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Cultural transmission, educational attainment and social mobility

Simone Scherger and Mike Savage

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between cultural socialisation, educational attainment and intergenerational social mobility. Picking up on debates about the transmission of cultural capital and social advantage, we use data from the *Taking Part Survey* of England to analyse how far socialisation into cultural activities and encouragement play a role in educational attainment, intergenerational mobility and in the reproduction of class. This survey has unprecedented data on whether respondents had been taken to museums/art galleries, theatre/dance/classical music performances, sites of historic interest, and libraries when they were growing up. This is buttressed by information on how much parents or other adults encouraged the respondents to read books or to be creatively active in different domains of the arts, literature and music. Using these rich measures of childhood socialisation, we can show that part of the effect of parental class on educational attainment is due to the transmission of this kind of cultural capital. Moreover, this transmission also has a direct effect on the level of educational attainment. In a similar fashion, respondents who have experienced a higher intensity of cultural socialisation are more likely to be upwardly mobile, and likewise, cultural transmission has a positive effect on the prevention of downward mobility among service class children. These results are discussed in the light of current issues in British mobility research and its treatment of cultural aspects of class and mobility.

During the past two decades major advances have been made in comprehending both the scale and extent of social mobility in the UK, and its core economic and social dimensions (see for example Goldthorpe, 1980 and 1987; Marshall *et al.*, 1997; Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007). There has, however, been a lack of clarity in the cultural dimensions of mobility, including both the effect of social mobility on cultural practices and tastes, and the role of cultural processes themselves in affecting mobility outcomes. This issue is linked to the existence of unresolved theoretical issues in the study of mobility which pit rational action approaches against those who argue for the importance of cultural capital in the structuring of social mobility (see Goldthorpe, 2007a and b; Savage *et al.*, 2005; 2007). This uncertainty also bears on the analysis of the role of educational attainment as a key mediator of social mobility, given (← p. 406) current debate about its significance as a lever for upward mobility (consider the contrasting arguments of Marshall *et al.*, 1997; Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007), and especially on the question of whether the role of educational qualifications in affecting life chances is to be understood as evidence of meritocracy or the power of cultural capital.

Our paper uses the *Taking Part Survey* conducted in 2005 and 2006, to deliver the most comprehensive study of the relationship between parental cultural practices and respondents' social mobility in contemporary Britain. The *Taking Part Survey* allows us to assess how socialisation into cultural activities may have an effect on both educational attainment and social mobility. We thus have the unusual scope to unpack the dynamic of those cultural processes which might structure social mobility.

The first part of our paper examines how social mobility researchers have reflected on the significance of cultural processes, exploring the theorisation of cultural capital, merit, education and mobility, and linking this to the findings of previous studies. The second part of our paper reviews the nature of the *Taking Part* dataset, and explains the selection of our variables. In the third section we examine the extent of parental socialisation, its association

with age and class and its impact on educational attainment, over and above the effect of class. The fourth part of the paper shows that parental encouragement and socialisation into cultural activities also have a marked effect on the prospects of upward mobility for the working and intermediate classes, even when controlling for educational attainment. In the fifth and last section we finish with some conclusions regarding whether our results can be taken to indicate the existence of parental cultural capital as a significant feature in the shaping of children's mobility prospects.

1. Issues in mobility research and the need for cultural analysis

Although cultural factors are frequently mentioned in passing, they have rarely been given major emphasis in British analyses of social mobility which have been couched within a class structural approach centred on the study of movement between occupational class positions. Since this approach has been pitched against status attainment perspectives (see for example Blau and Duncan, 1967), which focus on the correlates of 'who gets ahead', British research has not focused on people's individual characteristics – including cultural ones – which may be associated with mobility. Instead, analytical attention has centred on differentiating between absolute and relative mobility (Goldthorpe, 1980; Goldthorpe, 1987). One important aspect of this argument is that the relative chances of working class against professional-managerial service class sons in reaching service rather than working class positions have changed very little (Goldthorpe and Jackson, 2007; Goldthorpe and Mills, 2005, 2008; though for contradictory findings see Heath and Payne, 2000). (← p. 407)

Research on trends in absolute and relative mobility rates in Britain has been couched, increasingly explicitly, within a rational action theory which lies in contrast to those – notably Pierre Bourdieu – who argue for the importance of cultural processes for mobility (see Goldthorpe, 2007a). Rational action perspectives argue that those from working class backgrounds predominantly pursue the rational practice of acquiring the kind of qualifications which are likely to lead to realistically attainable occupational outcomes (like successful vocational training) rather than risky high level educational qualifications where they might fail (see Goldthorpe, 2007b). This has tended to marginalise an interest in the cultural processes of social mobility which were evident in earlier work in the sociology of education, dating back to that of Jackson and Marsden (1962). However, as Devine (1998; 2004) discusses, a certain ambiguity in Goldthorpe's commentary regarding the potential for cultural processes to influence mobility remains – as manifest in his asides about the possible importance of cultural factors, which are never developed or elaborated, and his reference to the importance of 'cultural resources' (Goldthorpe, 2007a; see also Savage *et al.*, 2007).

The area where this ambiguity about the importance of cultural factors surfaces most clearly is the discussion of the role of educational attainment in mediating the relationship between class origin and destination. Educational attainment can be attributed (to a greater or lesser degree) to cultural capital, notably that associated with parental support and socialisation, or it can be identified with innate meritocratic variables, such as intelligence (see the debate between Saunders, 1995; Savage and Egerton, 1997; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1999). There clearly is a strong link between scoring higher in intelligence and other tests and coming from more advantaged social backgrounds. Even if these class differences in ability are partly due to differential genetic endowments, socialisation in early childhood also seems to play a role

(Jackson *et al.*, 2007, Marshall *et al.*, 1997: especially 141ff, Saunders, 1995). This supports Lareau and Weininger's (2003) argument that cultural capital and ability cannot be separated empirically. In addition, over and above these 'primary effects' of ability, 'secondary' effects of educational choices also contribute to class differences in educational attainment (Jackson *et al.*, 2007) and it is possible that cultural processes are also implicated in these.

It is difficult to know how far these primary and secondary effects are related to cultural processes such as parental socialisation and the household activities when children are growing up. Arguments about the importance of cultural capital (alongside economic and social capital) have been raised most notably by Bourdieu (1984; see also Lareau and Weininger, 2003). He argues that educated middle class parents bring up their children in a manner which allows them to acquire the skills and capacities to do well in the educational system. His account of how this happens is imprecise (Sullivan, 2001), but seems to involve familiarising children with the range of cultural and art forms which are taught within the school system. This also means providing the dispositions that allow children to appreciate abstract cultural forms, which (p. 408) are removed from the 'culture of the necessary' (see the discussion in Bennett *et al.*, 2009). Yet it is becoming increasingly clear, following the arguments of Lareau and Weininger (2003) and Bennett *et al.* (2009) that cultural capital cannot be reduced to participation in and knowledge about 'highbrow' cultural activities. Many qualitative studies of educational processes draw attention to the way that middle class parents mobilise cultural capital in supporting their children through the educational sphere, for example by means of additional voluntary lessons, close relationships to the school, economic resources to prevent underachievement or the transmission of a work ethic that puts high value on learning and aspiration (Walkerine, 2000; Reay, 1998; Lareau, 2000; Devine, 2004; Ball, 2003; Butler and Robson, 2003; Savage *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, some of this research shows, in line with Bourdieu's argument, how middle class parents successfully impose their evaluative standards on schools in 'micro-political contests' for example with teachers and authorities (Lareau and Weininger, 2003).

There are some quantitative studies which have demonstrated too that cultural capital has a positive effect on educational attainment, measured as performance at school, prevention of dropping out of school early, or simply the level of qualification reached in school or further education such as vocational training or university. Cultural interests and attitudes, the existence of objectified cultural capital in the parental home, cultural activities and the connected knowledge all have a positive effect on children's educational attainment (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; de Graaf, 1986; de Graaf *et al.*, 2000; Teachman, 1987; Sullivan, 2001). There are some common results in these very different studies. It is the children's activities that are most important. Reading, in particular, influences the children's performance at school positively, whereas formal or 'legitimate' cultural activities (like visiting galleries or going into classical music concerts) sometimes have, but sometimes don't have an effect on school attainment. Moreover, the positive effects interact with class of origin and gender (di Maggio, 1982; de Graaf *et al.*, 2000). However, very few of these studies refer to Britain.

In order to examine the relationship between mobility and education and the role of cultural capital in it, not only the connection between class of origin and educational attainment is important but also the final outcome of the latter: the class of destination. In the study of the role of educational qualifications in shaping intergenerational mobility prospects, issues of

cultural capital are considered in a rather indirect way. Marshall *et al.* (1997: 128) claim that the advantages of the sons of the professional and managerial service class are increasingly mediated by educational qualifications. However, more recent studies find an unchanged or even diminished impact of education on social mobility (Jackson *et al.*, 2005; Tampubolon and Savage, 2009). These research findings alert us to the need to recognise the importance of class effects which work in other ways than that of education. We should not assume that educational qualifications are necessarily the only, or even main, requirement for upward mobility. (← p. 409)

Given the importance of these issues, it is striking that there have been few quantitative studies dealing with the relationship between cultural capital and mobility in the British case. Blanden (2006) examines which children from financially poor backgrounds ‘buck the trend’ and are able to overcome poverty in their own adult life. He highlights the crucial role of cultural factors for intergenerational upward (income) mobility, for instance parents’ reading to the children and parental interest in their child’s education. Although one can think of several ways in which, over and above the class effects on education, cultural capital and related socialisation processes could have an impact on mobility, including occupational choice and self-selection, the role of employers seems particularly worth thinking about. Jackson *et al.* (2005) argue that educational expansion has weakened the role of educational qualifications as signals and certificates, and that the growing personal service industries demand skills that are not captured by educational qualifications. Therefore attributes such as field of study, university, social background, and physical or psychological features of the applicant can become more important. In this way, Jackson *et al.* demonstrate that the role of educational qualifications in gaining certain (privileged) occupational positions is highly variable. Useem and Karabel (1986) show that individual class background and the reputation of the institution where somebody has obtained their degree influence the probability of gaining higher positions within corporate management. Although this finding is related to the movement within the (US) service class it might also be applicable to upward mobility *into* this part of the service class.

Hence, when studying the influence of socialisation variables we are faced with the question of whether the factors leading to upward *mobility* are the same as those entailing the intergenerational *reproduction* of service class positions. There could be different mechanisms at work, or the same mechanisms could lead to different results (see also Savage, 1997: 308). In this context, Goldthorpe sees a strong version of Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction as mistaken exactly because it cannot explain why, despite the stability of relative mobility rates, nonetheless so many children of working class backgrounds have been successful in moving into the service class (see Goldthorpe, 2007a; Goldthorpe, 1996; Savage *et al.*, 2007; Devine, 1998). In his own framework of rational action, Goldthorpe (2007b) distinguishes ‘strategies from below’ and ‘strategies from above’. However, some qualitative studies suggest that there seems to be at least an overlap in the kinds of (cultural) resources that are mobilised by the middle and the working classes in order to enhance their children’s chances. As Devine (2004: 93) notes (in agreement with Goldthorpe rather than Bourdieu) there is clearly no ‘lack of aspiration’ in the working class. The middle class parents in Devine’s study who came from a working class background reported that their working class parents had applied strategies similar to that of the middle classes in order to help them in their educational success although they were somewhat less ambitious than their middle class counterparts (Devine, 2004: 69–94). Jackson and Marsden (← p. 410) (1962) describe an

upper stratum of the working class which strongly supports their children in their education.

In order to address these important conceptual issues, our empirical analyses are not only aimed at clarifying the association between the transmission of cultural capital, educational qualification and intergenerational social mobility. We are also interested in examining whether cultural factors are equally important for educational attainment in different classes, and whether they play a role in both individual upward mobility *and* in the reproduction of class, ie the prevention of downward mobility. For this purpose, it is important to use data which has information on childhood socialisation and cultural practice, on educational attainment, and on the social position of both parents and respondents. The *Taking Part* Survey, commissioned by the DCMS, the Arts Council of England and other cultural agencies, aims at giving comprehensive information on participation in arts activities (eg playing a musical instrument or painting) and on attendance at arts events (eg cinema or classical music concert). Its questions on childhood socialisation and cultural practice are unprecedented in British surveys and make it ideal from our point of view. The subsequent part of our paper provides, after a description of the data and variables, descriptive frequencies on cultural socialisation variables from the *Taking Part* Survey.

2. Data and variables

The *Taking Part* Survey of England contains information on participation in sports, voluntary activities, heritage culture, museums, libraries, archives, and other fields (for an overview see Scherger, 2009). The data were collected in 2005 and 2006 and comprise a representative sample of the English population outside institutional accommodation, from age 16 up. Although some questions have only been administered to parts of the sample, the survey has an unusually large sample size, with approximately 28,000 interviews (for more information see Aust and Vine, 2007; Williams, 2006). In all descriptive findings presented here, the data have been weighted to reduce bias from non-random nonresponse. All case numbers are unweighted, as are the multivariate analyses.

We are particularly interested in two sets of detailed variables on parental cultural socialisation which have rarely been available in British surveys. The first four variables refer to the following kind of question: ‘When you were growing up, how often did your parent(s) or other adult(s) take you to...?’ This was asked (1) for museums or art galleries, (2) for theatre, dance or classical music performances, (3) for sites of historic interest, and (4) for libraries. The five possible answers were ‘never’, ‘less often than once a year’, ‘one or two times a year’, ‘less often than once a month but at least three or four times a year’, ‘at least once a month’, and ‘don’t know’. It is clear that these variables predominantly tap ‘high’ cultural capital, and can therefore be taken as evidence of parental interest in ‘legitimate culture’. Unfortunately, we (← p. 411) have no further information on who exactly carried out the named activities with the respondents or on when exactly that was. However, we assume that it will in most cases be the parents who took their children to these events and facilities.

The second set of variables goes back to the subsequent question ‘How much did they encourage you to...?’ which was asked for (1) reading books ‘that were not required for school or religious studies’, (2) for drawing or doing painting, writing stories, poems, plays or music, (3) for taking part in sport and (4) for playing musical instrument(s), acting, dancing or

singing. For these four questions the answer categories were ‘encouraged you a lot’, ‘encouraged you a little’, ‘didn’t encourage you at all’ and ‘don’t know’. Again, we do not know who exactly encouraged the children in these things. Although teachers might be more important here than in the first set of questions, we again assume that most of this encouragement came from the respondents’ parents.

The strength of these items lies in the fact that they do not measure cultural capital of the parents, other adults or the children as such, but they focus on practices relevant to the transmission of cultural capital, either in the form of the parents doing something with the children or encouraging them. Both potentially entail not only the transfer of interests, but also of knowledge. This is closer to what actually happens in the socialisation process; existent parental cultural capital as such is not necessarily being activated in socialisation processes. Unfortunately, the eight questions were only asked of half of the sample: excluding the few persons who have answered the questions with ‘don’t know’, between 13,721 and 13,779 respondents answered the single questions.

Apart from these variables on socialisation, we use the information on respondents’ gender, ethnicity, age, highest educational qualification, their occupational class, and the occupational class of the chief income earner in the household when the respondent was aged 16 (which will in the majority of cases be the father).¹ Variables on mobility are derived from a combination of the respondent’s occupational class and the occupational class of the chief income earner when aged 16.² Unfortunately, no information on the educational qualification or financial resources of respondents’ parents was available.

3. Patterns of cultural socialization and educational attainment

When considering whether respondents attended cultural activities with parents or other adults as children, the lowest numbers were for going to the theatre, dance or classical music performances.³ Slightly more than 50 per cent of respondents had never been taken to such performances and only around 12 per cent had been taken at least three times a year. Museums or art galleries have a quite similar distribution, though at a slightly higher level. Historic sites are the item with the lowest proportion of respondents who had never been taken there at all – though this proportion is still around 35 per cent. Regarding libraries there is, unlike the other examples, a strong polarisation between ([← p. 412](#)) those who never visited libraries with their parents or other adults (around 43 per cent) and those who visited them at least three times a year (46 per cent). Encouragement rates are highest for reading books other than school or religious books – around half the respondents were given a lot of encouragement to read. These rates were lowest for playing musical instrument(s), acting, dancing or singing and for drawing or doing painting, writing stories, poems, plays or music; around one third were given a lot of encouragement to do these things. Encouragement to do sport, experienced strongly by 41 per cent, falls between these two extremes.

We devised an additive index including both activities and encouragement, consisting of all eight variables. This was constructed by adding up the respondents’ scores on all variables. For this purpose, the first four variables had to be used in a summarised three-category version (‘never’, ‘less often than once a year to two times a year’, ‘at least three times a year’) so that both sets of variables would have the same weight in the index. With the lowest category of each variable being assigned zero points and the highest two points, respondents

can score between zero and a maximum of 16 points.⁴ Around six per cent of them have zero points on the index – ie they had never been taken to any of the events and facilities listed and had not been encouraged at all to engage in music, arts, sport and reading. 20 per cent have one to four points, 30 per cent five to eight. Slightly more than 30 percent report between nine and 12 points, and have experienced more intense cultural socialisation, and around 11 per cent score very highly, with between 13 and 16 points on the index.

The additive index shows an almost linear relationship with age, with the youngest age group displaying the highest level of encouragement and cultural activities in their childhood and youth. Recall bias, with older people being more likely to forget their childhood activities, might contribute to the important difference between the oldest and the youngest groups, but the difference might also be due to demographic shifts, with increasingly educated middle class parents amongst the parents of the youngest cohorts who are more likely to socialise their children in these ways. Besides, expectations that parents will actively support their children in school and become involved in school issues have intensified significantly in the last 40 years, promoted by corresponding educational policies (Reay, 1998; Standing, 1999).

Figure 1 indicates this relationship between cultural socialisation and class background, using measures of class which distinguish between professionals and managers. This is important in view of the arguments by Le Roux *et al.* (2008) and Bennett *et al.* (2009) that the distinction between the service class and other classes is a less useful boundary for differentiating cultural practices than one which distinguishes a professional executive class, consisting of higher and lower professionals and large managers and employers, from an intermediate class which includes lower managers.

Figure 1 shows that the children of higher professional fathers score systematically higher than any other class, with around one third of children from (← p. 413)

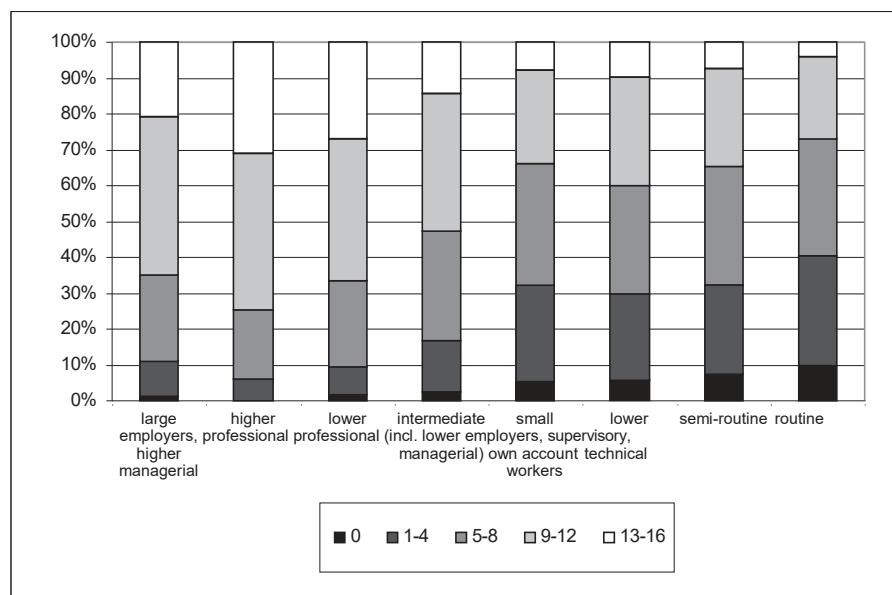


Figure 1 Overall-index parental socialisation for different parental classes Weighted percentages. Unweighted n = 10,568

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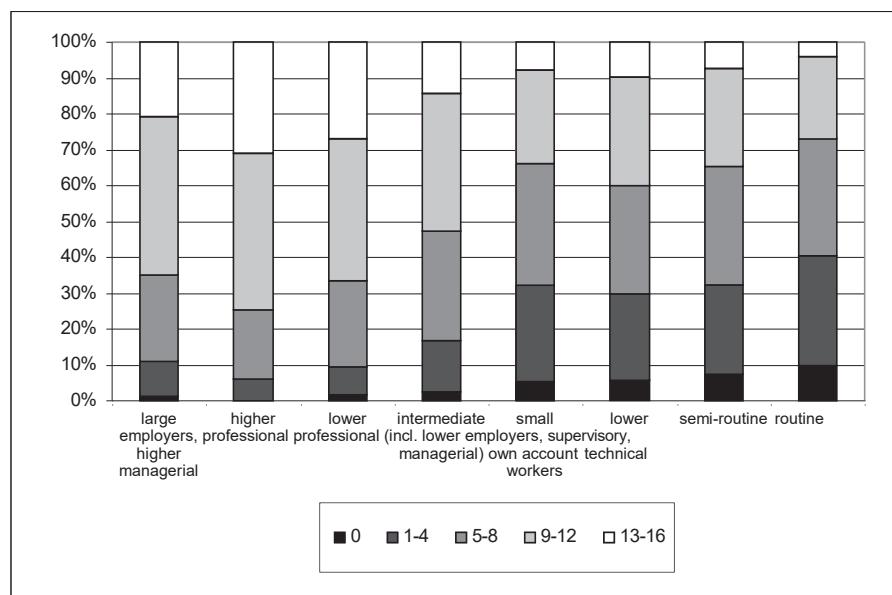


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these households scoring the maximum of 13 to 16 points. This is a very sharp contrast with those in routine occupations where only three per cent score so high. By contrast, 40 per cent of the children of routine workers are in households with very low scores of 4 or less points. Lower professionals are closer to higher professionals, with the higher managers and large employers rather further behind and closer to the intermediate classes than to the higher professionals. This suggests some differentiation between more cultured professional households and those in business and managerial contexts as suggested by Savage *et al.* (1992) and consistent with the emphasis in Le Roux *et al.* (2008). The self employed petit bourgeoisie score low, with only slightly more intense cultural socialisation than the routine workers.

We should note that class is not the only relevant variable which affects socialisation. Multivariate analyses (for details see Scherger and Savage, 2009) confirm the effects of age and parental class but also show that boys are considerably underrepresented in the group of most intense cultural socialisation (compared to girls), along with respondents of most ethnic minorities, notably Asian minorities (compared to Whites).

These differences in childhood cultural socialisation are strongly associated with educational attainment. More than half of those with a very low intensity of cultural socialisation do not attain any educational qualification, compared to less than 10 percent of those with the highest intensity. However, the (← p. 414)

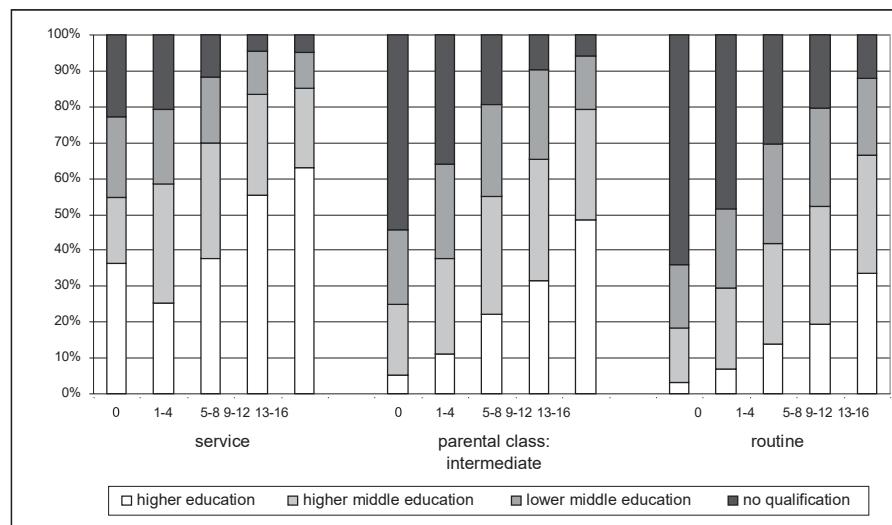


Figure 2 Educational attainment by points on cultural socialisation index, stratified by parental class⁵

Weighted percentages. Unweighted n = 9,953

connection between cultural socialisation and educational attainment might be a function of that between class of origin and education.

Figure 2 reveals that strong effects for the socialisation score remain even when controlling for class. Respondents from service class homes who score highly for encouragement and activities very rarely gain no qualifications, whereas among those with a low score one fifth earns no qualifications. By contrast nearly two thirds of service class respondents with high

scores are degree holders, compared to around one third of those with a low score. For the respondents of intermediate class backgrounds, socialisation scores make a bigger difference. Over half of those who score zero also earn no qualifications. Those who score highly, however, are almost as likely as respondents from service class backgrounds to go to university. These findings indicate a clear differentiation within the intermediate class, with one group showing an educational profile which is relatively similar to that of the service class. Another group within the intermediate class reports less encouragement, which results in educational achievements more similar to the working class. The patterns for the working class also show large differences. Those with low scores on the socialisation index are likely to have no educational qualifications, whereas those who have high scores nearly always obtain some qualifications, and one third goes to university.

A multinomial logistic regression model (Table 1) shows that the socialisation index has a marked effect on educational attainment, over and above the expected effects of parental class, age, gender and ethnicity. Controlling for their less intense cultural socialisation, men are more likely than women to (p. 415)

Table 1 Multinomial logistic regression educational attainment⁶

educational qualification respondent (ref.: no educational qualification)	higher education	higher middle education	lower middle education
	exp (b)	exp (b)	exp (b)
index of parental socialisation (0–16)	1.32***	1.19***	1.13***
class of chief income earner when aged 16 (ref.: routine and manual)			
managerial and professional	7.23***	2.93***	1.67***
intermediate (incl. lower managerial)	2.36***	1.68***	1.41***
age (reference: 75+)			
25–34	18.85***	10.70***	13.07***
35–44	15.06***	9.20***	11.45***
45–54	9.31***	6.05***	6.76***
55–64	5.05***	3.37***	3.52***
65–74	1.95***	1.70***	1.93***
gender (reference: female)			
male	2.47***	2.17***	1.18*
ethnic group (ref.: white)			
other	2.01	0.96	1.03
black	1.53*	1.32	0.91
asian	1.07	0.53***	0.49***
mixed	0.99	1.20	0.83
n		9,934	
Nagelkerke r ²		0.347	

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

have gained higher and middle educational qualifications, and Asian minorities are much less likely than Whites to have earned middle and lower qualifications. Although men and Asian minorities benefit less from cultural socialisation (see above), other factors play to their advantage in educational attainment. The age effects can be seen as linked to the different opportunities of schooling and qualification available to different cohorts, thus taking into account educational expansion. These cohort differences are particularly strong for reaching a higher educational qualification.⁷

The Nagelkerke r square (0.347) indicates that this is a powerful model. If we remove the socialisation variable, it falls to 0.270.⁸ In comparison to a model without the parental socialisation variable, the effects of parental class and of birth cohort are clearly reduced in the model presented in table 1, indicating that parts of the association of educational attainment with class and with cohort are explained by different intensities of parental socialisation. Similar models using the single items instead of the overall index show that activities, rather than encouragement, tend to have stronger effects on (← p. 416)

Table 2 Multinomial logistic regressions on educational attainment,⁹ stratified by parental class

educational qualification (ref.: none)	parental class	model 1: service classes	model 2: intermediate classes	model 3: working classes
		exp (b)	exp (b)	exp (b)
higher education	cultural socialisation (0–16)	1.28***	1.35***	1.31***
	age (reference: 75+)			
	25–34	17.38***	16.05***	17.21***
	35–44	11.72***	11.86***	17.65***
	45–54	9.55***	7.30***	9.93***
	55–64	5.93***	5.08***	4.76***
	65–74	2.49**	1.35	2.30**
	gender (ref.: female)			
	male	2.02***	1.87***	2.79***
	ethnic group (ref.: white)			
	non-white	1.24	0.97	1.58**
higher middle education	cultural socialisation (0–16)	1.13***	1.21***	1.19***
	age (reference: 75+)			
	25–34	7.10***	11.00***	11.20***
	35–44	7.80***	7.50***	10.02***
	45–54	5.10***	5.22***	6.65***
	55–64	3.96***	3.36***	3.28***
	65–74	2.22*	1.22	1.91***
	gender (ref.: female)			
	male	1.36	1.66***	2.75***
	ethnic group (ref.: white)			
	non-white	0.93	0.61**	0.91
lower middle education	cultural socialisation (0–16)	1.10**	1.14***	1.13***
	age (reference: 75+)			
	25–34	7.88***	11.50***	15.03***
	35–44	8.25***	8.62***	13.67***
	45–54	6.69***	5.50***	7.38***
	55–64	4.16***	3.02***	3.75***
	65–74	2.31*	1.51	2.12***
	gender (ref.: female)			
	male	1.07	0.99	1.25**
	ethnic group (ref.: white)			
	non-white	0.84	0.61**	0.62**
	n	1,791	3,007	5,136
	Nagelkerke r ²	0.167	0.259	0.295

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05 (← p. 417)

educational attainment, although all single effects are significant. Among the activities, being taken to historic sites has the strongest impact, and being taken to libraries the weakest. Being encouraged to read books is more important than all other forms of encouragement.

Table 2 displays the same analysis, with one model for each class.¹⁰ This allows us to address the question of whether cultural socialisation is equally important for educational success across all classes. In the literature, there are some indications that the effect of cultural resources on educational attainment is not the same across all classes. In our model, however, the differences between the exposed values of b for the three different class backgrounds are negligible.

The historically expanding possibilities of obtaining middle and lower educational qualifications, here manifest in the age effect, are particularly apparent among the intermediate and the working classes where cohort differences are stronger. The educational privilege of men is somewhat more pronounced in the working class. Similarly, differences in ethnic background carry more weight in the intermediate and the working class.¹¹

Therefore, we can confidently report that class differences in educational attainment are in part mediated by cultural activities and encouragement. Furthermore, these socialisation experiences also have a clear direct effect on educational attainment, over and above class effects. This relationship between socialisation and educational qualification appears to be roughly the same for different classes, indicating that these effects are important in and of themselves, even though they are also class related. In the following and final part of the empirical investigation, we examine whether parental socialisation has any effect on social mobility, over and above its role in affecting educational attainment.

4. Cultural socialisation and intergenerational social mobility

Having established that cultural socialisation affects educational attainment, let us now take a further step of considering whether it also affects social mobility prospects – over and above the much discussed effects of educational attainment. Here our data set allows us to break new ground. Amongst respondents with information on the chief income earner when aged 16, almost 60 per cent came from a lower or intermediate class background (ie routine, semi-routine, lower supervisory, technical, intermediate or lower managerial occupations, or small employers or own account workers), and within those, a good fifth (22 per cent) moved into the service classes. In the following analysis, only the cases with valid values for parental socialisation can be included. Amongst them slightly more than 60 per cent do not come from a service class background. As in the overall sample, slightly more than a fifth of them are upwardly mobile. (← p. 418)

Table 3 Logistic regressions on upward intergenerational social mobility (only respondents with working and intermediate class origin)

	model 1	model 2
	exp (b)	exp (b)
respondent's age (reference: 75+)		
25–34	0.49***	0.45***
35–44	0.52***	0.49***
45–54	0.74*	0.73*
55–64	0.72*	0.71*
65–74	0.91	0.90
gender (ref.: female)		
male	1.05	1.11
father's occupational class (ref. routine occ.)		
intermediate occupations (incl. lower managerial)	1.16	1.08
small Employers, and own account workers	0.91	0.89
lower supervisory and technical occupations	1.22	1.18
semi-routine occupations	1.14	1.11
educational qualification respondent (ref.: none)		
higher education and professional/vocational equivalents	40.75***	34.60***
other higher education below degree level	16.18***	14.26***
A levels, vocational level 3 and equivalents	5.01***	4.45***
trade apprenticeships	3.38***	3.20***
5 or more GCSE/O Level grades A* -C and L2 equivalents	4.06***	3.68***
GCSE/O Level grade A* -C(<5 A*-C) and L1 equivalents	1.86**	1.76**
other qualifications: level unknown	2.89***	2.72***
ethnicity (ref.: white)		
mixed	0.76	0.79
asian	0.89	0.96
black	0.73	0.78
other	1.27	1.34
cultural socialisation (0–16 points)		
Constant	-	1.05***
n	0.06***	0.05***
Nagelkerke r²	7,664	7,664
	0.337	0.342

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

The determinants of upward mobility are modelled in Table 3. The models only include those whose father's class is low or intermediate (as defined above). Within this group, a simple logistic regression distinguishes those who remained in these occupational classes from those who moved upward into the (← p. 419) services classes. By including the age of the

respondent we control again for the different structural mobility chances of the birth cohorts, and for the fact that the younger cohorts have not yet reached their final occupational position and might still experience some upward career mobility in future. In comparison to the reference group of those being aged 75 and more, most younger groups, especially up to the age of 45, display lower odds of being upwardly mobile.

As expected, higher education boosts the odds of being upwardly mobile. However, we can also see that the intensity of parental socialisation into cultural activities has a clearly significant effect over and above that of education.¹² After the inclusion of the additive index of parental socialisation, the explanatory power of the model rises slightly, and the effects of educational achievement become slightly weaker. Being taken to arts events or to a library, and being encouraged to be active in the arts, in sport or in reading enhances the chances of being upwardly mobile and makes a difference within the lower and intermediate classes. Part of the effect of education on mobility chances can be traced back to differences in cultural socialisation.¹³ Gender, ethnicity and exact class of origin do not have any significant effects.

Finally, we reverse our focus to look at downward social mobility (table 4). Table 4 only includes respondents from service class backgrounds, and examines those variables which are associated with being downwardly mobile compared to staying in the same class. There are barely any differences between cohorts, but being male and having experienced a more intense cultural socialisation when growing up both have a preventive effect on the odds of being downwardly mobile. In comparison to higher education, lower educational qualification raises the chances of leaving the service classes. These education effects are only very slightly reduced by the involvement of the socialisation index. In contrast to the dynamics for upward mobility, there is a differentiation according to class origin, with respondents whose father has a lower professional occupation being more likely to be downwardly mobile.

5. Discussion and conclusions

We have demonstrated that the disposition of parents (and other adults) to take children to cultural events and facilities and to encourage them to read, to do arts, music, and sport is unequally distributed across classes. This is part of the reason why children of less privileged class backgrounds obtain lower levels of educational qualification. Furthermore, and over and above the class effect, the transmission of cultural capital also has a direct impact on educational attainment. Yet the benefits of activities and encouragement do not stop with education – they also increase the chances of intermediate and working class children being upwardly mobile, even taking the effects of educational attainment into account. The same applies to the protection against downward (← p. 420) mobility for children from service class backgrounds – though here the model explains less of the overall variation in the outcomes.

Table 4 Logistic regressions on downward intergenerational social mobility (only respondents with service class origin)

	model 1 exp (b)	model 2 exp (b)
respondent's age (ref.: 75+)		
25–34	1.52	1.56
35–44	1.61	1.65
45–54	1.77*	1.75*
55–64	1.50	1.47
65–74	1.80	1.77
gender (ref.: female)		
male	0.76*	0.72*
father's occupational class (ref. large employers, higher managerial and professional occupations)		
lower professional occupations	1.27*	1.27*
educational qualification (ref.: higher education and professional/vocational equivalents)		
other higher education below degree level	2.33***	2.19***
A levels, vocational level 3 and equivalents	7.36***	6.93***
trade apprenticeships	19.43***	18.47***
5 or more GCSE/O Level grades A* -C and L2 equivalents	10.16***	9.53***
GCSE/O Level grade A* -C(< 5 A*-C) and L1 equivalents	10.11***	9.07***
other qualifications: level unknown	8.89***	8.38***
none	20.15***	17.62***
ethnicity (ref.: White)		
mixed	0.83	0.80
asian	1.09	1.00
black	1.89*	1.74
other	1.15	1.13
cultural socialisation (0–16 points)	-	0.95**
Constant	0.29***	0.49*
n	1,691	1,691
Nagelkerke r²	0.302	0.307

*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Regarding the single variables of our index, actions clearly speak louder than words – more detailed models (not displayed here) show that activities prove to be more important in educational attainment and in being upwardly (\leftarrow p. 421) mobile than encouragement. Being taken to historic sites stands out as the influence with the biggest single effect.

It is important to note the limitations of our analysis. First, the usual caveats of the survey method (see also Savage, 1997) include the often discussed issue of defining mobility by the job of the father (who is probably the ‘chief income earner’ in the household at age 16). In the context of this paper this is problematic because quite possibly mothers are more important in educational processes than fathers, and this might be even more so for older respondents (see Vincent, 2000; Reay, 1998; Thompson, 1997). Second, our central variable is based on a set of rather general questions: We do not know who exactly encouraged the respondents or took them to cultural events or facilities, nor do we know exactly when this was. It would be valuable to have more fine grained data here. Third, recall biases or biases induced by social desirability may affect the respondents’ answers. As long as recall biases are evenly distributed across social categories they pose less of a problem. However, younger respondents or those with higher educational qualifications may be more inclined to remember their childhood socialisation. Although we have no means of correcting for such a potential bias the results presented are robust and, at least for educational attainment, strong. They also tally with what we might expect from qualitative studies. Fourth, our information on the class destination of the respondents is not very accurate because we only know their occupational position at the time of the interview for the *Taking Part Survey*; many of them have experienced or will experience significant career mobility, and this will not be evenly distributed across age groups. Fifth, important information on other determinants of educational attainment and intergenerational mobility is not available; in particular the financial resources of the parents, the parents’ education and the child’s ability have been shown to be important. The parents’ financial resources or their education are likely to influence the child’s educational attainment and their social mobility; they are also likely to be connected to the activities that parents carry out with their children or in which they encourage participation. Including parental financial resources or education might thus reduce the effects cultural socialisation has on educational attainment and mobility.

We also need to recognise that the mechanisms which link these socialisation characteristics and our two dependent variables: educational attainment and social mobility could be various, and do not in and of themselves demonstrate how cultural capital operates. As discussed in the introduction, primary effects of ability on educational attainment have to be distinguished from those that are connected to educational choices. We cannot separate primary (ability) from secondary effects (choice) on school attainment here, but it is very probable that cultural socialisation is connected to both, that means it has the potential to improve the child’s ability in important areas of school performance, and it might be an indicator of attitudes and preferences in the family of origin that go together with more ambitious educational choices. For this reason, the possibility of isolating effects of ‘ability’ empirically must be ([← p. 422](#)) contested (see also Lareau and Weininger, 2003). As a third possible mechanism, being taken to cultural events and facilities and being encouraged to read, do arts and music etc. may be more about learning tastes and preferences of ‘legitimate’ culture than about actual skills. This would be a more specific version of Bourdieu’s cultural capital hypothesis but is, at least in the contemporary English context, probably only one (and perhaps not the most important) purview of cultural capital (Lareau and Weininger, 2003).

Other factors which might contribute to the impact of cultural socialisation because they are correlated with it are in particular financial and social resources (see also Savage and Egerton, 1997). Financial resources can help in realising more ambitious educational choices or in preventing failure. Social networks including other parents, teachers or other persons with

expert knowledge of the educational system can help to gain support or access to further resources. To put it another way, it is not only the substance of cultural practices ('contents', knowledge, tastes, preferences) that may play a role, but also the social organisation of participation in arts (Ostrower, 1998).

All these factors probably also effect the chances of being upwardly mobile or of preventing downward mobility. Education clearly is the most important correlate of intergenerational mobility, and this is in part due to processes of cultural transmission. However, as for education itself, the positive effect of cultural socialisation may reflect a whole range of attitudes and preferences that facilitate becoming a member of the service classes. Having visited many historic sites as a child is unlikely in itself to be directly relevant to the selection process for a professional or managerial job. However, it may entail interests and attitudes (for example in the areas of politics or history) that might leave a potential employer with a positive impression of an applicant for a job. Apart from what happens during the selection process for a job, self selection through ambition and self-confidence also contribute to the mechanisms that connect cultural socialisation and upward mobility. As in the case of education, the positive effect of the transmission of cultural capital on mobility may also be due to other resources that are connected to them: our socialization variables are probably indicative of the parents' contacts and networks, their knowledge about, and access to, the world of the service classes. These could all facilitate getting a job in the service classes – which is particularly plausible for managerial occupations. Finally psychological mechanisms can also account for the connection of class to school attainment and mobility prospects (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001).

Because of the manifold interconnections between all these influences, we need to be cautious in drawing clear causal connections. This is not only due to the lack of adequate data sufficient to map the underlying processes, but also due to the complex nature of these biographical processes themselves. As Jackson *et al.* (2007) point out when discussing the possibility of 'anticipatory effects': it is not clear whether a child's high school performance leads to educational decisions in favour of higher education, or whether parents' ambitions for their child leads to high performance which then reinforces the respective decisions. (← p. 423)

Nonetheless, after all these caveats, our results have important implications for the question of class formation and reproduction. Clearly, the transmission of cultural capital – as measured here in terms of encouragement and supporting the activities of children – contributes to the reproduction of class. However, cultural socialisation and the connected family background beyond parents' class also figure as possible means of differentiation within non-service, that is working and intermediate classes. By applying stratified models we have also demonstrated that, for education, the direct positive impact of cultural socialisation is surprisingly similar across the working, the intermediate and the service classes. Furthermore, upward mobility and the reproduction of class are at least in part determined by the same influences.

Many of the 'individual' factors discussed so far are not of a totally accidental nature but can be connected to class dynamics. Obviously, there are some intermediate and working class families who are more similar to the service classes in their cultural capital than others. Classes are not monolithic; they do not show completely consistent and uniform patterns of cultural participation and socialisation – they are rather a 'moving target' (Savage 1997: 300). In particular, middle class culture in Britain is diverse and by no means limited to 'highbrow'

culture (see also Savage *et al.*, 1992, chapter 6; Bennett *et al.*, 2009). Because of frequent upward mobility in the decades after World War II the middle classes come from more diverse backgrounds and display more heterogeneous patterns of cultural consumption than before (van Eijck, 1999).

In this vein, class dynamics can also be at the root of some working and intermediate class families displaying more middle class cultural attitudes and educational practices than others. Possibly these families have either some kind of service class origin, with for example one of the parents coming from a service class family, or there are service class members in the larger family network, for example among the siblings of the parents. In their study, Jackson and Marsden (1962: 53–8) characterise some of the working class families with educational ambition for their children as ‘sunken middle class’ families, in which particularly the mothers often have fathers in the service class. In their view, this could not only explain the higher amount of cultural capital in these families but may also be a motive for a higher degree of ambition. Tracing the wider (geographical and social) mobility histories of families could prove valuable in better understanding mobility, connected aspirations and strategies (see for example Bertaux and Thompson, 1997).

This last argument would fit well with part of Goldthorpe’s argument: in working class families with some ‘connection’ to the middle classes, for example through the family’s history or through the wider family network, the risk of failure when pursuing more ambitious aims for the children’s education and career might be reduced. However, we would add that cultural resources seem central to this. It is the value that is put on education and ambition, the knowledge about the educational system, and cultural preferences and attitudes closer to those of the middle classes that seem to distinguish working (← p. 424) and intermediate class families with upwardly mobile children – this does not imply that financial resources do not also play a role. We therefore think that the ‘strategies from below’ (Goldthorpe, 2007b) applied by the working classes cannot be fully understood without referring to cultural capital. Educational and occupational choices and the perception of risk are part of class cultures, as especially the cited qualitative studies show. Applying a completely a-cultural characterisation of the underlying decision processes would involve abstracting from individual views and strategies. Although the class typical conditions of educational and occupational decisions will partially work ‘behind the back’ of individual actors the interpretations of the latter give valuable clues as to what matters in their decisions. The value attributed to certain (more or less conscious) aims cannot be understood without referring to class cultures, understood as multi-faceted and differentiated sets of views on the world, attitudes, preferences and so on.

Future research should assess the influence of cultural resources and their different dimensions more precisely, for example regarding the time, place and agents of their transmission to children. A concentration on ‘highbrow’ cultural activities does not seem appropriate although it is still important to include them. The connection of cultural socialisation to education can be understood better if there is information on ability or at least school performance available, always bearing in mind that there are no ‘pure’ measures of ability. Furthermore, more information on other, such as financial and social resources is necessary, including wider family networks. Assessing the mobility history of families – and not only fathers – might give further valuable clues about the underlying dynamics of individual mobility. A closer examination of individual decisions and strategies, and the exact

temporal order of decisions, activities and consequences, would shed further light on the conditions and consequences of mobility and its connection to educational qualifications. Qualitative research on these processes seems indispensable in order to understand fully how individual decisions about education and occupation are made and how evaluative standards in school, for example, are imposed by the dominant classes (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). This should involve the decisions of gatekeepers like teachers and employers.

Notes

¹ In the publicly available dataset the standard occupational classification 2000 (SOC 2000) was given for this chief income earner. From this, the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) could be derived. Due to the lack of further information on the occupation of the chief income earner (employment status and size of company in the case of self employed), only the simplified derivation method could be used, resulting in around 17 percent incorrectly allocated cases. As we use only the seven-category and three-category reduced (← p. 423) versions of this variable for parental class, this error will not reduce the validity of our results. We have information on the occupational class of the chief income earner when aged 16 for slightly more than three quarters of the sample. Cases with missing information (including cases without any income earner at age 16) are excluded from analysis.

² Cases without information on occupational class (including those respondents still in education) were not included in any of the analyses on mobility, but were included in the earlier descriptive analyses.

³ For an overview of the encouragement variables and the effects of encouragement see also Oskala *et al.* (2009).

⁴ A cronbach's alpha of 0.78 for this construct confirms its reliability. As the questions were only asked of half the sample and the additive index could only be calculated if all eight questions were answered no more than 13,457 respondents have a valid value for it.

⁵ Only those aged 25 and older are included. *Higher education* = Higher education, professional/ vocational equivalents; *higher middle* = other higher education below degree level, A levels, vocational level 3 and equivalents, trade apprenticeships; *lower middle* = 5 or more GCSE/O Level grades A* -C, L2 equivalents/GCSE/O Level grade A* -C(< 5 A*-C), L1 equivalents, other qualifications: level unknown

⁶ See footnote 5.

⁷ As parental socialisation is included as a linear variable, the positions after the comma indicate how much the odds ratio (the probability of reaching the respective qualification divided by the probability of not attaining any educational education) increases per 1-point-step of the variable. The roughly linear influence of the socialisation-variable has been checked previously.

⁸ A comparison of two models, one using a class schema which distinguishes between service class, including the lower managerial occupations, and the intermediate class, the other between a professional executive, excluding the lower managerial, and an intermediate class including the lower managerial (and a similar working class in both cases), shows a slight preference for the latter model, lending further support to Le Roux *et al.*'s (2008) analysis of class divisions in contemporary Britain.

⁹ [→ original text: endnote 11] See footnote 5.

¹⁰ [→ original text: endnote 9] It is also possible to run separate models on different cohorts to assess whether the strength of these relationships is changing over time. The effects of parental socialisation remain strong, whereas the effects of class, gender and ethnicity become

markedly weaker in the youngest age groups. However, we cannot exclude that this is due to the fact that the youngest cohorts have not yet reached their final occupational position. The most striking of these shifts is for gender, where older men had enjoyed great advantages in the prospects of attaining higher education compared to girls. These advantages have now been much diminished.

¹¹ [→ original text: endnote 10] This summarising category has been applied because of insufficient case numbers for the different subgroups of non-whites.

¹² The coefficient gives the change in the odds ratio (the probability of being upwardly mobile divided by the probability of *not* being upwardly mobile) caused by a one step change in the index.

¹³ In single models including the single items respectively, all activities prove significant, in particular visiting historic sites and galleries/museums. In the respective four models for the single items of encouragement, the encouragement to read has a significant positive influence, and the encouragement to draw/paint/write and to play a musical instrument or sing exert a small significant influence too.

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these households scoring the maximum of 13 to 16 points. This is a very sharp contrast with those in routine occupations where only three per cent score so high. By contrast, 40 per cent of the children of routine workers are in households with very low scores of 4 or less points. Lower professionals are closer to higher professionals, with the higher managers and large employers rather further behind and closer to the intermediate classes than to the higher professionals. This suggests some differentiation between more cultured professional households and those in business and managerial contexts as suggested by Savage *et al.* (1992) and consistent with the emphasis in Le Roux *et al.* (2008). The self employed petit bourgeoisie score low, with only slightly more intense cultural socialisation than the routine workers.

We should note that class is not the only relevant variable which affects socialisation. Multivariate analyses (for details see Scherger and Savage, 2009) confirm the effects of age and parental class but also show that boys are considerably underrepresented in the group of most intense cultural socialisation (compared to girls), along with respondents of most ethnic minorities, notably Asian minorities (compared to Whites).

These differences in childhood cultural socialisation are strongly associated with educational attainment. More than half of those with a very low intensity of cultural socialisation do not attain any educational qualification, compared to less than 10 percent of those with the highest intensity. However, the (← p. 414)

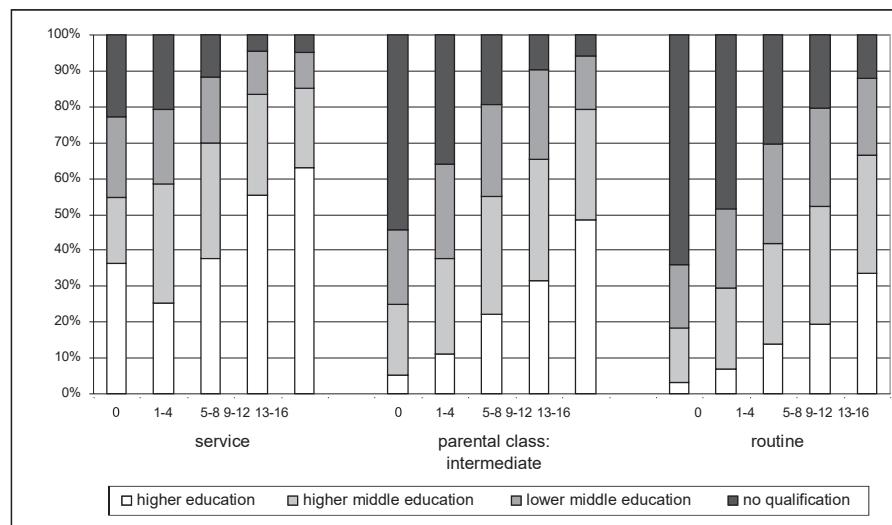


Figure 2 Educational attainment by points on cultural socialisation index, stratified by parental class⁵

Weighted percentages. Unweighted n = 9,953

connection between cultural socialisation and educational attainment might be a function of that between class of origin and education.

Figure 2 reveals that strong effects for the socialisation score remain even when controlling for class. Respondents from service class homes who score highly for encouragement and activities very rarely gain no qualifications, whereas among those with a low score one fifth earns no qualifications. By contrast nearly two thirds of service class respondents with high