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Routes into the British Service Class: Feeder Logics According to Gender and Occupational Groups

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ABSTRACT

Goldthorpe's conception of mobility into the service class relies strongly on biographical explanations. Hence, it is surprising that empirically biographical trajectories are often approached using methodological proxies. Employing a sequence analysis of the work histories of 13,119 members of the National Child Development Study's 1958 cohort, we examine different routes into the service class. It appears that there are two important roads leading to the service class: one direct and short, the other tortuous and long. Surprisingly, these two routes fork not along the boundaries of the factions of the service class, but along gender lines. Women move later and through feeder occupations to service class positions, whereas men attain these positions immediately subsequent to the educational phase. We explain this by different feeder logics for men and women.

KEY WORDS

gender / life course / service class

Introduction

Goldthorpe's theory of the service class maintains that despite many differences in terms of work conditions, salary or education, a unitary service class distinguishes itself by its specific relation of trust with the employer (Goldthorpe, 1982, 1995, 2000). The conceptualization of this 'service employment relationship' relies explicitly on biographical explanations. Two elements are noteworthy. First, Goldthorpe claims that the biographical routes that lead

to the service class contribute, in combination with the social origins of service class members, to the demographic and socio-cultural uniformity of the group (1982). Second, members of the service class experience better life chances because they are offered long-term promises of income progression and career opportunities on formal and hierarchical ladders of prestige and authority within the service relationship (Goldthorpe, 1982, 1995). However, it seems as though these biographical explanations are not always empirically examined and are only sketchily theorized.

Empirically, the log-linear models on which traditional mobility research is based struggle to grasp trajectories (Abbott, 2001; Abbott and Hrycak, 1990). Mobility tables rely ultimately on comparisons of two (or sometimes three) moments in time and must make speculative assumptions about people's trajectories. The advocates of this method think in terms of 'causes' rather than in terms of 'narrations' (Abbott, 2001: 161–82): social origin, the educational level or the first job is considered to (stochastically) determine whether a person occupies a service class position at a certain age. In some cases, this age is standardized across the sample, corresponding to a supposed age of 'occupational maturity' (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992: 72, 280–82). This strategy assumes that people remain in the position they attain by the age of 30–35, and therefore it suffices to compare the first job with the job at the age of 35 when examining intragenerational mobility. In other cases, the authors simply use the occupational position at the moment of the inquiry, irrespective of biographical questions (Goldthorpe, 1980; Savage, 1992). This practice raises two related issues: what about the temporal duration and the temporal ordering of these causes (Abbott, 2001: 51–4), and how are these causes embedded in biographical structures (Elder, 1985; Sorensen, 1986)?

These empirical weaknesses are fraught with problems, especially since Goldthorpe's *theoretical* interest in social mobility is not limited to rates and directions of mobility. Particularly in his early texts on the service class he was preoccupied with class formation (Goldthorpe, 1980, 1982). He aimed to explain the 'demographic' and 'socio-cultural' identity of the service class and 'to link satisfactorily the analysis of class positions to the understanding of collective action' (1982: 171). In our eyes, the theorization of this link between social mobility and political and cultural identity poignantly reveals the lack of biographical explanations. Goldthorpe holds that the political potential of the service class can only be realized if the group is historically constant and homogenous (demographic identity) and acquires a shared lifestyle and patterns of preferred association (socio-cultural identity) (1982). However, the emergence and development of these shared beliefs, identities, and lifestyles are hidden in a black box, even when it is implicitly stated that early socializing experiences minimize the impact of later life-course turbulences (Goldthorpe, 1980). The origins of the lifestyles and identities of the service class and how these develop over the life course have not been seriously considered. It is not clear, for instance, how and at what biographical moment the employment relationship of the service class enables them to develop a specific connection to the future.

To address this discrepancy between theory and empirical methods, we believe it to be essential to first investigate the routes into the service class with a more biographically sensitive approach. Therefore, we apply a sequence analysis to the occupational trajectories of the members of the National Child Development Study (NCDS) sample as an alternative to general linear modelling. Unlike event history analysis, a potent method for investigating transitions, sequence analysis allows us to examine *entire* trajectories and compare them within a small number of clusters (Aisenbray, 2000; Elliott, 2005). The article is organized as follows. In the first section, we discuss several hypotheses on the different routes to the service class with respect to occupational subgroups and gender. We then present the NCDS data and provide a detailed description of the method and the research strategy. Next, we present a description of service class trajectories and break down the analysis by subgroups of the service class and by gender. In conclusion, we propose some theoretical reflections on the accumulation of assets and on the link between trajectories and service class positions.[1]

Different Routes to the Service Class

On the one hand, it has been proposed that actors accumulate different types of 'assets' or 'capitals' on these routes that allow them to attain more prestigious positions or to hold these positions longer and more securely (Savage et al., 2005). On the other hand, we can assume that – from a life-course perspective – the transition to adulthood is structured by events such as leaving the parental home, the transition from education to the first job, the start of longer and more stable relationships, or marriage and the birth of the first child (Sorensen, 1986: 77). All of these events are potential formative influences on service class identities. But which factors preside over the directions of these biographical routes? It has been suggested that the routes into the service class differ depending on the service class faction and according to gender.[2]

A first debate focuses on the routes into the service class of managers, professionals, and sometimes associate professionals. It has been maintained that 'the entry into management or the professions represent two biographically distinct routes into the service class' (Mills, 1995: 100). The routes to professional positions would pass exclusively through higher education, and those to managerial positions would pass, at least for a certain proportion of managers, through so-called *feeder occupations* (Mills, 1995). On their route, the managers would accumulate organizational assets while the future professionals would primarily collect educational credentials. Over the years, this difference would amount to service class positions contrasting in terms of long-term stability or identities and lifestyles. Two types of feeder occupations that lead to management have empirically been identified: a subgroup of the future managers traverses some years of routine white-collar positions, while a second subgroup reaches managerial positions from positions of skilled manual work (Savage et al., 1992: 141). The period

of time spent in these different types of feeder occupations might influence these future managers and contribute to service class identities that differ from those of individuals who attained the same positions directly through education.

In considering the paths of women to the service class, two crucial issues arise: the interruption or instability of occupational activity and the question of expertise and authority (Crompton, 1995; Savage, 1992). It has been argued that female occupational trajectories are generally discontinuous and less standardized than male careers (Dex, 1987; Payne and Abbott, 1990). In addition to the gender-based segregation of the labour market and the structure of 'female occupations' (Witz, 1995), this instability is also due to the impact of family life (interruptions of paid work because of child rearing, for example) on the service class careers of women (Crompton, 1995: 67). Methodologies that measure trajectories at two points in time have conspicuously neglected to recognize the fact that the typical period of giving birth and raising children falls between the crucial ages of 20 and 35. How are future female service class members affected by these potential interruptions, and how do they affect their access routes to service class positions? Based on a calculation of the proportion of historical cohorts occupying service class positions, Mills believes that women engaged in service class trajectories face a specifically female déclassement at their re-entry into the labour market after childcare interruption (1995: 101).

In a similar discussion on the gender-based organization of contemporary middle classes, Savage postulated that, following the abolition of gender barriers to education, women gained relatively easy access to educational skills and expertise. At the same time, 'organization assets, because they draw upon male forms of solidarity and on gendered patterns of subordination, are intrinsically vehicles of male power' (Savage, 1992: 130). These differences between organizational and educational assets make it easier for women to access professional positions than to move to management positions (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990). As a consequence, women must rely on formal and 'meritocratic' educational credentials rather than on firm-bound networks and knowledge to move to service class positions. Assuming that these accumulation processes rely on different temporalities, women who rely on expertise would therefore reach service class positions earlier in their life course and more directly after obtaining their degrees than would men.

These theoretical discussions raise two sets of questions. The first aims to better understand the routes that lead to service class positions. Is there support for the supposed difference between the routes to managerial positions and professional positions? And if so, can a distinction be made in this respect between higher and lower professionals? Furthermore, it will be interesting to explore whether all routes to management pass through feeder occupations or if there are certain managers with access patterns that are similar to professional routes. Second, we aim to determine how the routes into service class positions differ between men and women. How do women access service class positions compared to men? Are there more interruptions or instability in the routes dominated by women? If so, is the effect of these interruptions the same for managers

and professionals or does it interfere with other biographical mechanisms? Do women tend to choose more direct routes to service class positions, mainly relying on educational assets?

Data and Methods

Data

The following analyses are based on the British National Child Development Study (NCDS). NCDS is a longitudinal study that investigates the biographies of a sample of people born in one specific week in 1958. It included 18,558 children in 1958. In the meantime, seven sweeps have been carried out: when the respondents were age 7 (1965), 11 (1969), 16 (1974), 23 (1981), 33 (1991), 41–42 (1999–2000), and 46 (2004). In this article, a specific part of the data is used: so-called 'work histories' that have been reconstructed as part of the 'Gender Equality Network Project' by linking waves 4, 5, and 6 with retrospective data. These work histories cover the period from 1974 to 2000, corresponding to the period from age 16 to age 42 of the respondents. The 2004 data are not yet integrated in this database and therefore could not be employed here. The database indicates the beginning and the end of each occupational period in terms of month and year. The two main variables are the occupational status (full-time vs. part-time employment) and the occupation according to the SOC80/SOC90 scheme. Of the 18,558 cases, only 13,119 (71%) could be used. This means that the data contain a large number of missing values, partly due to attrition of the panel (n = 5092, 27%) and partly due to the fact that not all work histories could be reconstructed for the entire time period (n = 348, 2%). Several methods of compensating for the missing data have been proposed; for example, using a weighted version (Carpenter, 2006; Plewis, 2006). However, as the current analyses are based on sequences of categorical data and do not involve inferential statistics, we decided against the use of the weighted version of the sample. To evaluate the robustness of our analyses, we compare the structure of the missing data with the data that have been used.

Table 1 focuses on gender and the class of the father (according to the General Register Office 1951 scheme). We see that men are slightly underrepresented in the employed sample, probably due to their shorter life expectancy. With respect to the class of the father, we see no significant differences between the two subsamples. The sample seems not to show any major biases. In addition, sequence analysis as a descriptive and inductive method seems to be rather robust and is not prone to the same instabilities as inferential statistical methods (Abbott and Hrycak, 1990). Nonetheless, we must remain cautious when it comes to the interpretation of the results. Apart from the general missing values, we must also deal with a number of gaps in the data as the respondents were asked only to indicate their periods of occupational engagement. This means that we ignore the reasons that led to periods of inactivity. These periods could

Table 1 Comparison of missing and used data according to gender and class of the father

	Missing data	*Used data*
Gender		
Men	54.0%	50.8%
Women	46.0%	49.2%
Class of the father		
Class 1 + 2	16.1%	17.2%
Class 3	56.7%	59.4%
Class 4 + 5	22.7%	20.6%
Other	4.4%	2.7%

correspond to unemployment, education, child rearing, disability, or even voluntary sabbaticals. As we were able to distinguish gaps at the beginning from gaps in the middle or at the end of the sequences, we assumed that gaps at the beginning correspond to educational periods, whereas the gaps in the middle and at the end of the trajectory equate to non-educational but otherwise non-specified inactivity. As a result, care is required when interpreting the findings as the categorization of the gaps is only approximate.

Coding Strategies

The centrepiece of the analysis is the coding of the occupational positions. We were compelled to rely on the SOC90 data as no further information on the occupational situation (employed vs. self-employed) or on the size of the firm was available in retrospective form. To effectively approach a classification that reflects Goldthorpe's definition of employment relationships, we carried out a series of re-codings of the SOC90. First, several of the administrational positions in national government and civil service were coded as professionals rather than as managers (SOC90: 100, 103, 132, 191). We assume that these higher level civil servants perceive themselves as professionals. They generally enjoy an education closer to the curriculum of other professionals than to managers. Second, some of the owners of small businesses were coded as skilled tradesman rather than as managers (SOC90: 171, 172, 174, 175, 178). Occupations such as 'hairdressers' and 'garage managers' pursue comparable educational pathways as skilled tradesmen. As small proprietors, they can be considered to belong to the traditional petite bourgeoisie. Third, certain functions in the public service that had been labelled as 'managers' in the SOC90 scheme were allocated to the 'associate professionals' (SOC90: 102, 152, 153, 154, 155, 190). With respect to education and organizational authority, 'police officers' and 'trade union officers' are not comparable to managers who control and coordinate subordinate workers. Fourth, highly feminized professions such as primary and secondary school teachers were coded as associate professionals rather than as professionals (SOC90: 233, 234, 235, 239, 261), which allowed us to sharpen differences in

gender composition between professionals and associate professionals. In addition, the decision reflects the lower status of their function and their comparatively shorter education. Finally, some changes were made in the working-class categories. Skilled tradesmen and the petite bourgeoisie were united in a relatively homogenous category in terms of educational skills (Semi-skilled workers: 505, 506, 509, 523, 524, 529, 544–553, 555, 559, 569, 572, 579, 594, 595, 597–599, 800–899; Routine non-manual workers: 600–619, 621–659, 670–672, 690, 699–731, 790–792; Other workers: 900–999).[3] What do these re-coding operations mean for the outcome of the analysis? To test the sensitivity of the modifications we carried out a comparative analysis with the original SOC90 categories. The results of this control analysis suggest that despite some minor changes, the types produced by the sequence analysis are rather stable. The types follow the same 'substantial logic' – a dominant occupational category around the age of 38 to 40 defines the clusters. In addition, the manager-dominated and the professional-dominated types are among the first types to emerge from the cluster analysis and can thus be considered robust.

Methods and Strategies of Enquiry

The analyses of the following section rely on sequence analysis. This method was introduced to the social sciences by Abbott in the late 1980s (Abbott and Hrycak, 1990). It is a descriptive and non-inferential method. It makes it possible to analyse *whole trajectories* by classifying sequences with respect to the *spells* that compose them, their *duration* and their *sequential ordering*. To apply a sequence analysis the data must first be organized as 'sequences of states'. A certain state (here: occupational category) is attributed to each time unit (here: year). The idea of sequence analysis is to measure the resemblance of every two 'sequence of states' 'by considering the question how much effort is required to transform one sequence into the other one' (Billari, 2001: 138). The algorithm that calculates the distance between the sequences proceeds by either inserting (a state is inserted into the sequence), deleting (a state is deleted from the sequence) or substituting (one state is substituted for another). Then, costs can be attributed to these operations, either on the basis of theoretical reflexion or on the basis of empirical measurement of the frequency of a transition between two states (Aisenbray, 2000). In the present cases, we set the inserting/deleting costs to three and calculated the matrix of the substitution costs empirically (according to relative frequencies between the states). By measuring the distance between every two sequences, a so-called 'distance matrix' can be created. This matrix indicates the similarity between every pair of sequences. A cluster analysis can then be applied to this distance matrix. We employed a ward procedure, an option that simultaneously minimizes the within-cluster distances and maximizes the between-cluster distances. It produces a small number of equal-sized clusters that can then be displayed graphically. For this purpose, we use a 'distribution plot' that displays the proportional composition of the cluster in terms of states (y-axis; 0–100%) for each time unit of the sequence (x-axis; 16 to 42 years). In further analytical steps, the cluster can then be scrutinized

by measuring the average length of certain states or by analysing its composition in terms of socio-demographic factors (e.g. gender and social origin). The analyses were carried out with the R-package 'TraMineR' (Gabadinho et al., 2008). We first explore the trajectories of the entire sample. The careers of the service class are compared with other types of occupational trajectories and provisional conclusions on the trajectories of managers, professionals, and associate professionals are drawn. In a second step, we consider the trajectory types of the service class factions and examine the subtypes that compose these clusters. Finally, we investigate the composition of the subclusters in terms of gender.

The Service Class and its Trajectory Types

An analysis of the trajectories of the 1958 cohort reveals that, according to the dendrogram, they are most appropriately differentiated into nine clusters, each dominated by one occupational type (indicated by the percentage of members of the dominant category at age 40): managers (n = 1476; 88%), associate professionals (n = 1664; 90%), professionals (n = 597; 93%), skilled tradesmen and petite bourgeoisie (n = 1603; 87%), clerical and secretarial jobs (n = 1728; 85%), semi-skilled workers (n = 1308; 85%), non-manual routine work (n = 1646; 81%), other workers (n = 614; 84%), and non-active (n = 2091; 87%). The high proportions of the dominant occupation around the age of 40 (on the right side of the graphs in Figure 1) confirm Erikson and Goldthorpe's (1992) hypothesis of occupational maturity. This mid-career stabilization of the occupational trajectories allows us to examine the routes that lead to these stable positions from the age of 16 through to the age of 35. Here we focus on the service class factions: the managers, the associate professionals, and the professionals.[4]

An examination of the first years of all three plots (in the top left corner of the graph) shows that, on average, members of all three types of trajectories traverse a comparatively long period of education. They then go through some years of feeding occupations (mainly clerical work, skilled manual work, and routine non-manual work) and then attain managerial, associate professional, and professional positions in which they remain stable until the age of 42. However, the analysis also reveals some differences between the three types, confirming already well-established findings (Mills, 1995; Savage et al., 1992). The high percentage of intermediate categories on the left side of the 'manager graph' also shows that on average the managers enjoy a significantly shorter period of education and traverse a significantly longer period in feeder occupations than both associate professionals and professionals. The professionals experience a slightly longer period of education than associate professionals. We also see that associate professional positions can function as intermediate steps on the way to professional positions, whereas the inverse is rather rare. Both associate professional and professional occupations can lead to managerial positions, even though they are a minority among the feeder occupations of managerial positions.

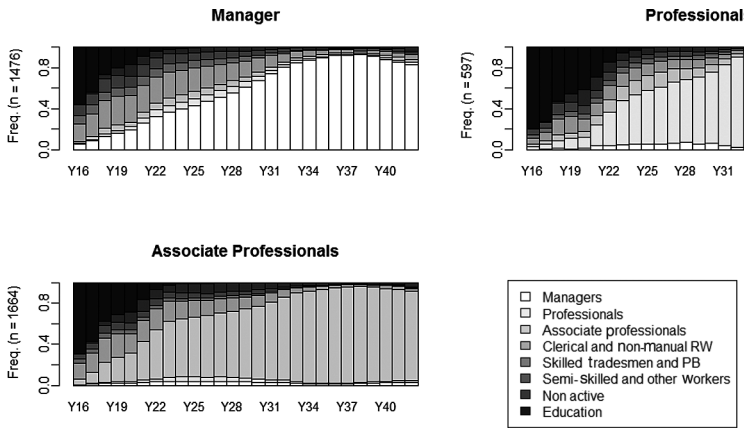

Figure 1 Distribution plots of managers, associate professionals and professionals

Service Class Trajectories under Closer Scrutiny

To unpack these rather aggregate trajectory types, we now closely examine each cluster and apply a second sequence analysis that reveals the subtypes in each cluster. For each service class trajectory type, three subclusters have been differentiated.

Managers

The subclusters reveal that the management trajectory type includes at least three significant sub-trajectories. Manager subcluster 1 (n = 189) shows a group that, subsequent to a short period of education, traverses a period of approximately 10 years of clerical and secretarial work before entering managerial positions. Manager subcluster 2 (n = 618) is more heterogeneous: its members arrive at management positions by different routes. Despite what the graph might insinuate at first sight, individuals hardly ever change between the feeder positions, rather they remain on one single route: skilled tradesmanship *or* semi-skilled work *or* non-manual routine work. The third manager subcluster (n = 669) is composed of people who start their trajectory in management positions or who attain those positions very shortly after some years of education. It seems as though this type of direct access to service class positions, far from being exclusive to professionals, is a major route into managerial positions.

Associate Professionals

The associate professionals also comprise three subclusters. In the associate professionals subcluster 1 (n = 170), individuals gain access to associate professional positions after a period of doing clerical work. It is only beyond age 30 that this group seems to accede to the service class. The largest cluster, subcluster 2 (n = 1084),

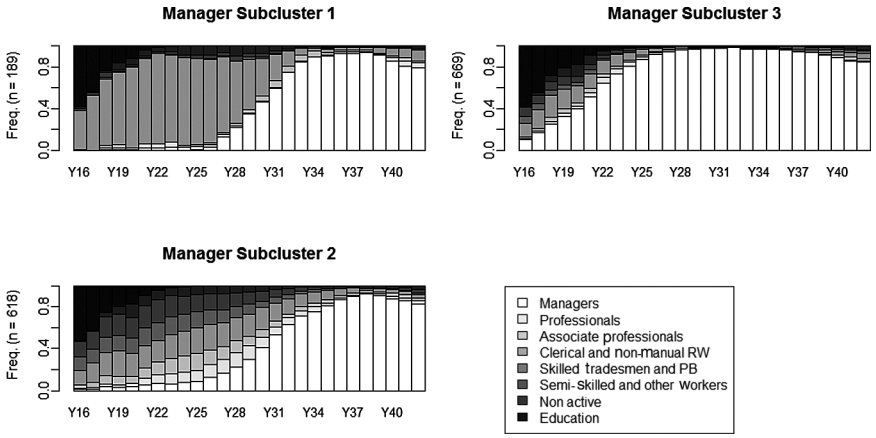

Figure 2 Subclusters of the management trajectory types

includes individuals who experience a slightly longer educational phase and then move directly to associate professional positions, which indicates that their access to the service class occurs biographically in their early twenties. The members of the associate professionals subcluster 3 (n = 410) pass through a series of feeder positions, mainly through non-manual routine work and skilled manual work.

Professionals

The subtypes of the professionals set the group apart from both the managers and the associate professionals. The professionals subcluster 1 includes actors benefiting from direct access to professional positions (n = 314). The members of this group attain professional positions early (at an average age of 22 years) and

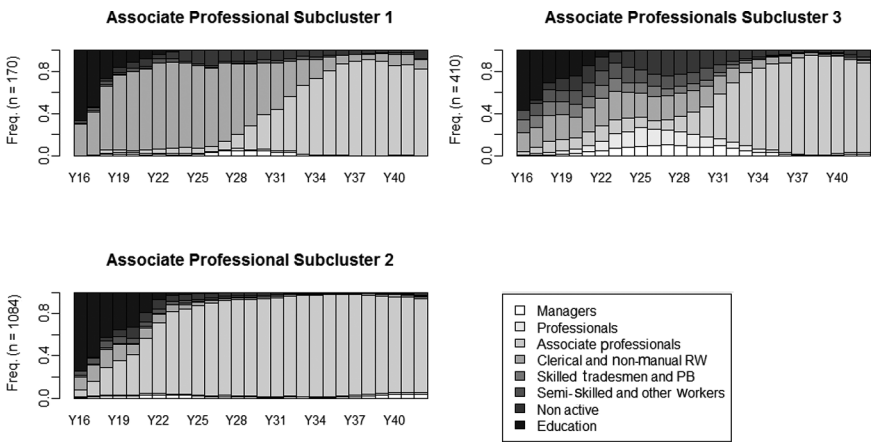

Figure 3 Subclusters of the associate professional trajectory types

remain stable. The second professionals subcluster (n = 64) shows that for a minority, it is also possible to reach professional positions without a long history of education and through positions of skilled and semi-skilled manual labour. Subcluster 3 comprises members who pass through several feeder positions (n = 219). However, in contrast to the second cluster, they traverse a longer educational period and then, as an intermediate step, move to associate professional or clerical positions from where they finally move to professional positions.

The Meaning of Feeders: Winning Spurs or Retarded Realization?

The sequence analyses of the routes into the service class show that there are differences in the length of the educational period, the length of the intermediate phase, and the feeders, according to the three factions. Most of these findings confirm what we already know: The educational period, on average, lasts longer for professionals than associate professionals and managers and longer for associate professionals than for managers. It appears also that longer educational periods in each of the clusters lead to *more direct* and *earlier* access to professional or managerial positions than trajectories with short educational periods. However, other aspects of the analysis are less conventional. Most surprisingly, the results show that in all three subgroups of the service class, there are patterns of direct, biographically early, and education-based access *and* indirect, biographically late access that relies on feeder occupations. In contrast to scholars who maintain that the direct or mediated access to service class positions distinguishes managers and professionals (Mills, 1995; Savage et al., 1992), our analyses suggest that in all three service class groups, direct passages to service class positions and access routes through feeder positions coexist.

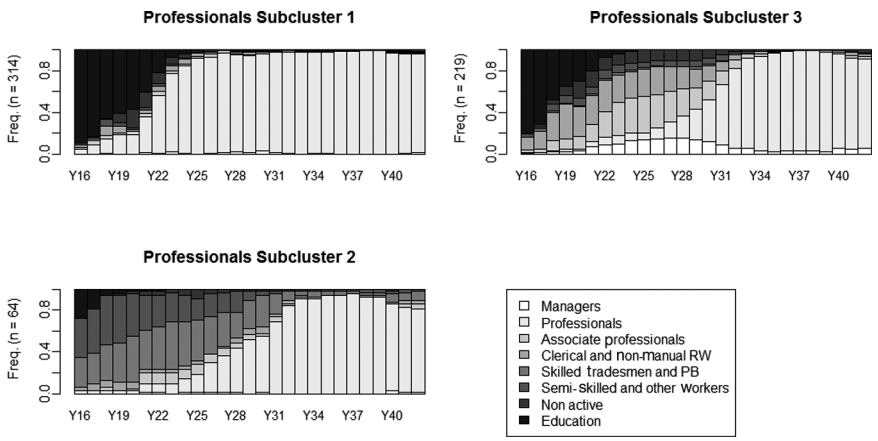

Figure 4 Subclusters of the professional trajectory type

The feeder-based routes into professional positions are particularly surprising since the exclusivity of direct access from education to professionalism has been considered to set professionals apart from managers. However, the results suggest that in the early 1980s, the transformation of educational credentials into service class positions was not always immediate – a majority of the professional subcluster 3 (n = 219) accedes to professional positions only in their late twenties. One hypothesis argues that a good proportion of highly educated future professionals must prove themselves competent before gaining access to professional status. Alternatively, must we look for other explanations for this 'biographically retarded realization' of educational credentials – for example, in the form of a modified gender composition of professions?

To understand the gender relationships within the service class factions, we examine the distribution of men and women according to the subclusters. In contrast to other clusters, the distribution plots display no pockets of unemployment among any of the general service class clusters, which could mean that these clusters are strongly dominated by men. Alternatively, it could signify that the women in these occupations, in contrast to other occupations, do not interrupt their employment in the aftermath of giving birth. Let us examine the distribution of women and men according to the subclusters of the service class.

These results (p = 0.00; Cramer's v = 0.324) show that, overall, women in management positions are a minority: not even one-third of the managers are female. However, an examination of the subclusters suggests that women are strongly overrepresented in the subcluster with clerical positions as feeders, while they are marginal in the two other subclusters. Among the associate professionals, 58 per cent are women. A closer examination of the subclusters reveals that women particularly dominate the trajectory type that leads to associate professional positions through clerical feeder occupations. However, the other two subclusters are also composed of a majority of women; there is no significant difference between subcluster 2 (with direct access) and subcluster 3 (with nonmanual routine work and skilled manual work as feeder occupations). In terms of professionals, the table indicates that women again compose only 30 per cent of the overall cluster. An examination of the subclusters shows that women are more likely to be in the subcluster in which actors attain professional positions via routes leading from associate professional positions and clerical work. The proportion of women in this subcluster is higher than in the subcluster characterized by direct and education-based access to professional positions.

Over all three factions of the service class, it seems as though men are overrepresented in the subclusters that lead directly from the educational phase to service class positions. Women, on the other hand, seem to reach service class positions mainly through feeders of clerical (and sometimes associate professional) work. However, let us cast a more detailed glance at the feeder subclusters of the two dominated by males – managers and professionals. In the case of the managers, the female feeder subcluster 1 is rather small (n = 189); the major pattern of feeder-based access to managerial position (n = 618) is quite distinctly male, not different in this respect from the direct access pattern. The situation

Table 2 Distribution of gender and educational level according to subclusters (%)

	Subclusters									
	Manager 1	*Manager 2*	*Manager 3*	*Assoc Prof 1*	*Assoc Prof 2*	*Assoc Prof 3*	*Prof 1*	*Prof 2*	*Prof 3*	*Total*
Male	45.5	72.6	74.9	30.0	41.8	46.3	70.4	93.8	61.6	57.4
Female	54.5	27.4	25.1	70.0	58.2	53.7	29.6	6.3	38.4	42.6
Beyond A-level	30.4	37.3	31.7	40.3	57.7	54.6	77.1	40.7	71.0	49.1
N	187	631	658	170	1084	410	314	64	219	3737

is different for professionals. Here the male-dominated subcluster 2 is rather residual. In contrast, women are heavily overrepresented along the major feeder route to professional positions (subcluster 3). At the same time, the percentage of people with a university education is not significantly lower among the professional subcluster 3 (71% beyond A-levels) than in the direct and early trajectory type (professional subcluster 1, 77%). It is not a lack of educational credentials but gender that defines the main feeder subcluster to professional positions. This finding leads us to the hypothesis that feeder phases on the road to managerial positions are different in their meaning and logic than the feeder phases on the road to professional positions: the former are 'male feeders', the latter 'female feeders'.

What could be the difference between these two gender-based feeder phases? Our data do not allow us to give empirically founded answers to this question. Nevertheless, we can formulate some assumptions on the basis of what others have found. The female feeder phase to professional positions, instead of an accumulation of organizational assets, could be a difficulty of immediately transforming educational credentials. These difficulties could either be due to the gender-based biographical structures of the female-dominated professions (Witz, 1995) or to the requirements of extra-occupational tasks (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990). For instance, it is possible that phases of reduction to part-time employment for childcare prolong the feeding phase on the route to service class positions. Alternatively, the prospect of having children may prevent women from directly entering service class positions and force them to traverse some years of clerical work in which part-time arrangements are more easily available (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990). In contrast, the men following the routes to management positions are exempt from such extra-occupational constraints. We therefore can make the assumption that their feeder phase effectively corresponds to a phase of accumulation of assets that ultimately allows them to move to managerial positions (without stable and secure educational credentials).

Discussion

We argue that the log-linear models that dominate mobility research, despite their tremendous advantages, suffer from certain weaknesses. Because they struggle to grasp mobility as a biographical trajectory, they do not shed light on the biographical explanations that are built into mobility theory. Therefore it is important, we argue, to create a descriptive account of the routes that lead into the service class in the biographical period from age 20 to 35. For this endeavour we applied a sequence analysis to the work histories of a cohort of Britons born in 1958. A closer examination of the trajectories leading to service class positions shows two types of access: direct, early access through educational periods and late, indirect access through feeder occupations. These two forms of access can be found among all three sub-factions of the service class but differ

according to gender. These results challenge mobility models based on measurement of two or three moments in time and place a new emphasis on the importance of a sequential conception of mobility.

In particular, they allow for a historically specified assessment of mechanisms of service class access. Savage et al. (1992) argued that the capital that enables individuals to remain in their jobs or to compete for higher positions is accumulated and transformed in the course of biographical trajectories. They showed that, in the 1970s, there was a clear distinction between managers and professionals: the first accumulated organizational assets while the second built their careers on educational assets. These dynamics of asset accumulation may change according to the historical period or the economic context. For the cohort born in 1958, we show that the link between a certain type of accumulation or transformation of assets and certain factions of the service class are no longer as clear. There are managers who access their positions directly, early, and on the basis of educational assets. At the same time, not all professionals attain their positions through educational channels. We think this change is due to a 'feminization' of professions in the early 1980s (Crompton and Sanderson, 1990). While the feeders leading to management do indeed correspond to a logic of asset accumulation, the ones leading to professional positions are typically occupied by women. Women from the 1958 cohort still rely on educational assets to enter the service class. Hence, in the early periods of their careers some women are unable to transform and realize their educational capital immediately. They must sidestep into some years of clerical or non-manual routine work before acceding to service class positions.

The difference between direct and early access to the service class and late and feeder-based access reveals that the biographical period of arrival in the service class has not been given sufficient explanatory weight in research on social mobility. The literature on the life course, for instance, suggests that crucial biographical events and transitions occur during the period from 20 to 35 years of age and shape people's beliefs, identities, and lifestyles. Attaining a service class position at the age of 22 is different from reaching the same position at the age of 35. For instance, the promises of psychological and material security built into the employment relationship can mean completely different things at these two biographical moments. In addition, it is very likely that these promises are interpreted differently by people who slip easily into the service class, people who attain these positions through experience on the job and people who cannot transform their educational credentials immediately into service class positions. It is up to further research to investigate whether these trajectories remain constant over time or if they change with transformation of employment structures or changes in the levels of education among women. It would be desirable to have confirmations or interrogations of the results with the use of alternative data bare of the methodological problems associated with the NCDS data. Also, more information is required – for instance from qualitative accounts – on the reasons for the retarded transformation of educational credentials by

female-dominated subgroups of professionals. Finally, it would be interesting to know more about the consequences of these different routes into the service class on the biographical construction of lifestyles or identities.

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Notes

1 This article focuses exclusively on processes of intragenerational mobility. The relationship between intergenerational and intragenerational mobility is beyond its scope, even though we are aware of the possible connection between the two (Little and Westergaard, 1964).
2 As a result of the 'women and class debate', women are now taken into account in most class and mobility analyses as individuals – and no longer as part of the household led by its male 'head' (see for example Crompton, 1995; Witz, 1995).
3 I would like to thank Andy Miles for the generous and instructive help on the British occupational classification system.
4 For purposes of better readability, I have merged the categories 'Clerical' and 'Non-manual routine work' in the graphs (and only there), as well as 'Semi-skilled workers' and 'Other workers'. Please contact the author if you wish to consult the graphs in their original level of detail.

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