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Source: *Sociology*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (NOVEMBER 1997), pp. 645-672
Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd.
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/42855857
Accessed: 19-12-2019 11:44 UTC

SOCIOLOGY Vol. 31 No. 4 November 1997
645–672

SOCIAL MOBILITY, INDIVIDUAL ABILITY AND THE INHERITANCE OF CLASS INEQUALITY

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Abstract This paper examines the intergenerational social mobility of young adults in Britain, from a secondary analysis of the National Child Development Study. We show that by examining the relationship between social class background and the tested 'ability' of boys and girls, it is possible to advance our understanding of some of the key processes that help facilitate the reproduction of class inequality. In particular, we emphasise that the advantages of the service class over other class rests not just upon their ability to impart appropriate cultural capital to their children, but also on other 'secondary' factors, notably material resources. We show how boys born in advantaged social positions have more resources than girls in maintaining their class advantages, and we indicate some patterns of closure within the 'service class'.

Key words: class divisions; gender divisions; social mobility; social reproduction.

For many years studies of social mobility in contemporary Britain have been conducted in the shadow of the Nuffield social mobility studies (Goldthorpe 1980). Goldthorpe's study has been a benchmark in British social science, being significant in developing a distinctive, 'class structural' approach to social mobility based on the study of intergenerational male mobility. His perspective combines both theoretical and methodological rigour to produce substantive findings of major interest both for Britain and in comparative research (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). Such has been the influence of the Nuffield mobility study that its findings are routinely reproduced in textbooks as the definitive account of English and Welsh social mobility (for example, Abercrombie and Warde 1994; Giddens 1989: 232). Even researchers critical of aspects of Goldthorpe's approach have had to spend much time settling accounts with him (for example Pawson 1989, 1993; Payne 1990, 1992; Savage *et al.* 1992; Saunders 1995). There are, however, recent signs that the hegemony of the Nuffield mobility study is under more serious challenge. Partly, this is linked to the emergence of new research interests outside the focus on male intergenerational mobility – for instance, in work-life mobility, in the relationship between class mobility, gender and ethnicity, and in the relationship between social and spatial mobility. This is also related to the construction of new data sets which are suitable for different kinds of inquiry into social mobility than those developed in Goldthorpe (1980).[1] Perhaps the most important of these is the National Child Development Study (NCDS), which has been championed by Peter Saunders as an unparalleled tool for the

analysis of the relationship between social background, individual development and social mobility in Britain (for one controversial study, see Saunders 1996, 1997).

Our paper analyses data from the NCDS to examine the relationship between the social class origins of men and women (as measured by the social class of their father), their levels of 'ability' (as measured by their performance on a general ability test undertaken when they were 11 years old), and the social class destinations of these individuals when they were aged 33. This analysis is therefore rooted in the orthodox Nuffield approach in focusing on the relationship between an individual's social class and that of their father, but it breaks new ground by considering how this relationship is mediated by the measured 'ability' of the children concerned. Although our paper has some similarity with Saunders's work, we depart from him in emphasising that taking note of an individual's ability does not entail breaking from a broad class structural approach to social mobility. Indeed, we argue that analysing the ability of individuals allows the processes which structure class inequalities to be better understood. In order to develop this point we spend some time clarifying the difference between what we call – rather simplistically – 'individualist' and 'structuralist' paradigms of social mobility research to explain the difference between Saunders's conception of the mobility process and our own.

Our paper proceeds firstly by examining the broad conceptual and methodological issues involved in social mobility research. As well as explaining our approach to the NCDS, this also serves as a contribution to the ongoing debate about understanding the significance of social mobility in contemporary Britain (see Marshall and Swift 1993; Saunders 1995; Payne 1996; Marshall and Swift 1996). In the second section we explain how we use the NCDS to examine the inter-relationships between class, gender and 'ability' in order to develop a processual account of social mobility. The third and longest section shows that even taking 'ability' into account, notable class and gender divisions remain, and that for some groups – especially for the daughters of the professional middle classes – we can detect clear patterns of class advantage even allowing for the 'ability' of the respondents concerned. A fourth section tests for the statistical significance of some of the relationships discovered, and a short conclusion rounds off our paper and suggests new lines for future research.

Paradigms in Social Mobility Research

Although Goldthorpe's programme of research on social mobility has provoked criticism on many counts, there are, at least in Britain, some controversial areas where remarkably little debate has been generated. Thus, there have been extensive debates about his treatment of gender and social

mobility, notably pertaining to his defence of a 'household dominance' approach whereby households are grouped into social classes on the basis of the occupation of their senior – usually male – members (Goldthorpe 1983; Stanworth 1984; Marshall *et al.* 1988; MacRae 1990; Dex 1990; Witz 1995). There have also been various criticisms of the Nuffield class schema used by Goldthorpe, for instance that it does not distinguish a capitalist class (Penn 1981), or that its concept of the service class unhelpfully amalgamates professionals and managers (Savage *et al.* 1992). However, there have been very few British critics of Goldthorpe's argument that social mobility should be studied as the movement of people between places defined in terms of a class structure, a perspective which leads Goldthorpe to examine mobility by the elaboration of inflow and outflow mobility tables (what Sorenson 1986 refers to as 'standard mobility tables') and the subsequent adoption of log linear modelling techniques to model these tables.[2]

It is therefore important to note that internationally the basic assumptions of Goldthorpe's class structural approach to social mobility have by no means won universal acceptance, especially in American circles. Goldthorpe's perspective sees the amount of aggregate mobility to or from given social classes as the main issue which needs to be explained. This is very different from the approach championed in an older body of work within the 'status attainment' tradition (Blau and Duncan 1967). This approach is not concerned with the aggregate mobility properties of social groups and instead examines what factors allow *individuals* to move up or down the social ladder. The focus here is on the correlates of individual success and failure, rather than the properties of particular social classes to hold on to or transmit their offspring to other social classes. From the late 1960s until the early 1980s status attainment research was dominant within America and led to a focus on the factors associated with success or failure at the individual level – such as ethnicity, educational attainment, family background, ability (as measured by IQ tests) and so on (for example, Duncan *et al.* 1972, and see the discussion in Savage 1996).[3] In Britain, by contrast, there has been no extended discussion of these questions. An interesting indication of the differences between the two research traditions is that whereas American status attainment researchers have examined educational attainment primarily as an individual attribute which correlates with mobility, British researchers (notably Halsey *et al.* 1980, and more recently Marshall and Swift 1997) have seen it as a mediating link between class origins and destinations.

It should also be pointed out that until the NCDS's fifth wave, there have been no British surveys which collect data on these sorts of individual level characteristics to permit 'status attainment' type analyses. The NCDS is a panel survey of 17,414 children born between the 3rd and 9th March 1958, who have been studied in five 'waves', when they were aged 7 (in 1965), 11 (in 1969), 16 (in 1974), 23 (in 1981) and 33 (in 1991). Until recently, the NCDS has mainly been studied by psychologists and educational researchers

(such as Fogelman 1983), but the collection of data from the most recent wave in 1991 has also made the NCDS a remarkable source for the study of social mobility. By this date the individuals in the panel study had been exposed to the labour market for well over a decade and it is possible to examine the determinants of mobility for these individuals drawing upon evidence collected in earlier waves. Research examining the individual level correlates of upward and downward mobility can therefore be developed using this data. This is the project taken up by Saunders (as in 1996, 1997), who has used his analysis of the NCDS to develop critical appraisals of the work of Goldthorpe and his associates. Saunders (1997) claims that his analyses of NCDS indicate that mobility is based more on individual attributes, notably meritocratic factors concerned with innate ability (as measured by the ability tests undertaken by the NCDS sample at age 11), than on class-based factors whereby the privileged pass on their privileges to their offspring through processes of social exclusion.

It must be pointed out that Saunders's arguments rest upon a flawed conception of how to analyse social mobility. It is not possible to test in an empiricist way whether individual factors or structural factors are more important in affecting social mobility, as if the two can be measured as two unrelated types of variables and their relative importance gauged through some sort of correlation. In fact, Saunders proceeds by treating structural factors as if they are individual attributes, and hence not truly structural at all. This is an important point to grasp. There is little doubt that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who score highly in ability tests as children seem more likely to 'succeed' in moving into more secure and lucrative employment than are those who score badly in these tests. But what does this simple fact mean? For Saunders (1997), as for Blau and Duncan (1967) it means that social mobility is based largely around meritocratic criteria and that bright kids can 'get ahead', in spite of their background. Within a structuralist perspective a very different interpretation is possible. Here the argument would run that in a society where white-collar and middle-class employment is expanding rapidly it is inevitable that children from the working class will rise to fill some of these jobs, since there will not be enough middle-class children to fill them. It is further quite plausible, and indeed likely, that those working-class children who fill those jobs tend to be 'brighter' (or are seen as 'brighter') than those children who are destined to stay in working-class positions. However, this in itself does not mean that measured ability causes mobility. Mobility itself is only possible due to structural changes, and 'ability' is simply a filtering device which distinguishes those working-class children who are able to move up from those who are not. The uncontroversial fact that high levels of measured ability correlate with upward social mobility should not – at least from a structural perspective – be confused with a causal explanation of mobility itself.

Given that the same basic fact can be interpreted quite differently, it is

clearly important to be aware at the onset of the gravity of making key choices of research design and analysis. Here it might be pointed out that the general current of thought in social mobility research in recent years has been towards some version of the structuralist approach. Even American researchers now widely accept that 'status attainment' approaches offer no ready way of analysing the structural forces which affect mobility and therefore give a misleading impression (see generally Brieger 1990). This does not mean that it is necessary to adopt a 'class structural' approach to mobility. Many American researchers sympathetic to structural approaches have been more interested in thinking of organisational and/or labour market structures rather than classes (for instance, through vacancy chain approaches (White 1970) or through labour market analysis (for example, Diprete 1993)).[5]

Although we have contrasted structural with individual approaches to mobility, it does need to be recognised that this is something of a simplification. Indeed, those working within structural perspectives are becoming more concerned to examine some of the individual-level, 'micro-processes' that affect aggregate mobility outcomes. Goldthorpe and his colleagues (as in Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992) have established that there is a commonality of patterns of social fluidity (that is to say, patterns of social mobility taking changing marginals into account) across nations and over historical periods. Their analysis of the processes which explain these common patterns is, however, somewhat undeveloped (see Devine 1995). It depends on imputing particular properties to individuals, specific social classes and economic sectors, but the existence of such properties is never empirically established. Thus, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992: Chap. 4) endorse an instrumental individual rationality in which people seek to maximise their class position, and they suggest (among other things) that those with either economic or cultural capital have distinct advantages in transmitting their social position to their offspring, and they note that it is easier to move within economic sectors than between them. These assumptions are incorporated into the topological models which Erikson and Goldthorpe use to model social fluidity, and although their putative effects appear to be consistent with the results produced, their existence is never directly examined in their own right.

It is important, therefore, to explore the sorts of processes at work which lead to aggregate patterns of social fluidity. In this respect the range of individual level information included in surveys such as the NCDS can be valuable in unpacking the 'black box' of process. This includes using information concerning the measured 'ability' of children which has traditionally been downplayed within class structural approaches. Given our earlier remarks, it is, however, important to use this information in ways that build upon a structural approach. We believe that the best approach is to conceptualise social mobility as a relational process in which working-class children compete with middle-class children for middle-class rather than working-class jobs. Measured ability might be important within this competitive structure. For

instance, when bright middle-class children are in competition with bright working-class children, who is it that tends to come off better? Or, perhaps more interestingly, when bright working-class children are in competition with less intelligent middle-class children, who comes off better? Thinking about the significance of ability tests in this way goes beyond the simplistic examination of whether there is a correlation between 'ability' and social mobility, and begins to allow us to see how 'ability' is related to social processes of competition between classes.[6]

In this paper we therefore examine the social mobility of individuals relative to their parents, examining such movement in terms of broad class categories. The novelty of our approach lies in that fact that we will introduce some controls for the measured 'ability' of the children concerned. This will allow us to see whether controlling for intelligence means that class inequalities in mobility are still evident or not. If such differences are small, this would suggest that class inequalities operate through the construction of children with different levels of 'ability' either by biological genetic processes (middle-class children are better endowed genetically than working-class children, as Saunders 1995 suggests) or by social ones (for example, middle-class parents are better at schooling their children to do well in ability tests). If such differences are still evident, even taking 'ability' into account, this suggests the significance of other social processes than those mediated through 'ability' (such as social networks or inheritance). Analysing the NCDS in this way therefore allows us to consider the relationship between class processes and 'ability' more directly. In the next section we specify our research questions more directly.

Social Mobility and 'Merit': Research Issues

It is not straightforward to use the NCDS to analyse mobility within a class structural perspective, since parents' occupations are coded to standard occupational classifications, such as the Registrar General's Social Class classification (RG Class) and Socio-Economic Grouping (SEG). Saunders's (1997) study uses the RG Class schema, but it is now widely accepted that it is of limited sociological value (see Marshall *et al.* 1988), and there is a growing consensus that the Nuffield class schema developed by Goldthorpe (1980) offers the best way of mapping the class structure. However, parents' occupations have not been coded to this schema in the NCDS. One way of getting round this problem is by amalgamating SEGs to approximate to the Nuffield class schema. This is a widely used strategy in situations where no direct coding is available (see, for example, Heath *et al.* 1985; Heath and Cheung 1996; Savage *et al.* 1992). However, we also felt that the Nuffield class schema needs to be modified for our analysis in order to aid our attempts to distinguish processes more directly than was attempted by Goldthorpe.

In particular, we felt it important to distinguish groups within the service class in the way suggested by Savage *et al.* (1992) (and see also Butler and Savage 1995). The reason for this is the need to explore the processes by which advantaged families could pass on their advantages. Goldthorpe's notion of the service class is rather broad and amorphous. It groups together people with high amounts of cultural capital but little economic capital (such as teachers), people with high economic capital but little cultural capital (such as unqualified industrial managers), and people with large amounts of both kinds of capital (like professionals). This means that the respective importance of cultural and economic capital cannot be gauged using this class schema (see also Wright 1996). We therefore distinguish professional groupings from managerial groupings within the service class in order to assess whether there are any important differences between these two groups. In some respects the differentiation of the service class into smaller constituent groups such as this is not a controversial procedure. Goldthorpe (1980) on occasion divides the service class into professional wing and administrative and managerial wing (see, for example, Chap. 5). Savage *et al.* (1992) have taken this procedure further and later research has also considered the merits and demerits of various ways of dividing up the middle classes (see Butler and Savage 1995 for a series of papers on this theme).

The analysis below thus distinguishes three 'service class' groupings, two intermediate class groupings and two manual groupings. We should emphasise that this procedure ran into some problems because some current distinctions between socio-economic groups were not made at the time of recording the latest data for father's occupation, which was in 1974, When respondents were aged 16. In particular, SEGs 2 and 5 were not subdivided (i.e. into SEGs 2.1 and 2.2 or 5.1 and 5.2). Normally, SEG 2.1 (small employers) is distinguished from SEG 2.2 (managers in small establishments) with the former being placed in the petty bourgeoisie and the latter in the service class. Similarly, SEG 5.1 (ancillary professionals) is normally placed in the service class and SEG 5.2 (non-manual supervisors) in the intermediate class. Since we were not able to make these distinctions for fathers we therefore placed both fathers and respondents coded as SEG 2 in a small business class, and all those in SEG 5 in a separate group (low service class). We recognise that this is a problematic procedure which does not marry perfectly with Goldthorpe's 'service class', but no better one is readily available and the distinctions we have drawn are ones which do have theoretical validity in their own terms.

In this paper we control for the performance of individuals in the 'ability' test they took at age 11 (for more detail on the test, see Douglas 1964). We measured ability rather crudely by dividing the sample into three groups of equal size. The 33.3 per cent of respondents who scored highest in ability tests are scored as 'high ability', the 33.3 per cent who scored lowest are regarded as 'low ability', leaving a group in the middle which we exclude from the following tables, since they are of less theoretical interest.[7] Readers will

have noted that we have so far dodged the question of what 'ability' actually means. This is of course hotly debated, with interest rekindled in recent years by the publication of *The Bell Curve*, which argues for a genetic account of ability, an approach taken up by Saunders (1996). Although we do not object to the view that there are some genetic aspects of people's performance in ability tests, we emphatically do not subscribe to the view that these tests are 'free' of social influences.[8] This is indeed well attested in existing research on the NCDS. Fogelman and Goldstein (in Fogelman 1983) show that scores on tests of verbal and numerical ability at age 11 are substantially affected by paternal social class (measured in this case by the Registrar General's Social Class categorisation). It is difficult to see that this effect might be due to the different genetic endowments of people from various social classes. Fogelman and Goldstein examined changes in test scores between ages 7 and 11, and between ages 7, 11 and 16, and found an increasing differentiation in scores by social class, using the seven-year scores as a baseline. Since defenders of IQ measures and the like argue that genetic factors associated with intelligence are constant over time, these changes can only be attributed to the social environment (factors associated with lower social class, such as poorer schooling, poorer nutrition, larger family size, etc.).[9] These results are consistent with an extensive body of research, using both longitudinal and experimental methods, which reports substantial socio-economic effects on measured intelligence (see Anastasi 1982 for a comprehensive introduction). In short, ability tests cannot be seen as measuring innate ability differentiated from social class environment.

If anything this observation increases the sociological interest of these tests. They help us to distinguish between class effects linked to the social construction of 'intelligent' children (through socialisation, cultural capital etc.), and class effects due to other sorts of processes (for instance, financial support). Linked to this they allow us to distinguish between class effects transmitted by the age of 11, when these tests were conducted, and those which come into operation later in an individual's life. Thus, if we find that once 'ability' is taken into account there are few class differences in mobility chances, this would suggest that all salient class advantages come early in life and are mediated through the construction of ability in children, as suggested by Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital, for instance. Another way of reflecting on their potential salience is by adopting Boudon's (1974) distinction between the 'primary' and 'secondary' class effects (see also Goldthorpe 1996). 'Primary' effects are those based around the construction of class differences in initial achievement – and would therefore be measured by the 'ability' tests we control for here. 'Secondary' effects are those which operate at later stages of the educational process, for instance when children either stay on in the education system or seek employment. Boudon (1974) and Goldthorpe (1996) both endorse the view that secondary effects are indeed much more significant than primary ones. If they are correct one

would expect to see marked class differences in mobility remain even when ability tests are taken into account.

Social Mobility, Class and 'Ability'

In this section we provide six mobility tables which explore the mobility of respondents compared with their fathers. Two of these tables do not control for 'ability', whilst two others look at the mobility of 'high ability' respondents and two at 'low ability' respondents. (For purposes of clarity, tables for mid-ability' respondents are not presented here, but can be found in the Appendix.) Tables 1 and 2 show the mobility of all sons and daughters respectively.[10] The patterns revealed by Table 1 will be familiar in their layout as a standard 'outflow' table (similar to Table 2.1 of Goldthorpe 1987, for instance). Looking across the first highlighted row of Table 1 indicates the proportion of sons from different class backgrounds who have reached 'service class' positions by the age of 33. It can readily be seen that the two chief 'wings' of the service class both have considerably higher chances of retaining their offspring in their own advantaged positions than any other group, with the professional middle classes being slightly more successful in this respect than the managerial middle classes. There is, however, one interesting difference from the findings of older research. Goldthorpe (1982), Payne (1987) and Savage *et al.* (1992) all point out that the sons of managers tend to move into professional ranks rather than directly inherit their father's position, but the evidence of Table 1 indicates that – by some considerable margin – the sons of managerial fathers are more likely to stay in managerial work rather than cross the 'situs' divide into professional employment. This suggests a higher degree of intergenerational closure within the service class than has been suggested in earlier research. However, one must note at this point both the rather different class classifications used here and also the fact that the NCDS is not a cross-sectional sample survey.

Table 1 also indicates that there was a high rate of absolute upward mobility for the young adults in the NCDS. Around 40 per cent of the sons of intermediate classes moved into the service class, and just over a quarter of the sons of manual workers. It is worth noting that these rates of upward mobility appear to be rather higher than found in the Nuffield survey, where around 14–17 per cent of the manual working classes, and 28–34 per cent of those from intermediate classes moved up (Goldthorpe 1987: Table 2.2). These different figures from the NCDS are interesting in that one might expect further movement into the service class after the age of 33. Given the rapid expansion of professional and managerial employment in the 1970s and 1980s these high absolute rates of upward mobility should not cause too much surprise. It is also interesting to note that upwardly mobile sons are considerably more likely to move into the managerial than the professional wings

Table 1
Social Mobility of Sons

	Father's group							
Son's group	Large bus (%)	Prof. (%)	Lower serv. (%)	Small bus. (%)	Inter. n-m (%)	Skilled (%)	Semi & Unskilled (%)	Total (%)
Large business	34.7	27.2	20.3	19.2	16.9	13.9	9.0	16.7
Professional	12.5	19.0	11.7	7.6	8.0	4.6	5.3	7.3
Lower service	16.5	23.9	20.8	12.8	14.7	9.7	7.5	12.3
All service	**63.7**	**70.1**	**52.8**	**39.6**	**39.6**	**28.2**	**21.8**	**36.3**
Small business	8.5	7.6	7.8	19.5	7.6	9.9	7.9	10.8
Inter. n-m.*	10.2	8.7	16.5	8.1	15.1	10.2	7.1	10.0
All intermediate	**18.7**	**16.3**	**24.3**	**27.6**	**22.7**	**20.1**	**15.0**	**20.8**
Skilled manual	9.7	9.8	15.6	24.2	28.9	34.0	36.5	28.1
Semi & unskilled	8.0	3.8	7.4	8.6	8.9	17.7	26.7	14.8
All manual	**17.7**	**13.6**	**23.0**	**32.8**	**37.8**	**51.7**	**63.2**	**42.9**
N	176	184	231	579	225	1,222	532	3,149

*Inter n-m.=intermediate non-manual.

of the service class, a finding which appears broadly comparable with Goldthorpe's (1987: Figures 5.11 to 5.14).

Table 2 provides equivalent figures for daughters. Daughters are much more likely than sons to move into the intermediate class. However, there is a similar gradient by father's social class for entry to service class and manual jobs for daughters as for sons, with one exception, the daughters of professionals. Compared to their brothers, the daughters of professionals stand out much more from the daughters of managers (although faring worse than their brothers, with 56 per cent of daughters compared with 70 per cent of sons remaining in the service class.). Admittedly, the daughters of professionals tend to be in lower professional jobs (notably teaching and nursing) rather than in the higher professional and managerial jobs like their brothers. This evidence suggests that more professional daughters are moving into the service class than used to be the case. Savage *et al.* (1992), drawing upon a representative sample in 1987 found that 46 per cent of daughters of professional fathers were in the service class, 10 per cent less than in the NCDS.[11] Given that Dex (1987) has shown that professional women are unlikely to be downwardly mobile after childrearing, this might suggest that younger women entering the labour market in the 1980s do have much improved chances of entering the salariat compared to earlier generations. This finding may also be related to Crompton and Sanderson's (1990)

Table 2
Social Mobility of Daughters

	Father's group							
Daughter's group	Large bus (%)	Prof. (%)	Lower serv. (%)	Small bus. (%)	Inter. n-m (%)	Skilled (%)	Semi & Unskilled (%)	Total (%)
Large bus.	10.0	8.9	9.5	9.4	4.6	5.9	4.7	6.9
Prof.	5.0	7.8	3.9	3.4	3.2	1.0	0.7	2.4
Lower serv.	24.9	39.1	26.8	23.9	21.3	18.6	13.9	21.1
All service	**39.9**	**55.8**	**40.2**	**36.7**	**29.1**	**25.5**	**19.3**	**30.4**
Small bus.	4.0	7.3	3.5	6.3	3.2	4.2	4.0	4.6
Inter. n-m.	41.8	27.4	35.1	36.5	41.7	36.0	32.9	35.7
All inter.	**45.8**	**34.7**	**38.6**	**42.8**	**44.9**	**40.2**	**36.9**	**40.3**
Skilled manual	1.0	0.6	3.5	1.2	0.5	3.7	5.6	3.0
Semi & unskilled	13.4	8.9	17.7	19.4	25.5	30.6	38.3	26.3
All manual	**14.4**	**9.5**	**21.2**	**20.6**	**26.0**	**34.3**	**43.9**	**29.3**
N	201	179	231	587	216	1,213	554	3,181

emphasis on women's distinctive reliance on educational credentials. We return to this point below.

Tables 1 and 2 largely confirm existing knowledge about the basic patterns of absolute rates of social mobility though with some signs that the 1980s may have led to increasing rates of mobility, especially for women. Let us now move on to the heart of our analysis by seeing how the performance of the respondents in 'ability' tests appears to affect these patterns. Table 3–6 examine the destinations of high and low 'ability' children from all classes in order to examine how this modifies the aggregate patterns. Before we discuss the results of each of these tables, it is worth noting at the outset that one of the most striking findings of Tables 3–6 can best be observed by comparing the marginal frequencies indicating the numbers of sons and daughters from each class who score high or low on 'ability' tests. These marginals starkly indicate that there are dramatic class differences in the numbers of respondents who score well or badly in ability tests. The most extreme figures are for the children of professionals. There are only eight daughters of professional fathers who fall into the 'low ability' category compared to 123 who are judged as being of high ability. The figures for the sons of professionals are only slightly less extreme. At the other end of the scale, only 22 per cent of the sons and 23 per cent of the daughters of unskilled fathers are regarded as 'high ability'. These distributions are in line with our argument that 'ability' tests are linked to class background and also indicate that it is

Table 3
Social Mobility of 'High Ability' Sons

	Father's group						
Son's group	Large bus.	Prof.	Lower serv.	Small bus.	Inter. n-m.	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual
Large bus.	41.2	28.0	30.0	25.0	20.2	24.5	18.3
Prof.	14.1	22.9	19.1	14.5	13.5	7.9	11.7
Lower serv.	25.9	24.6	19.1	18.4	20.2	17.6	15.0
All serv.	**81.2**	**75.5**	**68.2**	**57.9**	**53.9**	**49.0**	**45.0**
Small bus.	3.5	6.8	4.5	15.8	4.5	9.1	6.7
Inter.	8.2	6.8	17.3	7.5	21.3	12.4	10.8
All inter.	**11.7**	**13.6**	**21.8**	**23.3**	**25.8**	**21.5**	**17.5**
Skilled m.	4.7	6.8	8.2	13.2	18.0	19.4	23.3
Unskilled	2.4	4.2	1.8	5.7	2.2	9.1	14.2
All working	**7.1**	**11.2**	**10.0**	**18.9**	**20.2**	**28.5**	**37.5**
N	85	118	110	228	89	330	120

indeed the professional middle classes who appear more endowed with cultural capital than other groups within the 'service class'.

Table 3 examines the mobility of 'high ability' sons. Class gradients can still be observed, even taking into account the measured 'ability' of respondents, a fact which would seem to support Boudon's and Goldthorpe's claims that there are clear 'secondary effects' by which class influences mobility outcomes. Table 3 shows that nearly three-quarters of high ability sons of service-class fathers are themselves found in the service class. The fact that the figures for the service class are rather similar to that reported in Table 1 is due to the fact that the vast majority of sons from these backgrounds are deemed to be 'high ability'. There appears to be some degree of closure between professional and managerial wings of the salariat, with the sons of managers being more likely to become managers themselves compared to the sons of professionals. For those coming from intermediate backgrounds, the figures of those entering the service class drops to 54–58 per cent. Around half the high ability sons of skilled manual workers move into the service class, and slightly less than 45 per cent of the sons of unskilled workers. At the other end of the spectrum, it is the fortunes of the sons of the unskilled who stand out. These are more likely to stay in working-class positions rather than move into the service class, despite the fact that they are seen to be of 'high' ability.

Table 4 provides equivalent figures for those who are 'low ability'. Comparing Table 4 to Table 3 indicates considerable differences amongst all

Table 4
Social Mobility of 'Low Ability' Sons

	Father's group						
Son's group	Large bus.	Prof.	Lower serv.	Small bus.	Inter. n-m.	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual
Large bus.	26.9	33.3	12.8	11.3	10.7	5.4	4.4
Prof.	3.8	16.7	4.3	0.7	1.8	1.9	2.4
Lower serv.	3.8	5.6	14.9	5.0	7.1	5.6	3.6
All serv.	**34.5**	**55.6**	**32.0**	**17.0**	**19.6**	**12.9**	**10.4**
Small bus.	7.7	5.6	8.5	22.0	12.5	10.5	8.8
Inter.	23.1	11.1	10.6	7.8	3.6	6.7	4.8
All inter.	**30.8**	**16.7**	**19.1**	**29.8**	**16.1**	**17.2**	**13.6**
Skilled m.	15.4	22.2	36.2	36.9	44.6	43.8	41.0
Unskilled	19.2	5.6	12.8	16.3	19.6	26.2	35.1
All working	**34.6**	**27.8**	**49.0**	**53.2**	**64.2**	**70.0**	**76.1**
N	26	18	47	141	56	466	251

groups in their propensity to be socially mobile. For every social group, those who have scored badly in low ability tests at age 11 are more likely to be in the working class than are those who scored high on the ability tests. However, as we have noted above, this is not surprising. The crucial issue is whether ability appears to 'wipe out' class disadvantage. Here, Table 4 reveals a striking fact: the sons of managerial and professional fathers have a rather low chance of moving into the working class, *even if they perform badly in ability tests*. Only around a third of such sons move into the working class, less than remain in the service class (though note the small numbers, especially of professionals). This is a considerable dent for those arguing the meritocratic case. The more privileged social classes are able to find ways of preventing even their less 'able' sons from moving down the social spectrum.

A further point of interest, however, is that a not insignificant numbers of 'low ability' sons of working-class parents are upwardly mobile: 30 per cent of low ability sons of skilled manual workers move out of the working class, and 24 per cent of the low ability sons of unskilled workers do. Around half of these upwardly mobile sons actually move into the service class. This is a by no means trivial number, and does suggest that upward mobility does not depend on 'merit', at least as measured by these variables.

Comparison of Tables 3 and 4 indicates that the high ability sons of working-class fathers have roughly the same prospects of moving into the service class as the low ability sons of service-class fathers. There appears to

Table 5
Social Mobility of 'High Ability' Daughters

	Father's group						
Daughter's group	Large bus.	Prof.	Lower serv.	Small bus.	Inter. n-m.	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual
Large bus.	8.9	9.8	12.3	12.4	6.6	8.1	4.7
Prof.	5.6	8.9	5.4	7.4	6.6	3.0	1.6
Lower serv.	28.2	39.0	33.8	31.8	26.4	30.1	22.0
All serv.	**42.7**	**67.7**	**51.5**	**51.6**	**38.6**	**41.2**	**28.3**
Small bus.	5.6	8.1	2.3	7.0	3.3	3.5	5.5
Inter.	41.9	28.5	34.6	29.8	34.1	38.6	41.7
All inter.	**47.4**	**36.6**	**36.9**	**36.8**	**37.4**	**42.1**	**47.2**
Skilled m.	—	—	3.1	1.2	1.1	2.3	5.5
Unskilled	9.7	5.7	8.5	10.5	22.0	14.4	18.9
All working	**9.7**	**5.7**	**11.6**	**11.7**	**23.1**	**16.7**	**24.4**
N	124	123	130	258	91	396	127

Table 6
Social Mobility of 'Low Ability' Daughters

	Father's group						
Daughter's group	Large bus.	Prof.	Lower serv.	Small bus.	Inter. n-m.	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual
Large bus.	6.3	—	4.0	5.5	2.4	2.9	3.6
Prof.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lower serv.	18.8	25.0	8.0	12.7	11.9	11.0	7.6
All serv.	**25.1**	**25.0**	**12.0**	**18.1**	**14.3**	**13.9**	**11.2**
Small bus.	—	12.5	4.0	4.5	7.1	4.6	3.1
Inter.	37.5	37.5	28.0	40.0	45.2	26.9	27.6
All inter.	**37.5**	**50.0**	**32.0**	**44.5**	**52.3**	**31.5**	**30.7**
Skilled m.	6.3	—	—	0.9	—	5.2	7.1
Unskilled	31.3	25.0	56.0	36.4	33.3	49.4	51.1
All working	**37.6**	**25.0**	**56.0**	**37.1**	**33.3**	**54.6**	**58.2**
N	16	8	25	110	42	346	225

be a competition for service-class places occurring between these two groups. Two other groups are, however, largely insulated from this, having much more

predictable prospects. The 'high ability' service-class sons have very good prospects of following their father into the service class. By contrast, the 'low ability' sons of the working class generally have poor prospects.

Let us now turn to consider the patterns for women. Table 5 indicates that for women, performance in ability tests appears to have rather different implications than it does for men. For most high ability daughters, father's class makes relatively little impact on chances of moving into the service class. The exceptions are the 'high ability' daughters of professional fathers, who are by some considerable margin better able to stay within the salariat, and high ability daughters of unskilled manual workers, whose chances are much lower than for any other group. Leaving aside these two groups around 40–50 per cent of 'high ability' daughters enter the service class. A striking finding is the relatively low number of daughters of managers of large enterprises who move into the service class – at 43 per cent rather less than the figures for the daughters of the lower service class and small business groups. Comparison with Table 3 indicates that the class gradient for daughters moving into the service class is much less steep that it is for sons. A major reason for this is that intermediate white-collar work is the largest single destination point for daughters from every social class (except professionals). This applies whether the work if full-time or part-time. The broader implication however is that the class advantages of daughters depend more on 'primary effects' than do the class advantages of sons.

Table 6 examines the mobility of 'low' ability daughters. As with Table 5 one of the striking features is the common movement of daughters of fathers from all social classes into intermediate work. The proportions moving into these jobs are fairly similar to those of 'high ability' daughters from the equivalent social backgrounds and indicate that such is the significance of this type of work for women's employment that women from all backgrounds and levels of ability have high chances of moving into it. Table 6 reveals that it is virtually impossible for 'low' ability daughters to move into professional employment. This marks them off clearly from their male counterparts, where significant numbers of 'low ability' sons do succeed in moving into the professions, especially if they are from service class origins. However, in general, the class gradient of 'low ability' daughters does not appear as marked as it does for equivalent sons.

Comparing these Tables 3–6 with each other reveals an interesting finding. Controlling for ability does not wipe out class differences in mobility chances. But, it would appear that the class gradients for girls reduce rather more than do those for boys. This may suggest that the transmission of class advantages to girls depends more exclusively on endowing them with the appropriate 'ability' to do well in the educational system than is the case with boys. Boys seem to have more potential to tap other resources than those based on 'ability' alone. In the next section we consider this possibility further with the aid of simple tests of significance.

Testing the Relationship Between Social Class, 'Ability' and Social Mobility

We now take this analysis further by examining the odds ratios for different pairs of origin and destination classes, controlling for performance in ability tests. Odds ratios permit us to gain a greater insight into relative processes of social closure since they look at members of social classes in competition with each other (see also note 6). A further advantage is that we are able to report whether the class differences are statistically significant. It would have been desirable to model the effects of paternal social class, ability test scores and their interactions directly. However, the sample was not sufficiently large, given the skewedness of the data; for example, there are few low ability children in professional occupations and no low ability daughters.

Tables 7, 8 and 9 present estimates, standard errors and odds ratios for the relative likelihoods of low and high ability men and women from different class origins arriving at particular class destinations, compared with the likelihood of high and low ability men and women from the manual working class arriving in manual occupations. We have combined skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers as the baseline category (rather than unskilled manual workers) in order to ensure that numbers are large enough to allow reliable results to be obtained. The Glim program was used with its default parameters. The odds ratios reported give, for example, the relative odds of children from intermediate origins entering the intermediate class (rather than the manual class), and is expressed in terms of the likelihood relative to those of manual origins who arrive in intermediate destinations (rather than manual ones). This likelihood is set to one. If the odds ratio is equal to one, the likelihood is equal; if it is less than one, children from intermediate origins are less likely to enter the intermediate class than children from manual origins; if it is more than one, children from intermediate origins are more likely to enter the intermediate class than children from manual origins. Vice versa, the odds ratio for entering the manual class is the inverse (or reciprocal) of remaining in the intermediate class for children of intermediate origins. Since the odds ratio is dependent on the frequencies of all cells of relevant cross-tabulations, it is possible to have very large estimates. If, for instance, only eighty people from unskilled manual origins enter professional jobs, with 329 remaining in manual jobs, while twenty-five people from professional origins enter professional occupations, with another three entering manual work, the odds ratio will be (25/3) divided by (80/329), which equals 34.

Table 7 provides the odds ratios of the sample as a whole, without taking ability levels into account. It shows that the majority of odds ratios are statistically significant at the 0.001 level, and very striking class differences are evident. It should be noted that because we use the manual working class as our base line category, rather than the unskilled working class, the odds ratios here are somewhat less than would be reported if the most disadvantaged group (unskilled workers) had been used. None the less, the class differences

Table 7
Social Mobility of Sons and Daughters, Estimates, Standard Errors and Odds Ratios†

Father's class ×Destination	Men		Women	
	Est (s.e.)	OR1	Est (s.e.)	OR1
Intermediate				
×Intermediate	0.864(0.219)	2.37***	0.537(0.179)	1.71**
×Small bus.	0.171(0.278)	1.18	0.120(0.419)	1.12
×Low service	0.859(0.222)	2.59***	0.580(0.210)	1.78**
×Professional	0.891(0.283)	2.36**	1.638(0.474)	5.14***
×Managerial	0.684(0.209)	1.98***	0.193(0.360)	1.21
Small business				
×Intermediate	0.383(0.183)	1.46*	0.632(0.126)	1.88***
×Small bus.	1.260(0.145)	3.52***	1.015(0.224)	2.76***
×Low service	0.862(0.161)	2.36***	0.922(0.142)	2.51***
×Professional	0.980(0.202)	2.66***	1.918(0.349)	6.80***
×Managerial	0.952(0.141)	2.59***	1.127(0.195)	3.08***
Low service				
×Intermediate	1.447(0.228)	4.25***	0.565(0.189)	1.75**
×Small bus.	0.700(0.285)	2.01*	0.387(0.400)	1.47
×Low service	1.706(0.216)	5.50***	1.012(0.203)	2.75***
×Professional	1.768(0.262)	5.86***	2.023(0.442)	7.56***
×Managerial	1.369(0.213)	3.93***	1.115(0.278)	3.05***
Professional				
×Intermediate	1.334(0.331)	3.79***	1.121(0.287)	3.06***
×Small bus.	1.200(0.344)	3.32***	1.932(0.388)	6.90***
×Low service	2.370(0.264)	10.70***	2.192(0.279)	8.95***
×Professional	2.779(0.285)	16.11***	3.523(0.440)	33.91***
×Managerial	2.182(0.256)	8.87***	1.855(0.364)	6.39***
Managerial				
×Intermediate	1.236(0.308)	3.44***	1.126(0.222)	3.08***
×Small bus.	1.054(0.325)	2.87*	0.912(0.418)	2.49*
×Low service	1.738(0.272)	5.68***	1.321(0.243)	3.74***
×Professional	2.100(0.301)	8.16***	2.653(0.445)	14.20***
×Managerial	2.166(0.233)	8.72***	1.544(0.310)	4.68***

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
***Statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
†Reference category is manual work origin/manual work destination.

are still very clear. The odds ratios of managerial and professional sons are rather similar, indicating that for most destination classes they enjoy similar levels of advantage over manual workers. In general, the more advantaged the class destination, the higher the odds ratio becomes, a striking indication of

the relative advantages of the service class over the working class. There is one striking exception to the common odds ratios of professionals and managers. The highest odds ratios of all, for men, are found for the sons of professionals in competition with the sons of manual workers for professional work rather than manual work. In the overall context of service-class advantage it is therefore possible to detect a further process of professional closure (see Savage *et al.* 1992). Interestingly, the sons of managers are only very slightly more likely to move into managerial jobs. The lower service class also has fairly high odds ratios compared to the manual working class (between 3.9 and 5.9) in placing their sons in service-class positions.

The relative advantages of the sons of intermediate social classes over those from manual backgrounds are much less marked than is the case for professionals and managers, with odds ratios of around 2–3. The most striking odds ratio for these classes is for the sons of small businessmen (proprietors, managers in small establishments, own-account workers and farmers) who have a considerable propensity to retain their fathers' positions in competition with the sons of manual workers. This is in line with the well-known tendency for the self-employed to pass on their position to their sons (see, for example, Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). Even so, this process of direct inheritance is much less clear than is the case with the professional and managerial groups.

The situation of women is rather different from that of men. Compared to their brothers, the daughters of professionals are much more clearly advantaged over the daughters of managers in competition with manual daughters. The odds ratios for professional daughters moving into advantaged class positions are all much higher than for managerial daughters, and the trend towards professional closure which we have already noted for men is even more striking for women. Comparing Table 7 with the absolute figures contained in Tables 1 and 2, it seems that the reason for this is that professional fathers have good probabilities of placing *both* their sons and daughters into the service class. Managerial fathers are almost as good as professionals in placing their sons into the salariat but much worse in placing their daughters there. Whether this testifies to particularly marked gender divisions within managerial families, with family resources being concentrated on sons rather than daughters, is not clear, but it does testify to an interesting division between the two main wings of the salariat (see also Egerton 1997).

In general, it can be seen that the daughters of all intermediate and salaried groups are more advantaged in achieving professional jobs rather than manual jobs compared to their brothers. Yet most of the odds ratios for achieving managerial jobs are lower for women than for men. The conclusion would appear to be that women's access to the salariat depends more on entry into professional employment, and that the daughters of professionals are particularly advantaged in being able to achieve this.

Let us now consider what the odds ratios look like for the different 'ability'

Table 8

Men – Estimates, Standard Errors and Odds Ratios for Transitions Between Origin Class and Destination Class by Ability Tests†

Father's class ×Destination	Low ability		High ability	
	Est (s.e.)	OR	Est (s.e.)	OR
Intermediate				
×Intermediate	−0.403(0.743)	0.66	0.999(0.365)	2.71**
×Small bus.	0.347(0.432)	1.41	−0.207(0.582)	0.81
×Low service	0.495(0.555)	1.64	0.603(0.362)	1.82
×Professional	−0.043(1.04)	0.95	0.840(0.413)	2.31*
×Managerial	0.872(0.473)	2.39	0.299(0.357)	1.34
Small business				
×Intermediate	0.567(0.359)	1.76	0.017(0.328)	1.01
×Small bus.	1.101(0.248)	3.00***	1.119(0.290)	3.06***
×Low service	0.321(0.432)	1.37	0.580(0.259)	1.78*
×Professional	−0.777(1.04)	0.45	0.980(0.292)	2.66***
×Managerial	1.119(0.324)	3.06***	0.581(0.240)	1.78*
Low service				
×Intermediate	0.960(0.518)	2.61	1.492(0.411)	4.44***
×Small bus.	0.236(0.556)	1.26	0.508(0.569)	1.66
×Low service	1.503(0.465)	4.49***	1.250(0.398)	3.49**
×Professional	1.097(0.782)	2.99	1.892(0.413)	6.63***
×Managerial	1.320(0.489)	3.74**	1.398(0.371)	4.04***
Professional				
×Intermediate	1.570(0.851)	4.80	0.459(0.477)	1.58
×Small bus.	0.375(1.10)	1.45	0.811(0.485)	2.25
×Low service	1.083(1.10)	2.95	1.406(0.362)	4.07***
×Professional	3.029(0.775)	20.67***	1.976(0.382)	7.21***
×Managerial	2.846(0.629)	17.23***	1.231(0.352)	3.42***
Managerial				
×Intermediate	2.081(0.550)	8.01***	1.099(0.579)	3.00
×Small bus.	0.481(0.791)	1.61	0.603(0.730)	1.82
×Low service	0.495(1.06)	1.64	1.903(0.482)	6.70***
×Professional	1.342(1.08)	3.82	1.938(0.531)	6.95***
×Managerial	2.413(0.532)	11.16***	2.063(0.460)	7.87***

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
***Statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
†High and low scorers only, mid scorers are excluded. Reference category is manual work origin/manual work destination.

groups. If we examine first the odds ratios for low 'ability' men, we can see that some high values are present. The highest odds ratios can be found amongst the sons of professionals and managers. The figures for professional sons are especially high. They indicate that the chances of low ability sons of professionals moving into professional rather than manual work are twenty times the chances of manual sons moving into professional rather than manual work. These are very marked class differences, which would be amplified even more if unskilled workers were used as the reference category (in which case the odds ratio would increase to 32:8). This clearly indicates that the advantages of professional sons over manual workers are by no means exclusively due to their ability to socialise their children so that they can perform well in school. Comparison of Tables 7 and 8 indicate that whereas the odds ratios concerning manual and professional sons do fall for some of the destination categories of low ability sons, they actually rise for managerial destinations, and remain high for professional destinations.

Some interesting subsidiary points are evident from further scrutiny of this first column. The advantages of the lower service class over manual labourers are much less marked than they are for professionals and managers, indicating a significant horizontal cleavage within the salariat. A glance at the second column shows that this difference between the lower service class and the professional and managerial groups is not evident for high ability sons. It is also clear that the low ability sons of intermediate and small business groups are much more likely to be advantaged over the working class in moving to managerial rather than professional groups. To put this another way, the professions seem equally closed to the low ability sons of intermediate and small business groups as for manual workers, but intermediate and small business groups do appear to be advantaged over the sons of manual workers in moving into managerial jobs.

In general, it would appear that there are marked class differentials in the prospects of low ability sons entering into 'service-class' jobs. The most plausible explanation of this is the greater financial resources which professionals and managers possess. This is partly because issues of 'cultural capital' have already largely been taken into account in the propensity of respondents to perform well in 'ability' tests. Professional and managerial fathers are able to find ways of ensuring that even their (relatively small number of) sons who do not appear to be of 'high ability' have privileged chances of staying in advantaged social groups.

Turning to the next set of columns, for those who score highly on ability tests, there are also marked class gradients evident from the odds ratios. None the less, it is important to note that these are not always dramatic, and are consistent with the general point that those who do well in ability tests from any social class background have reasonable chances of moving into advantaged jobs. This having been said there are some intriguing patterns for 'high ability' boys. It is the sons of managers who have the highest odds ratios

Table 9
Women – Estimates, Standard Errors and Odds Ratios for Transitions between Origin Class and Destination Class by Ability Tests†

Father's class ×Destination	Low ability		High ability	
	Est (s.e.)	OR	Est (s.e.)	OR
Intermediate				
×Intermediate	1.030(0.365)	2.80**	−0.363(0.308)	0.69
×Small bus.	1.092(0.671)	2.98	−0.415(0.662)	0.65
×Low service	0.731(0.541)	2.07	−0.282(0.326)	0.75
×Professional	—	—	0.682(0.544)	1.97
×Managerial	0.238(1.06)	1.27	−0.315(0.500)	0.72
Small business				
×Intermediate	0.795(0.238)	3.34***	0.189(0.240)	1.20
×Small bus.	0.528(0.520)	1.69	1.019(0.383)	2.77**
×Low service	0.686(0.342)	1.98*	0.589(0.250)	1.80*
×Professional	—	—	1.478(0.409)	4.38***
×Managerial	0.956(0.499)	2.60	1.001(0.318)	2.72**
Low service				
×Intermediate	0.031(0.473)	1.03	0.345(0.322)	1.41
×Small bus.	−0.003(1.05)	0.99	−0.079(0.676)	0.92
×Low service	−0.184(0.769)	0.83	0.660(0.326)	1.93*
×Professional	—	—	1.173(0.539)	3.22*
×Managerial	0.238(1.06)	1.27	1.001(0.407)	2.72*
Professional				
×Intermediate	1.130(0.918)	3.09	0.856(0.432)	2.35*
×Small bus.	1.939(1.24)	6.95	1.886(0.548)	6.59***
×Low service	1.760(1.01)	5.81	1.509(0.425)	4.52***
×Professional	—	—	2.387(0.561)	10.88***
×Managerial	—	—	1.476(0.512)	4.37**
Managerial				
×Intermediate	0.724(0.585)	2.06	0.713(0.343)	2.04*
×Small bus.	—	—	0.991(0.533)	2.69
×Low service	1.067(0.722)	2.90	0.654(0.359)	1.92
×Professional	—	—	1.396(0.554)	4.04*
×Managerial	1.08(1.10)	2.96	0.850(0.459)	2.33

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.
***Statistically significant at the 0.001 level.
†High and low scorers only, mid scorers are excluded. Reference category is manual work origin/manual work destination.

in placing their sons in professional, managerial and lower service-class work in competition with the sons of manual workers.

Table 9 shows some striking findings for women. In general there are few significant odds ratios for low ability women, though this is partly due to the smallness of some cell numbers. There is a clear contrast with 'high ability' women where some high odds ratios are reported. The most interesting of these are for the daughters of professionals, whose competitive advantages over the daughters of manual fathers appear greater than do those for boys. By contrast, the daughters of managers have rather low odds ratios. The other group of women with significant odds ratios are the daughters of the small business grouping, whose daughters have greater competitive advantage in reaching professional positions than do the daughters of managers of large enterprises.

In general, there is a slight tendency for the odds ratios controlling for ability to be higher for men than for women: eighteen estimates are significant at the 0.001 level for men, only five for women. The most significant class processes for daughters tend to be encoded through ability tests, and – with the major exception of professional daughters – there are relatively few extra resources which are deployed on their behalf apart from these. Or, to put this in Goldthorpe's terms, 'primary' class effects are more significant for girls than for boys. This is in line with the arguments of Savage (1992), Savage *et al.* (1992) and Crompton and Sanderson (1990) concerning the particular reliance of 'successful' women on 'cultural assets', or 'the qualifications lever'. Women depend overwhelmingly on the education process if they are to move into privileged social classes, whereas boys have other sorts of resources which they can utilise on top of, or instead of, those concerned with qualifications (see also Heath and Cheung 1996).

Conclusions

We are now in a position to draw the threads of this paper together. We have seen that considering the role of ability tests within a class structural framework indicates some possible ways of exploring the relevance of different processes behind class inequality. A number of significant points stand out. First, and unsurprisingly, there is clear evidence that class advantages are transmitted both through 'primary' and 'secondary' effects. To spell this out, some of the advantages of middle-class children rest in their ability to score higher in ability tests and thereby go on to do better in the educational system. However, it is also clearly the case that middle-class advantages are also apparent even controlling for level of ability, and therefore that there are other mechanisms at work which tend to reproduce class inequalities.

Within this broad argument, we have also been able to observe some interesting nuances. Gender differences are especially revealing. The sons of

middle-class men have more resources to draw upon to perpetuate their advantages than do the daughters of middle-class men. The class privileges of daughters depend overwhelmingly on their scoring well on ability tests and then (presumably) using credentialist methods to sustain their class advantages. Boys, however, appear to rely less exclusively (though still importantly) on this process. Thus we have seen that, controlling for ability levels, the relevant odds ratios for boys tend to be higher than for girls. Related to this point, it is clear for low ability middle-class boys, there are a number of processes which allow them to have good chances of retaining their middle-class position. In this respect there does appear to be a clear check on the meritocratic factors emphasised by Saunders (1997).

Finally, we have seen that within the overall advantages of the service class over other social classes, which exist both with and without controls for ability tests, it is possible to detect a certain process of professional closure. This is especially notable for the daughters of professional men, who are markedly more advantaged than managerial daughters as well as the daughters of all other fathers, in being able to move to middle-class employment. But there also appear to be distinct advantages for the sons of professionals as well. The 'low ability' sons of professional fathers appear to have greater chances of staying in the salariat than do the 'low ability' sons of managers. There is also some trend for the sons of professionals to move themselves into professional jobs rather than managerial, and vice versa. The precise causes of these patterns are unclear. The important point to note is that the advantages remain even after controlling for ability tests, suggesting that they may be to do as much with the material advantages, social networks, etc., of professionals as with issues of cultural capital. There is a clear indication here that the social advantages of professionals may rely as much on their material resources as their much vaunted 'cultural capital'. This point would certainly repay further examination.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Fiona Devine, John Goldthorpe and anonymous referees for comments on this paper.

Notes

1. For instance there is now data suitable for the study of 'work-life' mobility using the OPCS Longitudinal Study (see Savage *et al.* 1992; Fielding 1995), the British Household Panel Study (see Buck *et al.* 1994), and the Social Change and Economic Life initiative (see Gershuny 1995; Mills 1995). These same sources are also suitable for the study of women's as well as men's work-life mobility (see also Payne and Abbott 1991).
2. The main exception is perhaps Payne, who over many years has argued that Goldthorpe's stress on class has obscured the importance of occupational and industrial factors affecting social mobility (see, for example, Payne 1987, 1990). This claim has been contested (as in Goldthorpe 1990), but in any event Payne

has never elaborated his perspective sufficiently and relies primarily on descriptive accounts of the mobility process which do not adequately distinguish absolute and relative components.

3. To some extent the status attainment tradition can be seen as having close affinities to social psychological research. This lineage is certainly clear in Herrnstein and Moore's *The Bell Curve* (1994).
4. Saunders operationalises the 'SAD' hypothesis by factors such as a measure of overcrowding in the parental home as well as factors such as parent's class.
5. The main exception here is Erik Wright who does use a class schema to analyse mobility; see Wright (1996).
6. The crucial methodological issue concerns whether odds ratios are the main means of conceptualising mobility. For Goldthorpe the analysis of social mobility focuses around the question of competition for desirable social positions between the members of different social classes and he therefore uses odds ratios since these refer to the chances of members of class x reaching class x rather than class y positions compared to the chances of class y reaching class x rather than class y positions (i.e. it directly measures relative, or competitive, odds). (The best introduction to this argument is still Heath 1981). Saunders, by contrast, is hostile to the use of odds ratios since he claims it produces a deliberately pessimistic view of social mobility because it links both success and failure rates in one index. Saunders thereby insists that the fact that a high proportion of working-class children are upwardly mobile – regardless of what is happening to middle-class children – should not be hidden from view. But in fact it is very difficult to avoid the logic of odds ratios when one comes to consider social processes of mobility. Thus even Saunders adopts the implicit logic of odds ratios when he claims that 'long range mobility is common in Britain and, crucially, . . . it occurs downwards as well as upwards' (Saunders 1995:24). It is furthermore strange that Saunders claims that it does not matter whether upward mobility is caused by the existence of 'room at the top' or meritocratic forces. These issues are now well rehearsed in the literature (see, for example, Westergaard 1990; Payne 1990, 1992; Kelley 1990; Goldthorpe 1990; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992) and there is no need to labour them here.
7. Sample attrition due to missing values on the occupational variables reduces the numbers in the low ability group to a greater extent than the other two groups, and the low ability and high ability groups finally comprise 28 per cent and 36 per cent of a total sample of 6,230 respectively. The mean test scores of children from different social classes within the ability grouping were compared, and were within 2 scale points on the 80 point scale for high ability children, and 4 scale points for the low ability children.
8. For an excellent discussion of this point with reference to *The Bell Curve*, see Fischer *et al.* (1996), Chaps 2–3.
9. Saunders (1997: fn 8) argues that differences in the scores of respondents on ability tests at age 7, 11 and 16 are due to measurement error. However, in this case, the differences would be random, not systematically differentiated in the way Fogelman and Goldstein discuss. It is quite remarkable that Saunders does not feel the need to critically evaluate the extensive research of social psychologists on the NCDS before embarking on his own analysis.
10. All economically active respondents are included. Therefore, occupational coding is based on the current or most recent occupation. A problem arises with the occupational coding of women, since at this age (33), many women are engaged in childcare and work part-time. Part-time work is associated with a loss of occupational status. A decision had to be made whether to analyse part-time and full-time women workers together or separately. The occupational down-

grading of part-time women workers has been extensively analysed (see, for example, Dex (1987), Paci *et al.* (1997), Dale and Egerton 1997), and it has been shown that tertiary level qualifications protect against down-grading. Although class of origin has not played a large part in these analyses, it is well-established that women from middle-class origins gain better qualifications. This is the case taking into account their measured ability (Egerton forthcoming). It was not considered appropriate to introduce these complex issues into this analysis. Rather, the occupational down-grading associated with part-time work was conceptualised as part of a life-time occupational trajectory, to which women from less advantaged origins are at more risk. Checks showed that higher percentages of low ability women worked part-time (56 per cent) than full-time, similar percentages of mid-ability worked part-time (48 per cent) and full-time, and higher percentages of high ability women worked full-time (60 per cent). Part-time workers were mainly clustered in manual and intermediate occupations, although sizeable percentages of high ability women were to be found working part-time in low service-class occupations, such as teaching, nursing, etc. Taking into account low frequencies in some cells and columns, class of origin effects seem similar for part-time and full-time women.

11. It is important to note here that because we are forced to include SEGs 2.2 and 5.2 in the service class our definition of the salariat is somewhat broader than that used by Savage *et al.* (1992).

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Appendix Table A
Social Mobility of 'Mid Ability' Sons

	Father's group						
Son's group	Large bus.	Prof.	Lower serv.	Small bus.	Inter. n-m.	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual
Large bus.	29.2	22.9	10.8	18.1	17.5	15.0	9.3
Prof.	13.8	10.4	5.4	4.8	6.3	4.9	5.0
Lower serv.	9.2	29.2	27.0	11.9	13.8	8.2	8.1
All serv.	**43.2**	**62.5**	**43.1**	**34.8**	**36.6**	**28.1**	**22.4**
Small bus.	15.4	10.4	12.2	21.9	7.5	9.9	7.5
Inter.	7.7	12.5	18.9	9.0	16.3	12.4	8.1
All inter.	**23.1**	**22.9**	**31.1**	**30.9**	**23.8**	**22.3**	**15.6**
Skilled m.	13.8	12.5	13.5	27.6	30.0	34.5	39.1
Unskilled m.	10.8	2.1	12.2	6.7	8.8	15.0	23.0
All working	**24.6**	**14.6**	**25.7**	**34.3**	**38.8**	**49.5**	**62.1**
N	65	48	74	210	80	426	161

Appendix Table B
Social Mobility of 'Mid Ability' Daughters

	Father's group						
Daughter's group	Large bus.	Prof.	Lower serv.	Small bus.	Inter. n-m.	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual
Large bus.	13.1	8.3	6.6	7.8	3.6	6.2	5.9
Prof.	4.9	6.3	2.6	0.5	1.2	—	1.0
Lower serv.	19.7	41.7	21.1	20.1	20.5	14.6	15.8
All serv.	**37.7**	**56.3**	**30.3**	**28.4**	**25.3**	**20.8**	**22.7**
Small bus.	1.6	4.2	5.3	6.4	1.2	4.5	4.0
Inter.	42.6	22.9	38.2	42.5	48.2	40.6	33.2
All inter.	**44.2**	**25.1**	**43.5**	**48.9**	**49.4**	**45.1**	**37.2**
Skilled mn	1.6	2.1	5.3	1.4	—	3.8	4.0
Unskilled	16.4	14.6	21.1	21.5	25.3	30.4	36.1
All working	**18.0**	**16.7**	**26.4**	**22.9**	**25.3**	**34.2**	**40.1**
N	61	48	76	219	83	471	202

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