

# Understanding ethnic group differences in Britain

**The role of family background and education in shaping social class outcomes**

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MARCH 2006  
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This paper was first published in the ippr book *Going Places: Neighbourhood, ethnicity and social mobility*, edited by Simone Delorenzi (2006).

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# Understanding ethnic group differences in Britain: the role of family background and education in shaping social class outcomes

There is still a lot we do not understand about the fortunes of Great Britain's minority ethnic groups, their occupational disadvantage, and the diversity of outcomes between them. This is despite the presence of a small but significant minority ethnic population since at least the post-war period, an extended body of research into the experience of the post-war immigrant population and relations between majority and minority, and the existence of race relations legislation since 1965. One area in which our knowledge is particularly limited is in relation to the transfer of advantage or disadvantage across generations.

This paper<sup>1</sup> discusses how social origins contribute to patterns of occupational success among contemporary young adults aged 24 to 45 from different ethnic groups who were brought up in England and Wales. The term 'social origins' here refers to the social class, educational achievement and economic resources of the individual's parents. Social class, or simply 'class', is defined in relation to occupation and terms of employment. In this chapter it is grouped into three standard, broad categories: 'service' or 'higher' which refers to professional and managerial occupations; intermediate; and working or 'lower', which refers to routine non-manual and manual occupations. It is the property of a family rather than an individual. Therefore, where two partners in a couple have an occupational position, the higher position of the two is taken to represent the family's social class.

Social mobility is defined as movement from one of these broad groupings to another, and upward mobility as movement from the working (or intermediate) classes to the professional or managerial classes. This chapter is specifically concerned with intergenerational mobility, that is movement from a class based on the parents' occupations, as experienced by an individual in childhood, to another based on the child's (and his or her partner's) occupations as experienced in adulthood.

Using data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Longitudinal Study, this chapter analyses the roles of class background and ethnic group in accounting for differences in outcomes between these young adults, and the intersection between the two. This enables a reflection on the context in which children of immigrants grow up. Does living in a stratified society mean that the life chances of members of minority ethnic groups reflect those of the majority, or is class 'trumped' by ethnicity? And what do such findings mean, both in terms of processes of occupational and social class achievement and the routes to achieving a more inclusive society?

As we shall see, background remains important: the children of parents from higher social classes are more likely to end up in higher social classes themselves. This is the case even when taking account of individual educational achievement. However, class background is less important for minority ethnic groups than it is for the majority. For the majority, class background operates separately from individuals' own educational success, but minorities achieve upward mobility through the education system.

Some members of minority ethnic groups (those identifying as Caribbean, black African, Indian or Chinese or other) with working class parents are more likely to end up in professional or managerial class families than white people of non-migrant but otherwise similar backgrounds. This means that Indians are now doing 'better' than the white majority. However, Pakistanis showed lower levels of upward mobility than their white British counterparts, and this disadvantage is exacerbated when their educational qualifications are taken into account. Thus there is not one 'story' that can be told for the children of immigrants. Instead, it is the way in which particular levels of class background and educational achievement intersect with ethnic group that seems critical.

The story is also complicated by more detailed analysis of Caribbeans. The aggregate levels of upward mobility of Caribbeans from working class backgrounds are slightly higher than those of their white British

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The results in this paper derive from analysis of the ONS Longitudinal Study. The permission of the Office for National Statistics to use the Longitudinal Study is gratefully acknowledged, as is the help provided by staff of the Centre for Longitudinal Study Information & User Support (CeLSIUS) – in particular Julian Buxton. Neither ONS nor CeLSIUS bear any responsibility for results or their interpretation. I am also grateful to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for funding the project from which much of this research derives; to the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex for allowing me time to carry out the research, and for the hospitality of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the LSE where I wrote this paper.

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working-class peers. But their overall class outcomes are slightly poorer, because a higher proportion started off in the working class. Moreover, they appear to take longer to see the benefits of their educational qualifications in terms of these being translated into higher social class positions, and remain more at risk of unemployment compared to those from the majority with similar backgrounds and similar qualifications.

Coming from advantaged backgrounds is of no benefit to young adults from this group. Thus relatively privileged origins do not seem to provide the resources with which to protect the next generation against downward mobility, whether as a result of discrimination or other factors. The results here also highlight the fact that minority ethnic groups are internally highly heterogeneous, and grouping them in the forms of standard classifications may in fact disguise relevant processes that are not reflected by ethnic group aggregations, as well as revealing those that are.

These results, and their implications, are discussed in more detail in the rest of this paper. We begin by considering the rationale for investigating the social class mobility of minority ethnic groups, and issues of interpretation. We then go on to describe the study and the data, followed by a discussion of some of the core findings to come out of this body of research. This is followed by a brief discussion of implications and areas for further research.

## Migration, ethnicity and social class

There is a body of literature that relates the difficulties of immigrants in achieving occupational success on a par with their white British counterparts and congruent with their educational skills and experience to the process of immigration itself. Thus, disparities in occupational achievement are related to the following factors:

- fluency in English language (Dustmann and Fabbri 2003, Shields and Wheatley Price 2002)
- lack of familiarity with job-search institutions (Frijters et al 2005)
- more limited networks (Battu et al 2004)
- lack of translation of human capital across national boundaries or failure of employers to recognise qualifications gained abroad (Yoshida and Smith 2005)
- employer 'preferences' for native workers (Becker 1971)
- discrimination (Brown and Gay 1985, Commission for Racial Equality 1996)

In the main, such disadvantage would be expected to disappear over time, as immigrants become increasingly familiar with host institutions, increase their networks, become more fluent in English, acquire locally recognised qualifications, and so forth. And there is some evidence that disadvantage does diminish with time following migration – although, clearly, this could also be a 'cohort effect', suggesting that earlier migrants faced less disadvantage than later ones. At the same time, the reduction is not sufficient to remove labour market disadvantage, even after the lapse of quite substantial periods of time.

What is more, disadvantage is further maintained into the second generation, when most of the factors associated with the process of migration are no longer relevant. British-born children of immigrants will have experienced the British educational system, and they could be expected to have similar networks and understanding of native institutions and English-language fluency as their peers from non-migrant backgrounds.

To the extent that there is educational variation between groups, the returns to education in terms of wages and chances of being in employment might still be expected to be the same, with differences disappearing once education is taken into account. However, there remains substantial variation between second-generation minority ethnic groups in their occupational outcomes. Even after controlling for relevant characteristics, including education, Heath and McMahon were led to conclude that 'being born in Britain is not associated with any improvement in competitive chances' (Heath and McMahon 1997: 108).

Some have gone on to argue that the gap between actual achievement of members of minority ethnic groups and that to be expected on the basis of their characteristics is down to discrimination (Blackaby et al 1999 and 2002). However, how this discrimination operates – whether it is purely employer discrimination or whether it makes an impact outside of hiring and promotion – is not fully discussed.

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An alternative account in this literature is to consider the possibility that certain minority ethnic groups have a 'taste for isolation', or 'oppositional culture', which limits their labour market options (Blackaby et al 2005, Battu et al 2005). It is acknowledged that such tastes may themselves be formed in response to discriminatory or racist experiences, but empirical support for this interpretation is not discussed.

Others consider that attributing the whole of any unexplained 'ethnic group effect' to discrimination is misguided. Other relevant characteristics that vary by ethnic group, and that may be important in accounting for differences, may have been excluded from the analysis (Hatton and Wheatley Price 1999, Yoshida and Smith 2005). The proponents of this position argue that we should at least attempt to exhaust possible relevant characteristics before attributing to any remaining gap the term 'discrimination'. However, in fact, such a search for additional relevant characteristics often focuses on individual attributes, thus assuming a highly individualised account.

Moreover, relevant characteristics, such as language fluency, are often tied back to the fact of immigration, thus locating causal processes with the individuals affected, and with their immigrant status, rather than in the constraints and structures with which they interact within the UK.

By contrast, the role of location may be important, given the relative concentration of certain minority ethnic groups in particular areas, the tendency of areas of minority ethnic concentration to overlap with disadvantaged areas (Dorsett 1998) and the differential nature of job markets – in terms of types of employment as well as unemployment rates, in different parts of the country.

The evidence both around neighbourhood effects and ethnic concentrations (Clark and Drinkwater 2002) is complex, and it has been argued that in the UK, minority ethnic groups have adapted relatively successfully to de-industrialisation (Iganski and Payne 1999). Nevertheless, the availability of specific employment 'niches' (Smith 1977) and alternative job opportunities varies widely at the regional and sub-regional level, and within areas, over time. This has implications for the position of the migrant generation and, thus, what its members can transfer to the next generation and to subsequent generations growing up in these areas.

For a number of practical reasons, it has been hard to incorporate into this analysis evidence of how far location and employment opportunities have contributed to observed outcomes for minority ethnic groups, and to differences between groups. However, these remain potentially important in helping to account for mobility patterns illustrated here.

In addition, the very meaning of the term 'ethnic group effects', in terms of the unexplained impact of belonging to a particular ethnic group found in statistical models, has been questioned. Some would argue that there may be a priori assumptions involved in constructing models to look for ethnic group effects in the first place. This necessarily leads to forms of explanation that try to identify what it is about particular ethnic groups that can explain their own disadvantage. These explanations frequently invoke 'cultural differences', and thereby run the risk of essentialising and decontextualising ethnicity.

Zhou has referred to the weight placed in quantitative analysis on the 'effect of the ethnic dummy, the exact meaning and contents of which remains a black box' (Zhou 2005: 131). Zhou is questioning what 'ethnic group' is intended to stand for and points out that the cultural intersects with, and is redefined and reconstituted in relation to, the structural. However, this apparently self-evident insight is not consistently followed through in other analyses. In what follows, an attempt is made to elucidate and understand how ethnicity intersects with class structure in a society that remains highly stratified, even in the 21st century.

Heath and McMahon (1997) coined the term 'ethnic penalty' to describe the gap that emerged between ethnic groups in the relationship between characteristics and the occupational outcomes that might be expected to flow from such characteristics. This term summarised the negative 'ethnic group effects' arising from statistical analysis. Heath and McMahon consider that discrimination is likely to be part of any penalty, but they argue that there may be other factors that they were unable to include in their analysis, and that tend to be more associated with particular ethnic groups.

The concept of 'ethnic penalties' does not require that a particular group's penalty must be due to characteristics specific to that single group. For example, an employment 'penalty' experienced by Pakistani men does not have to be related to 'being Pakistani' and notions of practices, behaviours or characteristics that are considered unique to Pakistanis. In other words, we do not have to employ cultural understandings of ethnicity to understand ethnic differences. Rather, the classification 'ethnic group' may be acting as an indicator for unmeasured or poorly measured characteristics that are unevenly distributed

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across ethnic groups, and may influence their aggregate outcomes. We could think, here, of access to job networks or possession of particular skills that are inadequately picked up in information on qualifications, or concentration in particularly unfavourable labour markets with limited opportunities.

The flexible understanding of ethnic penalties is important both in considering potential additional factors to account for differences between groups, and in considering remedies for those differences. One possible set of characteristics that Heath and McMahon highlighted was the potential contribution of social-class background in influencing outcomes across ethnic groups.

The authors later conducted an analysis that included class background in exploring differential outcomes between groups (Heath and McMahon 2005). However, the class background examined was typically pre-rather than post-migration class. Downward mobility on migration (Daniel 1968) and the lack of class congruence across national boundaries mean that the two are not likely to be the same. This work needs to be extended within a common context, measuring parental class at the same point and within the UK (see Platt 2005a). Thus the analysis presented here (focusing on England and Wales) develops our understanding of how social-class background contributes within such a context.

Investigating ethnic group differences and inclusion of ethnic group as an ‘explanatory factor’ in analysis raises two important points for this study. First, it is important to be cautious about what claims are being made in relation to ‘ethnicity’. Second, marginal effects may be a lot less important for a group’s welfare than absolute effects, despite the emphatic search for such marginal effects. For example, differences in levels of education that result in limited labour-market opportunities (an absolute effect) may be more worthy of attention than the marginal differences in returns to education in wages and chances of being in employment (a marginal effect).

What is more, the policy implications that stem from this difference in emphasis – on absolute rather than marginal effects – are also likely to vary. Absolute differences are likely to invite universalist solutions, such as to improve the education levels of all, or of those who are poorer, and disadvantaged minority ethnic groups are likely to benefit. On the other hand, a focus on the marginal differences – for example, on the fact that people are not getting the outcomes they would appear to ‘deserve’ on the basis of their observed characteristics – may lead towards more targeted policies, such as ‘race’ audits, anti-discrimination legislation and so on.

It is important to act with caution when interpreting ethnic-group effects from the results that follow. Consideration of the impact of social-class origins can raise some similar quandaries. Generally, the effect of people’s social class ‘origins’ on their ‘destinations’ has been consistently demonstrated as a relevant factor in their outcomes (Heath and Payne 2000). Social class is known to impact on occupational outcomes of future generations – not only through the ability of the higher social classes to mobilise educational qualifications, but also through a range of other factors.

Bourdieu (1997) used an analogy with economic capital to break down sources of advantage into cultural, economic and social capital, thus outlining the potential elements of class advantage and the processes by which they are maintained and transmitted. Researchers have taken up these concepts of ‘capitals’ extensively, and applied them to other contexts.

However, as with ethnicity, what ‘class’ precisely represents is often elusive. The precise way in which ‘social class’ (rather than its potentially constituent or related elements of networks, economic resources or ‘know-how’) operates to constrain or enable the outcomes of the next generation in the UK remains a somewhat open question. Nevertheless, insofar as class is recognised as structuring past and present British society, it is important to investigate its role in shaping the outcomes of minority ethnic groups. The ability of members of minority ethnic groups to maintain any class or occupational advantage that they achieve is indicative of greater openness of society over time in relation to ethnic difference.

## The role of family background and education for social class outcomes

The overall study considered here sought to address three questions:

- whether there was evidence that family origins continued to be important for social class outcomes across groups
- whether this impact of origins was replicated across groups

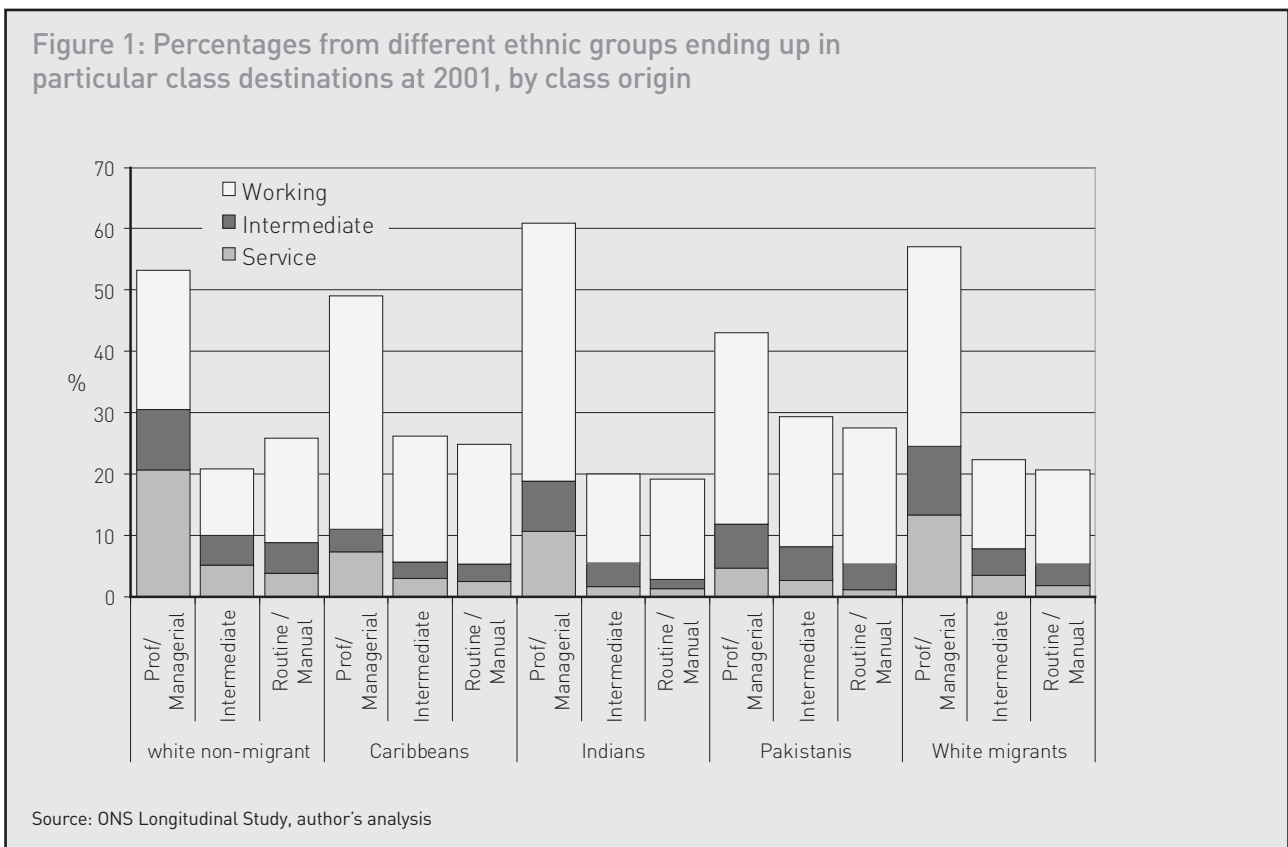
- what the role of education was, either alongside, or in place of class origins in determining social-class success, both for the majority and minorities (Platt 2005a and 2005c, Platt and Thompson forthcoming).

## Family origins and social-class outcomes

To do this, I made use of the ONS Longitudinal Study – a sample of the population of England and Wales that is followed over time from 1971.

Figure 1 illustrates the composition of participants’ social class in 2001, according to their parents’ social class, for five ethnic groups, and restricted to just the three main origin and destination classes. We see that in this year, for all groups, the largest proportion were in the professional and managerial classes. A high proportion of these had origins in the working class, reflecting the changes in the overall occupational structure that have taken place between 1971 and 2001.

However, there are also some striking differences: there is a significantly higher proportion of people of Indian origin in the professional or managerial classes than there is among white non-migrants, and a higher share of these came from the working class. Pakistanis and Caribbeans had lower proportions in the professional or managerial classes, while the pattern for those of white ethnicity but migrant parentage is comparable to the white non-migrant majority, but with a greater share starting off in the working class across all three class destinations.



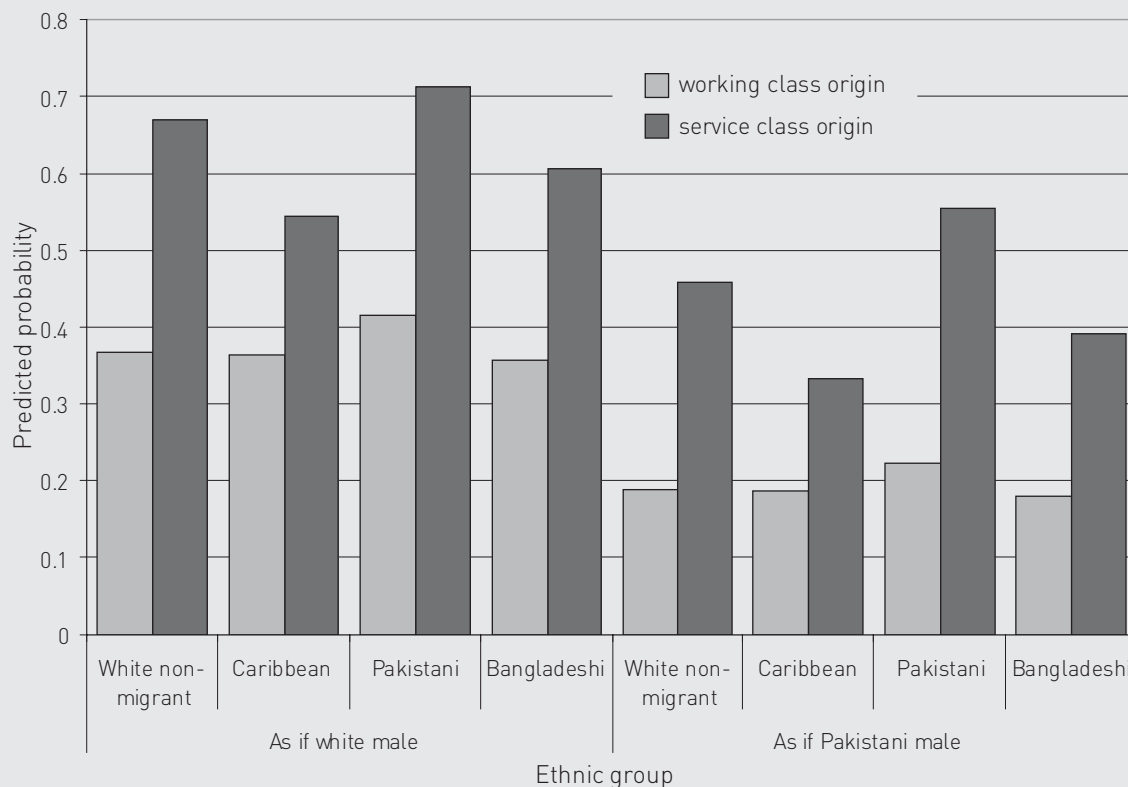
While Figure 1 illustrates the overall patterns of class mobility, further exploration of these patterns is enabled by multivariate analysis.

## Impact of origins across ethnic groups

Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities of being in a professional or managerial class in 2001, by class origin in 1971 or 1981. The figures are derived from a multivariate selection model, controlling for relevant background and individual characteristics (see methodological note, p11). These predictions are for men only but, given the construction of family class, the predictions for women are not widely different.

This figure graphically illustrates the impact of social-class origins or relative chances of social class success: note the differences between the columns in each pair. It thus shows how important class background remains to class outcomes.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of professional or managerial-class outcomes by ethnic group and origin, based on Heckman selection probit and estimating probabilities, and attributing 'white non-migrant' and 'Pakistani' effects to the probabilities



Source: ONS Longitudinal Study, author's analysis

The figure also incorporates a simulation, to illustrate the effect of ethnic group. Specifically, on the left-hand side, the predictions are based on the distribution of the characteristics across each of the groups included, with the exception that they are treated as if they were white British. (They are effectively given the 'white non-migrant' coefficient.) On the right-hand side, a similar process takes place, but this time the groups are treated as if they were Pakistani.

So, the white non-migrant-predicted probabilities on the left-hand side and the Pakistani-predicted probabilities on the right are the actual estimates for these groups. Pakistanis have substantially lower chances of ending up in the professional or managerial classes than their white peers – particularly when you take account of the fact that three-quarters of them (as opposed to half for white non-migrants) came from working-class backgrounds. However, in the construction where they are treated 'as if' they are white non-migrants, they would actually be doing rather better than their white British peers on the basis of their characteristics. So their overall disadvantage cannot be attributed to fewer advantageous characteristics, among those that it was possible to measure.

The implications of these results are that there is still much further to do in attempting to account for differences between groups. There were indications that ethnic group (or factors associated with particular minority ethnic groups) becomes more salient at particular distributions of advantageous and disadvantageous characteristics.

It is possible that, for example, lower levels of education result in particularly low levels of occupational success for minority ethnic groups compared with the majority, whereas there is greater similarity between the majority and minorities at higher levels of qualifications. This could be because the opportunities for less qualified members of minority ethnic groups are more limited than those of their majority peers, and they are more likely to be subject to discrimination by employers and colleagues in the jobs that these lesser qualifications command.

We also need a better grasp of the impact of geographical differences – a factor that was not effectively captured by the minority ethnic concentration variable used in the analysis illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. The measure of concentration of people from minority ethnic groups in the local areas where respondents



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were growing up showed some positive effects on achieving professional or managerial class outcomes: the more concentrated, the better the outcomes. But separate analyses showed that this result was driven by the majority, and there were no detectable effects for minority ethnic groups. It is nevertheless interesting that concentrations of members of minority ethnic groups were positively associated with higher class outcomes for the white majority.

Moreover, we need a greater understanding of characteristics associated with particular ethnic groups that are relevant to social-class outcomes. Combined with that, we also need the ability to measure them. One of these characteristics may be family size. There is some evidence that the number of siblings has a detrimental effect on social mobility.

In addition, the class and education categories used in the analysis discussed here may be too broad to adequately capture important distinctions within mobility patterns. For those whose parents started off in some of the least-skilled jobs, movement upward within the working class may feel like upward mobility, but would not be recognised as such for the purposes of this study. There may be a high proportion of people from Pakistani backgrounds in this position.

Additionally, the only qualifications held by participants' parents included in this study were higher educational qualifications. In 1971 and 1981, only a small minority of the population had qualifications at this level, and this limitation does not allow for differentiation between those with some and those with no qualifications. This is potentially a much more important distinction than that between those with higher educational qualifications and those without.

Additionally, measures of 'success' may not be appropriate for some contexts. Some women move out of the labour market on marriage, and this is far more likely to occur in Pakistani and Bangladeshi families than in others. In this situation, the possibility of a well-qualified wife establishing the 'family class' on the basis of her occupation disappears. If a woman in this situation marries a man in a working-class occupation, she appears to experience downward mobility, and there is evidence that in the Pakistani community, women do not raise the social class of the family as much as they do for other groups.

However, women in this situation may not feel that they have experienced downward mobility in moving out of the labour market. In addition, highly qualified full-time mothers are well placed to pass on the benefits of their education to the next generation. It therefore may take more than one generation to understand fully how different groups engage with existing class hierarchies. Overall, we need to think about how characteristics associated with particular ethnic groups interact with particular contexts – both geographical and in terms of social structures and discriminatory practices (Bhavnani et al 2005).

The issue of time is also relevant to a separate analysis of the Caribbeans that was carried out as part of the same study. The class outcomes of Caribbean participants were examined in both 1991 and again in 2001. The findings indicated that they were disadvantaged by comparison with their white British peers in 1991, but that by 2001 they were achieving in line with their educational qualifications (Platt 2005b).

Just as there is some evidence that gaining qualifications may require some 'catching up' time, so the translation of those qualifications into success may also require some additional time. An additional contributing factor was probably the fact that the economy was much less buoyant in 1991 than in 2001, and it is consistent with both theory and other evidence that minority ethnic groups are more vulnerable to recessions than those in the majority. A greater susceptibility to unemployment also remained in 2001. Although attainment of professional or managerial classes was congruent with background and educational attainment, greater risks of unemployment at 2001 could not be explained in this way.

This confirms the view that minority ethnic group status may be particularly salient for those in the most vulnerable labour-market positions. It also shows the importance of considering unemployment alongside occupational-class outcomes, when investigating the experiences of members of a minority ethnic group. Indeed, the greater risk of unemployment for people of Caribbean origin, even in 2001, outweighed their small relative advantage in terms of upward mobility into the professional and managerial classes compared to white non-migrants. This emphasises again both the heterogeneity of minority ethnic groups, and the consequent complexity of developing appropriate policy responses.

With members of the Caribbean community, as with the Pakistani community, we have to be sensitive to different judgments on what constitutes 'success' and on the direction of aspirations. Complementing the research from the ONS Longitudinal Study with a qualitative study of Jamaican migrants indicated that for some of the Caribbean migrant generation their aim in migrating was to gain a 'good working-class job'

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(Platt and Thompson forthcoming). It is possible that such aims were transmitted to the second generation.

Additionally, this same research suggested that aspirations among the first generation to return to the country of emigration may have influenced outcomes for the second generation. If returning parents took all their assets with them to establish a new life in their 'home' country, then this could influence the amount of financial support that was available to them.

## The role of education

The results in Figure 1 indicated the extent to which society within England and Wales remains stratified, with outcomes being susceptible to class origin over and above educational qualifications. They would indicate that members of minority ethnic groups have to engage with class stratification as well as racial discrimination. But do these class effects hold across ethnic groups?

Individual analysis for the different ethnic groups suggested that the impact of class background was smaller for members of the minority ethnic groups than it was for non-migrant white groups – if, indeed, it existed at all. For example, for people of Caribbean origin, class background appeared to have no effect on social-class outcomes, nor to protect them against unemployment. For members of the Indian community, class effects disappeared once education was introduced into the model. That is, any class advantage was directly channelled through education, rather than operating alongside it, as it does for the white non-migrant majority.

On balance, then, intergenerational processes within minority ethnic groups do not seem to mimic those of the majority, even though this would be the expected outcome in the absence of discriminatory processes or structures. On the other hand, despite concerns about the education system in replicating disadvantage, members of minority ethnic groups are on the whole determinedly making use of the education system to advance between the migrant and the second generation. For many minority ethnic families, education becomes very important in the absence of being able to utilise class advantage for their children. This finding is consistent with studies of immigrant children in other countries (Lauglo 2000, Card 2005).

However, the translation of educational success into occupational or social-class success is not straightforward. As discussed above, it does not work for all groups, and it is possible that such translation occurs more easily at more advanced levels of education. Even within particular educational levels there may be some important differences, for example between degrees achieved at 'old' and 'new' universities. Modood and Shiner (1994) have argued that this distinction between higher education institutions is an important one in both defining educational inequalities between groups and in determining future outcomes.

## Conclusions and implications

A number of issues arise from this research into how background impacts on outcomes among the current generation of young adults.

First, background potentially plays an important role in determining social class outcomes. However, the difference in the role of social class background across ethnic groups would suggest that members of minority ethnic groups are not competing on a level playing field with members of the majority.

Second, for those ethnic groups that are most disadvantaged, this disadvantage cannot be attributed either to their background or their levels of educational qualifications.

Third, class success at the family level is influenced by gendered occupational patterns. Individualised accounts of the relationship between characteristics and labour-market performance fail to recognise that class is experienced at the level of the couple or family. Further, aspects of family structure that may be important to consider (for example, the number of siblings) have been proposed as relevant explanatory factors, but await further investigation to understand whether they have an effect.

Fourth, there is extensive variation within each group, and treating ethnic groups as homogenous entities is neither justifiable nor likely to lead to effective interventions. (For more discussion of heterogeneity within groups, see Platt 2005a.)

In relation to the policy emphasis raised at the start of this chapter, these results suggest that universalist policies may well have the biggest impact on ethnicity-related differences in outcomes. That is, the policies

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that are likely to have an impact on the most disadvantaged minority ethnic groups are those that support educational achievement and employment opportunities among those who are living in disadvantaged areas, and are experiencing the consequences of deindustrialisation and more limited opportunities.

What is more, given the dependence on education as a route to upward mobility for minority ethnic groups, the role of the education system, and the extent to which it enables equality of opportunity, is clearly crucial. Thus concerns over the possible impact of current education plans may well be pertinent to considerations of ethnic as well as social equality.

At the same time, social-class background is not as significant for minorities as it is for the non-migrant white majority. This indicates that even more privileged members of minority ethnic groups face obstacles in transmitting privilege across generations. Meanwhile, at the other end of the scale, less privileged groups appear more vulnerable to unemployment, and have more limited chances of upward mobility than their majority peers.

This indicates that policy attention to ethnic difference and ethnic discrimination is still very much warranted. For some groups, relative disadvantage is still likely to remain even within a more equalising society unless there is focused intervention and the enforcement of race relations legislation. However, as far as an unequal society shapes behaviours and responses, moves towards greater equality may reconfigure patterns as well as levels of ethnic disadvantage.

We would benefit from understanding in more detail the ways in which structure and context constrain and redefine group and individual practices. There also needs to be greater attention paid to the family and household experience of members of minority ethnic groups, in contrast with the current emphasis on individual outcomes and their individualised determinants.

It is now widely recognised that there is great diversity between minority ethnic groups in the UK: diversity that is confirmed in this study. However, we also need to be sensitive to, and understand more about, diversity within ethnic groups – also demonstrated in this study. To what extent does it make sense to aggregate individuals within such categories? What do they share compared to what distinguishes them from each other?

We also have relatively little direct evidence on how discrimination operates, and its impact. Does it shape the absolute differences between groups – for example, by constraining opportunity and educational achievement, as well as making up a part of the gap that remains after relevant characteristics are controlled for? These are questions that still deserve further and more detailed consideration in research, and to which policy needs to be sensitive.

## Methodological note

The ONS Longitudinal Study is a one per cent sample of the population of England and Wales that is followed over time. It was initially obtained by taking a sample of the 1971 census, based on those born on one of four birth dates (day and month).

Information from samples taken at each subsequent census has been added to the ONS study. Participants are also added to the ONS study between censuses, by linking information on births and immigrations using the same selection criteria. Data on events that occur to participants – births of children to them, infant deaths, deaths of spouses and cancer registrations – are also added. No more information is linked where participants' records indicate that they have died or have left England and Wales, unless emigrants re-enter at a later date, in which case they are re-incorporated into the study.

The ONS Longitudinal Study has some key advantages when it comes to exploring intergenerational mobility and ethnicity – namely, the size of the study sample, which facilitates analysis by ethnic group at relatively disaggregated levels, and the longitudinal design of the study, which allows intergenerational mobility to be tracked directly. By making use of the file on household members living with the participant, we can directly observe parents' social class, educational qualifications and household economic resources when the study members were children and living with their parent(s) in England or Wales (in 1971 or 1981). We can then follow through the cohort of participants to observe their own occupational class – and that of their partners – when they are grown up (in 2001).

For the purpose of this study, I pooled two cohorts of children. They were aged between four and 15 in 1971 or 1981, and grew up (or received at least some of their schooling) and entered the labour market in England or Wales. Their social class of origin was based on the higher social class of either co-resident parent, using the three-form CASMIN scale (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1993) (plus the category 'other'). This was done in the conviction that social class is a family attribute, and that it is misleading to base it simply on one or other parent.

Their destination social class was measured using the occupational class of the participant or their co-resident partner (whichever was higher), on a similar principle, and based on the three-form version of the NS-SeC (Rose and Pevalin 2003) plus 'currently unemployed' and 'other'. Other variables in the analysis included:

- whether parents had a higher qualification in 1971/81 (the only measure of education available in the census at that time)
- housing tenure and car ownership of the household in 1971/81, to represent available economic resources
- the minority ethnic concentration in the ward of residence in 1971/81 in a five-point scale, to give some handle on area effects, discussed above
- the participants' own achieved qualifications by 2001, on a five-point scale.

For further discussion of the variables and their derivation, see Platt (2005b).

Multivariate analysis estimated the probability of different social-class outcomes, both separately and together (Platt 2005a), and outcomes at 1991 were compared with those at 2001 for a restricted number of groups (Platt 2005b). I also explored the impact of attrition on the sample and adjusted for differential 'survival' to 2001 among the original study members from 1971/81 by using a selection model of the probability of ending up in a higher professional or managerial class (Platt 2005c, Platt et al 2005).

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