

In: I.Schoon and R.K. Silbereisen (Eds.). *Transitions from School to Work. Globalisation, Individualisation, and Patterns of Diversity*. (pp. 219-242). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

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Sequences, Patterns, and Variations in the Assumption of Work and Family-Related Roles: Evidence from Two British Birth Cohorts

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New, more global, and pluralistic views regarding the nature of transitions into adulthood are emerging. It has been argued that since the 1970s, transitions into adulthood have become destandardised (i.e., more variable and protracted and less norm-conforming) due to the expansion of the education system, decoupling of educational qualifications and professions, changing gender relationships, and increased risk of youth unemployment. Much of the current debate reflects ongoing speculations about the way in which life courses are changing. There is, however, a lack of systematic empirical research on historical change and social diversity in life-course patterns ([Elder & Shanahan, 2007](#); [Macmillan, 2005](#)). The examination of changes in life-course patterns requires longitudinal data collected across multiple domains from representative samples in a series of birth cohorts. Such data are rarely available. In this chapter, we exploit the opportunity provided by two British birth cohorts born in 1958 and 1970, aiming to fill the evidence gap. Following the lives of more than twenty thousand individuals, we map variations in transitions from

adolescence to adult life and examine the ways in which transitions have been reshaping in times of social change. We examine hypotheses regarding the destandardisation of life courses in different, recent historical contexts and across different subgroups in the population. We also address methodological challenges in examining life-course changes and offer approaches on how to operationalise ideas concerning the transformation and variation in life courses a changing socio-historical context. In particular, this chapter draws on our recent work in applying Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA) (Martin, Schoon, & Ross, 2008) and latent class modelling (Ross, Schoon, Martin, & Sacker, 2009) to map transitions over time, and we extend these studies to identify patterns and variations in transition experiences. The findings indicate stability and change in transition experiences, as well as the continued influence of social background and gender. Social change has affected all, but not all in the same way.

[A] Conceptualising Transitions Within a Life-Course Perspective

Within life-course theory (Elder, 1985), transitions denote changes in status or social roles, such as leaving school and entering full-time employment. Transitions are usually short in duration and indicate a change in a single status position, moving from one social role to another. Transitions are embedded within trajectories that give them form and meaning. Trajectories take place over an extended period and capture sequences and duration of particular roles and experiences. Work-related trajectories, for example, can involve moving into continuous paid employment immediately after compulsory schooling. Alternatively, the trajectories might be

characterised by participation in further education and training, graduation, or a combination of casual employment and repeated periods of unemployment.

The life course is not defined by single transitions but rather is characterised by the interplay of multiple role transitions and trajectories involving, for example, the combination of work- and family-related roles. The combination of multiple social roles at a given time has been conceptualised by the notion of role or status configurations, which describe combinations of different social roles occupied by individuals at given points in the life course (Macmillan & Eliason, 2003). Life-course dynamics arise in part from the dynamic and interconnected unfolding of multiple role transitions and trajectories over time, which has been described in terms of social pathways (Elder, 1985). The notion of social pathways integrates the assumption of role configurations with those of transitions and trajectories (Macmillan & Copher, 2005).

Within a given society, pathways through life are shaped by a set of formal or normative timetables that reflect social expectations regarding appropriate times and ages for important life transitions (Elder, 1994). Early in the second half of the twentieth century, a standard male life course involved a sequence of leaving school, starting work, leaving home, getting married, and having children. These normative timetables, or 'scripts of life', provided models for both role behaviours and the linking of roles and pathways over time (Buchmann, 1989). They defined access to status positions according to age, prescribed the sequencing of roles, and ascribed associated rights and obligations. The life course was thus socially structured by a set

of formal or institutionalised rules. Such normative patterns, however, are subject to change. Changes can be brought about through influences from the wider sociohistorical context in which the pathways are embedded (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). Since the early 1970s, young people in industrialised nations have experienced rapid and profound social and cultural transformations. It has been argued that the time spent in education and training has become more extended and intermittent, creating a longer transition time between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2000); working lives have become more unstable and precarious; and patterns of family formation are more variable and less uniform, leading to a destandardisation of the life course (Shanahan, 2000).

However, the notion of destandardisation of the transition into adult roles remains contested. It has been challenged on three accounts. First, it has been argued that postwar transitions were not as straightforward as the argument suggests (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2005). Second, it has been stated that although social change has affected all young people, it has not affected all in the same way, and there has been a differentiation of life-course transitions across social groups (Bynner, 2006; Jones, 2002). A polarisation has opened up between those who can afford to invest in further education – who take a slower route to adulthood involving longer education and delayed assumption of adult roles – and those who follow the traditional fast-track transition, leaving school at the minimum age, followed by early entry into the labour market and family formation. Third, scholars have noted the lack of

systematic empirical evidence and lack of precision in the concepts employed (Brückner & Mayer, 2005; Shanahan, 2000).

A Transitions in Context

In the following, we assess transition experiences of young people born in the United Kingdom before and after the proclaimed onset of these major changes. We analyse data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS), which follows a cohort born in 1958, and from the British Cohort Study 1970 (BCS70), which follows a cohort born in 1970 (Ferri, Bynner, & Wadsworth, 2003; Schoon, 2006). Although only born 12 years apart, the two cohorts experienced a dramatically changed socio-historical context. The 1958 cohort grew up during a period of extraordinary economic growth and social transformation described by Hobsbawm (1995) as a ‘Golden Age’, which came to an end during the 1970s. The 1970 birth cohort, in contrast, grew up in an era of increasing instability and insecurity – ‘the Crisis Decades’ (Hobsbawm, 1995), characterised by two major recessions and the sharpest rise in unemployment since World War II, especially among young people (Gallie, White, Cheng, & Tomlinson, 1998). During the same period, there were far-reaching transformations in the sphere of work and the necessary skills to succeed (Gallie, 2000). Employment in manufacturing industries declined and was superseded by rapid growth in service industries. The fast spread of new technologies led to an increasing demand for highly qualified recruits. Successive governments responded to these fundamental changes in the labour market by expanding higher education and implementing new training programmes.

These changes in the labour market were accompanied by a dramatic increase in women participating in the workforce (Gallie, 2000). Women's lives were generally greatly transformed in the second half of the twentieth century, and the reinvigoration of feminism advanced the narrowing of gender gaps in educational and occupational opportunities. In the early 1970s, young women tended to gain fewer formal qualifications and were generally underrepresented in the universities. By the early 1980s, the situation started to change. Girls were more likely than boys to obtain school-leaving qualifications and were increasingly participating in higher education (Department of Education and Science, 1993). Other demographic changes concern the dramatic increase of cohabitation as a precursor or alternative to marriage, the rise in divorce rates, and changes in the timing and context of parenthood (Ferri & Smith, 2003). As in most other Western countries, there has been a trend towards fewer births and the postponement or even rejection of parenthood (Coleman, 2000).

How have these changes influenced the transition into and assumption of adult roles? Has there been an increasing destandardisation of transition pathways, characterised by greater heterogeneity in the timing and sequencing of role transitions, or changing prevalences of certain states and role configurations at specific ages?

A Methodological Challenges

Although the proliferation of longitudinal surveys in recent decades has provided many possibilities to analyse sequential data on large samples of individuals,

conceptualising the life course as a multifaceted, dynamic, and diverse process poses major methodological challenges for empirical research (Macmillan, 2005; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004; Phelps, Furstenberg, & Colby, 2002). Standard approaches, such as event history or regression models, cannot easily accommodate theoretical issues regarding interlocking trajectories, heterogeneity in life courses, and the dynamic interplay between person and context unfolding over time. Moreover, many aspects of the transition to adulthood are reversible. For example, young people may start full-time work directly after leaving school but may return to education to gain further qualifications.

To capture the dynamics of multiple interlocking pathways in the transitions to adulthood, the use of optimal matching as well as latent constructs has been recommended (Shanahan, 2000). Both methods allow us to identify patterns and heterogeneity in transitions and their precursors. In the following both methods are applied to examine diversity and change in the assumption of adult roles. The combination of these methods allows us to identify patterns of transitions and to examine changes in sequencing and constellations of adult roles, as well as their precursors and interlinkages. Much previous research on transitions into adult roles tended to concentrate on only one transition at a time, such as the school-to-work transition. In contrast, we investigate the simultaneous interlocking of multiple transitions as well as their unfolding over time. In addition, comparing experiences of individuals born twelve years apart makes it possible to assess the influence of

sociohistorical change because the birth year of a cohort locates it in a specific historical time.

A Mapping Transitions over Time: Application of Sequence Analysis

Our first analysis investigates the passage from school to work and other economic activities, looking at a broad slice of time from the end of compulsory schooling until the late twenties. Post–World War II, the standard normative trajectory for young men involved taking up full-time work after leaving school. Young women typically were expected to leave employment to care for the family home once they married. Of course, empirical passages are much more diverse, even for the older cohort. However, if the life course has become destandardised, we would expect the passages into adulthood to be more variable in BCS70 (i.e., the 1970 cohort) than in NCDS (i.e., the 1958 cohort). Increasing variability implies that formerly normative trajectories characterise an ever smaller part of a population (Brückner & Mayer, 2005). To operationalise this hypothesis, we defined the passage into adulthood as a sequence of states of economic activities. Sequence analysis offers an approach to examine such sequences as whole units. In combination with cluster analysis, sequence analysis enables us to develop a typology of passages into adulthood. Because we do not concentrate on single transitions, we can focus attention on atypical passages that might include U-turns (i.e., the reversal of a transition already made) and multiple transitions – passages that we expect to find in nonstandard life courses.

□ B Optimal Matching Analysis

In this section, we summarise recent work (Martin, Schoon, & Ross, 2008) that used OMA (MacIndoe & Abbott, 2004), a type of sequence analysis that is gradually becoming established in social science. Our aim in this analysis is to identify and compare typical transition patterns in both cohorts in order to assess the impact of social change on transition experiences. The sequences are defined by fourteen states, representing a cohort member's economic activities for each year from ages sixteen through twenty-nine. These states were recorded in October of each year from 1974 to 1987 in NCDS and from 1986 to 2000 in BCS70 (Martin, Schoon, & Ross, 2008). We distinguished six states of economic activity: full-time employment, part-time employment, full-time education, government training, unemployed seeking work, and out of the labour force. The analysis is based on data indicating the economic activities of 22,212 individuals, consisting of 11,130 cohort members in NCDS and 11,082 in BCS70.

OMA proceeds in two steps. First, a measure of dissimilarity, or distance, is calculated for each pair of sequences.¹ Second, the resulting distance matrix is subjected to cluster analysis to develop a typology of sequences. We tested different cluster analytical procedures and selected the typology that had the best fit to the data (Martin, Schoon, & Ross, 2008).

In the following section, we discuss the classification of economic activity sequences for the two birth cohorts. The separate datasets for each cohort were pooled into one for the analyses. Although most men and women in both cohorts are

likely, in general, to follow one of a few standard trajectories, the hypothesis of destandardisation suggests that a number of significant ‘new’ trajectories would emerge among the BCS70 cohort. In our analysis, we thus give particular attention to small groups, which signal the erosion of standard passages into adulthood.

B Typology of Transition Pathways Between Ages Sixteen and Twenty-Nine

We identified seventeen clusters representing different types of passages, as well as a diverse group of ‘idiosyncratic’ individuals. [Table 10.1](#) shows the classification of economic-activity sequences and the percentages of group membership by gender and cohort. Each cluster is represented by an ideal-typical sequence. In [Table 10.1](#), these ideal types are symbolized by a series of fourteen letters (i.e., one for every year). The combination ‘ffff ooooo ppppp’, for example, represents a sequence of four years of full-time employment followed by five years out of the labour force followed by five years of part-time employment. Many individuals’ sequences do not exactly match the ideal type under which they are subsumed. However, the typology represents the data reasonably well and has the advantage of providing a concise description, on the basis of which we can compare the two cohorts (for a more detailed description of the analytic procedure, see [Martin et al., 2008](#)).

Insert Table 10.1 about here

Does [Table 10.1](#) demonstrate destandardisation – that is, a process of life-course diversification – in the twelve years that separate the two cohorts? We believe

that it does, although the change is moderate rather than groundbreaking.

Furthermore, diversification does not mean the same for men as it does for women.

Our indicator of diversity is the number of clusters we need to describe most individuals of a cohort (separately for each gender). For example, we can count the number of clusters that contain more than 1 percent of men and women in each cohort. Percentages greater than 1 percent are boldfaced in Table 10.1. It turns out that there are only six clusters greater than 1 percent among NCDS men but nine for BCS70 men. Conversely, NCDS women are classified into eleven clusters greater than 1 percent, compared to sixteen for BCS70 women. Admittedly, our chosen cut-off point is arbitrary. However, other cut-off points (e.g., 2 or 5 percent) yield substantially similar results: the number of significant clusters among BCS70 men or women is always either the same or slightly higher than in NCDS. Thus, the number of minorities who do not follow one of several standard normative paths into adulthood is slightly higher in BCS70 than in NCDS.

We learn more about the nature of this change by examining the typology more closely. Most men and women in both cohorts have followed one of four standard trajectories that involve a straightforward transition from school to work (clusters 1 through 4). The educational expansion is reflected in the relatively larger size of the clusters with longer periods of education among BCS70 men and women.

A significant minority of both NCDS and BCS70 men experienced sustained periods of unemployment (clusters 5 and 6). The diversification of the male experience is demonstrated particularly by clusters 7 through 9. The BCS70 cohort

came of age in a period of high youth-unemployment rates and was among the first to be covered by government-funded training schemes introduced in the late 1980s with the aim to alleviate the dire prospects many school-leavers faced. Cluster 8 reflects the take-up of these schemes by the BCS70 cohort. The increased importance of educational qualifications for employment is also likely to have played a role in bringing about the trend towards a return to education, which is reflected in cluster 7. Cluster 9 describes a small group of BCS70 cohort members that started full-time work several years after finishing school, bridging the gap with part-time work.

Women's passages are more diverse than those of men in both cohorts. In addition to the four clusters representing straightforward school-to-work transitions, female life courses are described by a variety of clusters characterised by leaving full-time work, to either work part-time or drop out of the labour force altogether (clusters 11 through 17). These groups reflect two types of adult roles that young women are likely to take on: workers as well as mothers and caregivers.

Social change, of course, is not only visible in the increased number of significant clusters in BCS70 but also in changed proportions in the large groups: compared to NCDS, fewer BCS70 women follow one of the 'typically female' passages represented by clusters 11 through 17, whereas more BCS70 women are found in the 'adult worker' clusters 1 through 4. Like the BCS70 men, BCS70 women also sought the opportunities that training schemes and a return to education promised to provide (clusters 7 and 8). In addition, we found evidence for a trend towards part-time work. Specifically, some BCS70 women followed a previously

almost unknown trajectory of a ‘part-time career’ (cluster 10): these women remain in the labour market but rarely, if at all, work full-time. As discussed in the following, these women combine their part-time work with family commitments. We can speculate that many are supplementing their partner’s income, although they might also be motivated by the independence their own job and the attachment to the labour market might bring.

Our sequence analysis demonstrated that, indeed, the younger cohort followed more diverse passages into adulthood, driven by changes in education participation and increasing female attachment to the labour market, even after childbirth. However, the changes are not as dramatic as often implied in the literature and mostly apply only to minority groups. The majority of men and women move into continuous full-time employment after leaving school, although more cohort members born in 1970 engage in postgraduate studies before doing so.

A Precursors of Transition Pathways

The clusters are clearly related to the social-class background of the cohort members, as [Table 10.2](#) illustrates. Our assessment of social background is based on a dichotomous variable indicating whether the cohort members were born into a family in which the head of the household (usually the father) was employed in a semi-skilled or unskilled occupation and whether the mother had participated in further education after compulsory schooling.

Insert Table 10.2 about here

Transition pathways characterised by extended participation in further education (clusters 2 through 4 and 12) or return to education (cluster 7) are associated with a more-privileged family social background and higher maternal education. In contrast, cohort members from less-privileged families are more likely to be found in activity sequences indicating interrupted transition patterns, specifically those marked by long-term unemployment (clusters 5 through 6), dropping out from the labour market (clusters 15 through 17), interrupted careers (cluster 11), and part-time employment (clusters 10, 13, and 14). Thus, it might be that changes in transition experiences reflect an increasing polarisation into fast-versus slow-track transitions based on the socioeconomic resources available to the young person. Young people from more-privileged backgrounds are more likely to participate in further education before entering full-time employment and are less likely to experience interrupted careers when compared to their less-privileged peers. Notably, mothers of BCS70 cohort members were less likely to leave school early compared to mothers of cohort members born in 1958 (64 versus 74 percent), suggesting that a higher proportion of the parent generation was better educated, thereby providing better education-related resources for their children. Those born to less-educated parents in 1970 thus might be relatively more disadvantaged than those born into similar circumstances twelve years earlier.

A Outcomes of Transition Pathways: The Work–Family Nexus
What are the outcomes of these economic transition pathways in terms of the work–family nexus? So far, we have gained a better understanding of the timing and

sequencing of economic activities in two birth cohorts. Now, we examine how these transition sequences combine with other social roles, specifically family-related careers. We consider variations and combinations in various types of outcomes, associated with the combination of work- and family-related roles. We applied a latent class approach to identify how different indicators of adult social status combine within individuals. The usefulness of latent class analysis (LCA) to map out diversity and heterogeneity in role configurations was demonstrated in previous studies ([Macmillan & Copher, 2005](#); Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, & Barber, 2005; Sandefur, Eggerling-Boeck, & Park, 2005).

B Latent Class Analysis

LCA is a statistical method that enables us to identify a set of latent (i.e., unobserved) classes that account for the distribution of cases that occur within a cross-tabulation of observed discrete variables ([McCutcheon, 1987](#)). It can be used to examine whether the association between a set of observed (or manifest) categorical variables can be explained by an unobserved (or latent) typology ([Goodman, 1974](#); [Lazarsfeld & Henry, 1968](#)). LCA uses observed data to estimate the prevalence of each subpopulation or latent class and conditional-response probabilities which describe the classes in terms of their distribution across the observed indicators ([Clogg, 1995](#); for more details about the methodology, see [Ross et al., 2009](#)).

We analysed combinations of status indicators across five domains, describing cohort members in their early thirties (i.e., thirty in BCS70 and thirty-three in NCDS). The five status indicators used in the analysis include partnership

status (i.e., single, cohabitating, or married); parenthood (i.e., no children, one or two children, or three or more children); housing position (i.e., lives in parental home, renting, or owner-occupier); economic activity (i.e., works full-time, works part-time, looks after the home, is unemployed, or other); and highest qualifications (i.e., none, up to O-level [end of compulsory schooling], A-level [further education], or degree-level qualifications). Model parameters were estimated using maximum likelihood criterion, as implemented in the statistical software package, Mplus 4.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2004).

[B] Typology of Role Combinations in the Early Thirties

We identified four distinct patterns of role combinations in both cohorts, which we labelled Traditional Families, Career No Children, Disadvantaged Families, and Singles (for a more detailed description of the analytic strategy and resulting typology, see Ross et al., 2009). The distribution in the two cohorts is shown in Table 10.3.

Insert Table 10.3 about here

<C> **Traditional Families.** Members of the Traditional Families class are typically married, own their own home, and have one or two children. In both cohorts, women comprise slightly more than half of the class members. The level of educational attainment varies, yet most have gained some qualifications. More than half are in full-time employment, yet a considerable proportion is in part-time work or is caring for the home (mostly women). Traditional Families are by far the largest

class in NCDS, with 52 percent of the cohort predicted to be in it, compared to only 32 percent in BCS70.

<C>**Career No Children.** The typical member of this class is in full-time employment, has no children, and owns his or her home. Partnership status among members is mixed, including single, cohabitating, and married individuals. Members of this class, on average, are more highly educated than those of any other class. In both cohorts, women comprise slightly less than half of the class members. The Career No Children class is the second largest in NCDS with a 22 percent membership probability; in BCS70, it is the largest class, with 37 percent of the cohort members.

<C>**Disadvantaged Families.** Members of this class are most likely to live in rented accommodations and are the least educated: this class, more than any other, has more people without any formal qualification. Compared to all other classes, individuals in the Disadvantaged Families class are least likely to be in full-time employment: considerable proportions are unemployed, work part-time, or care for the home. Compared to the Traditional Families class, more members in the Disadvantaged Families class have not only one or two but three or more children. Women comprise approximately two thirds of class members in both cohorts. The Disadvantaged Families class comprises 18 percent of cohort members in NCDS and 14 percent in BCS70.

<C>**Singles.** Members of this class are typically unmarried, childless, living either with their parents or in rented accommodations, and are either in full-time

employment or unemployed. This group has more than doubled in the later-born cohort, increasing from 7 percent in NCDS to 17 percent in BCS70. The educational profile of this class varies considerably between cohorts: in NCDS, only a third of the Singles have A-level or higher qualifications, whereas in BCS70, more than half have A-level or higher qualifications. Previous studies showed that those still living at home in their early thirties were more likely disabled or had a long-term illness (DiSalvo, 1996). However, the class of Singles identified here does not have large proportions of cohort members with disabilities (approximately 7 percent of Singles in both cohorts).

The data suggest that the cohorts share similar ‘templates’ for youth transitions but that their distribution has changed. We found no evidence for a diversification of role combinations because the number of latent classes needed to adequately describe the data is the same in both cohorts. However, the changing prevalence of role combinations in the two birth cohorts can be understood to indicate a destandardisation of transition patterns. Whereas transition outcomes in NCDS, especially among women, were dominated by the Traditional Families model, in BCS70, about a third of cohort members could be characterised by either Career No Children or the Traditional Families pattern. It appears that a ‘dual normative’ pattern has replaced a single dominant pattern. There also has been an increase of Singles in the later-born cohort, as reflected in the growing proportion of unmarried young people (mostly men) who either stay in the parental home or are living in rented accommodations. The increasing prevalence of Singles in the later-

born cohort confirms the demographic shift towards a delayed assumption of adult roles. In particular, it suggests an increasing diversity of ‘single lifestyles’, implying either an increasing preference for ‘solo living’ or a prolonged – or, at least, periodic – dependence on one’s parents. The group of Singles might represent cohort members who are in an extended period of exploration characterising emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) – which, however, is not the majority group in our sample.

The proportion of cohort members in the Disadvantaged Families class has slightly decreased, although in the later-born cohort, these families were characterised by less stable and more precarious employment and living conditions than in the earlier-born cohort. This group has the greatest proportion of single mothers, especially so in the later-born cohort (i.e., 18 percent single mothers in NCDS versus 32 percent in BCS70), suggesting persisting or even increasing gender inequalities in labour-market opportunities for young women with children.

A Linking Transition Pathways to Work- and Family-Related Role Combinations

Aiming to gain a better understanding of the pathways leading to the combination of adult roles within individual lives, we linked the typology emerging from the economic-activity sequence analysis to the four status configurations found in early adulthood. Tables 10.4 and 10.5 present the associations between the economic-activity sequences and the status configurations of cohort members in their early thirties (i.e., thirty in BCS70 and thirty-three in NCDS), identified by the latent class solutions based on a simple cross-tabulation. Tables 10.4 and 10.5 examine the

associations among men and among women, respectively. The coefficients express the ratio of observed to expected probabilities. For example, for men in NCDS who followed a pattern of continuous full-time work after leaving school at age sixteen – the probability for being in the Traditional Families class – was 1.08 times greater than expected under the assumption of independence of the two variables. Among BCS70 men following the same trajectory, the probability was 1.27 times greater than expected.

Insert Tables 10.4 & 10.5 about here

Both tables illustrate that life-course transitions are marked by considerable variability in successive outcomes and a diversity of developmental pathways. Reviewing the transition sequences of men in both cohorts (see [Table 10.4](#)), men in the Traditional Families class are more likely to have entered continuous full-time work directly after leaving school at age sixteen. They are less likely to have participated in further education and less likely to have experienced extended periods of unemployment or early drop-out from the labour force. Men in the Career No Children class are most likely to have participated in further education and are less likely to have started work early or to have experienced extended periods of unemployment. Cohort differences in this group suggest a more distinct grouping in the later-born cohort, characterised by the reduced chance of an interrupted career progression. Men in the Disadvantaged Families class, in contrast – especially men in the later-born cohort – are likely to have experienced an interrupted and precarious employment career, characterised by prolonged periods of unemployment or a

complete drop-out from the labour force. Entry into the Singles class, in turn, is surprisingly not associated with extended participation in further education but rather with an interrupted employment career, suggesting difficulties in establishing oneself in the labour market. It is interesting that in the 1958 cohort, men in the Singles class were more likely to have participated in extended training after leaving school, which seems to be associated with delayed assumption of adult roles or possible problems in establishing oneself financially. In the later-born cohort, men in the Singles class were more likely to have returned to education, possibly trying to improve their employment prospects.

In summary, among men, participation in further education is associated with career orientation without children. Early school-leaving followed by continuous full-time employment is linked to entry into Traditional Families forms, suggesting that men following this transition sequence could afford to buy their own home and to start a family, especially in the 1958 cohort. Interrupted employment sequences, in contrast, are associated with more precarious living circumstances, or a delayed assumption of partnership and family formation and prolonged dependence on one's parents.

Table 10.5 shows transition sequences among women and their outcomes. It appears that in both cohorts, women in the Traditional Families class are likely to have started their family formation in their early to mid-twenties. They are less likely to have engaged in continuous full-time employment either directly after leaving school at age sixteen or after extended education. They are more likely to have

dropped out of the labour force in their early to mid-twenties or to have taken on part-time work. There also are interesting cohort differences for women in the Traditional Families class, suggesting that women in the later-born cohort are more attached to the labour market, even after childbirth, as indicated by increased probabilities of either being in a continuous part-time career or resuming part-time employment.

Women in the Career No Children class, in contrast, are more attached to a continuous full-time career and are less likely to have experienced interrupted employment sequences. It is interesting that career orientation without children is not the preserve of women who participated in further education but is also more likely among women experiencing continuous full-time employment after leaving school early. Furthermore, in the later-born cohort, we found that women in this class are more likely to have participated in extended training or to have returned to education, possibly to improve their employment prospects.

Women in the Disadvantaged Families class, in turn, are least likely to have participated in continuous full-time employment and are the most likely to have experienced interrupted employment careers or early drop-out from the labour market.

Women in the Singles class are also likely to have encountered interrupted employment careers, specifically prolonged unemployment, or to have completely dropped out of the labour market. Furthermore, in the later-born cohort, we found an association between membership in the Singles class and return to education, as well

as participation in extended training. In both cohorts, we found an association between leaving school at age sixteen followed by continuous full-time employment and a delayed assumption of partnership and parenting roles, i.e. being single without children. This finding again indicates that it is not only women participating in further education who are delaying the step into family formation but also those who are fully attached to the labour market. It also suggests a stark, albeit unsurprising, gender difference: whereas men find it easy to combine full-time employment with the Traditional Families form of status combinations, women with full-time employment careers are typically childless at age thirty or thirty-three and are likely to be in either the Career No Children or the Singles class.

A Conclusion

The empirical examination of transition experiences requires detailed life histories across various life domains and across a series of representative birth cohorts – as well as appropriate methods to map continuity, change, and variation in transition experiences. This chapter illustrates how sequence analysis and the latent class approach can serve as useful techniques for mapping diversity and heterogeneity in transition pathways. Sequence analysis enables us to examine simultaneously the volatility of transition sequences for different social roles and to classify individuals into groups that can be described by ‘ideal types’. These, in turn, can be associated with individual or institutional factors to obtain a better grasp of how young people arrived at particular status combinations in their early thirties.

We found both stability and change in transition experiences and mixed evidence regarding the destandardisation hypothesis. Standardised life-course patterns continue to exist (especially in school-to-work transitions), but they also have changed (especially in partnership and family transitions). Certain sequences and events, such as continuous full-time work after compulsory schooling, characterise a smaller (yet, by far, the largest) proportion of men in the later-born cohort, and more cohort members born in 1970 are engaging in postgraduate studies. However, the pattern of continuous full-time employment after leaving full-time education remains the majority sequence for both men and women. New sequences, such as training that leads to full-time employment, are emerging, yet they can be understood as a variation of the progression from postsecondary education to employment, especially because they correspond to institutional initiatives and policies aimed at facilitating the school-to-work transition. Thus, the observed changes in education-to-employment transitions can be understood as changing ‘standardised’ patterns.

Furthermore, there are remarkable gender differences in transition experiences. Women’s transitions are generally more diverse than men’s transitions, and they are increasingly combining child-rearing with paid work (although often part-time). Some women are adopting a more ‘male’ pattern of career orientation without children, yet the majority of women have become mothers by the age of thirty and are facing the challenge of balancing multiple roles. The traditional breadwinner–homemaker template, therefore, must be revised to account for new

forms of living arrangements and enable the combination of work and family commitments.

Another important observation is that transition experiences continue to be associated with structural factors, such as social background. There is evidence of polarised transition experiences, in which young people from a more-privileged background are more likely to participate in extended education and to delay the step into parenthood, whereas their less-privileged peers follow the traditional fast-track transitions, characterised by early assumption of adult roles, specifically family-related transitions.

Each pathway requires different strategies to successfully meet the ensuing demands and can lead to different and yet equally positive trajectories and social pathways. For some, early school-leaving is followed by continuous employment and successfully making the step onto the housing ladder by age thirty. For women in this group of early school-leavers, successful transitioning is associated with a delay in taking the step into parenthood and continued attachment to the labour market. Those who encountered difficulties in establishing themselves in the labour market after leaving school early, became parents early, or completely dropped out of the labour market, conversely, encountered more precarious living conditions in their early thirties (especially those in the Disadvantaged Families class). Furthermore, although extended education and delayed parenthood are associated with independent living for some – especially those who also made the step onto the housing ladder by their early thirties – for others, it is associated with prolonged dependence on their parents.

Some members in the Singles class, particularly some women, might simply be ‘taking it slow’, preferring to study rather than settle down with a family and/or to earn enough money to buy a house. However, many who are in the Singles class in their early thirties look back on a difficult start to working life, characterised by either a long period in training schemes or long-term unemployment (especially men).

Thus, the findings emphasise the role of resources in facilitating the resolution of transition demands and highlight the need for broader definitions of ‘successful’ transitioning (see Chapter 11 in this volume). Transition templates must be revised to meet the realities of young people’s lives and to enable the combination of work and family roles for those between age sixteen and their early thirties (see Chapters 15 and 16 in this volume). Furthermore, it is crucial to provide second chances and opportunities for lifelong learning, enabling those who initially encountered difficulties in the transition to independent adulthood to provide for themselves and their prospective families. In their prolonged transition to independence, they might also need the continued support of their parents, which raises the issue of intergenerational models of obligation and dependence – a topic discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 in this volume.

In summary, the findings indicate heterogeneity in transition experiences between and within different social groups in the population and draw attention to the need for a more dynamic and multilevel conceptualisation of school-to-work transitions. Focusing on combinations of multiple social roles gives us a better

understanding of the problems and risks facing young people, who at similar ages in their life course are nonetheless at different life stages. Normative timetables linking social roles and pathways over time are subject to change, yet there is not one general majority trend. Rather, a ‘dual normative’ pattern is emerging, reflecting a polarisation of transition patterns into fast versus slow transitions, as well as differentiation within these groups.

In our aim to better understand the changing nature of life-course transitions, we must learn more about how different aspects of the transitions to adulthood weave together in people’s lives and how they develop over time. We have only scratched the surface in appreciating the processes and mechanisms that produce the varied life-course patterns that we observe. Yet, recognising the interdependence of life-course transitions, their dynamics, and the role of the wider sociohistorical context in shaping individual transitions offers new avenues for future research on the changing structure of the life course and its implications for social and individual development.

A Acknowledgments

The analysis and writing of this chapter were supported by grants from the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): L326253061, RES-225–25-2001, and RES-594–28-0001. Data from the cohort studies were provided by the ESRC Data Archive. Those who conducted the original collection of the data bear no responsibility for its further analysis and interpretation.

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Table 10.1. *Classification of economic activity sequences (N = 22,212)*

No.	Cluster	Ideal Type	Percentages			
			Men		Women	
			NCDS	BCS70	NCDS	BCS70
1	Continuous full-time work	fffffffffffffff	61.2	46.6	21.3	21.6
2	A-levels into full-time work	eee ffffffffffff	13.8	14.6	11.8	15.8
3	Degree into full-time work	eeeeee ffffffff	11.1	11.5	9.3	10.8
4	Postgraduate studies	eeeeeeee fffff	3.0	6.2	1.5	5.1
5	Intermediate unemployment	ffffff uu fffff	4.1	1.6	0.9	0.4
6	Severe unemployment	fffff uuuuuuuu	2.3	2.0	0.8	1.0
7	Return to education	ee fffff eee ffff	1.0	2.0	0.6	1.7
8	Training into full-time work	ttt ffffffffffff	0.3	8.2	0.1	3.9
9	Part-time into full-time work	ee pppp ffffffff	0.5	1.8	1.2	1.7
10	Part-time career	e f pppppppppppp	0.2	0.5	0.9	4.5
11	Interrupted career: OLF/PT work	fffff ooo pp ffff	0.1	0.4	2.2	1.0
12	Degree into FT into OLF or PT work	eeeeee ffff oo pp	0.3	0.5	3.4	2.1
13	Full-time into part-time work	fffffff ppppppp	0.4	0.5	6.6	6.8
14	From full-time via OLF to part-time	ffff ooooo ppppp	0.0	0.1	4.5	2.3
15	Drop-out of labour force: mid-20s	fffffff oooo	0.6	0.8	10.2	5.8
16	Drop-out of labour force: early 20s	fffffff oooooo	0.6	0.8	14.9	7.0
17	Drop-out of labour force: teens	ff oooooooooo	0.4	0.9	8.6	7.1
18	Idiosyncratic	---	0.3	0.9	0.5	1.4

N		5557	5372	5573	5710
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Notes: Adapted from Martin, Schoon, & Ross (2008), Tables 2 and 3.

This table shows employment activities for each year (fourteen states) between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine, as follows:

f = full-time employment; p = part-time employment; e = full-time education; o = out of the labour force; u = unemployment; t = government training scheme

Table 10.2: *Precursors of transition pathways: Parental social class and mother's education*

No.	Cluster	NCDS				BCS70			
		Head of household's occupation at birth: semi- or unskilled		Mother's education: left school at minimum age		Head of household's occupation at birth: semi- or unskilled		Mother's education: left school at minimum age	
		%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
1	Continuous full-time work	24	(4,386)	82	(4,424)	23	(3,463)	73	(3,490)
2	A-levels into full-time work	12	(1,323)	59	(1,336)	15	(1,528)	56	(1,539)
3	Degree into full-time work	6	(1,055)	41	(1,058)	8	(1,103)	34	(1,107)
4	Postgraduate studies	7	(236)	42	(236)	12	(537)	33	(542)
5	Intermediate unemployment	30	(268)	86	(272)	31	(107)	69	(107)
6	Severe unemployment	37	(166)	88	(170)	43	(152)	75	(153)
7	Return to education	11	(84)	54	(84)	17	(184)	52	(190)
8	Training into full-time work	41	(17)	89	(18)	27	(649)	78	(657)
9	Part-time into full-time work	17	(48)	77	(48)	21	(137)	64	(138)
10	Part-time career	26	(137)	85	(138)	35	(74)	79	(78)
11	Interrupted career: OLF/PT work	22	(49)	69	(49)	28	(210)	67	(213)
12	Degree into FT into OLF or PT	5	(183)	47	(184)	12	(129)	35	(130)
13	Full-time into part-time work	25	(356)	80	(357)	25	(378)	74	(379)
14	From Full-time via OLF to part-time	25	(286)	83	(286)	37	(143)	72	(141)
15	Drop out of labour force: mid-20s	25	(606)	82	(611)	23	(361)	74	(362)
16	Drop out of labour force: early 20s	24	(782)	83	(788)	27	(376)	78	(387)

17	Drop out of labour force: teens	34	(467)	85	(472)	40	(410)	82	(413)
18	Idiosyncratic	21	(24)	88	(24)	40	(82)	77	(82)
—	TOTALS^a	21	(10,473)	74	(10,555)	21	(10,023)	64	(10,108)

^a *Note:* Changes in the overall sample sizes (n) are due to missing data on parental social class and mother's education.

Table 10.3. *Time trends in the distribution of status configurations: Percentage of cohort members in each of the four latent classes*

Status Configuration	NCDS	BCS70
Traditional Families	52%	32%
Career No Children	23%	37%
Disadvantaged Families	18%	14%
Singles	7%	17%
Totals	100%	100%
(Base)	(10,706)	(11,005)

Note: Table based on results from Ross, Schoon, Martin, & Sacker (2009).

Table 10.4. Association of transition sequences (age 16–29, OMA) and status configurations at age 30/33 (LCA) expressed as a ratio of observed-to-expected probabilities – Men

		NCDS Men				BCS70 Men			
No.		Traditional Families	Career No Children	Disadv. Families	Singles	Traditional Families	Career No Children	Disadv. Families	Singles
1	Continuous full-time work	1.08	0.85	1.12	0.88	1.27	0.90	1.05	0.82
2	A-levels into full-time work	1.00	1.30	0.42	0.76	1.01	1.16	0.48	0.87
3	Degree into full-time work	1.05	1.43	0.09	0.48	0.65	1.57	0.11	0.70
4	Postgraduate studies	0.71	1.76	0.13	1.34	0.54	1.51	0.16	0.94
5	Intermediate unemployment	0.79	0.76	2.23	1.58	0.71	0.52	2.38	1.78
6	Severe unemployment	0.27	0.43	4.05	3.52	0.23	0.18	3.51	2.63
7	Return to education	0.75	1.77	0.20	1.04	0.40	1.27	0.38	1.47
8	Training into full-time work	0.75	0.37	1.01	4.15	1.09	0.68	1.47	1.32
9	Part-time to full-time work	0.51	1.00	0.92	3.77	0.73	0.96	0.84	1.47
10	Part-time career	1.13	0.74	2.01	0.00	0.29	0.91	2.75	1.47
11	Interrupted career: OLF/PT work	0.75	1.47	0.00	2.07	0.74	0.89	1.39	1.39
12	Degree into FT into OLF or PT	0.66	1.52	0.59	1.83	0.61	0.84	0.57	1.91
13	Full-time into part-time work	0.72	0.85	2.32	1.60	0.54	0.56	3.04	1.69
14	From full-time via OLF to part-time	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.97	2.64	1.76
15	Drop-out of labour force: mid-20s	0.68	0.29	3.63	2.07	0.42	0.40	4.08	1.78
16	Drop-out of labour force:	0.07	0.57	3.10	5.19	0.26	0.41	4.82	1.72

early 20s									
17	Drop-out of labour force: teens	0.13	0.25	0.67	8.30	0.15	0.21	2.80	2.90
18	Idiosyncratic	0.27	0.00	4.32	4.45	0.29	0.39	2.85	2.38
	N	2,614	1,332	487	473	1,494	2,171	399	1,194

Note: Boldface indicates adjusted residuals >2.58 . Assuming that the adjusted residuals are normally distributed with $\mu = 0$ and $\sigma = 1$, boldfaced figures indicate a significant deviation of the observed from the expected value for the cell at the $\alpha < 0.01$ level (Everitt, 1992). We chose this strict alpha-level because of the large number of cells in the table.

Table 10.5. Association of transition sequences (age 16–29, OMA) and status configurations at age 30/33 (LCA) expressed as a ratio of observed-to-expected probabilities – Women

No.		NCDS Women				BCS70 women			
		Traditional Families	Career No Children	Disadv. Families	Singles	Traditional Families	Career No Children	Disadv. Families	Singles
1	Continuous full-time work	0.79	1.89	0.52	2.03	0.84	1.47	0.30	1.25
2	A-levels into full-time work	0.95	1.83	0.23	1.60	0.91	1.41	0.29	1.22
3	Degree into full-time work	0.82	2.59	0.05	0.82	0.57	1.94	0.09	1.03
4	Postgraduate studies	0.85	2.23	0.14	1.62	0.44	1.77	0.17	1.83
5	Intermediate unemployment	0.65	0.49	0.86	4.00	0.76	0.53	0.73	3.79
6	Severe unemployment	0.46	0.38	1.89	6.57	0.10	0.20	3.77	1.76
7	Return to education	1.31	1.17	0.18	0.00	0.48	1.57	0.22	2.27
8	Training into full-time work	1.06	1.05	0.99	0.00	0.84	1.31	0.44	1.52
9	Part-time into full-time work	1.08	0.88	0.55	2.55	1.03	1.11	0.66	1.15
10	Part-time career	0.96	0.15	1.84	1.31	1.75	0.26	1.18	0.55
11	Interrupted career: OLF/PT work	1.13	0.30	1.34	0.75	1.23	0.33	1.66	1.21
12	Degree into FT into OLF or PT	1.51	0.34	0.35	0.27	1.91	0.42	0.59	0.55
13	Full-time into part-time work	1.35	0.20	0.95	0.21	1.97	0.18	1.03	0.34
14	From full-time via OLF to part-time work	1.12	0.11	1.68	0.16	1.44	0.04	2.37	0.24
15	Drop-out of labour force: mid-20s	1.36	0.09	1.03	0.08	1.75	0.07	1.71	0.24
16	Drop-out of labour force: early 20s	1.10	0.07	1.76	0.22	1.24	0.05	2.65	0.38

17	Drop-out of labour force: teens	0.64	0.04	3.00	0.62	0.53	0.06	3.87	0.58
18	Idiosyncratic	0.93	0.55	1.30	2.42	0.71	0.17	2.61	1.82
	N	2,883	968	1,030	222	2,021	1,940	1,055	607

Note: See note in [Table 10.4](#).

Footnote

¹ For the distance calculation, we used the Transition Data Analysis (TDA) software developed by Blossfeld, Rohwer, & Ebrary, Inc., 2002.