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## Unique Britain

Danny Dorling, 15 May 2011

*Startling wage inequality, shocking child poverty, but thankfully – to date - low support for fascism. Danny Dorling presents a snapshot of Britain's more unusual features.*

In Britain, the best-off fifth of households have an average weekly income of more than 7 times the poorest fifth. Among the large affluent nations only the United States of America has a greater income inequality.

And the gap is wider when you look at young Britons, even more so if you cast an eye on the capital. In London in 2010, when all adults were included, the median person amongst the top fifth of Londoners was 270 times more wealthy than the median person in the bottom fifth.



A lot can be said about us according to where we live.

For one thing, money makes us move. When we suffer major shocks to our wealth, our home address will often change.

The more times a person's heart is broken, the nearer they will tend to move to the sea. Home moves are more frequent amongst those who separate and tend to take people aged over forty away from cities rather than towards them.

Divorcées who remain single are more likely to end up in Blackpool than in any place. Divorcées who remarry are most likely to wash up on the South coast.

Some often-cited stereotypes simply aren't true. Here are the facts that challenge them:

Gun-crime is more common in the countryside than the city. Farmers' wives, their children, and farmers themselves are most at risk of dying from gun shot wounds.

Muslims are far more likely to marry non-Muslims in Britain than Christians are to marry non-Christians.

There are no ghettos in Britain. According to accepted definitions, a ghetto is an area where most people belong to one group and most of that that group live in that area. Our last ghetto was the Jewish enclave in Whitechapel a century ago.

But . . . most children who live above the fourth floor of tower blocks in *England* are Black or Asian. High-rise living with children in Britain is almost always not luxury living. Most of these children are poor and Britain tolerates a much high proportion of its children living in poverty than does anywhere else in Western Europe.

That's life — what about death? The greatest threat in Britain for everyone under age 30 is the car.

Adults are most likely to die as a driver or a passenger; for children over the age of 9, if they die it's most likely they'll have been a pedestrian hit by a car.

Within cities children from poor areas are up to seven times more likely to be killed by a car than those from affluent areas. In affluent areas younger children are largely imprisoned in their home, often because of fears of cars crashing into them if they try to cross local roads.

Lastly, the odds of a newborn being male diminish when there are natural disasters, wars, or recessions. It's not entirely clear why this is the case but it's thought that higher levels of stress amongst potential parents may have an influence. In Britain more boys are born than girls, but not as many more as when I was young, when inequalities were lower and social mobility was higher.

This also helps to explain that age-old question 'where have all the good men gone?' They have gone in greater numbers from London as compared to any other British town or city. Within a decade London went from having a surplus of young men for every young woman, to a dearth. This was because of girls being allowed to study more equitably at school and winning fairer access to universities; because of changes in the demand for different jobs and skills; because of the influx of new child-carers being mainly women; and even because (at the margin) fewer boys had been born than before.

It may be a huge stretch to link the lack of young men to be found in London today with growing social inequalities since the mid 1970s, but as everything is related to everything else we should not be surprised to find strange connections. Britain is unique in many ways, some of the features of British society — such as gross inequalities of income and wealth — are little to be proud about, but other unusual aspects of life in Britain are worth highlighting as good.

Votes for fascist parties in Britain, such as the BNP, remain amongst the lowest in Europe. Britain is a multicultural society and in parts is home to a greater mix of people coming from more countries than is the case anywhere else in Europe. Anti-immigration anger in Britain is likely to rise as the economic depression deepens and despite more people being likely to leaving Britain in the coming months than to enter. How the multicultural British deal with this and whether they let themselves again have their prejudices stoked up by politicians who want to distract them from growing economics inequalities is yet to be seen.

Late last month, UK GDP was announced to have risen by half a percentage point. However, measured in Euros or Dollars the trend looks negative. It is only by allowing the pound to devalue that UK exports become cheaper and we can afford to import less and take fewer holidays. Couple that devaluation with the cuts to come, forecast by the IMF to reduce UK public spending to below even the proportion of the United States of America, and Britain begins to look unique in yet another and unenviable way in Western Europe.

*BBC Radio 4's "More or Less" broadcast an edited version of this piece on 8 May.*

*Danny Dorling is professor of human geography at Sheffield University and the author of [Injustice: why social inequality persists](#) (Policy Press), and [So You Think You Know About Britain?](#) (Constable). Both books are fresh out in paperback.*