

## 8 | *Origins versus Education: Are there 'Glass Floors' and 'Glass Ceilings'?*

In the two preceding chapters we have examined in some detail the associations that exist between individuals' social origins and their educational attainment and between their educational attainment and their class histories and eventual class destinations – that is, the associations on the OE and the ED sides of the OED triangle. The results we have presented show that the OE association has not weakened nor the ED association strengthened in the ways that would be expected if the expansion and reform of the British educational system over the last half-century or more had resulted in movement towards an education-based meritocracy.

In the present chapter we turn to the third side of the triangle, the OD side. This relates to the 'direct' effect of origins on destinations or, that is, to that part of the association between origins and destinations that is *not* mediated via education. If an education-based meritocracy were emerging, then, with the weakening of the OE association and the strengthening of the ED association, the direct OD association should also weaken (see Figure 5.1). In other words, the overall association between origins and destinations should become *increasingly mediated through education*, while the direct effect falls away. Conversely, the persistence of a direct effect must imply that individuals' origins continue to qualify the effects of their education on their destinations; and, insofar as this is so, the degree to which any reduction in social inequalities in educational attainment is translated into a weaker overall OD association – that is, into greater social fluidity – will be restricted. 'Glass floors' will prevent children of more advantaged origins but with relatively poor educational attainment from being downwardly mobile, while 'glass ceilings' will limit the upward mobility of children from less advantaged origins who have performed well educationally.

In Chapter 5 we noted previous research that has indicated that in Britain the direct effect of social origins – or DESO in the usual

sociological abbreviation – has remained remarkably stable over time, and we reported results consistent with this conclusion from our own analyses of data from the 1946, 1958 and 1970 birth cohorts.<sup>1</sup> Then in Chapter 7 we have also shown how, across these cohorts, individuals' social origins have a persisting effect on the class trajectories that they follow, independently of the level of their educational qualifications at labour market entry. However, we now wish to take the question of DESO further in three different respects.

First, we examine how DESO is affected if we consider social origins not simply in terms of class but in the more comprehensive way that we introduced in Chapter 6 in regard to social inequalities in educational attainment: that is, if we take into account, in the way there described, parental status and education in addition to parental class. If this is not done, it could be that DESO will be *underestimated*. Second, though, we also move to a larger view of educational attainment and take into account the further qualifications that individuals may obtain *after* labour market entry – that is, in the course of their working lives. If this is not done, it could be that DESO will be *overestimated*. And third, having arrived at our best estimates of DESO, we seek to gain some better idea of how DESO comes about. To refer to the direct effect of social origins on destinations, in the sense of the effect that is not mediated via education, is in fact to refer to an *unexplained* effect

<sup>1</sup> One of the papers previously cited, Vandecasteele (2016), appears in a collection (Bernardi and Ballerino, 2016) in which the extent of, and changes in, the direct OD association are examined in fourteen modern societies. It is found that whether origins and destinations are considered in terms of income, socioeconomic status or class, a significant direct association is in all cases present. This association is weakening in only two cases, is strengthening in two, and stable over time in the rest. A recent British study (Sullivan et al., 2017), drawing on the 1970 birth cohort dataset, claims to show that there is *no* residual effect of social origins on destinations once education is taken into account. However, several limitations of this study have to be noted. First, it is concerned only with access to NS-SEC Class 1 and not with the association between class origins and destinations more generally; second, class origins are not likewise treated on the basis of NS-SEC but on that of the now outmoded Registrar General's Social Classes, which very likely underestimates their effect; and, third, the definition of 'education' is extended to include not only qualifications obtained but also type of school and university attended. But the effect on class destination of attending a 'Tatler public school' or a Russell Group university *over and above the level of qualification obtained* could as well be seen as an effect of social origins as of educational attainment per se.

of social origins. If education is not the mediating factor, then what other factors are involved?

These more detailed concerns do, however, mean that, because of data considerations, we have to limit our analyses to the 1970 birth cohort. It is for this cohort that we have the fullest information on the nature and timing of qualifications gained after labour market entry; and it is only for members of this cohort that we have information about whether they have ever received any kind of direct help from their parents in searching for and obtaining jobs – which is of course one possible way through which DESO could operate. In turn, because the numbers in our analyses are thus reduced, we work with only a threefold version of NS-SEC, in which Classes 1 and 2 and Classes 6 and 7 are collapsed, as well as Classes 3, 4 and 5, and we focus on the chances of individuals being found, at age 38, either in Classes 1 and 2, the managerial and professional salariat, or in Classes 6 and 7, the wage-earning working class. Further, as regards educational attainment at labour market entry and again at age 38, we form, on the basis of a detailed classification of cohort members' academic and vocational qualifications, three relative qualification levels, rather than the four we have previously used, with qualifications being relativised according to age at labour market entry.<sup>2</sup> We label these levels, which cover roughly equal numbers of individuals, as low (comprising no, or only sub-secondary, qualifications) intermediate and high (comprising higher secondary and tertiary qualifications). And finally, since preliminary analyses revealed no significant gender effects, we treat men and women together, although in the analyses on which we report gender and also part-time working are always included as control variables.

Table 8.1 derives from analyses in which we fit three successively more inclusive statistical models to data for the 1970 cohort, and shows significant positive and negative effects on the chances of being found at age 38 either in the salariat or in the working class for

<sup>2</sup> The logic of this relativising of qualification level by age at labour market entry is the same as that of relativising across birth cohorts, i.e. that what matters as regards labour market returns is not just how much education individuals have but how much relative to those with whom they are in most direct competition. Five age groups are used covering the entire age range from 16 to 38. Further details can be found in Gugushvili, Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2017: Online Appendix A).

Table 8.1 Effects of social origins and of change in relative level of qualification on class position at age 38, by relative level of qualification at labour market entry<sup>(a)</sup>

	Relative level of qualification at labour market entry					
	Low		Intermediate		High	
	Class at age 38		Class at age 38		Class at age 38	
	1 and 2	6 and 7	1 and 2	6 and 7	1 and 2	6 and 7
<b>Model 1</b>						
Class of origin						
Classes 6 and 7	–	++	ns	+	ns	+
Classes 3, 4 and 5	reference		reference		reference	
Classes 1 and 2	++	--	+	–	+	ns
<b>Model 2</b>						
Class of origin						
Classes 6 and 7	ns	+	ns	+	ns	+
Classes 3, 4 and 5	reference		reference		reference	
Classes 1 and 2	+	ns	ns	ns	+	ns
Parental status	ns	--	+	ns	ns	ns
Parental education	++	--	++	--	++	ns
<b>Model 3</b>						
Class of origin						
Classes 6 and 7	ns	+	ns	+	ns	+
Classes 3, 4 and 5	reference		reference		reference	
Classes 1 and 2	+	ns	ns	ns	+	ns
Parental status	ns	--	+	ns	ns	ns
Parental education	++	--	++	--	++	ns
<b>Change in relative level of qualification</b>						
Worsened			–	+	--	+
Did not change	reference		reference		reference	
Improved	++	--	++	--		

Note (a) For symbols, see Table 6.1

Source: Gugushvili, Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2017)

individuals who entered the labour market at the three relative qualification levels that we distinguish.<sup>3</sup>

With Model 1 the only explanatory variable included is that of parental class. It can be seen that this has rather systematically significant effects. Compared with individuals of intermediate class origin (the reference group), individuals of salariat origin have a higher probability of being themselves found in the salariat, and individuals of working-class origin a higher probability of being themselves found in the working class *regardless of their level of qualification at labour market entry*. And for individuals with low- or intermediate-level qualifications, being of salariat origin also has a negative effect on their risk of ending up in the working class. In other words, there is here clear evidence of DESO being in general operation and in creating glass ceilings and, especially, glass floors.

With Model 2 we introduce parental status and education in addition to parental class. It can be seen that the effects of parental class now in some instances weaken or indeed become non-significant, although they still play a part in maintaining intergenerational immobility. Parental status is of rather limited importance – perhaps the main point of interest to emerge is that it is now higher parental status, rather than more advantaged parental class, that appears to create a glass floor protecting individuals with low entry qualifications from ending up in the working class. But parental education proves to have rather consistent effects. Higher parental education has a positive effect on the chances of individuals at all qualification levels accessing the salariat, and a negative effect on the risks of those with low and intermediate levels of qualification being found in the working class.

These results do then indicate that DESO will tend to be underestimated if only parental class is considered. As we argued in Chapter 6, although parental class, status and education are correlated, the correlations are not perfect, and *cumulative* effects may therefore be expected in some degree to arise. We take this matter further in Figure 8.1. In the left-hand panel of the figure we show the probabilities, under Model 1 of Table 8.1, of men of salariat, intermediate and working-class origins being found in the salariat and in the working

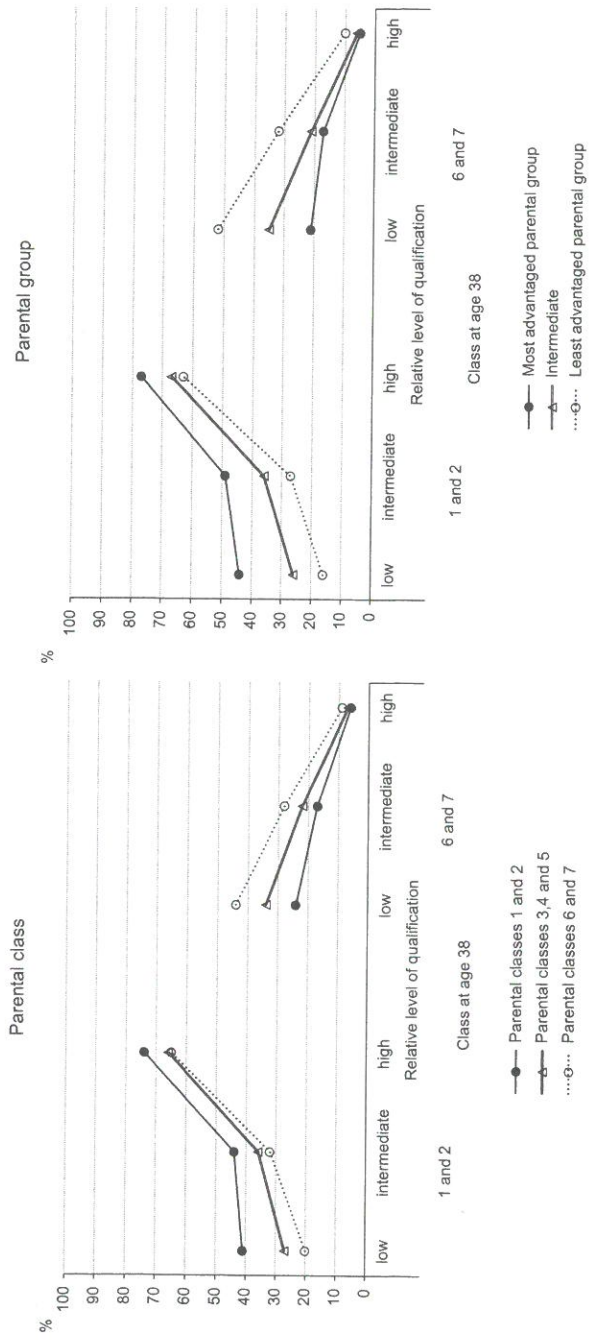
<sup>3</sup> Full details of the models – known as linear probability models – and of the construction of the variables included are given in Gugushvili, Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2017).

class in relation to each of the three qualification levels that we distinguish at labour market entry. Then in the right-hand panel we show, under an analogous model, the corresponding probabilities for men allocated to the three parental groups defined by *combinations* of class, status and education that we introduced in Chapter 6. It is evident that the effects of social origins are greater in the latter case than in the former – and results for women are on much the same pattern.<sup>4</sup> In other words, as regards the first issue that we raised, we can directly confirm that DESO will be underestimated insofar as social origins are not treated in a sufficiently comprehensive way.

At the same time, though, what also emerges from Figure 8.1 is that the differences resulting from DESO are more marked, *the lower the level of qualification* – and this shows up especially strongly in the right-hand panel. Thus, it can be seen that for individuals with low-level qualifications the difference between those with parents in the least and most advantaged groups is up to almost 30 percentage points in their chances of being found in the salariat and to over 30 percentage points in their risks of being found in the working class. These are disparities of a rather remarkable order, testifying to the actual extent to which the experience of men and women in the 1970 birth cohort diverges from what would be expected if an education-based meritocracy had been brought into being. They also reinforce previous indications that DESO contributes more to the creation of glass floors than glass ceilings. This is an outcome much in line with the importance that we have attached to the particular concern of parents and their children – stemming, we suggest, from the psychology of loss aversion – to avoid intergenerational *downward* mobility. Where the children of more advantaged parents do not perform well educationally before entering the labour market, other factors would appear to operate that still give them a good chance of maintaining their parents' position or, at all events, of not falling too far below it.

Moving on now to the second issue we wish to address – that of the effect on DESO of taking account of qualifications gained after labour market entry – we introduce in Model 3 in Table 8.1 a further variable that we have constructed specifically to allow for change in individuals' relative qualification level in the course of their working lives. We compare each cohort member's relative qualification level at labour

<sup>4</sup> See further Gugushvili, Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2017: Online Appendix B).



Source: Gugushvili, Bukodi and Goldthorpe (2017)

**Figure 8.1** Estimated probabilities of men working full-time being found in different class positions at age 38 by parental class (left panel) and parental groups defined by class, status and education (right panel), by level of qualification at labour market entry (%)

market entry and at age 38, and then categorise them according to whether, over the intervening period, their level improved, stayed the same or worsened. The positions of almost a third of cohort members did in fact change, with the level of 11 per cent improving and that of 22 per cent worsening. Because we are here treating qualifications relatively, it is of course possible for individuals' positions to worsen simply because, while others raised their qualification level, they did not do so or at least not to the same extent. There are no significant differences in relation to class origins in the proportions of men and women changing their levels or in the direction of any change.

As can be seen from Table 8.1, when this new variable is brought into the analysis, its effects prove to be of a very clear kind. An improvement in relative qualification level significantly increases an individual's chances of being found in the salariat at age 38 and reduces his or her risk of being found in the working class, while a worsening in level has the opposite effect. It has therefore to be recognised that the importance of education for the class positions that individuals eventually achieve does not end at labour market entry but can be continued over a lengthy period afterwards. And we can now in fact say that DESO will be overestimated – at all events in the sense that the effects of educational attainment on class destinations will not be fully recognised – if qualifications gained during working life are disregarded.

At the same time, though, it can also to be seen from Table 8.1 that when with Model 3 we do take account of such qualifications, *the pattern of the significant effects of the social origin variables remains exactly the same as under Model 2*. In other words, while we gain a fuller understanding of the way in which class destinations are determined, DESO is not eliminated. This means, therefore, that the third question we posed retains its relevance: if DESO is the effect of social origins on destinations that is not mediated through education, how is it mediated?

To address this question, we move on to a yet further model in which all of the variables included in Model 3 are retained but in which three additional variables are included. In the case of each of these variables there are grounds for supposing that it could capture a mediating factor in DESO.

Two of the variables relate to individual characteristics, the first of these being cognitive ability. As we have already shown in Chapter 7,

cognitive ability can in itself play a significant part in individuals' class trajectories – independently, that is, of the influence that it also has via their educational attainment. We allocate cohort members to cognitive ability quintiles in the same way as previously. The second individual characteristic that we consider relates to what psychologists call 'locus of control': that is, to the extent that individuals feel they have control over their lives and can influence their own futures rather than being 'fatalistic' and seeing their lives as being primarily shaped by circumstance and chance. Previous studies have in fact shown that a high sense of 'internal' as opposed to 'external' control is associated with more ambitious educational choices and more extensive job searches, and in turn operates as a mediating factor in both intergenerational income and class mobility.<sup>5</sup> In the 1970 cohort locus of control was measured at age 10 on a multi-item scale, and we allocate cohort members to quintiles according to whether they revealed a lower or higher sense of internal control. It should be noted that men and women of more advantaged class origins prove, on average, to rank higher on *both* cognitive ability and a sense of internal control than do those of less advantaged origins.

Our third additional variable concerns help in their working lives that individuals may have received from their parents. It is widely believed that family social networks and influence are not only often used in assisting individuals to obtain employment but, further, in actually advancing their careers.<sup>6</sup> Cohort members were asked: 'Have your parents ever done any of the things on this card to help you get any job you have ever had? Please include internships and placements, even if unpaid.' Of the various forms of possible parental help that were listed, we selected the following as those most relevant to our concerns: parents giving advice, providing recommendations to an employer, directly employing the cohort member, and using their

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Osborne Groves (2005), Blanden, Gregg and Macmillan (2007), McGee (2015), Caliendo, Cobb-Clark and Uhlendorff (2015) and Bethäuser and Bourne (2017). Of late, a good deal of interest has arisen in the role of 'non-cognitive' attributes in individuals' educational and occupational success, but research findings have so far been somewhat inconsistent. Locus of control is one of the attributes that most regularly emerges as significant.

<sup>6</sup> See for some (limited) supporting evidence Ioannides and Loury (2004) and Loury (2006).

contacts to help find the cohort member a job.<sup>7</sup> Parental advice was the most frequently reported kind of help – by 36 per cent of respondents – while the other forms of help were each reported by around 10 per cent. Advice was more likely to be reported by men and women of more advantaged class origins, but reports of the other forms of help were not associated with class origins.

Table 8.2 has the same format as Table 8.1 but with the three variables representing potentially mediating factors of DESO being now included in the analysis. It may be noted, first of all, that the two individual characteristics of cognitive ability and locus of control both have certain significant effects.

As regards cognitive ability, it can be seen that (with the intermediate quintile being taken as the reference category) being in the lowest quintile further increases the likelihood of being found in the working class for individuals with low or intermediate qualification levels at labour market entry. But of greater interest so far as DESO is concerned are the effects of being in the highest or next-to-highest quintile. This adds to the effect of a high relative qualification level at labour market entry, and of any subsequent improvement in this level, in raising the chances of being found in the salariat, and being in the highest quintile also offsets the negative effects on these chances of starting working life at a low qualification level and of failing to improve on this. Furthermore, for those who thus remain at a low qualification level, being in the two higher ability quintiles reduces the risk of ending up in the working class. In other words, while high cognitive ability can reinforce the effects of educational attainment, it can also compensate for educational shortcomings. And insofar as high cognitive ability is associated with more advantaged class origins, it could then be regarded, from the standpoint of a meritocracy based on educational attainment rather than simply on ability, as a factor

<sup>7</sup> The other forms of parental help that were listed were help with job application forms and writing references. It should be added that the item on parental help was included in interviews with members of the 1970 cohort carried out in the 2012 'sweep' when they were aged 42, while we focus on their class destinations at age 38. It is therefore possible that some few instances of help that were reported occurred between these two ages, and should have been excluded from our analyses.

Table 8.2 *Effects of cognitive ability, locus of control, parental help, change in relative level of qualification and social origins on class position at age 38, by relative level of qualification at labour market entry<sup>(a)</sup>*

	Relative level of qualification at labour market entry					
	Low		Intermediate		High	
	Class at age 38		Class at age 38		Class at age 38	
	1 and 2	6 and 7	1 and 2	6 and 7	1 and 2	6 and 7
Cognitive ability						
first, lowest	—	+	ns	+	ns	ns
second	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	+
third	reference		reference		reference	
fourth	ns	—	ns	ns	+	ns
fifth, highest	++	--	ns	ns	+	ns
Locus of control						
first, lowest	—	+	ns	+	ns	+
second	—	+	ns	+	ns	+
third	reference		reference		reference	
fourth	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
fifth, highest	ns	ns	+	ns	ns	ns
Parental help						
advice	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
recommendation	ns	ns	ns	+	ns	ns
direct employment	ns	—	ns	ns	ns	ns
help finding job	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Change in relative level of qualification						
Worsened	reference		—	+	--	+
Did not change	reference		reference		reference	
Improved	++	--	++	--		
Class of origin						
Classes 6 and 7	ns	ns	ns	+	ns	+
Classes 3, 4 and 5	reference		reference		reference	
Classes 1 and 2	+	ns	ns	ns	+	ns
Parental status	ns	--	ns	ns	ns	ns
Parental education	+	—	++	--	++	ns

Note (a) For symbols, see Table 6.1

that mediates DESO, though, again, more through the creation of a glass floor than a glass ceiling.<sup>8</sup>

As regards locus of control, it is, in some contrast, the effects of being in the lowest and the next-to-lowest quintiles, as regards a sense of internal control, that are most notable. These effects further reduce the chances of individuals with low levels of qualification at labour market entry being found in the salariat, and they also increase the risks of being found in the working class for individuals *at all levels of qualification, including the highest*, and independently of whether or not they have improved their qualification level since labour market entry. Thus, insofar as children of less advantaged class origins are more likely to have a low sense of internal control, this could be taken as a further mediator of DESO and as one that in this case tends to create a glass ceiling.

Turning now to our third potential mediating variable, that of parental help, we have what might appear to be the most surprising finding. As Table 8.2 reveals, the various forms of parental help that we consider appear to be of no great importance for individuals' chances of accessing the salariat or being confined to the working class. Only two significant effects show up – one of which is in fact rather readily interpretable: direct employment by a parent reduces the risk of being found in a working-class position for those who at labour market entry were at a low qualification level. This is much in line with what we have earlier shown in Chapters 4 and 7 that in the case of Class 4, in which small employers are included, there is a relatively high propensity for intergenerational succession – with,

<sup>8</sup> In research undertaken by economists – as, for example, by McKnight (2015) for the Social Mobility Commission and in the US by Reeves and Howard (2013) – and focused on the presence of glass floors, DESO is in effect defined not in contradistinction to the part played by education in the OD association but to the part played by cognitive ability, with education then being brought into the analysis as a factor through which DESO may be mediated. We see advantage in the opposite approach that we, along with most other sociologists, have adopted, at all events if it is meritocratic selection that is at issue. In this case, departures from selection by educational attainment must be of greater concern than departures from selection by cognitive ability. For, as we have earlier remarked (Chapter 6, n. 11), the possession of a high level of cognitive ability is essentially a matter of chance, whereas educational attainment could be better regarded as meritorious in that it does in some degree involve effort and choice for which individuals could be held responsible.

say, children taking over family concerns – in which educational attainment plays little part.<sup>9</sup>

### DESO through intergenerational succession

#### Barry

Barry grew up as the eldest son of a sheep farmer, and knew from an early age ‘that I was always meant to be a farmer myself’. His upbringing was ‘homely’; having to go to school ‘meant tears’. He learnt the business of farming – ‘fencing, hedging, ditching, caring for stock’ – from his father and from the farmhands. He left school at the minimum age, without any qualifications, to work for his father on the farm. He has generally negative views about modern education and its value.

When he was 21 his father died suddenly, so Barry, together with his mother, took over the running of the farm – ‘I felt a responsibility to keep it all going.’ Subsequently he took sole charge himself and then acquired a second farm. Around the same time he and his wife divorced. His social life is limited as he lives in a remote valley. Farming, he says, is ‘as much a lifestyle as a career’. Questions of ‘getting on’ and social mobility mean little to him: ‘I just think of myself as running my own business and being comfortable – modestly comfortable – out of the income.’

We do of course recognise the possibility that cohort members may have failed to report the parental help that they received, whether because they had forgotten about it or because they did not wish to admit to it. But the important point that emerges is that *in those cases where help was reported*, there is little indication that it was of any consequence for the class destinations eventually reached by the men and women concerned. Moreover, our finding in this regard is actually not as surprising as it might at first seem, in that it has been essentially foreshadowed in a number of earlier studies. Whatever may be the case with access to certain elite positions, very little evidence has in fact been

<sup>9</sup> One might speculate that the other significant effect – a parental recommendation increasing the probability of individuals with intermediate levels of qualification being found in the working class – reflects what would appear still to be the fairly common practice within the skilled trades of fathers ‘speaking for’ their sons to their own employers.

produced to indicate that parental or wider family social networks are of more general importance in improving individuals’ labour market chances or, at all events, in increasing their chances of obtaining jobs that enable them to achieve upward mobility intergenerationally or to avoid downward mobility.<sup>10</sup>

Individuals’ cognitive ability and sense of internal control, if not, for the most part, parental help, can then be shown to play some significant role in mediating DESO and in thus creating glass floors and glass ceilings that limit the amount of mobility that would be expected if the association between class origins and destinations did in fact derive from educational attainment alone. However, we cannot claim to have provided a complete account of how DESO is brought about. If we had done so, we would have found that in Table 8.2 under Model 4 all social origin effects became insignificant. But, as can be seen, the pattern of these effects is only rather slightly modified from what it was under Model 3 in Table 8.1. We have therefore to recognise that DESO is likely to result from a wide variety of social processes and to involve a range of other factors than those that we have been able to identify and to include in our present analyses. For example, the persisting effect of parental class may be in part mediated through family *wealth* (recall Figure 1.7) which, even if not directly drawn upon, can serve as what has been called ‘a general insurance factor’, facilitating more ambitious, and thus perhaps more risky, educational and occupational choices on the part of children. And the persisting effect of parental education may reflect family environments in which education is highly valued and children are expected to continue to

<sup>10</sup> A further study based on the 1970 birth cohort (Gutierrez, Micklewright and Vignoles, 2015) takes a somewhat different approach to ours in covering all forms of help reported and also help from friends, but still finds no evidence that men and women who said that they had received help had derived any benefit from it as regards either higher average earnings or higher socioeconomic status. These authors also note that less than a third of cohort members who reported help believed that it had contributed ‘a lot’ to their occupational careers, with the remainder believing that it had contributed ‘a little’ or ‘nothing at all’. A study using a different dataset, obtained from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (Macmillan, Tyler and Vignoles, 2014), and focused on access to NS-SEC Class 1 positions finds that for men and women graduating in 2006–7 social networks appeared to have ‘very little impact on the residual relationship between family background and entering a top occupation’ – i.e. on DESO as we would term it.

'improve themselves' in adult life, even if in ways not necessarily reflected in further formal qualifications.<sup>11</sup>

What, then, are the wider implications of our investigation of DESO? To begin with, we have established that still with the latest cohort we can consider, that of men and women born in 1970, DESO is readily apparent, and especially so if we treat social origins as comprising parental status and education as well as parental class. Social origins still significantly qualify the effects of educational attainment so far as individuals' chances in the labour market are concerned. The doubts we have expressed concerning the capacity of educational policy alone to bring about a greater equality of opportunity within the class structure are thus again underlined.

Further, DESO is most marked in relation to educational attainment at labour market entry. The degree to which social origins can influence class destinations independently of individuals' relative level of qualification at this point is strikingly brought out in the graphs of Figure 8.1, and especially in the case of those with low levels of qualification. At the same time, though, we have found that the effects of education on class destinations can extend well beyond labour market entry. Qualifications obtained in the course of a working life that raise an individual's relative level increase their chance of accessing the salariat, while if their level falls, their risk of ending up in the working class increases. In these ways, therefore, evidence is again provided, complementary to that of Chapter 7, to show that the idea of educational attainment at labour market entry becoming class destiny is far from realisation. And in this regard we can now add that a high level of cognitive ability, as a mediating factor in DESO, can compensate for a low level of qualification at labour market entry, and even where no improvement in qualifications is later made.

Furthermore, the results of our attempt to find mediating factors in DESO are of some consequence in regard to policy in two other respects. First, a good deal of attention has of late centred on identifying – in the hope of then reducing – influences on occupational achievement deriving from what has been labelled as 'opportunity hoarding' on the part of more advantaged classes.<sup>12</sup> For example, there

<sup>11</sup> The idea of wealth as a general insurance factor comes from Pfeffer and Hällsten (2012). On parental education as an influence on lifelong learning, see Tuckett and Field (2016).

<sup>12</sup> The term comes from the American sociologist, Charles Tilly.

has been much discussion of the use of family resources in advancing young peoples' career prospects through internships or placements, often unpaid, that are in effect restricted to those with the social contacts needed to obtain them and the financial support to make them viable. However, while opportunity hoarding of this kind may well be of importance in regard to career progression to higher-level positions in some particular cases – such as, say, finance, the law or the media – our findings would suggest that the degree of concern shown in this regard has become somewhat exaggerated, at all events if the focus is on mass rather than certain kinds of elite mobility.<sup>13</sup> We confirm the conclusion reached in a number of other studies that direct parental help is not a 'non-meritocratic' factor of any great importance in determining the degree of individuals' success in working life within the population at large.

Second, and in some contrast, our finding that low levels of internal locus of control are likely to restrict the chances of upward mobility even of men and women with relatively high levels of qualification could be taken to point to what might be a far more extensive, if largely overlooked, problem, and especially insofar as a low sense of internal control tends to be associated with disadvantaged social origins. The Social Mobility Commission has sought to identify geographical localities in which the chances of upward mobility appear to be particularly poor – so-called social mobility 'cold spots' – and many of these turn out to be deindustrialised areas in the north and Midlands, areas around decayed coastal towns or more remote rural areas. If these areas are indeed ones characterised by low rates of upward mobility, problems in local schools and the state of local labour markets, on which the Commission's analyses have so far concentrated, no doubt play a part. But more consideration could certainly be given to the possibility that in such areas working-class children, especially, may very well grow up with a fatalistic sense that people, or at least people of their kind, do in fact have little control over what happens to them in their lives, which then limits the extent to which they actively seek to

<sup>13</sup> It may further be noted that the economic advantages of unpaid internships are in any event questionable. Holford (2017) shows that graduates who take up such internships rather than moving directly into paid employment incur a substantial earnings penalty for up to three years afterwards, although this penalty is mitigated somewhat in the case of those from more advantaged social origins.



translate such educational success as they may achieve into such labour market opportunities as may exist.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, though, perhaps the most significant question that arises from the analyses we have presented in this chapter is the following. Given that DESO is overestimated if attention is limited to educational attainment at labour market entry, and that whether or not individuals later make improvements in their relative qualification level has a significant effect on their eventual class destinations, does this continuing role of education make in the end for greater mobility – or greater immobility? This question becomes of heightened interest in view of a growing importance that has been attached in government circles over recent years to ‘lifelong learning’. Insofar as the implications for social mobility of policy initiatives in this regard have been considered, it would appear to have been supposed that they will be positive – if only perhaps on the basis of the rather simplistic assumption that more education, of whatever kind, must mean more mobility. But relevant evidence is in fact very limited. In the next chapter we take further our analyses of the experience of men and women in the 1970 birth cohort to try to throw a clearer light on the matter.

<sup>14</sup> On social mobility cold spots, see further Social Mobility Commission (2016: chs. 3 and 4; 2017b) and the discussion in our concluding chapter. One may, incidentally, doubt if in places like Stoke, Blackpool and west Somerset worries over the availability of internships, paid or otherwise, are all that widespread.

## 9 | *Lifelong Learning: Compensation or Cumulative Advantage?*

Provision for lifelong learning has been widely regarded as a way in which men and women who have not performed well within the normal course of full-time education can later upgrade their levels of qualification. In the case of those of more disadvantaged social origins, who are likely to have below average levels of educational attainment on entering the labour market, lifelong learning has then been taken to have a particular value. For such men and women it can offer a ‘second chance’ through which they can compensate for their earlier lack of educational success and, in turn, improve their prospects of upward social mobility during worklife and thus intergenerationally. An influential report published by the Ministry of Education in 1959 made explicit the idea of an ‘alternative route’, via mainly part-time further education, which would enable those children, predominantly of working-class origin, who had failed to reach grammar schools or who had been ‘early leavers’ still to gain higher-level qualifications while in employment and in turn access managerial and professional occupations.<sup>1</sup>

However, another possibility has to be recognised – as sociologists were in fact rather quick to point out. It may be that lifelong learning is not only, or not even primarily, pursued by men and women from less advantaged social origins but rather by those from more advantaged origins, and especially in cases where the latter had levels of educational attainment which, if not especially poor, were still insufficient to give them a strong assurance of maintaining their parents’ social position. Through further education, these individuals could take the opportunity of building on their previous qualifications, and in this case lifelong learning would serve less to give a second chance in a

<sup>1</sup> See Ministry of Education (1959). The report became widely known as the Crowther Report, after Sir Geoffrey Crowther, chairman of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England), which was responsible for its production.