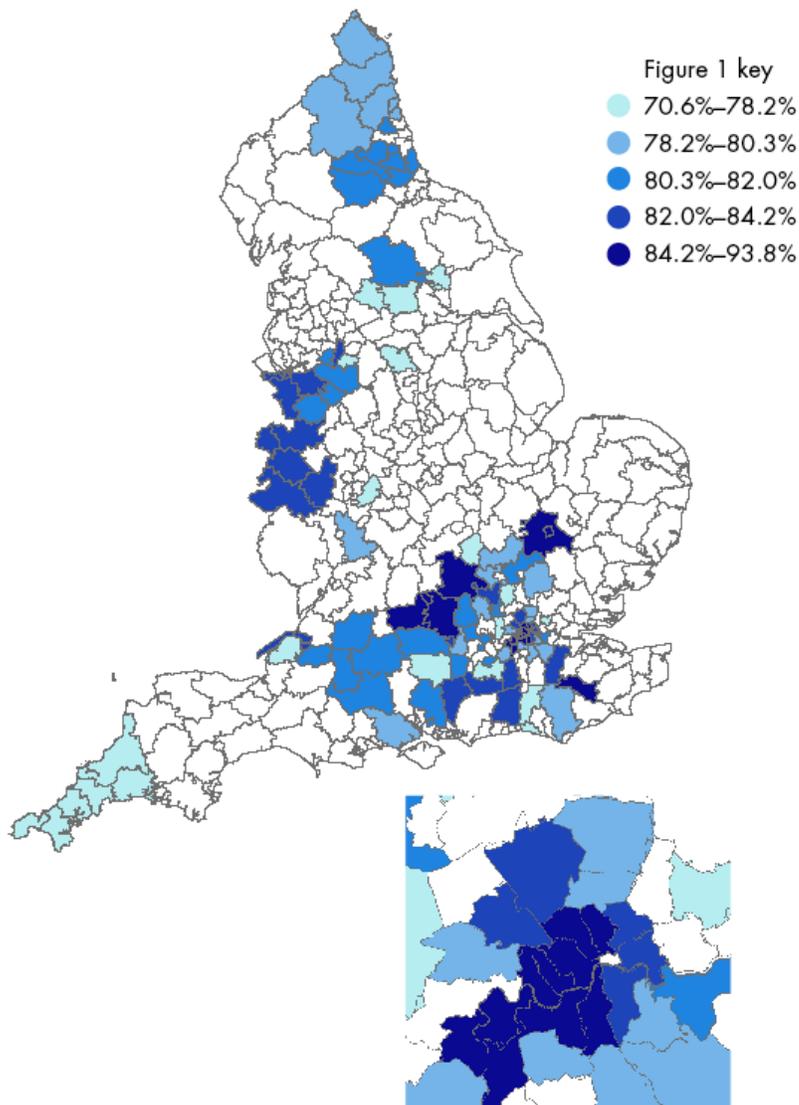
Table 3: top and bottom 20 LAs in terms of elite closure

LA	% of elite from managerial/professional backgrounds
Oxford	94
Cambridge	91
Kensington & Chelsea	91
Hammersmith & Fulham	91
Camden	89
Lambeth	89
Westminster	88
Wandsworth	87
Vale of White Horse	87
Aylesbury Vale	86
Islington	85
South Cambridgeshire	85
Tunbridge Wells	85
Kingston upon Thames	84
Richmond upon Thames	84
South Oxfordshire	84
Brent	84
East Hampshire	84
Mole Valley	84
Waverley	84
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Merton	78
St Albans	78
Guildford	78
Brighton & Hove	78
Leeds	78
Mid Sussex	78
Aberdeenshire	78
York	78
Cardiff	77

² The other 350? LAs, mainly situated in non-metropolitan areas, had to be excluded because they had too few elite respondents

Bradford	77
Sheffield	77
North Somerset	77
Aberdeen	77
Cornwall	76
Basingstoke & Deane	76
Birmingham	75
Stockport	75
Milton Keynes	72
Redbridge	72
Hillingdon	71

Figure 1: Map of England with degree of closure in Local Authorities with 100+ elite respondents.



While Savage et al (2013) identify a British elite based on measures of economic, social and cultural capital, it is important to recognize that most sociological investigations of elites have focused on particular occupational groupings. In particular, much recent attention has centered around the increasing power, resources and social closure of a ‘corporate elite’ made up largely of senior managers and those working in finance (Savage and Williams, 2008). Indeed, as Table 4 illustrates, a number of distinctly ‘corporate’ occupations such as Chief Executive Officers, Financial Managers and Marketing and Sales Directors, are among the 8 most over-represented occupations within the elite identified by Savage et al (2013). Table 4 also illustrates that rates of mobility into these occupations varies, most strikingly in terms of IT and telecommunications directors who are significantly more socially diverse than any of the other seven occupations.

Table 4: rates of mobility into the most over-represented occupations in the GBCS elite

Occupations	Parent’s class			N
	I/II	III/IV/V	VI/VII	
Chief executive officers	77	15	7	4,593
IT and telecommunications directors	66	22	11	270
Marketing and sales directors	76	15	9	899
Functional managers and directors	76	16	7	783
Barristers and judges	77	15	8	532
Financial managers	71	19	10	1,167
Dental practitioners	74	18	8	169
Advertising and PR directors	80	16	4	102

In order to look at the British elite purely in terms of a class-occupational hierarchy, though, Rose (2013) argues that NS-SEC category 1.1 - which captures ‘large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations’ – provides a better frame than Savage et al’s ‘elite’. However, as noted, standard representative surveys rarely have sample sizes large enough to meaningfully examine NS-SEC 1.1. In order to widen our investigation of mobility into the British elite, Table 5 therefore uses the GBCS to examine mobility into occupational groups categorized within NS-SEC 1.1. Moreover, it also examines mobility rates into a number of

traditionally high-status professions³. In Britain, there has been a considerable political interest (Milburn, 2012) in examining mobility into these occupations, with equitable access to ‘the professions’ often presented as the ultimate and idealised goal of raising social mobility.

Table 5: social origins across key occupations and professions

Occupations	Parent's class			N
	I/II	III/IV/V	VI/VII	
Lawyers	80	13	7	2,060
Journalists	77	14	9	1,437
Medical professionals	77	14	8	3,347
NS-SEC 1.1	73	17	10	12,140
Other business	73	17	10	6,838
Arts professionals	72	18	10	3,981
Scientists	71	18	11	3,124
Accountants	71	17	12	1,460
Engineers	69	21	10	3,520
Senior IT	69	20	11	8,999
Academics	68	21	12	2,976
GBCS average	68	20	12	161,400

Table 5 shows striking differences in the social origins of different high-status occupational groups. First, it is notable to highlight that social closure within the business world does not seem to vary much between the so-called corporate elite in NS-SEC 1.1 and those in other senior business roles. However, among professional sectors of the elite there are quite striking differences. The groups which seem to have the most social closure, with over 77% of members having parents in managerial and professional jobs, are lawyers, journalists, and medical professionals. Less than 9% of respondents from each of these groups have parents in semi-routine or routine occupations. In contrast, the occupations with fewest respondents with parents in managerial and professional jobs (in descending order) are scientists, accountants, engineers, senior IT workers, and academics.

³ These professions are as follows: scientists (SOC 2010 codes 2000-2119); engineers (2120-2129); IT professionals (2130-2139); medical professionals such as doctors, dentists, and pharmacists (2200-2219); academics (SOC 2310-2312); lawyers (2410-2413); accountants (2421); other senior business people (2421-2429); journalists (2471) and arts professionals (3410-3419).

This finding points towards an increasing distinction within the professions between the managerial and technical (Savage, 1992). More specifically, there is a visible distinction between a more managerial - even 'gentlemanly' (Miles and Savage, 2012) - version of the professions in the form of law, medicine, and journalism, which remain defiantly exclusive and a more technical but open type of professional in the form of researchers, accountants, IT workers, and IT and telecommunications directors. We can therefore say that not only do rates of mobility into elite professions vary by occupation, but they vary in ways that betray a strong historical precedent (Miles, 1999).

The Limits of Capital Gains within the Mobile Elite

The differences between those who are upwardly mobile into elite groups and those who are stable members are unlikely to consist only of differences between the occupations they work in. Indeed, while some occupations are overrepresented within the elite identified in Savage et al (2013), its occupational makeup is not its distinctive feature, with the analysis forged around the group's strikingly high stocks of social, cultural, and economic capital. However, the distributions of these capitals across different sections of the elite are not evenly spread. In this section, we investigate whether capital scores differ when we examine elite respondents from different social origins. Table 6 shows the mean scores of each of the variables used to construct Savage et al's (2013) LCA across different sections of the elite.

Table 6: scores for economic, cultural and social capital for stable and mobile elite

	Stable	Shortrange	Longrange	GBCS average
Household income	£102,530	£82,560	£85,926	£52,767
House value	£401,680	£381,779	£379,968	£204,563
Savings	£108,266	£117,163	£120,094	£36,432
Mean contact status score	55.8	53.4	52.6	50.2
Number of contacts	13.5	13.7	13.9	13.2
Range of contacts	61.7	63.6	64.3	62.9
High culture	15.9	15.7	15.3	13.2
Emerging	17.6	16.1	16.4	18.1

culture

These results demonstrate that the distribution of capitals within the elite varies significantly⁴ according to its members' social origins. Beginning with economic capital, Savage et al (2013) note that household income is arguably the most powerful single variable in determining one's social position within their 7-class model. Strikingly in this regard, Table 6 illustrates that the stable elite earn almost £20,000pa more than their mobile counterparts. This echoes the findings of Blanden, Gregg and Macmillan (2012) who note a similar drop off the further the upwardly mobile move up the income scale. Moreover, while total volume of economic *assets* are similar for stable and mobile members of the elite, they are not distributed evenly: those mobile into the elite have more in savings, whereas those stable in the elite have more expensive houses. This raises interesting questions surrounding attitudes towards money and somewhat explodes the popular perception of the 'Nouveau Riche' upwardly mobile, conspicuously spending on property in order to demonstrate their wealth (Veblen, 2006). In fact, it seems to point toward both a more cautious and conservative mobile elite, who prefer the financial security of savings, and a stable elite who perhaps cement their privilege through the inheritance of valuable familial properties.

In terms of social capital, the results are more mixed. While the stable elite tend to have considerably higher status social contacts, which may point toward important networks of power based on 'bonding' social capital (Bond, 2012), the mobile have a higher *number* of contacts. Significantly, the mobile also have a wider *range* of social contacts, defined in terms of subtracting the CAMSIS score of the lowest-status contact from that of the highest-status contact⁵. This problematises Li et al's (2008) findings and instead suggests that the socially mobile have a broader range of social contacts, and subsequently higher bridging social capital, due to being introduced to a wide variety of people at different life stages.

⁴ All references to "significant" differences or variation are based on differences being significant at the 95% level, although in most cases differences are significant at the 99.9% level, based on the assumptions of t-tests. However, p-values are based on a random sample, and as these results are derived from the GBCS sample, it is not accurate to report p-values in this context.

⁵ Those with narrow ranges of contacts will score low on this measure, and those with wide ranges will score high.

Finally, measures of cultural capital also demonstrate the advantage of the stable elite. Not only do this group have higher levels of highbrow cultural capital - in terms of high-art taste and cultural participation – but significantly they also score higher in terms of their engagement with more popular and ‘emerging’ forms of culture, such as online social networking, going to the gym and listening to dance and rap music. This is significant as it seems to contradict a number of studies that have argued that the socially mobile are more likely to be culturally omnivorous, due to the increased variety of ‘socialising agents’ they have come into contact with (Van Eijk, 1999; Lahire, 2008). The cultural differences between stable and mobile members of the elite are also underlined by focusing on a number of individual taste and lifestyle measures. Table 7 presents nine single taste and lifestyle variables where the variation between the two groups is striking. For example, the stable elite are much more likely to participate in high-art cultural activities such as opera, more likely to eat out regularly, and more likely to take part in expensive and traditionally exclusive holiday activities such as skiing and scuba diving. Similarly, there is some indication that the upwardly mobile retain an interest in cultural activities associated with their class of origin, evidenced by a much higher likelihood to ‘do DIY’ and listen to folk and metal music, tastes otherwise associated with those at the lower end of the class structure. It’s important to point out that the majority of other taste and lifestyle indicators show only negligible differences between the stable and mobile elite. Yet while this may indicate that the mobile and stable elite may share much in common culturally, the differences highlighted above indicate that important fault lines still exist, and suggest the maintenance of symbolically significant cultural boundaries between the two groups.

Table 7: salient individual taste and lifestyle variables

	Stable	Shorrange	Longrange	GBCS average
Eat out more than twice a week	14%	10%	10%	7%
Ski or scuba dive on holiday	45%	33%	33%	30%
Social networking	60%	46%	48%	70%
Attend opera	19%	16%	15%	8%

Go to the gym	64%	57%	59%	57%
Do DIY	44%	56%	54%	44%
Like folk music	41%	45%	44%	41%
Like metal	19%	23%	23%	27%
Like pop	55%	58%	60%	56%

Broadly, then, the results in this section demonstrate that members of the elite whose parents worked in managerial or professional jobs have higher levels of all three capitals than those who have been upwardly mobile into the elite. They earn more and spend more freely, have higher status social contacts, and are more culturally active in both high and emerging cultural domains. In this way, this data seems to support the proposition that a glass ceiling exists within the British elite that prevents the upwardly mobile from reaching the very top. What survey data like this cannot elucidate, however, is whether the upwardly mobile actually *desire* to reach the top of the elite. Indeed, this issue speaks to the importance of examining the social attitudes of the upwardly mobile, to which we will now turn.

Ambivalence and Scepticism Among The Mobile Elite

Using survey data to tap the subjective experience of social mobility, particularly a survey not designed to investigate this kind of question, is always going to be limited. Nevertheless, the GBCS contains three attitudinal measures that do provide some useful (if indirect) insight in this area. First, it asks respondents about their views on achieving success in Britain, broadly examining whether they think this is determined more by merit or inherited social privilege. Specifically, it asks respondents to choose three factors (from 16 options) that they think are ‘most important’ in getting a ‘good job’. Here we group seven of the possible responses into two scales. The first, which we label ‘meritocratic’ criteria, consists of the categories ‘hard work’, ‘ambition’, and ‘natural ability’. The second set, which we label ‘social reproduction’ criteria, consist of ‘being born into a wealthy family’, ‘having been to private school’, ‘having good social connections’, and ‘class’. This leaves the more ambiguous and amorphous

categories of ‘luck’, ‘level of education’, ‘having the right accent’, ‘good looks/appearance’, ‘your ethnic group’, ‘being a man’, ‘having good health’, ‘being a woman’, and ‘social skills’, which we simply term ‘other’ here. Table 8 illustrates that the upwardly mobile are less likely to think success is based on meritocracy than the stable elite and more likely than the stable elite to think success is facilitated by forms of advantage that are socially reproduced. This finding is striking as it suggests that, despite being the supposed ‘success stories’ of Britain’s meritocracy, the upwardly mobile are more skeptical about the fairness of British society. One possible explanation for this, following the findings of Friedman (forthcoming), is that in the process of achieving their success the upwardly mobile must contend with many obstacles rooted in the advantages offered to those around them from more privileged backgrounds.

Table 8: scores on meritocracy, reproduction, and other scales, by origin within the GBCS elite

	Stable	Shortrange	Longrange	GBCS average
Meritocracy	1.49	1.45	1.38	1.38
Reproduction	0.38	0.42	0.47	0.49
Other	1.12	1.11	1.12	1.10

Second, the GBCS asks respondents whether they think they are able to ‘effect change’ at a local, regional and national level. Table 9 demonstrates that the upwardly mobile are significantly less confident in their power to spearhead change at all three levels. This perhaps supports the ‘status anxiety’ hypothesis whereby the upwardly mobile - despite ascending to the upper reaches of British society – retain a certain lack of confidence concerning their own ability to wield power. Simultaneously, it may add support to Bourdieu’s arguments (1984: 411-414) about the way in which the habituses of the intergenerationally privileged are inculcated with a deeply embodied sense of confidence about their ‘right to speak’, and subsequently effect change, in the realm of politics.

Table 9: percentages feeling they can influence decision-making at different levels, by origins within the GBCS elite

	Stable	Shortrange	Longrange	GBCS average
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% influence local decision-making	0.55	0.55	0.51	0.44
% influence regional decision-making	0.35	0.34	0.31	0.28
% influence national decision-making	0.24	0.22	0.21	0.20

Finally, the GBCS asks respondents about their subjective class identity - whether they identify with a class and, if so, which class group. Table 10 illustrates two significant findings. First, it shows that the stable elite are much more likely to identify with a class than the mobile elite. Second, it demonstrates that the stable elite are much more comfortable with their privileged class position than the mobile elite, who tend to play down their elevated class position. Thus 34% of the stable elite identify as upper middle or upper class, while only 13% of the short-range and 12% of the long-range upwardly mobile elite do so. It is also telling that when the mobile do identify with the middle class it is frequently the 'lower' middle class.

Table 10: feeling of class membership, and subjective class identity, by origin within the GBCS elite

	Stable	Shorrange	Longrange	Total
% identifying with a class	61	53	52	54
% Upper class	2	1	1	0
% Upper Middle class	32	12	11	11
% Middle middle class	49	47	43	35
% Lower middle class	10	19	21	24
% Upper working class	4	13	14	14
% Middle working class	4	8	9	14
% Lower working class	0	0	1	2

These findings are highly revealing. The fact that the mobile are less likely to identify with any class identity suggests some support for Friedman's (2013) argument that the upwardly mobile often feel stuck between the class identities of their origin and destination, and therefore may be frequently caught in an unsettling state of 'cultural homelessness'. Indeed, this is perhaps further supported by the finding that, when pressed, the second most popular class category among the mobile elite is the lower middle class, a class identity that arguably attempts to reconcile the mobile respondent's origin and destination. Finally, the findings concerning class

identity also help to contextualize the suggestion that a glass ceiling is preventing the mobile from reaching the top of the elite. In particular, they indicate that there may well be limits to the ambitions of the mobile elite, who may fear that reaching the summit of British society implies a certain betrayal of one's class-cultural origins. Either way, the strong retention of a working-class identity among many upwardly mobile respondents suggests that the emotional pull of class loyalties can entangle subjects in the affinities of the past, and why – despite prevailing political rhetoric – the constant quest for upward mobility may not be something that all unequivocally aspire to.

Conclusion

In this article we have examined the social makeup of the contemporary British elite. We should reiterate that this portrait is not representative, and is skewed toward a younger, more educated, and predominantly male portion of the elite. Yet while the data lacks representativeness, its main strength lies in its unusually large sample which has allowed us to mine deep inside the elite and uncover important axes of social stratification and differentiation within it. Indeed, access to such unparalleled detail has yielded a number of significant insights.

First, it has allowed us to look at the degree of social closure within the elite as a whole and also among specific occupational sections and particular geographical areas. In this way, the fact that the elite is the most exclusive class in Savage et al's (2013) new class schema is certainly significant, but not necessarily surprising considering previous studies of social mobility (ref). What is perhaps more illuminating, however, is the way in which the GBCS data illustrates clear lines of variation within the social composition of the elite. For example, it points to an important distinction between the 'traditional' professions, such as law, medicine and journalism, which are significantly harder for the upwardly mobile to enter, and a corporate and technical elite that is significantly easier to enter. Read through a Bourdieusian (1984) lens, this finding is perhaps illustrative of the tacit role that inherited and embodied resources of cultural capital play in both reproducing the stable elite's dominance over the traditional professions and discouraging the upwardly mobile from attempting to enter in the first place. In

contrast, among business and technical professions there is arguably a greater emphasis on economic and 'human' capital, which Bourdieu (1984) continually reiterated was easier to acquire than cultural capital.

Second, the granular detail provided by the data has also allowed us to map the geographical patterning of the elite. Indeed, this data provides perhaps the article's most original and sociologically significant finding, namely that the elite is significantly more reproductive in inner London, Oxford and Cambridge. This tells an intriguing story about the limits of existing forms of social mobility in Britain and indicates the remarkable capacity of stable elites to preserve their physical proximity to the traditional seats of political and intellectual power.

Allied to these findings about rates of mobility *into* the elite, the article also demonstrates the ways in which the socially mobile, even when they are successful in entering the elite, are invariably still set apart by their relative lack of economic, cultural and social capital. They earn less, have lower status contacts, and are less culturally engaged than stable elites, and when they do participate this is less likely to be in the traditional and symbolically significant elite arenas, such as the opera house or the après-ski. Of course the implications of these findings are hard to straightforwardly interpret from quantitative data alone. They could be evidence of a powerful glass ceiling, but equally they could illustrate a lack of ambition among the upwardly mobile. Equally, they may even be a byproduct of the mobile elite's more peripheral geographical locations, where their resources may already be sufficient to reach the apex of a local social hierarchy ('big fish in small ponds').

Some additional insight into this question is provided by the attitudinal measures analysed in this article. Indeed, they provide tentative support for the second of the three explanations above, highlighting the somewhat ambivalent relationship between the upwardly mobile and the elite they've become a part of. Not only are the mobile more skeptical about the fairness of British society and their capacity to effect change within it, but their self-reported class identities - as likely to be expressed as working or lower-middle as upper-middle and upper - belie a complex set of personal affinities as much informed by origin as destination.

Thus while this article may, in large part, illustrate the enduring social closure of the British elite, it is important to remember that this may not be an entirely one-way process. Indeed, like the Yorkshiremen in Monty Python's famous sketch, the attitudes of the mobile elite demonstrate that people may not always be compelled by 'objective' markers of capital success, but also by notions of wellbeing deeply rooted in the kinship ties and cultural affinities of the past.

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