Global Pressures, Household Social Reproduction Strategies and Compound Inequality

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**Abstract**

We contribute to the IPE literature on social reproduction and the International Political Economy of the everyday. We focus on how the global economy rests on domestic foundations not just including state institutions but micro-social structures such as households and families. To do so, we employ data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study exploring the way different types of household (using proxies for social class) parent - as one aspect of their social reproduction strategies. We argue that under conditions of increased global competitiveness, the UK state has successfully embedded a politics of competitiveness at the household scale. Households of all types are *aspirational* for their children and invest parental time in helping their children with educational activities. However, parents in middle class occupations, with higher levels of qualifications and higher income have advantageous informational, cultural and financial resources and use these in a variety of ways to support their social reproduction strategies. The result is that agential responses to competitiveness result in ‘compound inequalities’. We theorise this by demonstrating variegation across different household social reproduction strategies and show the embodying the violence of social reproduction, even where there is no violent intent. We speculate that compound inequality may be causing a breakdown in the stable reproduction of society.

**Key Words:**

Social Reproduction, Class, Inequality, Social Mobility, Bourdieu, Capitals, Assets Resources, Inter-generational, Parenting.

# Introduction: Global Pressures, Household Social Reproduction Strategies and Compound Inequality

This paper contributes to an understanding of the multi-scalar processes of Social Reproduction (SR), empirically documenting the way that concerns with competitiveness have shaped parenting practices, which are a crucial process in the reproduction of the domestic and global political economy. The paper uses data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) to develop an understanding of how parenting practices have influenced the lives of young people born in the UK during the year 2000. This is novel in unpacking the detailed everyday practices of SR and, methodologically, in the use of data that is usually ignored in IPE. We also use the data to show how everyday micro-practices reshape structural aspects of the political economy; in this case illustrating the way that competitiveness and extant inequalities shape behaviours which in-turn lead to ‘compound inequalities’.

We situate parenting practices as one component of Household Social Reproduction Strategies (HSRS). There is now a burgeoning literature on SR building on a feminist tradition (e.g. Federici, 2012; Mies, 2014; Vogel, 2014). While there are different understandings of how SR relates to capitalism, and the boundaries between productive/reproductive work in particular (Mezzadri, 2021), there is broad agreement on what SR involves: the biological, cultural and economic reproduction of society including the “…carework necessary for biological reproduction, the reproduction of human labor (and – in large part – the social and cultural values of specific societies).” (Steans & Tepe, 2010, p.809).

Bakker (2003) and Gill’s (Bakker & Gill, 2008) work on SR emphasises the link between global economic processes and SR as a single totality, rather than distinct spheres of social inquiry. Similarly, Fraser stresses the reproduction of the ‘institutionalised social order’ and Jaeggi the reproduction of the ‘form of life’ (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018). Regardless of terminology, the intention is to explore linkages between, through and across different scales of human social activity to identify the relations between systemic pressures at the scale of the global economy and the temporal frame and spatial scale of everyday life. Borrowing from Peck, Theodore and Brenner (e.g. Brenner et al., 2010), Bakker and Gill have recently (2019) argued that SR is ‘variegated’ in that global pressures are experienced in different ways and elicit different responses at different times and places. Here, common pressures to be competitive at the scale of the world market are translated through a “historically specific, unevenly developed, hybrid, patterned, tendency of market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring” (Peck et al., 2012, p169).

Peterson (2004, 2020) and Elias and Rai (2019) have added clarity to the idea, developing separate but overlapping frameworks to understand how global pressures are experienced across space and time, and at very micro-scales. The latter develop a framework of ‘Space, Time and Violence’ to

“…emphasise the co-constitutiveness of social reproduction and the everyday. … important to rethink core IPE concepts such as production, the market, and labour … the ways in which the work of social reproduction plays out temporally, spatially, and in the context of gendered structural violence”.

Their emphasis on the ‘everyday’ is part of a literature (Davies, 2016; Elias & Roberts, 2016; Seabrooke, 2010; Seabrooke & Hobson, 2006; Stanley et al., 2016)[[1]](#footnote-1) on the political economy of the everyday which showcases how global pressures are experienced and reproduced in the often mundane practices and rhythms of everyday life (Mezzadri et al, 2021:2), and more broadly part of a wider research in IPE on scale and space (Charnock, 2010a, 2010b; Macartney & Shields, 2011), borrowing from pioneering work in geography (e.g. Marston, 2000; Smith, 1992).

Earlier work on the everyday (Braudel & Reynold, 1992) stressed not just the top-down aspects in which global pressures shape everyday life, but also the everyday practices that lead to accretions that, as they are repeated, contribute to the establishment of social structures within broader temporal frames (e.g. in the epochal or longue-durée temporalities) and spatial scales (Bakker, 2007, p543). While Braudel treats the everyday as a temporal frame, others have used it as a spatiotemporal scale and emphasised scalar-relational linkages such that macro-scale global pressures force adaptation at lower scales. However, in turn, the most micro-scales of SR reproduce economic structures in contested forms through (more or less conscious) adaptation, subversion and contestation (Marston, 2000; Mitchell et al. 2001). Peterson’s (2020) recent contributions show how broad-scale/long-term structures are at least partly constructed in the intimate practices and relations of the family.

This paper contributes to this literature illustrating the co-constitutive and co-evolutionary nature of social phenomena at the largest temporal/spatial scales and the most micro. Its aim is to elaborate empirically some of the ways in which household scale-everyday processes are influenced by the global pressures of competitiveness at the scale of the world market, passed through the institutional structure of state policy and political rhetoric. We also show how household responses to these pressures might add to them, contributing to the development of social structures, such as increased inequality. We utilise the concept of HSRS, which are “the more or less consciously developed day-to-day and inter-generational responses to the social conditions that households confront and their own motivations and aspirations for the future” (Authors, 2019). The concept focuses on how everyday structures and agency adapt to global pressures, but also on how they contest and reimagine them through their own motivations and aspirations. Furthermore, it elaborates the abstract idea of variegation because households are able to mobilise very different resources (financial, relational, informational and cultural) as they confront global pressures and strive toward their own goals and values. One potential outcome of this is the reproduction and accentuation of structural conditions. For example, in conditions of inequality and increased competitiveness, the different resources that households are able to use in their HSRS might ‘compound’ broader inequalities.

We explore these linkages across space and time through an empirical exploration of one aspect of this process in the spatial frame of the UK. The analysis which follows is novel in several respects. It draws on six sweeps of the MCS to explore how parenting has operated across the lives of a cohort of young people who are now entering the labour market. A focus on families and parenting inside the household is relatively unusual in IPE anyway, but even where this is referenced, there is very little work using quantitative empirical data from the suite of cohort studies available in the UK (or indeed, elsewhere). Most work on the everyday is abstract and theoretical or, if empirically informed, uses ethnographic or qualitative methods. Our approach is significant because it extends our understanding of how global economic trends can be explored through detailed empirical research at the household scale.

The next section outlines the secondary and primary data we use and our analytical strategies. The findings section then utilises different sources of data to unpick – empirically - the steps in our argument. First, we show that the UK social ensemble is under increased global pressures of competitiveness arising from world market integration. Second, we assert that this has resulted in policies, political rhetoric and institutional reform that have sought to pass the pressure of competitiveness down to the household and individual scale, in an attempt to increase the economic competitiveness of the social ensemble as a whole. Third, we investigate how households have adjusted to this through parenting aspects of their HSRS, using the MCS data. Analysis of this data highlights three themes. First, different types of households (using various proxies for social class) are very similar in their parenting values and behaviours. Importantly, the data dispels any sense that working class, poorer or less educated parents lack aspiration for their children. While this is repeatedly shown in sociological research, it remains a rhetorical device in state scale attempts to pass down the pressure of competitiveness. Second, the data reveals an important counterveiling trend; the different financial, informational and cultural resources that households use to pursue their HSRS. Third, we find very little difference in parenting by ethnicity, indicating a trend toward homogeneity in HSRS, at least in relation to education and skills. In the discussion section we suggest that the result of this homogenisation and difference might be the simultaneous generation of ‘compound inequality’ and political polarisation, extending Elias and Rai’s notion that social reproduction involves structural violence.

# Methods and Data

Each section below draws on diverse data sources to substantiate the sequential steps in the overall argument, but our main novel findings are based on data from the MCS. IPE readers may be unfamiliar with the UK’s main ‘cohort studies’ and their potential for use in IPE research. There are four main cohort studies covering generations born in 1958, 1970, 1998 and 2000 respectively. Here we draw on the MCS which is a UK wide cohort study following the lives of more than 18,000 children born in 2000-1. There have been 7 waves of the MCS covering exceptionally detailed aspects of the cohort members’ lives. In early childhood they comprise medical data, teacher and school surveys/interviews, parental interviews and sometimes test data. More recent sweeps often include time-use and even technology enhanced data on physical activity. They sometimes cover very intimate aspects of the cohort members’ health, well-being and social life. While always subject to the constraints of quantitative data, they nevertheless offer very detailed insights into the lives of a representative (with weighting) sample of different UK generations. To our knowledge few papers draw on this data in IPE.

We draw on data from sweep 2 (age 3) to sweep 6 (age 14). We use this to create independent variables related to class and ethnicity, and dependent variables related to parenting as one component of HSRS. To construct our independent variables (see Table 1 for distributions in the sample) we use three proxies for class position, recognising the political (Tyler, 2015) and analytical problems associated with any particular operationalisation of the concept. First, we use the most recent NS-SEC classification (5 class version), using the highest of either parents’ occupational class on the NS-SEC recorded at any sweep from 1-6 when the cohort members were aged 14. We undertake a similar process to create a 'highest parental qualification' variable as a second proxy for class identity. We also utilise the OECD income quintiles from the MCS Sweep 6 Derived Variables dataset. The data in the MCS also allows exploration along a number of other important intersections with class such as gender and ethnicity. We also report a very brief account of differences in parenting by Cohort Member ethnicity.

We do not address the gendered question of who specifically does the work associated with HSRS, for three main reasons. First, this is already the subject of extensive research which shows that domestic, caring and parenting work is disproportionately undertaken by women and that it is ‘depleting’ (Authors, 2020; Folbre and Yoon, 2007; Rai and Goldblatt, 2020). Second, MCS data is not as well suited to this task as some other data sources. The main focus is on the cohort – at this stage children, rather than the adults involved. The data includes interviews with a ‘MAIN’ respondent who is a parent or carer for the Cohort Member as well as a ‘PARTNER’. We use the MAIN respondent data, which, echoing the point above, is usually the Cohort Member’s mother. For example, at Sweep 1 the MAIN respondent identified as female in 99.8% of cases and the natural parent in 96.4% of cases. As such, the vast majority of the work in parenting we report below is done by women/mothers. Third, as above, constraints of space mean that other lines of analysis requiring different analytical strategies will be dealt with in subsequent papers.

Another important issue revolves around the meaning of the household. ‘Households’ are tricky to pin down as an analytical unit precisely because they can look very different, can comprise multiple families or stretch across different spaces and can have very different internal memberships. For the MCS, a household revolves around those people living with the Cohort Member, and the dataset includes basic information on all other siblings, children and other adults who live in the household, but the majority of the variables relate to the Cohort Member themselves. So in this sense, ‘the household’ in the analysis is the place that the Cohort Member lives (including if they are at boarding school or live part of the time with another carer/parent). While always problematic, this de-facto (rather than theoretical) definition of the household is sufficient to substantiate the arguments we make below about agency, strategy, resources and outcomes (e.g. compound inequality).

INSERT Table 1 ABOUT HERE.

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| Box 1: Selection and construction of the composite variables |
| We created a series of variables (ParEdAtt) that focus on **parental attitudes to education** – which act as a proxy for the frequently discussed concept of parental aspiration. At age 3 this focusses on the importance of ‘doing well at school’, at age 7-14 this focusses on whether parents want children to ‘stay on’ at school and how likely they think it is that their child will attend university, with the age 14 measure having more answer options. These survey items express attitudes to education, aspiration and confidence in those aspirations.We created a series of dummy variables that aggregate the various ways in which **parents invest time in their children**, though obviously, the activities that feed into this differ across the different ages; singing, practising the alphabet at age 3, whereas at age 7 through 14 this also included help with homework. Where relevant, the aggregation separated investment of time in homework or educational development (ParInvTime3Rs) from broader aspects of spending time doing recreational activities, which are nevertheless widely associated with cognitive and social development (ParInvTime), and might therefore be associated with processes of ‘concerted cultivation’. A further way in which parenting may affect child outcomes, and which might vary for different types of family or household, is concerns how **parents interact with institutions, particularly schools** (ParSchool). Throughout all the age groups the variables focussed on attending parents' evenings and parent-initiated special school meetings to ensure that the emphasis was on parents engaging schools rather than the other way around. At different ages these measures were broadened with additional items focussed on educational reasons for school choice (age 5); active investment of time in school-based activities such as helping in the classroom (age 7); and steps taken to get into the desired secondary school (age 11). Variables derived from the use of financial resources to engage with schools are dealt with separately.There is concern that one of the mechanisms that underpin the reproduction of inequality is **extra tuition outside of school** (Jerrim, 2017). At age 11 and 14 MCS asked parents about additional classes in English, Maths and Science and we aggregated these into two measures of receiving extra classes (Tuition) and whether these were paid for (PayTuition). There are a variety of other ways in which families can seek to use financial resources to advantage their children. The most obvious is by **paying for private schooling**. The MCS has questions about school fees at most sweeps and we used these as a binary at ages 5, 7 and 14 (SchFees). However, there are also more subtle ways in which this is manifest such as being able to **purchase a house in a particular school’s catchment area**, a factor widely held to inflate property prices in particular areas. We also used a computed measure of using financial resources to influence school admissions at the transition to secondary school (age 11) which aggregated variables for moving house, renting or paying for extra tuition for entrance exams specifically (FinResSch). A large part of what Lareau (2011) described as ‘concerted cultivation’ revolved around **organised extra-curricular activities**. There are some variables in MCS that we can use to judge these, especially at age 11, aggregated from survey items about the frequency of visiting the library or learning a musical instrument, and age 14 aggregated from items about a range of activities outside of school (going to the cinema, going to watch live sport, sing in a choir or play in an orchestra, reading for pleasure, visiting heritage sites, religious services or engaging with organised clubs or societies or engaging in vigorous physical activity). We also included a counter-veiling ‘screen time’ measure at age 14, though some previous research has noted that watching TV may be correlated with faster cognitive development in early years at least (Sullivan et al., 2013). |

To develop an understanding of intergenerational HSRS, we created dependent variables (see Table 2 and Box 1) to represent six different aspects of parenting behaviour highlighted in the literature on parenting as related to the development of ‘Capitals, Assets and Resources’, including (1) parental values, attitudes and aspirations; (2) investment of time in helping with school work and wider activities associated with cognitive development; (3) parental interaction with educational institutions (schools); (4) extra tuition; (5) using financial resources to influence school selection; and (6) extra-curricular activities. Wherever possible we developed composite variables that could be measured across multiple sweeps of the MCS.

We removed missing data/respondents. This has downsides in reducing the sample sizes, potentially increasing response bias. The positives are that we avoid the risks of imputing values and since we are interested mainly in structural (in)variance between groups, the risks to representativeness are minimised. For the most part, we undertook the analysis unweighted, but made checks to see the effects of weightings, using the individual sweep weights from the longitudinal file and sweep 6 where we used cross sweep analysis. No changes to the patterns identified were identified. We conducted a series of parametric tests (one-way anovas) using SPSS. To assess where the differences are located between the groups we conducted post-hoc tests and employed the Bonferroni correction to minimise potential errors from multiple pairwise testing (Shaffer, 1995). The headline results are described in the text, referring only to statistically significant differences. We present only summaries of the data aligned to key findings which show tests of the significance of the variation in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable (eta). Additional data summarising the means comparisons (and significance) are in tabular form in the appendix.

INSERT Table 2 HERE

# Analysis

We make five sequential arguments and provide evidence to substantiate each in turn. The first two are largely contextual, documenting the pressures experienced by UK households. The latter three are more novel and derived from the MCS data and outline the similar and different ways that HSRS have responded to those contextual pressures.

## The UK State under the Global Pressure of World Market Integration

The institutional architecture for governance of the global economy at the end of WW2 focussed on world market integration and expansion, with huge success, especially since the end of the Cold War. Any number of indicators of the scale of this process are available, including trade growth, the increased output and productivity in China and South East Asia (Milanovic, 2019), the industrialisation of the so-called BRICs and the massive growth of the global labour force at least partly engaged in wage labour, though that clearly understates the intensification of world market integration given the significance of related processes of resource and input extraction outside of wage labour (Harvey, 2003), the continued relevance of informal work (ILO, 2020) and the transformation and rescaling of social reproduction (Elias, 2020).

All this means that the global scale is increasingly ‘ecologically dominant’ over other scales in the social ensemble of the global economy (Jessop, 2012). Smaller scales of political organisation must increasingly cope with the ‘feedback effects’ of global integration (Jessop, 2015), with one of these being to ensure national competitiveness. Table 3 shows ten-year aggregate averages (to iron out cyclical patterns between individual years) of shares of world economic output overall and per-capita. The UK, Europe and the US have captured a declining share of global output, since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008-, all three have experienced a declining ratio of output per-capita relative to the world total. In sum, the UK has experienced a declining competitive position in the global economy as world market expansion has accelerated since 1990.

INSERT TABLE 3 about here.

## State Scale Responses to Global Pressures: Driving Competitiveness Deeper

One state-scale response has been an increasing preoccupation with recovering economic competitiveness (Coates, 2000). There is no shortage of national and macro-regional strategies that exhibit this, such as attempts by international organisations to promote competitiveness among their member states (Cammack, 2001, 2021) or the various iterations of competitiveness strategies as part of the EU’s *Lisbon* and then *Europe 2020* Strategies. Successive UK governments have been no exception to this trend.

Of course, state scale policy responses are widely cast; covering skills and technology, fiscal policy, the designation of deregulated spatial zones, transport policy and investment and so on. Responding to the idea that Thatcherism had created a low-value added economy (Gamble 1990:214), the New Labour government targeted workforce skills and education from the outset (Author, 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009). A government report succinctly summarises the issue:

“British business can no longer compete on the basis of low cost, low value added activity. To be successful, it is even more important for business and individuals to learn new skills, be more creative and innovative and use their knowledge to produce higher value added goods and services” (DFEE and DTI, 2001).

The evolving policy agenda has involved academisation of secondary schools, the extension of compulsory schooling at both ends of the age spectrum, increased enrolments in higher levels of education, endless reform of technical post-compulsory education and apprenticeships, apprenticeship levies on employers and introduction and successive reforms of the ‘national curriculum’ and assessment processes (Authors, xxxx). As we write this paper, HE is again in the government’s sights with another round of pressure to focus enrolments in subjects that can apparently better support competitiveness (Gove, 2020). Schools have faced pressure directly and mediated *via* OFSTED inspection judgements, to engage parents more in support of their childrens’ education and to be clear with children and young people about individualised targets for progression and attainment which are regularly and repeatedly communicated, revised and assessed. Teachers have become familiar with regular data analysis on pupil progress and few parents will be unfamiliar with how many ‘points progress’ their children were expected to have made and their achievements in this regard. Examination points such as A-Level (age 18), GCSE (the end of secondary school at age 16) and ‘Standard Assessment Tests’ or SATs (end of primary school) have become the subject of a great deal of pressure on young people to achieve, with the former two in particular linked to gateways to Further and Higher Education pathways which largely control access to career opportunities. The pressure around these key education gateways and the risks/rewards associated with them is massively exacerbated as a result of the decades of labour market reform, increased insecurity and welfare retrenchment (Edmiston, 2017).

Successive governments have also lamented a lack of willingness or ability among some sections of society to engage in the process. ‘Aspiration’ is frequently mentioned as a barrier to educational performance and therefore also of economic performance (Authors, xxxx). This is both a rhetorical initiative and an institutional one. Many researchers have of course successfully challenged the idea of an ‘aspiration’ problem (Ermisch, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2013), but it remains an important part of the ongoing ‘social mobility’ agenda and it is well embedded in the minds of practitioners.

The reality of course, is that neither educational performance nor aspiration will change the structural opportunities available nor the creeping casualisation and insecurity of previously secure and well-paid occupational roles. Prominent social mobility theorists now anticipate that the growth of Professional/Managerial occupations may be slowing (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018), and recent research illustrates the resulting downward patterns of intergenerational mobility (Social Mobility Commission, 2020). This is relevant to the wider political significance of our empirical findings, discussed in the final section. Now, we move to show not just that the state has attempted to push down competitiveness to the individual and household scale, but that this has been largely successful.

## Competitiveness in Household Social Reproduction Strategies

One measure of household strategising for competitiveness is their values in relation to education (our variables on this are labelled ‘ParEdAtt’). For the NS-SEC class proxy, mean answers vary very little across these variables, especially between age 3 and 11 where the range is small and variances are mostly not statistically significant or show mixed patterns. There is little difference in the mean scores of attitudes to education by parental NS-SEC class when the cohort members were aged 3, 7 and at age 11 Professional and Managerial parents had statistically significantly lower positive values on the aggregated variable of wanting their children to stay on at school and thinking it likely their children would go to University. A very similar pattern was observed in relation to the educational proxy for class, with a slightly larger negative gap with the least educated parents. Likewise, virtually exactly the same pattern was observed for income groups, with the most well paid having lower positive scores on these variables at age 11 than other income groups, but no statistically significant patterns at earlier ages.

In sum, the data on these educational attitudes and values variables shows no discernible pattern of variation by three separate proxies for social class, until age 11 when it appears that ‘working class’ parents have stronger positive values about education than do ‘middle class’ parents.

INSERT Table 4 ABOUT HERE

A second way to think about how households internalise competitiveness might be in investing their time in helping children with school work or directly related tasks like reading, writing or maths at age 5, 7, 11 and 14 (ParInvTime3Rs). There were some statistically significant differences in parental investment of time in helping with school work, but no clear pattern in terms of the NS-SEC proxy in early childhood. For instance, at age 5, Professional/Managerial parents spent less time than all other groups, but this difference was significant only compared with lower supervisory and technical parents. At age 7 there were no statistically significant differences. The patterns were similar in terms of parental education; no clear statistically significant patterns at age 5, 7 or 11. There were differences in parental investment of time helping with school/educational work according to income groups however at age 5, though not at age 7, indicating mixed findings, at least at earlier ages (see below).

What the data suggests is that there are very few differences in parental aspirations for their children in relation to education and that working class and lower educated parents are just as, or more likely, to spend time helping their children with school work, especially at early ages. This questions the idea that working class, lower income or lower educated parents lack aspiration for their children or fail to help them engage with education. It rather suggests that the state scale message about education has filtered through to all households.

## Class Based Differences in Resources to Pursue HSRS

This is not to say that class differences in HSRS are unimportant. There remain important differences in the extent to which different households can utilise informational, cultural and financial resources in support of their HSRS.

First, while our aggregate variable for testing parental attitudes to education (ParEdAtt) did not show class-based variation up to age 11, at age 14 there were clear variations. Part of this was caused by the difference in the measure at that age 14 where there is greater scope for variation because of the larger range of answer options on the survey and because it includes a ‘likelihood’ or confidence measure in those aspirations. At age 14, class-based differences are present. On the NS-SEC proxy the mean scores on this variable range from 4.3 for Professional and Managerial parents to 3.8 for Semi-Routine/Routine parents with a linear pattern (in that the mean increased for each of the class groups from Routine through to Professional/Managerial) through the class groups which is statistically significant. Similar and significant linear patterns were also apparent concerning parental qualifications and income group quintiles at age 14. The largest differences were related to parental qualifications, with a 25% difference in the mean score. Like earlier research (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011, Irwin, 2018) we can conclude that parental aspirations about children’s education are not greatly affected by class, income (or indeed ethnicity), but confidence in those aspirations does vary as children get closer to the end of compulsory schooling.

Differences along class lines were also apparent in the investment of time on educational activities (ParInvTime3rs) at age 14, as opposed to at earlier ages. At age 14 there were small but statistically significant differences between Professional and Managerial and Intermediate class parents and the rest with the former having slightly higher scores, with similar patterns reported for higher income groups.

INSERT TABLE 5 about here.

There were also differences in the time parents spend on wider - not directly school-related – activities (ParInvTime). These were broadly linear (i.e. were progressively larger through the class hierarchy) and statistically significant on the NS-SEC proxy for class. Very similar patterns emerge using the highest parental qualification proxy for class. There are linear and significant patterns through the qualification distribution at age 3 and in the general investment of time at age 7. Comparison by income group reveals similar significant differences in the investment of time generally between ages 3 to 14, with broadly linear and positive differences in mean values as income rises.

A similar measure relates to participation in organised extra-curricular activities. Children of Managers and Professionals spend significantly more time on organised or concerted extracurricular activities at age 11 and 14 and less time on TV/Videos/internet and social media. Using the education proxy shows a broadly linear pattern of variation. Children of Managers and Professionals had an 8% higher mean at age 11 and 12% higher mean at age 14 for organised/concerted activities and a 7% lower screen time score. The difference between top and bottom of the scale on the educational qualification proxy was larger still being 20, 18 and -10% for concerted extra-curricular activities at age 11, 14 and screen time respectively. Using the statistical test, class proxies explain between 0.5-5% of the variance. Similar patterns of variation are present across income groups and again like educational qualifications, differences are broadly aligned to income quintiles, with income explaining between 0.4 and 4% of the variation.

There were further differences in our measures of parent-school engagement ((ParSchool) which could itself be taken as a proxy for institutional manipulation) for all proxy measures of class with these explaining up to 5% of the difference between groups. Managers and Professionals and those with NVQL5 showed greater engagement with schools throughout the age ranges and differences between the top and bottom of the scales ranged from 8% to over half. Differences by income group were even starker, ranging from 9 to 70% in the mean score between the top and bottom of the distribution. In the statistical tests, income explained 8% of this variation. The gaps on all these scores were much larger for the age 7 measure where the variable we used had a larger number of more nuanced components, including not just engagement with school choice and parent evenings but more active measures such as helping out in school.

INSERT TABLE 6 about here.

We investigated whether households organise additional tuition for their children (ExtraTuition) and whether they pay for this (PayTuition). Weighted for the UK population at the relevant sweep, about 20% of households reported that cohort members had extra tuition at age 11 and about 11% at age 14. There were small but non-linear differences across class groups using NS-SEC. Managers and Professionals and Self-Employed parents were significantly more likely to have extra lessons for their children at both sweeps. Where they have extra lessons, Managers and Professional parents were more likely than lower supervisory or Semi/Routine workers to pay for those lessons. Linear patterns are present in the parental qualification proxy, with those with parental qualifications at NVQ Level 4 and 5 being significantly more likely to have extra lessons and to pay for them. On both proxies, class is an important predictor of variation in paying for lessons – accounting for between 6-10% of the variation. While income groups only explain a small part of the variation in having extra lessons, they explain roughly 10% of the variation in paying for them.

INSERT TABLE 7 about here.

We also found similar patterns for using financial resources for other forms of educational advantage such as paying school fees for private schooling (SchFees) and using financial resources to influence state school entry by living close to a desirable school or paying for tuition specifically to pass a selective school entrance exam (FinResSch). Around 6% of the sample report paying school fees in sweep 6 – at other points in time the figure is lower. For the most part, children of Managerial/Professional parents were significantly more likely than the rest to use financial resources for school fees or to influence which secondary school their child goes to. For example, Professional/Managerial parents had a mean score on the measure for using financial resources to influence school of more than 150% that of Semi/Routine or Lower Supervisory parents. While paying school fees is marginal for all groups, it is several times more likely for Professional/Managerial, the highest qualified parents or highest income groups relative to Semi/Routine, the lowest qualified and lowest earners. For income, the differences between groups increase through the income distribution and are statistically significant across all variables.

INSERT TABLE 10 ABOUT HERE.

One interpretation of the differences that are clearly present in class-based patterns of parenting in HSRS is to suggest that they arise out of informational, cultural and financial resources. ‘Middle class’ parents do not spend more time helping with school work, but they do intervene more at *critical* phases in their children’s lives (e.g. at the point at which children are taking exams which set them on institutionally unequal educational pathways). They engage with schools more, especially beyond merely attending parents’ evenings. They are also more likely to spend time on non-school activities and to ensure their children participate in out of school organised activities. They are more likely to use their additional financial resources to pay for extra tuition and to use financial resources to effect school selection and, unsurprisingly, pay private school fees. If the logic and motivation to compete is broadly homogenous, the ability to use resources of all types to do so, is not.

## Differences in Parenting by ethnicity

Shilliam (2009) has argued persuasively that racial categories have historically served purposes similar to those of ‘class’ in demarcating certain individuals and communities for differential economic positions, often with extreme and violent consequences. He also argues that race and class intersect prominently in contemporary debates in British politics (2018: Ch7) about identity and who is regarded as ‘deserving’ of economic position or state support. Our data allows a very partial glimpse at these issues from the perspective of parenting.

The findings are to some extent revealing in their banality. They show some variation in parenting by cohort member ethnicity but no clear trajectory. For example, that there was no clear pattern in terms of ethnicity for parental attitudes to education across sweeps 2-6. However, at age 14 when the variable has a wider range there is a significantly more positive attitude to education among all non-white ethnicities, compared to white cohort members, with Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi and Black cohort members having parents with the strongest positive attitudes to education. Comparison of parental investment of time reveals significant differences in the investment of time at ages 3 to 11 with White, Mixed ethnicity and Indian children receiving more general time investments from parents. Significant variation in time investments largely disappear however for schoolwork.

Small differences were present in parental engagement with schools. In the more fine-grained age-7 measure, parents of White and Mixed ethnicity children engaged significantly more with schools than other parents. Parents of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children had the lowest scores for engaging with schools. This didn’t add up to a picture of disinterest in school among parents of Black and Minority Ethnic children; far from it. Black/Black British children were significantly more likely than other ethnic groups to receive additional out of school tuition both at age 11 and 14. White children and dual heritage children were less likely to have additional tuition. These differences did not carry through into paying for lessons however, where there were no clear or consistent differences, save for Indian children being more likely than some other groups to pay for lessons. There were no clear differences in relation to paying private school fees, except for Indian cohort members whose parents were more likely to pay for private school or use financial resources to influence school choice. Nearly all non-White ethnicities were statistically more likely to be active in extra-curricular activity than are White young people at both age 11 and 14.

The data clearly needs unpacking in more detail for meaningful messages to emerge from it, with intersections of class and gender clearly being important to unpick. We suspect the former will help to explain some of the variations highlighted above. The initial conclusion to be drawn from it though is that ethnicity has no main influence on parenting in the sense of reproducing class position. There are hints that some ethnic minority groups may find it harder to engage with institutions, despite having similar positive values toward education. The other non-finding here is a relative lack of support for any sense of ‘left behind’ White working class communities in terms of parenting. As with class, all parents appear aspirational for their children’s future.

# Discussion

The preceding discussion adds to studies (Ermisch, 2008; Irwin, 2018; Lareau, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2013) that open up the ‘black box’ of the household to show how different HSRS might add up to the reproduction of inequalities between generations. In relation to IPE, we draw attention to four implications below.

First, following Elias and Rai (2019,pp.214–215), we argue that violence is an integral element of everyday social reproduction. They focus on the gendered depletion of mundane household tasks, domestic violence, the structural violence of poverty and inequality and the way that everyday violence is used to regulate public spheres. Our data extends this conceptualisation of everyday violence still further. We show that violent outcomes can result from benign intentions: households doing their best for their children. We show that because of extant inequality this act results in differential and unequal outcomes. We think of this in terms of ‘compound inequality’ in that it refers to the ways that agential responses to extant structural conditions, reinforce and accentuate those structural conditions.

Second, the discussion illustrates the long-running feminist case that the formal economy rests on a series of foundations in the domestic sphere (Elson, 1998) – the ‘back stories’ (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018) – which are most often not accounted for in mainstream or ‘orthodox’ economics or even some critical international political economy (Authors, xxxx). As such we contribute to the plugging of gaps in research on the relational nature of scale that do not fully account for the interaction between the global scale of production and competitiveness and the micro-scales of social reproduction (Marston, 2000), A failure to account for the significance of these factors is not merely an intellectual omission: it has very practical consequences. It may actually undermine efforts to pursue competitiveness for the economy overall, albeit there are also significant risks in subsuming related issues such as the gender inequalities of HSRS to the often ambiguous or shifting requirements of competitiveness (Elias, 2020). It also ignores the way that micro-scale processes add up to macro-scale social problems such as compound inequalities.

Additionally the data speaks to a range of political economy issues and research problems. The findings suggest that Bordieuan insights into class reproduction (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984) have a political economy significance that exceeds their current discussion in the IPE literature. This is not so much as a replacement for more structural or Marxist ideas of class, which is how they have tended to be discussed when they do feature (Radice, 2014) but how individuals and social groups position themselves to advantage (or otherwise) within them. The findings also call into question the utility – or violence – of such systems of classification themselves.

Finally, the link between HSRS and ‘compound inequality’ may be fuelling a popular sense of injustice, with broader structurally violent and destabilising outcomes – a ‘new politics of inequality’. This includes first a widespread recognition of inequalities and that this is driving resentment but without serious prospect that their underlying causes will abate. Indeed, as we speculate above, the opposite seems likely, creating fertile ground for further political destabilisation and disciplinary – structurally violent - responses (Authors, Forthcoming).

# Conclusion

Returning to the more direct contributions of this paper. First, we contribute empirically to the now burgeoning literature exploring various aspects of social reproduction. We highlight how parenting helps to reproduce inequalities over time, as one aspect of HSRS. We suggest that the relationship between extant inequality, household agency and future inequalities is captured in the concept of ‘compound inequality’. Theoretically we contribute to the literature on social reproduction as an ‘everyday’ socio-economic process and how the reproduction of the overall social ensemble which is variegated across space, time and involves the reproduction of structural violence. This itself is part of a now increasingly important literature which illustrates the domestic foundations of the global economy, and the relational aspects of scale production that extend both capitalist imperatives and state power into the scale of social reproduction (Marston, 2000). Given that the data is largely derived from women/mothers we contribute to what is already well known about the gendered division of labour, but also that there is a strong intersection between gender and class in the reproduction of the population and workforce over time, not so much in attitudes, aspirations and effort, but in the informational, cultural and material resources that different parents can draw on in the process.

Finally, we offer an insight into possible methodological departures for critical IPE: to make more of the voluminous empirical data that is available in longitudinal and cohort studies. This is not a replacement for, but in addition to, the more qualitative and ethnographic work that is usually related to the investigation of the ‘everyday’ in IPE. There are limitations to the cohort study data; for instance in this case we cannot answer questions about *why* parents hold particular values or adopt particular strategies. To answer such questions quantitative survey data needs to be complemented with qualitative exploration. In future research, we aim to extend our analysis addressing intersections between class, gender and ethnicity and to add new qualitative data to understand these ‘why’ questions.

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1. Also See IPEEL.org [↑](#footnote-ref-1)