Personal contacts, employment and social mobility in Britain

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Abstract

This paper contributes to debates around social mobility and social capital by exploring the links between social class background, assistance from non-parental personal contacts for finding employment, and social class destination. The literature on social mobility, social capital and social networks is reviewed, drawing a conceptual distinction between social capital and social networks. Previous research has focussed on help from parents, yet much of the literature indicates that wider social networks are more important for labour market advancement. Using the 1970 British Cohort Study, with data collection at respondent ages 10 and 42, the relationship between help received from relatives/friends in getting jobs and social class is examined. The likelihood of receiving help varies according to class origin, yet the strongest predictor of social class destination is social class background, not social capital.

Key words: Social mobility, social capital, employment, longitudinal

Introduction

Social mobility is the term used to describe the extent to which the social class of one's parents determines their own social class in adulthood. It has been the subject of much academic research and debate over recent decades (Goldthorpe 1980, 1996, 2013, McKay 2010, Macmillan et al. 2015, Blanden, Gregg and Machin 2007, Gorard 2008) and has been the focus of various government policy initiatives in Britain (PFAP 2009, SMCPC 2014).

The appointment of a social mobility tsar in 2010 and the formation of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, now the Social Mobility Commission, in 2012 further illustrate this. Their most recent *State of the Nation* report lamented that 'the link between demography and destiny is becoming stronger rather than weaker' (2017:1). In July 2016, new Prime Minister Theresa May put social mobility at the centre of her first speech from the steps of Downing Street, immediately seeking to associate her fledgling administration with commitment to this issue.

In publishing its social mobility strategy, the Department for Education states that 'We need to improve access for young people from lower income backgrounds to networks of advice, information and experiences of work' (DFE 2017:10). The emphasis on networks is noteworthy, as the importance of social connections to social mobility is articulated in a range of academic literature. Previous research focusses mainly on help from parents, not from other relatives or friends (Devine 2004, Kramarz and Skans 2014, Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al 2015). The support provided by parents is undoubtedly important. While the desire to do the best for one's children is universally accepted, the excessive influence of parental interventions can be construed as a threat to meritocracy and a brake on social mobility. However, the role of help, which can include advice, references or recommendations to an employer, from non-parental sources is also of great interest, as sociological literature indicates that wider networks are important for finding jobs (Granovetter 1973, 1982). This article adds to that body of work, assessing the importance of help from other friends and relatives in achieving labour market advancement using a large-scale, longitudinal dataset to examine the effect of this help on social mobility in England for the first time. It poses four research questions:

- Is there a relationship between social class and the use of support from personal contacts to find jobs?

- What specific forms of help from friends and relatives do people use, and does this differ to that provided by parents?
- Do people see the help received as having contributed usefully toward their career?
- Is this help associated with class destination?

To begin, the literature on social capital and social networks is reviewed, and the distinction between the two concepts is delineated, followed by a discussion of how they relate specifically to social mobility, with reference to education, employment and social class. Next, the data and measures are detailed. Findings are then presented in four subsections, relating to each of the research questions listed above. The final section offers reflections and conclusions.

The analysis finds that the use of *parental* assistance to find jobs is socially distributed, but by no means limited to higher classes, while help from *other relatives/friends* is less strongly associated with social class, with the main difference being between the lowest occupational category and all others. People are more likely to seek advice or help with job applications from their parents rather than other relatives/friends. Respondents from higher class backgrounds are more likely to receive all of these types of help from a personal contact. Finally, while help from personal networks is not significantly associated with reaching higher class destinations, class origin unequivocally is. This suggests that equality of opportunity is best improved through measures to address inequality between occupational classes.

Social capital, social networks and social mobility

Robert Putnam is credited with taking social capital beyond academia and into mainstream discourse. For Putnam, 'the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value ... social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups' (2000:18-9). His main substantive interest is declining civic and associational activity in the United States. Thus, his notion of social capital is based on norms of political and community engagement, trust in individuals and institutions, and how these aspects of social connectedness relate to outcomes such as employment, education and health (Putnam 2000). Some accounts of social capital, particularly those from political science, have focussed on these areas, where sociological contributions are more orientated toward networks and resources and how these affect such outcomes (see Foley and Edwards 1999 for a review). This article is chiefly concerned with the latter.

The origins of social capital can be traced back further, to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the stock of interpersonal connections held by an individual. Access to such networks is deemed a resource in its own right. It combines with the other forms of capital - economic, cultural, and symbolic - to determine one's position in the social field. Bourdieu argues that the total volume of capital held by an individual or group determines their position in the social hierarchy, contending that social and symbolic capital are closely interrelated, with parallels between the expression of one's class habitus and their ability to utilise networks and connections to improve their social standing.

Similarly to Bourdieu, James Coleman depicts social capital as a positive and productive resource, 'making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence' (1990:302). He argues that community and family support can make up for a lack of public resources, concluding that social capital has a positive effect on education, facilitating

'the creation of human capital in the rising generation' (Coleman 1988:S109). Coleman examines 'the strength of the relations between parents and child as a measure of the social capital available to the child from the parent (Coleman 1988:S110)'. A concrete example is the use of friends and family to find a job.

The differences between the three founding figures of social capital are expounded elsewhere (Foley and Edwards 1999) but they share important similarities. Each account conceptualises social capital as not only the links between people or groups, but *as the resources made available through such connections*. The object of enquiry here is not networks as an end in themselves, but the extent to which these networks enable access to resources. Social capital is therefore conceptually distinct from social networks, and is operationalised as such in previous research (Cheung and Phillimore 2014, Macmillan et al 2015). In this paper, the specific emphasis is on the deployment of social capital to obtain jobs.

Granovetter (1973, 1982) conceptualises networks in terms of successful job seeking, positing that weak ties are the most useful in this respect. Broad, diverse connections extending beyond one's immediate circle are crucial for employment information and recommendations. This distinction between weak and strong ties bears some resemblance to Putnam's (2000) conceptualisation of bonding and bridging networks. The essence of Granovetter's thesis is that having a wider range of contacts boosts the chances of finding work.

Nan Lin follows Granovetter and Putnam in distinguishing between dense networks, mainly intended to protect resources already held, and sparse networks, focussed more on pursuing new resources (2001:27). As dense networks are assumed to comprise similar people, Lin postulates that interaction is more likely between those sharing common lifestyles and socioeconomic statuses - the homophily hypothesis (2001:39). Lin also observes that the

disadvantaged are likelier to use informal networks for accessing social resources (2001:93). This view underpins the analysis that follows, along with the perceived benefit of the assistance given.

Since Granovetter (1973), much research has investigated the use of personal contacts for career advancement, linking the study of social networks to the study of social mobility. There are concerns, dating back to Durkheim, that nepotism and the use of personal connections to secure labour market progress undermine the principles of meritocracy upon which advanced capitalist democracies profess to be based. However, several more recent scholarly interventions engage with this issue. The implications of social closure, or social immobility, are that some individuals reach positions for which they are unsuited, and others are prevented from fulfilling their potential by virtue of being born into the wrong family or community. Parents invest in 'defensive expenditure' to protect the position of their offspring in the social hierarchy (Thurow 1976:95-7, Goldthorpe 2013). This 'deliberate transmission of wealth and other advantages to children and other recognised heirs' has been branded 'opportunity hoarding' (Tilly 1998:191) and is not restricted to financial resources. A recent report from the Prince's Trust (2016) highlights how 'the social bank of mum and dad' can also be important, with advice, practical assistance and referrals all key contributions that parents can make. The availability of such support varies according to class, yet wider family and friendship networks can also determine an individual's career trajectory, which necessitates an analysis of the relationship between these factors.

Using data from the Destinations of Higher Education Leavers Survey, Macmillan et al (2015) find that the type of school attended is a significant determinant of labour market outcomes. Privately educated graduates are more likely to land jobs in high status occupations 3.5 years after graduation than those who attend state schools, holding prior attainment constant (2015:498). This pattern remains evident even when controlling for

human capital (A-level results) and social capital (using networks to find jobs). Macmillan et al find an independent effect of using personal networks, but this is not the main determinant of socioeconomic variation in who enters the highest occupational strata.

The findings from Macmillan et al (2015) raise pertinent issues. Firstly, family and educational background are associated with differential progress beyond graduation. Attending university does not nullify the effects of attending a private school, even for those able to develop personal or professional contacts during their time in higher education or afterward. Secondly, it is unclear whether the type of contacts available to individuals affects labour market progression, nor whether the type of help offered makes any difference. These matters are interrogated in this paper, which builds on previous research by analysing the relationship between class origin, class destination and support from friends and relatives in finding employment.

Rivera (2015) explores graduate recruitment practices in the 'Elite Professional Service' sector for prestigious entry level roles at investment banks, law firms or management consultancies. These posts are extremely well remunerated and competition is intense; applicants other than those from the highest ranking universities are unlikely to even be considered. Attending the right institution confers great advantages, but for others, knowing someone inside the firm, even tenuously, could instantly bypass official screening processes (Rivera 2015:50-2). This relates back to the classic Granovetter (1973, 1982) argument, that weak ties are more useful in the pursuit of employment. Knowing someone in the right place, even an acquaintance or a friend of a friend, can be decisive.

Rivera's argument is based on the recruitment of elite students at elite universities by elite employers in a highly organised annual operation. The generalisability of this thesis can be questioned, in terms of how far educational background and 'pedigree' take precedence over

attainment (human capital) and connections (social capital) beyond the entry level on formalised graduate career pathways with the most sought-after employers. Another area not explicitly addressed by Rivera is the relationship between contacts and institutions. Those attending top universities probably have networks containing more successful people, who will in turn be connected to others in positions of influence. Being educated in an environment dominated by the economic, cultural and social elite will increase the possibilities for making friends in high places, which can be useful when looking for work.

The relationship between education and social networks also features in the more recent work of Robert Putnam. He contends that 'better educated Americans have wider and deeper social networks' (Putnam 2015:208-9, see Richards et al. 2017:54-5 for an example from Britain). One might interpret this statement as contradictory to the conceptual distinction between bonding and bridging social capital for suggesting that the two dimensions are not mutually exclusive or inversely proportionate to one another, as implied by the original typology. However, Putnam still raises a valid point. The importance of social contacts to someone's class position is evident in the Great British Class Survey, where the occupation of one's friends is one of only five questions asked to respondents (Savage et al. 2013). This is therefore treated as being more important than the respondent's own occupation, which is not asked in the survey. The merits of this approach are debated elsewhere (Bradley 2014, Mills 2014, Dorling 2014) and these exchanges need not be recapitulated here, but the onus on social networks is noteworthy.

Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al. (2015) investigate social mobility and personal networks using the 1970 British Cohort Survey (BCS70), analysing the relationship between class background, defined as parental class when the respondent was aged 10, and respondent class at age 42. Specifically, Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al. examine whether personal networks affect social mobility, finding that just under half of respondents report having been helped by relatives or

friends to get a job (Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al 2015:195). However, BCS70 has separate questions about assistance given by parents on one hand, and other relatives or friends on the other. Also there are different survey items on the specific type of help received, creating greater possibilities for detailed analysis which are fully exploited for the first time in this article.

Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al restrict their analysis to help provided by parents as they 'believe it is likely to be better measured' (2015:198) than help from other relatives or friends. The category 'other relatives and friends' might be seen as too broad as it could stretch from passing acquaintances at one extreme to grandparents with legal guardian status at the other. In view of Rivera's observations that job referrals can come from individuals with tenuous links to the applicant, provided that the person vouching for them is well placed (2015:50-2), one must acknowledge the wide range of connections that this category can encompass. However, while the label 'other relatives and friends' may be broad, the type of assistance is clearly defined, and is measured as well as could be expected from self-reported survey data. Furthermore, there is evidence that help from this source is potentially vital, as seen above (Granovetter 1973, 1982, Putnam 2015). The importance of strong family ties and parental support is not in dispute here, yet help from non-parental sources, as varying in quality and quantity as these links may be, should not be ignored. As such, non-parental assistance is examined in the analysis presented below.

In practice, most people receiving parental help are also helped by other relatives and friends, and 30 per cent report no support from either source (Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al 2015:194). A clear class gradient is also found, with around 40 per cent of the bottom two classes reporting parental help, compared to 60 per cent of the highest two groups. By contrast, the class gradient for help from other relatives and friends is less pronounced, ranging from around 41 per cent for 'Unskilled' to 50 per cent for 'Professional' (Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al 2015:198).

These findings advance knowledge on the role of help from personal contacts in driving social mobility, yet an important part of the picture, help from other relatives and friends, is overlooked. The current article therefore makes a unique contribution to the literature on social mobility and social capital through presenting multivariate analysis of assistance from non-parental sources and its impact on class destinations.

Data and measures

The British Cohort Survey (BCS70) set out to track over 19,000 people born during one week in 1970. At the time of writing there have been eight 'sweeps' of all cohort members, at ages 5, 10, 16, 26, 30, 34, 38 and 42, with parental interviews during early years. In this paper, a BCS70 sample comprising individuals aged 10 and 42 years (2012) is used to examine associations between respondent circumstances during childhood and outcomes in adulthood. Only respondents participating in both sweeps are included in the analysis, leaving an achieved sample of 9,841.

Respondents are asked a set of questions on the type of help received to find a job, from both parents and from other relatives/friends. The latter category is broad and it would clearly be preferable to identify the source of support more precisely. However, following Foley and Edwards (1999:165), while the diversity of these ties is important, the resources to which they provide access are ultimately of equal or greater value, and it is these outcomes that are examined in this analysis. The dataset contains survey items on eight particular types of help, which are: 'Provided advice', 'Helped with application forms', 'Acted as a reference', 'Recommended me to an employer that they work for or had worked for', 'Recommended me to an employer that they did not work for', 'Directly employed me', 'Helped me find a job through people that they know', and 'Other'. These are offered as multiple response questions.

Respondents are also asked whether they feel that this assistance 'contributed towards your current occupation or career', with three possible responses: 'A lot', 'A little', or 'Not at all'. Unfortunately this is not linked to specific types of help, so for individuals receiving more than one type of assistance it is not possible to directly attribute the perceived contribution to particular forms of support.

Social class is defined by the Registrar General's Social Classes, the official measure used in the United Kingdom in 1980, at the time respondents were aged 10. This schema comprises six categories: I 'Professional', II 'Managerial and Technical', III 'Non-Manual', III 'Manual', IV 'Partly skilled', V 'Unskilled'. Class origin is determined by the father's occupation when the respondent was aged ten, or the mother's occupation if there is no data for the father. Class at age 42 is assigned using the same framework but is based on the respondent's own occupation[1]. To determine class destination, the original six category variable is collapsed into two, with the 'Professional' and 'Technical-managerial' groups constituting the higher strata, and the other four groups forming the lower strata. Aggregating class destination in this manner produces an even split in sample size for the two groups (see Table 1).

Multivariate analysis is conducted through logistic regression, a method estimating the strength of relationship between a set of predictors, which can be continuous or categorical, and a binary outcome variable. It is used firstly to determine how the likelihood of an individual receiving help from parents and other relatives/friends is affected by class origin, gender, and years of education. Next, descriptive statistics examine the types of help received and the perceived usefulness toward the current career of the respondent. Logistic regression is then used to determine how the likelihood of an individual ending up in one of the top two

[1] For class aged, 10, the 'BD3PSOC' variable is used. The corresponding 'B9CSC' variable is used to define class aged 42, based on respondent's own occupation.

class categories is affected by class origin, gender, years of education and whether the respondent has received help in finding a job from either parents or other relatives /friends.

In deciding how to analyse the data, a variety of alternatives were considered. Ordinary Least Squares regression was deemed unsuitable as the class destination variable is not continuous. Multinomial logit regression was also dismissed due to the inherent ordering of the categories, although whether a genuine hierarchy exists between the 'Skilled non-manual' and 'Skilled manual' groups is questionable. This approach is also invalidated by the presence of small counts in some cells. Ordered logistic regression was then attempted, using a reduced occupational schema combining the lowest two and highest two class categories to make four groups, but the assumption of proportional odds was violated. It therefore seemed preferable to use logistic regression, compromising on precision in class categorisation to facilitate meaningful multivariate analyses.

In using the class destination variable as a binary outcome, it made sense to also treat class origin in the same way for those models (although this is not the case in Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al 2015). Class is presented in fully disaggregated form until the final table, as the other analyses are not affected by the constraints discussed above. This also allows the reader to gain a fuller picture of the relationship between class and the other variables of interest. In transforming class into a binary variable, one could also reach different conclusions as to whether treating the highest two categories as distinct from the others is the correct approach. Logic might dictate that separating the bottom three from the top three makes more sense but as suggested above treating 'Skilled non-manual' and 'Skilled manual' as different is problematic, not least because movement between these classes is likely to reflect changes to the occupational structure during the study period rather than the social mobility of individual respondents.

Results

This section begins by looking at how parent occupational class affects the likelihood of individuals receiving help to find a job, from either parents or other relatives/friends. It then turns to the specific type of help. Next, respondent perceptions of the usefulness of the help are examined, with findings again presented according to parent class. Finally, logistic regression models are estimated to determine the relationship between parent class, help from personal contacts and respondent occupational class aged 42.

Who is more likely to receive help?

Before considering the effects of help from friends and relatives to find jobs, it is first necessary to ascertain who is more likely to receive such help. There is a wide range of literature attesting that personal contacts are important for finding work opportunities (Granovetter 1973, Ioannides and Datcher Loury 2004, Datcher Loury 2006, Bentolila et al. 2010). It could be assumed that individuals from relatively privileged backgrounds are better positioned to benefit from connections to others of similar standing. However, previous research demonstrates that using family and friendship networks can also be crucial for finding work even when the employment in question is not high status or high pay (Cartmel and Furlong 2000, Mathews et al. 2009). It is therefore of interest to investigate the social distribution of the likelihood of receiving such help.

Two logistic regression models are specified, with whether the respondent has/not (1/0) received help as the outcome variable. Respondents answering yes to *any* of the questions listed in the previous section are treated as receiving help. The purpose of this analysis is to document the social gradient of those receiving help to find jobs, and compare the patterns for those helped by parents and those helped by other relatives or friends. These two

categories are not mutually exclusive as around 30 per cent of respondents report receiving help from both sources (Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al 2015:194). Descriptive statistics for the variables included in these models are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for variables used in logistic regression model

Variable	%
Social class 1980: parental occupation (N=8,280)	
(V) Unskilled	3.8
(IV) Partly Skilled	12.8
(IIIM) Skilled manual	40.3
(IIINM) Skilled non-manual	11.3
(II) Managerial-technical	25.6
(I) Professional	6.3
Social class 2012: current job (N=8,269)	
(V) Unskilled	2
(IV) Partly Skilled	11.8
(IIIM) Skilled manual	17.1
(IIINM) Skilled non-manual	18.4
(II) Managerial-technical	44.6
(I) Professional	6.2
Gender (N=9841)	
Male	48
Female	52
Use of relatives/friends to find job (N=9,841)	
Parent help	50.6
Other help	47.5
Years in FT education (N=9,793)	Mean = 13.08, SD = 3.02

Results from the logistic regression models are displayed in Table 2. The reference category for parent occupational class is 'Unskilled', which is the lowest status group in the class typology. The first model focusses on help provided by parents. Respondents with parents in all class categories are more likely to have received parental help to find a job than those with 'Unskilled' parents. The odds ratio increases for each class; while the second highest class has a slightly larger odds ratio ('Managerial and technical' Odds Ratio [OR] = 2.499) than the highest ('Professional' OR = 2.249), a social gradient is evident.

The second model presented in Table 2 relates to help received from other relatives and friends. Here, the social gradient is far less visible. Compared to respondents from 'Unskilled' backgrounds, all are more likely to have been helped to find jobs by other relatives or friends, with all differences statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level except for the 'Professional' category. However, the odds ratios are very similar across all groups, corroborating the argument that use of personal contacts is not concentrated exclusively among the most privileged. While this shows some evidence of a class effect, the main finding here is that the use of such assistance occurs across the spectrum. It is not so much a class gradient, but a difference between the 'Unskilled' group and the other categories. The large difference in the chi-square statistics for the two models further illustrates the divergence between the patterns observed.

Table 2 also shows that females are less likely to receive help from parents than males (OR = 0.72), but for help from other family and friends, there is no statistically significant gender difference (OR = 0.98). It is not clear why this variation exists. Finally, the models show that additional years in education are associated with increased likelihood of receiving help from other relatives or friends, but not with help from parents. The analysis now turns to the types of help received.

Table 2: Logit models, outcome whether/not (1/0) received any help to find a job

	Parents	Other relatives/friends
Parental class at age 10, reference: V Unskilled	Odds ratio	Odds ratio
IV Partly-skilled	1.247*	1.320**
	(0.166)	(0.174)
III Manual	1.380***	1.318**
	(0.169)	(0.160)
III Non-manual	1.913***	1.250*
	(0.259)	(0.167)
II Managerial & Technical	2.449***	1.405***
	(0.310)	(0.176)
I Professional	2.249***	1.241
	(0.339)	(0.184)
Female (ref male)	0.720***	0.977
	(0.032)	(0.043)
Years in education	1.005	1.021***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Constant	0.703**	0.535***
	(0.107)	(0.080)
N	8,241	8,241
LL	-5598	-5695
df	7	7
$\chi 2$	222.1	19.00

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05 (SE in parentheses)

Who receives which types of help?

Table 3 shows the proportion of respondents receiving certain kinds of help by occupational class of their parents, separated into help from parents and help from other relatives and friends. To reiterate, respondents can receive help from both sources, and are able to receive more than one type of support.

Looking firstly at advice from parents, only 25 per cent of respondents with 'Unskilled' receive this type of assistance, yet this proportion increases through each class category and reaches almost half of respondents (49 per cent) among the top 'Professional' group. One could speculate that parents in higher occupational groups are better equipped to offer advice;

while there is no specific evidence for this, the class gradient is clear nonetheless. It is also clear with respect to advice from other relatives and friends, with 16 per cent of those with 'Unskilled' parents receiving their advice, compared with 26 per cent of 'Professional' background. The slope for advice from other relatives and friends is less steep than the slope observed for parental advice, but it is still apparent.

BCS70 also contains data on help received with application forms. Again a social gradient is evident in terms of assistance from parents. The proportion of respondents with 'Unskilled' parents receiving help with job applications (13 per cent) is less than half of the proportion with 'Professional' parents receiving this help (27 per cent). Both figures are high compared to help from other relatives or friends; only 7 per cent of those with 'Unskilled' parents and 11 per cent of those with 'Professional' parents had such help. The lower level of variation and lower overall numbers are both of interest here.

The two types of help discussed so far are provided more by parents than other relatives or friends, yet the pattern is reversed when looking at whether a personal contact has 'acted as a reference'. This is unsurprising as a reference from a parent would probably not be acceptable to an employer. While some research shows that young people enter the labour market at their parents' workplace (Kramarz and Skans 2014), it can be assumed that in such cases references are mostly obtained from other sources or not required. There is barely any discernible relationship between parental occupation and parents providing a reference.

However, there is some association between class background and references from other relatives and friends. 13 per cent of respondents from an 'Unskilled' background used these personal contacts as a reference, a lower proportion than for all other class categories. Between other groupings, variation is markedly lower (for example, 'Partly-skilled' = 19 per cent, 'Professional' = 21 per cent). It could be argued that people from lower classes are less

likely to have relatives or friends that can provide credible references, yet there is no evidence here to support this.

Table 3 also presents figures on whether parental occupation is associated with the likelihood of someone being helped to find a job. Overall, it is more likely that respondents receive this help from parents (13 per cent) than other relatives or friends (10 per cent), although the difference is smaller than for the other three types of help considered thus far. There is also negligible variation by class. It could be debated whether one in ten is a high proportion of people to find jobs this way. These figures may also mask variation in the types of roles obtained and the characteristics of individuals seeking them.

To summarise the findings from this section, more people get advice from parents than other relatives or friends. A class gradient is evident for both sources of help but it is steeper for parents. Parents are also more likely to help with job applications. There is a similar class gradient for parents on this item but hardly any for other relatives or friends. Fewer respondents use parents as a reference than use other contacts, but the class gradient for the latter is noteworthy. Relatively few use contacts for finding a job but the figure is slightly higher for other relatives/friends than parents. Having established who is more likely to get help to find a job from personal contacts, and discussed the precise nature of the assistance given, the analysis now turns to subjective perceptions of how useful this help has been.

Table 3: Type of help received from parents or other relatives/friends, by parental occupational class when respondent was aged 10.

	Help from parents				Help from other friends/relatives			
	Advice %	Application help %	Acted as reference %	Helped find job through contacts %	Advice %	Application help %	Acted as reference %	Helped find job through contacts %
V Unskilled	25.2	12.9	5.5	11.9	15.8	7.1	12.9	11.9
IV Partly-skilled	29.2	14.8	5.1	11.8	18.4	9.5	18.8	11.1
III Manual	31.3	14.8	5.1	12.2	17.5	10.0	18.2	10.6
III Non manual	39.9	21.6	5.0	12.3	22.7	10.5	20.0	9.0
II Managerial and Technical	45.7	23.4	6.0	15.6	23.2	9.5	20.4	8.7
I Professional	48.8	26.6	3.7	14.3	25.5	11.2	20.7	9.8
Total%	36.5	18.4	5.2	13.2	20.1	9.8	19.0	10.0
TotalN	3019	1522	433	1088	1662	813	1570	825

Base: all valid responses (n = 8262)

Do people think that the help contributed toward their current career?

The survey also asks respondents about the extent to which the help received - from parents, and from other relatives or friends - has contributed to their current career. One limitation of this question format is that it does not link to the exact type of help given, as noted in Marcenaro-Gutierrez et al. (2015). Nevertheless, it is useful to know whether the support is seen as important. The findings are displayed in Table 4.

There is no clear class gradient among those who rate parental help as having contributed 'a lot'. On one hand, the difference between those with 'Unskilled' (38 per cent say their help contributed 'a lot') and 'Professional' (25 per cent say the same) parents is sizeable. On the other hand, between these two extremes there is fluctuation, muddying the overall picture. However, the class differential for those who rate parental help as having contributed 'A little' is more distinct, with 26 per cent of respondents from 'Unskilled' backgrounds giving this

answer, compared to higher values among all other strata including 36 per cent for individuals with 'Professional' parents. There is virtually no class variation among those who say parental help has 'Not at all' contributed to their current career.

For help from other relatives and friends, the picture is different. Firstly, respondents from all class backgrounds are more likely to say that such help contributed 'a lot' to their current career than say that parental help contributed 'A lot'. Secondly, respondents in the higher classes are less likely to say that non-parental help contributed 'A lot'. While 40 per cent of respondents with parents who held 'Manual' occupations gave this response, this falls to 32 per cent for those of 'Professional' background. A different pattern emerges among those who say the help received contributed 'a little', rising from 31 per cent of respondents with 'Unskilled' parents to 46 per cent from the 'Professional' category. This mirrors the pattern among recipients of parental help although overall figures are higher in all classes, albeit marginally in some cases.

A further finding is the negative association between non-parental help contributing 'Not at all' and parent occupational class. This stands in contrast to parental help, which shows no class pattern. It is possible to infer that relatives and friends from higher occupational categories are most likely to help 'A little' perhaps because such individuals have a more useful range of suitable contacts. A network of weak ties could prove more than the sum of its parts, with such connections not making a decisive intervention, but still able to provide a useful steer.

Table 4: Extent to which help from parents/ other friends or relatives has contributed to current career by parental occupational class when respondent was aged 10.

	Extent to which help from parents has contributed to current career %			Extent to which help from other relatives/friends contributed to current career %		
	A lot	A little	Not at all	A lot	A little	Not at all
V Unskilled	37.6	25.6	36.8	39	30.9	30.1
IV Partly-skilled	27.7	34.1	38.2	41.4	34.9	23.7
III Manual	31.8	30.5	37.7	39.5	35.1	25.4
III Non manual	27.8	35	37.2	38.6	35.9	25.5
II Managerial and Technical	31.3	33.4	35.3	35.1	42.5	22.4
I Professional	25.1	36	38.9	32.2	45.5	22.3
Total N	1278	1369	1557	1486	1473	952

Parents n = 4204, $\chi^2 = 16.587$, df = 10, sig. = .084. Others n = 3911, $\chi^2 = 27.568$, df = 10, sig. = .002

Is help from personal contacts associated with class destination?

The final part of the analysis concerns the association between class origin, help given by non-parent relatives /friends, and class destination. Three models are estimated, each treating class destination at respondent age 42 as a binary outcome. The first model includes four predictors. The first two are whether an individual has/not (1/0) received help in finding a job from parents and from other relatives/friends. As the logistic regression models above demonstrate (see Table 2), there are signs of gender differences in the help received, so gender is included in the model here. Lastly, years spent in full-time education are entered as a predictor. The second model also includes class origin as a binary predictor. The measurement of class origin is detailed above. The third model adds interaction effects for class origin and help from parents, help from other relatives/friends and respondent gender.

The estimates displayed in Table 5 show the odds of a respondent being in the two highest occupational classes at age 42 relative to the reference category (the other four classes) given a unit change in the predictor. The coefficients are exponentiated and should be interpreted as odds ratios. Standard errors are shown in parentheses.

Model 1 firstly includes help in getting a job from other relatives/friends and parents as predictors. There is a positive, statistically significant association between receipt of such assistance from parents (OR=1.113) and class destination, whereas the relationship is negative for help from others (OR=.851). The odds of females ending up in the higher two occupational groups are lower than for males (OR =.857). The number of years spent in full-time education is associated with higher odds of ending up in one of the two higher class categories at age 42 (OR = 1.32).

Model 2 adds parental class at respondent age 10 as a predictor. The odds ratio indicates that the likelihood of ending up in the higher class destination is strongly associated with parental occupation (OR = 1.624), holding all other predictors constant. On this evidence, parental class remains a powerful predictor of class destination. The other noteworthy change compared with Model 1 is that the relationship between help from parents and class destination is no longer statistically significant (OR=1.065).

Model 3 retains the same predictors as Model 2 but also adds interaction effects between class origin and three other predictors. The interactions between class origin and both parental (OR = 1.172) and other help (OR = .927) are not statistically significant. These results show that for respondents from higher class backgrounds there is little difference in the odds of ending up in the higher destination class associated with whether help to find a job has been provided by personal contacts. This applies to help from parents and other relatives or friends.

The interaction between class origin and gender (OR=0.798) is significant at the $p<0.01$ level. This shows that the odds of being in the higher destination classes are 20 percent lower for respondents who are both female and from a lower class background compared to males from the same class. The odds of being in the top destination class are 1.723 times greater for men from the higher origin class compared to those in the lower origin class, whereas for females the equivalent odds ratio is 1.375 (=1.723*0.798). Therefore, both male and female respondents from higher class origins enjoy better odds of ending up in the higher destination class, yet for females the magnitude of the advantage is attenuated.

To summarise, the logistic regression models estimated in this section show that parental class remains the most powerful predictor of class destination even when controlling for other factors. Individuals drawing on help from relatives or friends to find a job are less likely to end up in the highest occupational class at age 42. The number of years spent in full-time education is positively associated with class destination, although the effect of class background is stronger than any other variable.

These results demonstrate that the use of personal contacts to find jobs is spread across the social spectrum, and is not the preserve of the most privileged. However, the strong relationship between class origin and destination illustrates that for those from lower class backgrounds, using personal contacts may be of limited use in ascending the occupational strata. It is class origin that exerts the greatest effect on class destination.

Table 5: Logistic regression, outcome: class destination aged 42

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Other help	0.851***	0.861***	0.883**
	(0.041)	(0.045)	(0.056)
Parent help	1.113**	1.065	1.016
	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.065)
Female	0.857***	0.830***	0.890*
	(0.041)	(0.043)	(0.055)
Years in education	1.320***	1.298***	1.299***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Prof/tech/managerial		1.624***	1.723***
		(0.093)	(0.195)
Prof/tech/managerial# Other help			0.927
			(0.106)
Prof/tech/managerial# Parent help			1.172
			(0.136)
Prof/tech/managerial# Female			0.798**
			(0.09)
Constant	0.031***	0.034***	0.033***
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
N	8,246	6,992	6,992
LL	-5173	-4340	-4337
df	4	5	8
$\chi 2$	1083	1010	1017

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05 (SE in parentheses)

Discussion

This article has investigated the use of personal contacts for finding jobs. It looked specifically at who is more likely to report receiving such assistance, the type of support given, the perceived contribution this has made toward the current career, and the association between this help and class destination. It found that parental assistance is more common among those from higher class backgrounds, but also evident among other classes. For help from other relatives and friends there was less of a pattern, yet respondents from all classes receive this support more than those from the lowest class.

Over half of respondents reported using help from personal contacts, and the use of such assistance occurred across all classes, although a social gradient is still evident. People were more likely to use parents as a source of advice and for help with job applications, and this type of support was reported much more among those with higher class background. The Department for Education notes that 'people from lower income backgrounds are less likely to have access to the networks of advice, information and experiences of work to enable them to turn aspiration into reality – it is very hard to aim for an opportunity that you do not know exists' (DFE 2017:8-9). Greater investment in careers education, to raise awareness of opportunities available locally and further afield, could help to address this.

The analysis also found that the perceived usefulness of help from other relatives or friends was significantly related to class background. Respondents from higher class backgrounds were less likely to downplay the usefulness of the support they were given. There was a negative association between non-parental help contributing 'Not at all' and parent occupational class. This stands in contrast to parental help, which showed no class pattern. Conceivably, relatives and friends from the higher occupational categories were most likely to help 'A little' as these individuals have access to more useful networks of suitable contacts. One possible interpretation is that people are reluctant to give full credit to others for finding them jobs.

Class origin remains strongly related to class destination, and the evidence here indicates that parental help to find a job does not significantly affect class destination once class origin is taken into account. Rivera's (2015) observation that networks can offer a route into top jobs for those who have not attended the right university may hold true in some cases, yet the analysis here has shown that parental class and years in education are the stronger predictors. Social capital may convert into economic capital, but economic capital doubtlessly leads to more economic capital.

It could be that the other relatives and friends mentioned in this paper are still close enough to count as strong ties or instances of bonding social capital. The dataset does not contain further detail on this, which is a clear limitation. To fully explore this conceptual distinction empirically, wider networks of looser connections alongside closer connections must be studied. Future research should examine the connections an individual is able to draw upon and the precise ways in which this help is seen to have made a difference. Greater distinction between the sources of help within the broad category of other relatives and friends could also lead to greater insights.

These findings show that the effect of differential privilege during early years continues well into adulthood. Recent government reports into social mobility (DFE 2017, SMC 2017) focus on different life stages, with early years, compulsory schooling, youth transitions into education and training, and adult employment seen as the key phases. The analysis presented here covers a 32 year period, during which individuals pass through primary and secondary school, and in many cases post-16 and higher education, on to the labour market. There is scope for intervention across all phases.

This paper has shown that nothing predicts future class more strongly than parental class. The design of future interventions should hold this as paramount. Improving the availability of advice and guidance is important, as is ensuring that opportunities are advertised, people know where to look, and nepotism is curbed in favour of meritocracy. However, assistance from personal contacts does not compensate for the material disadvantages of growing up in a lower class family. Reducing inequality between the different occupational strata would be the best solution to this.

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