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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine variations in the combination of social roles during times of social change. We specify a latent class approach to examine role configurations for individuals in their early 30s, establishing a typology of how work and family related roles combine within individuals born twelve years apart, and examine their antecedents. Drawing on data collected for two British Birth Cohorts born in 1958 (N=10706) and 1970 (N=11,005), we provide empirical evidence of both consistency and change in life course patterns. Findings are discussed in terms of destandardisation, differentiation, and individualisation of the life course in times of social change, and their implications for family research within a life course perspective.

(words: 116)

Keywords: Family; Latent Class Analysis; Life Course; Social Change; Work; Young Adulthood

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Social, economic and demographic changes over the past three decades have brought about changes in life course transitions, especially among young people making the step into adult roles and family formation. Traditional pathways into adult life are said to have become de-standardised, more heterogeneous and differentiated, with individuals gaining greater control of their lives (Buchmann, 1989; Shanahan, 2000). Education and training are more extended, and entry into family formation and parenthood postponed until the late 20s or early 30s (Arnett, 2000). But have these changes impacted on all young people in the same way? Young people do not follow a single, uniform passage into adulthood; instead a distinction has opened up between those who take a slower route to adulthood, and those who follow traditional fast track transitions (Crow & Rees, 1999; Jones, 2002). Although the changing nature of the life course in modern society has been, and still is, the focus of speculation and discussion, there is a lack of systematic empirical research on the structure of the life course, how it has changed and is differentiated across social groups (Elder & Shanahan, 2007; Macmillan, 2005). Here we will report evidence based on data collected for two British Birth cohorts born in 1958 and 1970 respectively, following the lives of over 20,000 individuals from birth into adulthood.

STATUS TRANSITIONS IN CONTEXT

The unfolding of the life course necessitates the assumption of new social roles, such as leaving full-time education, entry into paid employment, settling down with a partner, and becoming a parent. These transitions are not independent of one another, and for a better understanding of their changing nature, especially regarding changing patterns in family formation, we need to learn more about how different transitions weave together in people's lives.

It has been argued that since the 1970s transitions into adulthood have become de-standardised, i.e. more variable and protracted, and less uniform. In operational terms this implies that certain life states or role configurations and their sequencing characterise an increasingly smaller group in the population or occur at more dispersed ages (Brückner & Mayer, 2005). Moreover, it has been argued that there has been an 'ideational shift' characterised by changing social practices and the breakdown of many class, gender, and age based constraints shaping demographic events (Lesthaeghe, 1995). Individual biographies have become more removed from traditional life scripts and more dependent on individual decision making, leading to an individualisation of the life course (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991).

Status transitions are based on complex interdependent relationships, including links to one's family of origin as well as wider social networks, and are always situated within a larger socio-historical and cultural context (Elder, 1985). Structural characteristics such as socio-economic status at birth and parental education have been linked to variations in academic attainment and motivation, to educational and occupational opportunities later in life, as well as to the timing of partnership and family formation (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Schoon, Martin, & Ross, 2007). Family stability, indicated for example by parental divorce or separation from parents, has shown to influence the timing and sequencing of transition experiences and adult outcomes (Amato & Booth, 1997; Furstenberg, 2000). Another key structural factor that shapes transitions and the pacing of work and family related transitions is gender (Moen, 2001). The female life course has been described as more complex than that of males, and there is a persisting structural imbalance in the social pathways and biographical options available to women. This is largely because of the greater interdependence of family and work related roles due to persisting gendered expectations ascribing women the main responsibilities for care and family tasks, rendering female participation in the labour market more interrupted and unstable than that of men.

Understanding the structuring of the life course requires simultaneous consideration of multiple dimensions, which interact in important ways (Macmillan, 2005). The interdependence of education, work and family related transitions suggest the need for empirical methods that account for the multidimensional associations between variables. Recent studies have demonstrated the usefulness of latent class analysis to map out diversity and heterogeneity in role configurations in young adulthood (Macmillan & Copher, 2005; Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, & Barber, 2005; Sandefur, Eggerling-Boeck, & Park, 2005). Drawing on data collected for the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT), Osgood and colleagues identified six distinct pathways among study members at age twenty-four differentiating between fast starters, parents without careers, educated partners, educated singles, working singles and slow starters. The six groups related well to four groups identified by Sandefur and colleagues using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) at age twenty-six and the High School and Beyond Study (HSB) at age twenty-eight. In both studies the resulting grouping of cohort members reflected differences in the combination of educational attainment (college education versus limited education only) and having made the step into family formation or not. Furthermore both studies demonstrated the influence of social background differences in shaping the paths into adult roles, with young people from relative disadvantaged background being more likely to have fewer qualifications and to start family formation earlier than their more privileged peers. The smaller number of distinct groups among the slightly older individuals in NELS and HSB (compared to MSALT) might be explained through findings from harmonised census data reflecting changes in role combinations between 1900 and 2000, showing that the most turbulent phase in terms of status changes is generally between ages twenty and twenty-five, while by age thirty the majority of young adults have finished school, joined the labour force, left the parental home, and are married (Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005).

In the present study we assess variations in life course patterns among young adults in their early thirties, assessing the specific role of cohort membership, social background, and individual capabilities in shaping transition experiences. Has there been an increasing de-standardisation of life course patterns, as identified by changing prevalences of role configurations? And has there been an increasing individualization of the life course, as indicated by a reduced influence of social class and gender, and a greater importance of individual factors in shaping role configuration in the later born cohort? What is new in our approach is that a) we pool data from two birth cohorts to test cohort variations in life course patterns; b) we incorporate a set of background factors into the model as predictors; and c) that we assess the differential role of social background and individual capabilities in shaping the life course in different ways for the two cohorts.

METHOD

-- Insert Figure 1 --

In the following we use multiple indicator multiple causes latent class analysis (MIMIC-LCA) as implemented in MPlus 4.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2004) to identify how different indicators of adult roles combine within individuals. Latent class analysis (LCA) is a statistical method that enables us to examine latent structures among a set of categorical scored variables and to identify underlying types or classes(Goodman, 1974; Lazarsfeld & Henry, 1968). We use five categorical status indicators reflecting partnership, parenthood, residence, economic activity, and level of education in early adulthood. A number of latent classes are identified that adequately capture the structure in the data, and parameters estimated that give the proportions of individuals within each of the latent classes (latent class probabilities) and their distribution across the indicator variables within these classes (conditional probabilities). Parameters are estimated using maximum likelihood criterion where the estimates are those most likely

to account for the observed data (Clogg, 1995). In the MIMIC-LCA model covariates are added to the latent class model, and their effects on the latent variable are estimated jointly with the other parameters (Jöreskog & Goldberger, 1975). The model is described more fully in figure 1.

All covariates were measured in childhood and adolescence, thus being biographical antecedents of our latent variable. It is assumed that status configurations are shaped by experiences and resources acquired during childhood and adolescence, in particular by the socio-economic family background as well as individual agency processes which are indicated by school engagement, educational aspirations and academic attainment. A number of direct paths from the covariates to the status indicators were also estimated (as indicated by the broken lines in figure 1). These represent relationships between the covariates and status indicators that are not fully mediated by the latent variable. Statistically, failure to include these effects would result in model misspecification, and could lead to distorted classes (Muthén & Muthén, 2000).

Identifying the optimal number of classes (model fit) is determined by the disparity between observed and expected cell frequencies in multi-way frequency tables of the status indicators, summarised by a log-likelihood function with a known chi-square distribution. We employ Schwarz's Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) (Schwarz, 1978), a commonly used fit index that balances model fit with model parsimony, adjusting for the size of the sample. The model with the lowest BIC is considered optimal (Muthén & Muthén, 2000). Alongside an overall measure of model fit we also consider the usefulness of the solution in practice, determined by the interpretability of the classes, the number of individuals in each class, and the differences in predictions of consequences.

Following the assumption of increasing individualisation we would expect a reduced influence of class and gender effects among the later born cohort, as well as an increased influence of individual factors. Following the assumption of increasing de-

standardisation of the life course, we would furthermore expect a greater diversity or changing prevalences of role configurations in the later born cohort, or the emergence of new role configurations reflecting for example, a delayed assumption of adult roles.

DATA

The study used data collected for the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70), two of Britain's richest research resources for the study of human development (Ferri, Bynner, & Wadsworth, 2003; Schoon, 2006). NCDS took as its subjects all persons living in Great Britain who were born between 3 and 9 March 1958. In six follow up studies data were collected on the physical, psycho-social and educational development of the cohort at age 7, 11, 16, 23, 33 and 42 years. The BCS70 has followed children born in the week 5 – 11 April 1970. Data collection sweeps have taken place when the cohort members were aged 5, 10, 16, 26 and 30 years.

The analysis is based on cohort members with complete data on transition outcomes at age 33 in NCDS and 30 in BCS70, including 10706 cohort members in NCDS and 11005 in BCS70. An analysis of response bias showed that the achieved samples in the age 30/33 sweeps did not differ from the target sample across a number of critical variables (social class, parental education, and gender), despite a slight under-representation of males, and of the most disadvantaged groups (Hawkes & Plewis, 2006; Plewis, Calderwood, Hawkes, & Nathan, 2004). Bias due to attrition of the sample during childhood has been shown to be minimal (Davie, Butler, & Goldstein, 1972; Fogelman, 1976).

MEASURES

Status indicators assessed of cohort members in their early 30s include partnership status (single, cohabiting, married); parenthood (no children, 1-2 children, three or more children); housing position (lives in parental home, in rented or temporary accommodation, owner occupier); economic activity (out of the labour force, looking

after the home, part-time employment, fulltime employment); and highest qualifications (none, NVQ levels 1 - 2 [equivalent to qualifications taken at the end of compulsory schooling], NVQ level 3 [equivalent to university entrance level qualifications], and NVQ levels 4 – 5 [degree level qualifications and above])

Covariates assessed at birth include parental social class measured by the Registrar General's measure of occupational social class (RGSC), assessed by the current or last held job of the cohort member's father. Where the father was absent, the social class (RGSC) of the mother was used in BCS70, and of the mother's father in NCDS. 364 (3.4%) cases were coded this way in NCDS, and 434 (4.1%) in BCS70. For the purpose of this analysis, RGSC is coded as: I & II: managerial and professional; III skilled manual or non-manual; IV & V semi- or unskilled (Leete & Fox, 1977). We also included mother's education differentiating between mothers who left school at the minimum age or stayed on; as well as mother's age at first birth, given in years.

Covariates assessed in early childhood (age 5 in BCS70 and age 7 in NCDS) include: *Material hardship* in the family environment, a summative measure indicating whether the cohort member lives in overcrowded accommodation (one or more persons per room), has shared or no access to a bathroom, toilet and hot water, and whether they lived in rented or temporary accommodation, with overall scores ranging between 0 and 3; *Family stability* indicating whether the cohort member had experienced parental divorce, separation or death by early childhood.

We also include measures of academic ability. In NCDS the *Southgate Reading Test*, a test of word recognition and comprehension was used. The test has a good reliability of .94 (Southgate, 1962) and scores range from 0-30. In BCS70 the *English Picture Vocabulary Test* (EPVT), an adaptation of the American Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Brimer & Dunn, 1962) was used, assessing word recognition among 5-year olds. The test has a good reliability of .96 (Osborn, Butler, & Morris, 1984) and ranges from 0-51. For cohort comparability test scores were z-standardised. In addition a *Copying designs test was used to* assess the cohort member's perceptual-motor ability

(Osborn et al., 1984). The ability to copy designs or geometric shapes is included as an element of assessment in many standard intelligence tests. The test has a satisfactory reliability of .70 (Osborn et al., 1984). In NCDS test scores ranged from 0 to 12, in BCS70 0 to 8. Again, test scores were z-standardised.

Covariates assessed in adolescence (age 16) include: *parents' educational aspirations for the adolescent cohort member* indicating whether the parent wanted their child to continue education beyond age 18, or not; The cohort member's *own educational plans*, indicating whether they wished to continue education beyond age 18, or not; A measure of *School motivation*, whereby cohort members completed a 5-item Academic motivation scale including items such as "I feel school is largely a waste of time" and "I think home work is a bore" (Fogelman, 1983). A summative scale was derived where a high score represent a greater motivation to study. Internal consistency of the scale is satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha: $\alpha = .77$ in NCDS and $\alpha = .76$ in BCS70), and scores were z-standardised.

The cohort member's academic attainment at age 16 is measured by an overall *'exam score',* calculated for both cohorts from their examination performance at age 16. The examination system was the same for both cohorts. The overall exam scores range from 0 to 106 in NCDS and from 0 to 97 in BCS70 (Schoon et al., 2002). Again, exam scores were z-standardised.

To address the issue of missing data due to component and item non-response we used multiple imputation of missing values (Rubin, 1987; Schafer, 1997) employing the ICE-program in STATA8.2 (Royston, 2004; Royston, 2005). We imputed 5 datasets for each cohort. The analysis takes account of the random component in the imputation model by estimating coefficients for each imputed dataset separately and averaging the estimates over the five results to achieve a single estimate. Standard errors of the estimates are adjusted according to Rubin's rule (Rubin, 1987).

RESULTS

-- Insert Table 1 –

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the covariates included in the model for both cohorts. There were some statistical differences, suggesting better educated mothers and less material hardship in the later born cohort, but substantive differences were small. Test scores in early childhood are obtained from different assessments in the two cohorts and are not directly comparable as raw scores.

Identification of (latent) Class membership

Although the lowest BIC was represented by an eight class solution for NCDS and a seven class for BCS70, there was little relative improvement beyond a four class solution for both cohorts, differentiating between 'traditional families', 'career orientation without children', 'disadvantaged families', and 'slow starters'. Inspection of solutions with greater than four classes did not reveal any qualitatively different configurations, or they were simply not interpretable. For example, in both cohorts we find a single mother's class emerges from the group of disadvantaged families, which although it differs from the former according to partnership status and gender, showed no further variation amongst the other predictors in the model. In addition, some further classes revealed a splitting of both traditional families and disadvantaged families into male and female equivalent classes. Simulation studies have also shown that BIC tends to overestimate the optimum number of classes (Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthen, 2006). To test the reliability of our solution, we re-ran the modelling strategy with a randomly selected sample of approximately 25% (2,500 cases) in both cohorts. We were able to replicate the four class solutions exactly, while solutions with additional classes were not stable. In addition, with a reduced sample, BIC also supported the four class solutions.

Typology of Role Configurations in young adulthood

Table 2 presents the latent class and conditional probabilities of the final 4-class solutions. Class characteristics are sufficiently similar to justify using the same labels across cohorts: whilst membership proportions have changed from NCDS to BCS70, conditional probabilities and gender distributions follow a similar pattern in both. The four classes can be characterized as follows:

 -- Insert Table 2 --

Traditional Families. Members of the "Traditional Families" class are typically married, own their own home, and have one or two children. Few have no qualifications, but the level of educational attainment varies. Whilst over half of the members are in full-time employment, considerable proportions are in part-time work or are caring for the home, this variation in Economic Activity is structured by gender. Traditional Families are by far the largest class in NCDS, with 52 % of the cohort predicted to be in it. In contrast, Traditional Families make up only 32 % of the BCS70 members.

Career without children. Members of the "Career without children" class are typically full-time employed, have no children, and own their own home. Partnership Status among members is mixed – the class includes single, cohabiting, and married individuals. They are, on average, more highly educated than those of any other class. The "Career without Children"-class is the second largest in NCDS, with 22 % membership probability. In BCS70, however, it is the largest class, containing 37 % of cohort members.

Disadvantaged Families. The "Disadvantaged Families"-class is characterized by a high likelihood of living in rented accommodation, and by poor educational attainment: this class contains more people without any formal qualification than any other class. In comparison to the "Traditional Families", more members of the "Disadvantaged Families" class have not only one or two, but three or more children.

Compared to *all* other classes, individuals in "Disadvantaged Families" are least likely to be in full-time employment. The "Disadvantaged Families"-class contains 18 % of cohort members in NCDS and 14% in BCS70.

Slow Starters: "Slow Starters" are typically single, childless, live either with their parents or in rented accommodation, and are either in full-time employment or unemployed. This group has more than doubled in the later born cohort, increasing from 7% in NCDS to 17% in BCS70. Their educational profile is the only instance where a considerable cohort difference in conditional probabilities can be found. In NCDS only a third of the Slow Starters have NVQ level 3 qualifications or higher, while in BCS70 more than half of the Slow Starters in BCS70 have NVQ level 3 qualifications or higher,.

Previous studies have shown that those still living at home in their early 30s were more likely disabled or long-term ill (DiSalvo, 1996). However, our "Slow Starters" groups do not contain large proportions of cohort members with disabilities (around 7% in both cohorts).

<center>*Antecedents of class membership*</center>

In order to ensure a valid comparison of covariates across cohorts, once the similarity between the two solutions had been established, we re-ran the four class solution using a pooled data set. In this manner we ensure that latent classes are empirically equivalent across cohorts so that any differences found in the coefficients may be attributed to a variation in covariate effects and not to slight differences in the latent classes. We also eliminated any effect of sample size by fixing the sample for both cohorts to n=10706. As expected the conditional probabilities for the pooled analysis fall midway between the two separate solutions. For reasons of brevity we do not report them here, however they are available on request from the authors.

Antecedents expected to predict social role configurations in young adulthood were added stepwise in three blocks beginning with cohort effects, followed by structural factors measured at birth and early childhood, and then with individual factors

and parental aspirations. At both steps interaction terms were examined between cohort and each covariate to test for significant cohort differences. For ease of interpretation the standard multinomial regression coefficients have been converted into relative risks, which eliminate the need for a reference class. The estimates presented in Table 4 summarise the change in probabilities for being a member of each class associated with a one unit change on the predictor variable (holding all other predictors constant at their means). For dichotomous covariates these represent a ratio of the probability for class membership for category '1' versus the probability for class membership of category '0'. Where the interaction term was significant we report the cohort specific effects associated with the covariate (in bold), otherwise a single and identical main effect is reported for both cohorts.

-- Insert Table –3

In a first step we estimated the effect of cohort as a formal test of the differences in latent class probabilities seen in table 1 (results not shown in table 3). A cohort member born in 1970 is only half as likely to be in the traditional families' class in their early thirties as those born in 1958 (0.51***). Instead they are almost twice as likely to be in the career no children class (1.82***). The small reduction in the percentage of cohort members allocated to the disadvantaged families' class in the later born cohort (14 per cent in BCS70 versus 18 per cent in NCDS) was non-significant. However there is a much greater risk of becoming a slow starter in the latter born cohort (2.47***).

In a second step we added the structural characteristics, and then the individual characteristics. The coefficients for both the traditional families and the career no children class remain fairly stable throughout the modeling process. However the addition of structural characteristics leads to a slight increase in the risk associated with being in a disadvantaged family or being a slow starter in BCS70 relative to NCDS.

Individuals in the traditional families' class are slightly more likely female than male, to come from a low social class background (NCDS) or have a mother who left school at the minimum age (BCS70). Their mothers tend to be slightly younger than average when they had their first child, especially in BCS70. They are a little less likely to have experienced material hardship in early childhood than average, and are the least likely of the four types to have experienced parental divorce or the death of a parent.

The addition of individual attributes and parental aspirations cancels out the small effect of social class, and mother's age at first birth. However the effect of mother's education in BCS70, and early hardship and family disruption in both cohorts remain relatively unchanged. The effect of individual characteristics suggest that those in traditional families tended to score slightly above average on reading tests measured in early childhood, and in NCDS, also on the copy design test. At age 16 they show the highest school engagement of the four family types. In BCS70, being a member of the traditional families' class is associated with having lower than average aspirations when aged 16, and having parents with lower aspirations for them than average. They also tended to do less well in their school leaving exams. In NCDS there were no such effects, suggesting perhaps, that the more ambitious and academically successful individuals are likely to follow a different path in the latter born cohort.

Of all four classes, those in the career no children class are the most likely to come from a professional or managerial background, least likely to have a mother who left school at the minimum age, or to have experienced hardship in early childhood. They also tend to have been born to mothers who had themselves delayed parenthood, suggesting a possible cycle of advantage. This class shows no association with family disruption in early childhood, and tends to be more male than female.

With the addition of individual attributes the influence of social class is significantly reduced and the effect of mother's education disappears altogether. Mother's age at first birth on the other hand continues to remain important, and to a slightly lesser extent, so does early hardship. This class shows the highest academic

attainment of all four types in both early and later childhood. The effect of exam scores measured at age 16, which represents the only significant cohort difference for this class, suggests that in BCS70, members of this group show higher attainment relative to their peers than in NCDS. Members of this group did not show a particularly high school engagement, although were by far the most aspirational, and most likely to have parents with high aspirations for them.

Given the more precarious circumstances of our disadvantaged families' class it is perhaps unsurprising that they tend to come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. They are the most likely of the four classes to come from a low social class background, although this association has become less prevalent in BCS70. They were most likely have had a mother who left school at the minimum age, and a mother who was younger than average when having her first child. Interestingly they were also themselves the youngest parents of our four types (results not shown). They were much more likely to have experienced material hardship in early childhood and to be brought up by a single parent or in a reconstituted family. Again, members of this class were also themselves the most likely to have experienced divorce or separation (31% in NCDS, and 18% in BCS70) by their early thirties. There were also far more women in this class than men.

The introduction of individual attributes and parental aspirations reduces the effect of social class. Its influence disappears altogether in BCS70. The effect of early hardship and mother's age at first birth also reduces, and the association of mother's education becomes insignificant. However the strong association with family disruption remains, and there is a significant increase in the gender bias for this class. Cohort members in this group perform relatively badly in their examination at age 16, although, interestingly, during their early years their test scores are no worse than for individuals in the slow starters class. Possibly by age 16 however, they had 'switched off' and 'dropped out' of the educational system altogether. They show especially poor school

engagement and low aspirations compared to any other class, and in NCDS, also tend to have parents with very low aspirations.

Members of the slow starters' class are slightly more likely than average to come from a semi or unskilled social class background. A differential effect for mother's education in the two cohorts suggests that slow starters may represent a slightly different group in each cohort. In NCDS, members of this group are more likely to have a mother who left school at the minimum age, whereas in BCS70 the opposite is the case. In both cohorts members of this group tend to have mothers who delayed parenting, especially in BCS70. There is some suggestion that they experienced early material hardship, although less so in BCS70. Perhaps most pertinent of all, this group is a predominantly male group.

The addition of individual attributes and parental aspirations cancels out the effect of social class in BCS70 but not in NCDS. The influence of mother's education disappears in NCDS, but is instead, accentuated in BCS70. Likewise, mother's age at first birth also increases in effect, whereas the effect of early hardship reduces overall, becoming insignificant in BCS70. Members of the slow starter's class tend to show low academic achievement, both in early childhood and at age 16, although slightly less so in BCS70 and not to the extent of those in disadvantaged families. They also tended to show low school engagement. Another clear distinction between the two cohorts lies in an apparent gap between aspirations and achievement. In BCS70, members of this class tend to have relatively low academic attainments, yet they and their parents appear to have high educational aspirations, possibly indicating overconfidence in their academic potential.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In both cohorts four distinct groups could be identified, which relate well to earlier studies using latent class analysis (Osgood et al., 2005; Sandefur et al., 2005). As in these previous studies our groups are characterized by variations in their academic attainment and family formation – yet our groups are in addition, clearly defined by

their housing situation (housing position was also included in the previous studies as a status indicator). 'Traditional Families' and 'Career-oriented adults without children' generally lived in their own home, whereas 'Disadvantaged Families' typically lived in rented accommodation, and 'Slow Starters' either lived with their parents or in rented accommodation.

There have been changes in the prevalences of these role configurations, suggesting a slightly increasing de-standardisation of transitions in the later born cohort. Transition outcomes in the 1958 cohort are dominated by the "Traditional Family" classification, whereas in the 1970 cohort there appears to be a double norm with the majority of cohort members being allocated to either the "Career without Children" class or the "Traditional Family" class There has also been an increase of "Slow Starters' in the later born cohort, reflecting a demographic shift towards a delayed assumption of adult roles, which can imply either an increasing preference for "solo living" or a prolonged dependence on one's parents. The group of 'Slow Starters' can possibly be seen to representing those cohort members who are in an extended period of exploration characterizing emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Furthermore, there has been some reduction in the proportion of cohort members in "Disadvantaged Families", although the risk of entering this group is greater in the later born cohort after controlling for socio-economic background factors, suggesting an increasing polarization of transitions. In the later born cohort 'Disadvantaged Families' are characterized by less stable and more precarious employment and living conditions than in the earlier born cohort, indicating greater disadvantage among a distinct minority group. This group contains the greatest proportion of single mothers, especially so in the later born cohort (72% of all single mothers in NCDS versus 85% in BCS70), suggesting persisting or even increasing inequalities for single women with children.

Regarding the question of increasing individualisation, we find a reduced influence of parental social class in shaping transition outcomes, yet persistent gender

differences and enduring effects of maternal education, family material hardship, maternal age, and family stability. The findings suggest changing structural influences and indicate the need for a multidimensional view of social stratification that takes into account dimensions other than occupational social class. Gender, education, material resources as well as family structure play an important role in shaping transition behaviour and future studies should investigate the separate as well as combined effects of these factors in more detail.

Our findings suggest evidence of cycles of (dis-)advantage, where assets and resources are unequally distributed within subgroups of the population. Take for example members of the "Disadvantaged Families" class. Members of this class are more likely born to early mothers, were exposed to material deprivation and family break-up during childhood, and demonstrated low academic attainments and aspirations. Members of the 'Career no Children' class, in contrast, were less likely to have experienced material hardship in their family of origin, were born to relative older mothers, and showed high academic achievement and aspirations.

The findings furthermore suggest intergenerational transmission of values and behaviours (Amato & Booth, 1997; Furstenberg, 2000). For example, the experience of a stable family environment is linked to the entry into the 'Traditional Family' group, and members of the "Career no Children" group were more likely born to a mother who themselves had delayed parenthood, and whose parents wanted them to continue with further education, as they themselves did. The findings are also in line with previous studies suggesting that increased educational engagement and parental support for education are associated with career orientation which in turn is associated with a delayed step into parenting (Feinstein & Bynner, 2004; Schoon et al., 2007).

Our findings also suggest that a delayed assumption of adult roles is not necessarily associated with high academic attainment. Members of the 'Slow starters' groups showed relatively low academic attainment and low school engagement. In these aspects our 'Slow Starters' group corresponds the group of 'Slow Starters' identified in

the study by Osgood and colleagues (2005), although in the UK sample this group had not started to make the step into parenthood and are most likely to live with their parents. The findings might thus suggest decreasing opportunities for economic independence necessary to support a family of one's own in the later born British cohort, especially for those with lower levels of academic resources.

In interpreting the findings, one has to be aware of a principal limitation of latent class analysis, which lies in the temptation to attach too much meaning to a latent class or the label assigned to it (Sandefur et al., 2005). One has to remain cautious in interpreting the group allocations, especially in regard of reifying labels assigned to the classes for easier interpretations. The final model provides only a summary of the many ways in which role configurations may occur in society.

Our data has been measured at different ages in the two cohorts, reflecting a three year difference in the point of measurement. It is possible that more cohort members born in 1970 would have made the step into parenthood by age 33, especially those in the 'Career without children' class. In this manner, at least some of the cohort differences in latent class probability could be a result of the three year age gap between the cohorts. However, given the relative demographic stability in transitions after age 30 for similar age cohorts (Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005), it is unlikely that this would dramatically change our general conclusion. Another aspect to be considered is that status configurations of cohort members in their early 30's only represent a snap shot in time, and do not capture the dynamics of transition processes. For example, "Slow Starters" living with their parents might have returned to the parental home following a relationship breakdown or a career break. Linking data collected at age 30 with data collected during early or mid twenties we could use latent transition analysis to study change in class membership (Macmillan & Copher, 2005; Macmillan & Eliason, 2003).

The analyses presented here, provide evidence of changes and similarities in status configurations in two birth cohorts born 12 years apart, and their biographical antecedents, contributing to a better understanding about the interdependencies of

family and nonfamily transitions in times of social change. The results challenge the view that established social divisions that previously structured demographic events are completely breaking down, and provides some evidence to support the assumption of an increasing de-standardisation of the life course. The changes in life course patterns are however only slight, as indicated by the identification of four comparable groups in both cohorts. There is not one general trend in changing transitions, but a dual norm reflecting a polarization into fast and slow track transitions with variations between as well as within these subgroups of the population. The life course perspective and latent class approach provide insights into the social and developmental context in which families exist and emerge. In particular we gain a better understanding of the intergenerational transmission of family values and behaviours, the antecedents of different family forms, and consistency and change in patterns of how family and nonfamily roles combine in individual lives. The findings reported here are a starting point for a better understanding of population change and variations in family formation across subgroups in the population.

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Table 1: *Sample characteristics for both cohorts*

Measures	NCDS			BCS70		
	M	*SD*	*Range*	*M*	*SD*	*Range*
Gender: female	0.51	0.50	0 – 1	0.52	0.50	0 – 1
RGSC: dummies						
skilled	0.61	0.49	0 – 1	0.61	0.49	0 – 1
semi–/unskilled	0.21	0.41	0 – 1	0.21	0.41	0 – 1
Mother's education: low	0.74***	0.44	0 – 1	0.64***	0.48	0 – 1
Mother's age at 1st birth	23.27***	4.25	11 – 45	22.31***	3.94	12 – 47
Hardship	1.39***	0.92	0 – 3	0.87***	0.88	0 – 3
Broken family	0.07***	0.26	0 – 1	0.10***	0.29	0 – 1
Reading / Picture vocab test	23.91	6.76	0 – 30	33.70	9.39	0 – 50
Copy-a-design test	7.09	1.98	0 – 12	4.82	1.97	0 – 8
Educational plans: post 18	0.21***	0.41	0 – 1	0.25***	0.43	0 – 1
Parents' aspiration: post 18	0.35***	0.48	0 – 1	0.24***	0.43	0 – 1
School engagement	6.37***	2.31	0 – 10	6.16***	2.33	0 – 10
Exam score	18.39*	18.00	0 – 94	19.14*	15.74	0 – 97
N	*10706*			*11005*		

Note: All results include imputed values.

*Significant cohort differences: * $p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$*

Table 2 *Latent class probabilities and conditional probabilities for both cohorts*

Manifest variables		NCDS				BCS			
		Traditional families	Career without children	Disad-vantaged families	Slow starters	Traditional families	Career without children	Disad-vantaged families	Slow starters
Partnership	single	.014	.326	.177	.982	.010	.297	.319	.941
	cohabiting	.046	.232	.154	.014	.179	.368	.336	.031
	married	.941	.443	.669	.004	.811	.335	.345	.028
Residence	parental home	.001	.000	.023	.680	.012	.000	.028	.669
	renting/temp	.056	.098	.687	.259	.075	.182	.856	.312
	owner occupier	.942	.902	.290	.061	.912	.818	.115	.020
Children	none	.032	.917	.048	.980	.056	.960	.035	.984
	1-2 children	.788	.083	.582	.019	.856	.040	.678	.016
	3+ children	.180	.000	.370	.001	.088	.000	.287	.000
Activity	unempl/other	.024	.036	.129	.273	.031	.029	.173	.218
	home	.171	.001	.291	.005	.155	.000	.364	.005
	PT work	.239	.017	.225	.021	.259	.017	.196	.042
	FT work	.566	.946	.355	.701	.555	.954	.267	.736
Education	none	.041	.028	.404	.230	.065	.034	.266	.115
	low	.461	.358	.507	.439	.413	.258	.505	.353
	med	.191	.178	.054	.149	.232	.195	.145	.224
	high	.307	.437	.034	.182	.290	.513	.084	.308
Latent class probabilities		.517	.224	.184	.075	.318	.372	.143	.167

Note: Conditional probabilities give the probability for being at a particular level on an indicator variable conditional on being in that latent class. Latent class probabilities indicate the probability for being in that latent class.

Table 3 *Multinomial Logistic Regression Estimates of Covariate Effects on Latent Class Membership: Expressed as Relative Risks*

	Structural Covariates								Structural Covariates + Individual Characteristics							
	Traditional Families		Career no Children		Disadvantaged Families		Slow Starters		Traditional Families		Career no Children		Disadvantaged Families		Slow Starters	
	NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70
Cohort: BCS70	1.00	0.50***	1.00	1.82***	1.00	1.21***	1.00	2.78***	1.00	0.49***	1.00	1.91***	1.00	1.20***	1.00	2.76***
Gender: female	1.21***	1.21***	0.77***	0.77***	2.77***	2.77***	0.42***	0.42***	1.22***	1.22***	0.76***	0.76***	3.51***	3.51***	0.44***	0.44***
RGSC: prof/man (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Skilled	0.99	0.99	0.86***	0.86***	**2.55*****	**1.59*****	1.09	1.09	0.98	0.98	0.97	0.97	**1.84****	**1.09**	1.01	1.01
semi–/unskilled	**0.92***	**1.05**	0.73***	0.73***	**3.36*****	**2.20*****	1.25**	1.25**	**0.93**	**1.06**	0.89*	0.89*	**2.15*****	**1.32**	**1.32***	**0.95**
Mother's education: low	**0.99**	**1.14*****	0.82***	0.82***	1.66***	1.66***	**1.23***	**0.85****	**0.99**	**1.13*****	0.96	0.96	**1.28***	**0.97**	**1.11**	**0.74*****
Mother's age at 1st birth	**0.99*****	**0.97*****	1.05***	1.05***	0.91***	0.91***	**1.03****	**1.06*****	1.00	1.00	1.06***	1.06***	0.96***	0.96***	**1.06****	**1.10*****
Hardship	0.98*	0.98*	0.88***	0.88***	1.87***	1.87***	**1.26*****	**1.10****	0.98*	0.98*	0.94***	0.94***	1.54***	1.54***	**1.17*****	**1.00**
Broken family	0.84***	0.84***	1.00	1.00	1.67***	1.67***	1.10	1.10	0.86***	0.86***	1.06	1.06	1.61***	1.61***	1.07	1.07
Reading/Picture vocab test									1.03**	1.03**	1.05**	1.05**	0.87***	0.87***	**0.72*****	**0.88*****
Copying-designs test									**1.05*****	**1.00**	1.05***	1.05***	0.84***	0.84***	**0.77*****	**0.89*****
School motivation									1.05***	1.05***	1.03	1.03	0.69***	0.69***	0.90**	0.90**
Educational plans: post 18									**1.00**	**0.84*****	1.21***	1.21***	0.65***	0.65***	**0.80**	**1.27*****
Parents' aspirations: post 18									**1.03**	**0.82*****	1.15***	1.15***	**0.44*****	**1.09**	**0.82***	**1.28****
Exam score									**1.03**	**0.91*****	1.15***	1.23***	**0.42*****	**0.64*****	0.88***	0.88***

Note: Coefficients are reported as relative risks (a ratio of two probabilities) and signify how many times more likely a respondent will be a member of latent class 'k' given a one unit change on the covariate. Significant main effects are reported for both cohorts, indicated by stars:. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

At each model step cohort interactions were tested. Where a significant interaction was present, cohort specific effects are reported and highlighted in bold. For insignificant interactions the identical main effect is reported for both cohorts

Figure 1

A Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes Latent Class (MIMIC-LCA) model of Role Configurations