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Social Mobility

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Social mobility

Recent years have seen the re-emergence of social mobility as one of the central concerns of British sociology, a position which it had lost in the explosion of other sociological knowledge in the mid-1960s. In its original specialist form, mobility research was an area in which a small number of British sociologists made significant contributions. Now, a broader conception of mobility, which capitalises on the efforts of the specialists, has made it a mainstream topic for many more sociologists in this country.

This is not to argue, as Goldthorpe has done, that in certain respects, mobility 'could well claim a position of pre-eminence' as a central area of British sociology (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1980:1; 1987:1). Goldthorpe's criteria for the claim are the scale of research projects, levels of international collaboration, and techniques of data analysis. The last two correspond to two substantial points of growth, but taken as a whole, the claims of mobility must be more modest. Comparing mobility with other topics such as gender, race, work, or sociological theory, we would find many fewer British sociologists involved in mobility research, fewer (if any?) specialist options in the undergraduate curriculum, and as we shall see below, an output gap in terms of new empirical research on the topic before the late 1970s. Conversely, these other areas could point to high levels of research investment, international collaboration, and conceptual, if not statistical, elaboration.

The high point of research investment in mobility research was in the early 1970s, when three major national surveys of England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland absorbed very substantial proportions of the SSRC's spending on sociology. Only the Oxford Social Mobility Group retained a sufficiently large team of scholars to sustain active work on the data collected, although the number of publications that have subsequently made use of the three data-sets must now be several hundred in number (which may go some way to vindicate the SSRC's policy against the criticisms of the time). The dismal economics of large-scale survey research have since prevented any similar follow-ups of mobility *per se*, but there have been some

smaller specialist studies (e.g. Lee 1981; Fiddler 1981) and new data have been derived from other sources. These include the 1983 British General Election Study; the OPCS General Household and Labour Force Surveys; the DE Women and Employment Survey; Open University teaching materials (the People in Society exercise); the British Class Survey and a variety of projects by the Department of Applied Economics at Cambridge.¹

As a result, by most conventional indicators of academic salience, mobility is thriving. Several specialist books have appeared (e.g. Dex 1987; Goldthorpe *et al.* 1987; Halsey *et al.* 1980; Heath 1981; Hope 1984; Payne 1987a and b); citation scores, in particular of the Nuffield Mobility Study, continue to mount steadily; Council for National Academic Awards' documents have shown social mobility as an almost universal component of the first or second year public sector undergraduate curriculum; recent text books now give more space and more up to date coverage of the topic, and in the last couple of years, the *BJS* and *Sociology* have carried 14 articles on various aspects of mobility (and about 20, if we include notes and replies, and articles in which mobility makes a brief appearance).² These dealt with gender, elites, technical aspects of measurement, social closure, unemployment, family businesses, language skills, professionalisation, assimilation of migrants, and international comparisons of class structures.

DECONSTRUCTING MOBILITY

Both the range of these articles, and the secondary analysis referred to above, demonstrate how the original paradigm of mobility research has become modified. Social mobility is now not so much a single area of sociology as four — or arguably five — connecting clusters of work. The *first*, not least in terms of paradigmatic dominance, concentrates on discovering and describing large-scale flows of people between social origins and social destinations. It is this which gives rise to our knowledge about patterns and rates of mobility; at its heart lies analysis of the mobility table. To accomplish this, a *second* cluster of activity has developed, aimed at refining the technical means of ransacking and modelling mobility tables. While no longer an a-theoretical statistical exercise, its discourse tends to emphasise the mechanics of the process, and is often difficult for the non-specialist to penetrate. These two clusters can be regarded as mobility research in the narrow sense.

In contrast, the *third* cluster is one which does not regard mobility *per se* as the focus of research, but rather as a subsidiary process which illuminates the more important topic of *social class*. This, too, has been central to the social mobility paradigm since Glass, particularly in Britain where a number of theorists have used data

available as a product of the first cluster to elaborate their accounts of the class structure. More recently, however, interest has grown in using the newer data produced by the national mobility studies of the 1970s and later general surveys in a *fourth* way; to explore wider issues, such as occupational and industrial change, the role of women, the fate of migrant groups, or the policy performance of education systems. Finally, drawing on each of the previous four clusters, there is a fifth, explicitly concerned with the comparative analysis of national systems, in a context of macro-sociology in its full sense.

These clusters are not new. A brief glance at *Social Mobility in Britain* (Glass 1954) will show something of them at an early stage, and by taking in Lipset and Bendix (1959) and Miller (1960) to cover the comparative aspect, we would probably include them all. What is new is the extent of the increased specialisation of interest and activity (typical of the expansion of all fields of scientific knowledge), the rapid progress made in each, and as we shall see below, the particular growth of the use of mobility data to explain a wider range of sociological phenomena.

Of course, these clusters overlap. The flows which comprise patterns and rates of mobility are measured by reference to origins and destinations defined by theories of social class. The technical debates take on their significance because they empower the mobility analyst to address new issues with a more sophisticated version of the data from mobility tables. Similarly, individuals have contributed to more than one cluster. Westergaard and Halsey, for example, have separately addressed education and class systems, while Goldthorpe has used mobility to elaborate ideas about the national class structure, helped to promote log-linear modelling and more adequate class classification schemes in current sociological practice, and is presently a leading figure in the comparative analysis of mobility regimes.

The purpose of identifying these clusters is two-fold. On the one hand, it provides a heuristic structure to simplify the description of a complex set of changes. This is particularly necessary in the case of social mobility, because its connection with, and dependence on, other areas of sociology raise frequent problems of boundary identification; the interface with class theory being the most obvious. The clusters also help to sub-divide the complexity into manageable units, allowing for otherwise apparently inconsistent statements about rates of development and for explaining the terms of internal debate. On the other hand, the clusters help to point to a characteristic of social mobility which is unusually strong for a sub-field of the subject, namely that its core phenomenon can be regarded as either an explanator or the explanandum. In British sociology, the main motivation behind mobility research has been to use it as an explanator of class. Only in more recent years has there

been a growth of a parallel interest in mobility as both explanator and explanandum, in the context of new work on the economy, and on gender.

THE GLASS PARADIGM AND THE SECOND GENERATION

The original character of mobility research, as indicated by our first two clusters, was set by the LSE Study (Glass 1954), which addressed the central issue of the class position of senior managers and professionals, reporting national rates of mobility for the first time, and developing new statistical techniques. From this point on, mobility research was primarily perceived as involving a large national sample, a formal questionnaire-based survey, sophisticated computerized statistical analysis, and several other specific operational definitions, such as father-to-son status movements from the respondents' origins at the end of compulsory schooling, the idea of a hierarchy of occupational classes, the lay-out of the mobility table, and so on. The centrality of occupation as an indicator, mobility as percentage rates of flow or specific indices, and education as a causal factor were also established (not surprisingly in the light of contemporary sociological and political developments). The interest in comparative analysis that ensued also shifted attention away from the occupational distributions that made up the origins and destinations, as these were seen as 'noise' in the comparison of the actual processes of mobility in different nations (a key point to which we will return).

This rather demanding framework probably helped to inhibit further empirical research: to a large extent, sociologists felt they 'knew the answer' to mobility, and additional work would be relatively cost-ineffective. Indeed, already having *evidence* that inequalities existed, that could be used in academic and political debate against those who claimed the death or irrelevance of class, strengthened the professional sociologist in the face of mere opinion, prejudice or party ideology. Certainly it is a matter of record in terms of the literature that for more than twenty years after 1954, almost all British work on mobility was based on Glass's account, re-using his data and core interpretations.³

This was not only the result of a combination of paradigm dominance flowing from the pivotal positions held by former LSE sociologists, but also a widespread concern with class rather than mobility *per se* (our third 'cluster'), and the later anti-empirical tendency in British sociology in the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, the Glass position was not even seriously challenged at a theoretical level: as Hope noted in 1974, our ideas

far from being derived from some broad body of speculative sociology, have tended to ground themselves in an agreed reading of the findings of the 1949 inquiry. (Hope 1975:1–2)

Even the Nuffield Study explicitly set out to follow the younger generations of Glass's survey who would have become fathers, rather than sons, by 1972.

At the risk of falling into the trap of false periodacy, we can see the second half of the 1970s is the key period in which a new view began to be generally accepted. The publication of Westergaard and Resler's *Class in a Capitalist Society* in 1975 was both the final flowering of the previous consensus in its use of Glass's data, and also a major re-statement of the importance of mobility as a class process. A couple of years later (at the same time as the paperback edition appeared) three key new contributions to the mobility field became available. One demonstrated beyond all reasonable doubt that the data in the Glass mobility table could not be trusted, as the table could only arise from a society in which there were virtually no class differentials in fertility, and no historical expansion of non-manual employment, i.e. conditions absent from all advanced industrial societies (Payne *et al.* 1977). The others presented the first tranches of data from the new generation of mobility studies, showing radically different patterns and rates of movement from the 1954 report, and directly challenging the models of class and mobility advanced by Parkin, Westergaard and Resler, and Bottomore (Goldthorpe and Llewellyn 1977a, 1977b). This work was further elaborated in Goldthorpe's subsequent book (1980) and its companion volume (Halsey *et al.* 1980), while the work from the Cambridge team was also beginning to appear in print (e.g. Stewart *et al.* 1980). In other words, the specialist work of the first two clusters of social mobility analysis became available to a much wider group of other sociologists, not least those in the class/mobility cluster.

THE SECOND GENERATION FINDINGS

The first key finding from the 1970s national studies was that of greater fluidity, over 'long distances', from low in the class hierarchy to its upper reaches. The agreed reading of Glass had been that, while there was considerable short-range movement, virtually nobody originated in the manual working classes and ended up in the professional/managerial class. The Nuffield and Scottish Mobility Studies showed much higher inflow rates of upward mobility, as Table I shows. Detailed comparisons are a little difficult, because the class categories are different, but whereas 52

TABLE I: % Inflow mobility into the upper middle class^a

Origin Class	Glass	Nuffield	SMS
A (Managers/Professionals)	47.7	24.2	23.3
B (Intermediate White Collar)	11.7	12.5	19.6
C (Routine White Collar)	12.6	35.0	21.3
D (Skilled Manual)	15.3	15.7	16.5
E (Semi Skilled Manual)	2.3	} 12.6	9.3
F (Unskilled Manual)	1.1		10.0
	100%	100%	100%
	(n = 262)	(n = 1285)	(n = 550)

Notes:

* The classes A – F have been created by taking the equivalent original classes from each of the studies: this works quite well for the upper middle and manual classes, but less well for the lower middle sector. The following shows the details of the grouping of the studies' original class categories:

Glass: A = I+II; B = III; C = IV+Va; D = Vb; E = VI; F = VII

Nuffield: A = I; B = II; C = III,IV+V; D = VI; E+F = VII

SMS: A – I; B = I; C = III+IV; D = V; E = VI; F = VII

^a Adapted from: Miller 1960:71; Goldthorpe 1987:45; Payne 1987b:65

per cent of Glass's upper middle class was upwardly mobile, with only 19 per cent from the manual class, the Nuffield Study shows 76 per cent upwardly mobile, with more than 10 per cent coming from each of the other classes, including 28 per cent from the two manual classes, a level slightly exceeded in the Scottish data. It was this new evidence that challenged existing models of class boundaries and closure.

We can also compare mobility from manual to non-manual classes (using the Kelsall/Miller version of Glass's data) in the three studies, as well as, more cautiously because of the different categories, gross mobility. This is shown in Table II.

We again apparently see more fluidity in the more recent studies, and the second new finding that while upward mobility can apparently increase or be high, downward mobility does not need to increase or to be equally high. The new occupational opportunity in the non-manual classes creates conditions in which the sons of non-manual workers need not be displaced to accommodate incomers from below. Mobility is not a zero-sum game. The low rates of downward mobility may explain lack of interest in this aspect of mobility (Richardson 1977, excepted).

TABLE II: *Mobility rates in 3 studies*

	<i>Glass</i>	<i>Nuffield</i>	<i>SMS</i>
<i>Manual/Non-Manual Mobility:</i>			
- Upward	15.6	23.0	23.0
- Downward	15.6	13.8	11.3
- Immobile Non-Manual	21.5	32.3	23.2
- Immobile Manual	47.3	30.9	42.5
<i>Gross Mobility*</i>			
- Upward	28.2	40.0	38.4
- Downward	33.1	25.6	26.5
- Immobility	38.7	34.4	35.1

Notes

* Calculated over classes A, B, C, D, and 'E + F': see Table II above for derivation. The number of classes alters the mobility measured (the greater the number of classes, the higher the apparent mobility). The reader is reminded that these rates are broad indicators only, because the classes are only equivalents across the 3 studies.

The second generation studies would have provided a historical picture of trends had the Glass data been reliable; instead they had to rely on 'internal evidence' from a comparison of cohorts at different stages of their career development to identify changing rates of mobility. Goldthorpe has shown how absolute rates of mobility indicate that younger men have better chances of obtaining non-manual and service class positions than older men (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1987). On the other hand, relative rates do not improve (see *below*), while the Scottish Study has shown that for access to non-manual jobs, particularly on first entry to the labour market, the major gains in improving the opportunities from sons of manual workers were made by the late 1950s and have hardly improved since (a point confirmed by the British General Election Survey data: Goldthorpe *et al.* 1987:262; Payne 1987b).

It could therefore be claimed that in terms of the key questions of 'how much mobility is there?' and 'is it increasing or decreasing?', the main studies have now provided a substantial answer.⁴ The data in a processed and published form are available for other sociologists to use, and with the up-date work to 1983 from the General Election Survey (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1987) showing no radical departure from the 1970s picture, a fairly comprehensive gap in our knowledge has been filled. Of course, this basic increase in information has gone hand in hand with conceptual development, and it is here that these

apparently straightforward answers and steps forward begin to disappear again.

DIFFERENCES IN APPROACHES

Perhaps even the suggestion above that there were straightforward answers was over-optimistic. The reports from the mainstream studies require careful reading, as their arguments and use of evidence are dense. Even apparently simple things such as counts as mobility are hedged in by detailed operationalisation.

Goldthorpe's main analysis of mobility coincided with his interest in the 'service class' and doubts about a neat hierarchical order to the class structure. There is naturally an emphasis on the service class in his subsequent writing, and his general discussion (although not his tables of data) tend to 'speak of upward mobility only in the case of movement into classes I and II, rather between the other 5 classes' (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1980:42). An even more important feature is his focus on relative mobility between people from different origins, rather than using an absolute count of how many people were mobile. This enables him to differentiate between mobility due to changes in occupational distributions, and changes in the processes of class inequalities. It also leads to the elegant paradox that while, absolutely, more people are upwardly mobile, the extra supply of non-manual jobs equally advantages those already born into the non-manual classes, so that the relative chances do *not* improve for the sons of manual workers. For some people, this is the key finding from the 1970s.

The model of 'constant social fluidity' in this relative sense can be used to point to a failure of post-war welfare reforms or class politics to reduce class differentials in inherited life chances. Given Goldthorpe's central concern with how mobility relates to the class structure, it follows that a pessimistic view of relative mobility looms large in the sophisticated deployment of odds-ratio and log-linear modelling around which much of his work has been built. While he recognises the role of occupational change in total mobility, he is not particularly interested in it precisely because the interest in total mobility is 'the result of changes in objective mobility opportunities, and did not reflect any changes . . . in the direction of greater equality of opportunity or "openness"' (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1987:253).⁵ The pattern of class inequality has been *confirmed*, rather than *modified* by occupational and mobility changes (see Payne 1987c).

In contrast, the approach of the Scottish Mobility Study has been to emphasise the occupational character of social mobility, by charting industrial and occupational transition, and attributing to employment (which defines the actual origins and destinations used

in the mainstream studies) a causal power in determining mobility rates. This view is not so much a negation of the importance of class as an attempt to treat it in a series of more specific forms: mobility as a product of class is shifted to class as being partially a product of mobility, the latter in turn being an outcome of labour market processes and the deployment of capital. Combined with a more conventional view of occupational classes as a hierarchy, this leads to concentration on absolute mobility and in particular inflows to current classes, rather than relative outflows from origins (Clarke, Modgil and Modgil 1990). While not optimistic about changing class inequalities, the conclusion is that these are not so much confirmed, as modified, by structural change.

On the surface, the contrast between the two approaches can be read as a difference between specialists in the mobility field, or as alternative methods of statistical analysis: that is, to say, issues that are really mainly the concern of those working in the first two of our clusters. However, at the heart of the two perspectives lies the problem of how mobility relates to class analysis. Goldthorpe, despite his new model of the class structure and his methodological contribution, speaks for the tradition that constitutes the third cluster of mobility research, that of mobility as a class process. As his choice of book and chapter titles signal, he is interested in 'class mobility' not 'social mobility', the same interest which has driven most of the many British 'consumers' of data on mobility in the past.

This perspective, in most of the work done up to 1980, treated mobility as being tied to structural class analysis. Given the assumption that occupational status could be conveniently used to denote individual class position, this discouraged reflection about operationalisations, and gave a particular character to our perception of mobility. A second strand of writing, in the context of a British sociology in which class has always been central, has made use of mobility in a looser way as part of more descriptive accounts of 'who gets what' in Britain today. One could argue for example, that research on cycles of deprivation, second generation black immigrants, or much of the debate about equality of opportunity in education, comes under this rubric: the line between 'mobility research' and research in which a broad mobility approach is used, is a blurred one. This kind of usage relegates mobility to a subsidiary position: in both cases, mobility has been as strong or as weak as the core class analysis at the time. Mobility was kept on the agenda by our interest in class, but remained essentially an item requiring little discussion in its own right. A recent example is the discussion of proletarianisation and associated issues in the British Class Survey (Marshall *et al.* 1988).

Thus writers on class structure, in particular such as Bottomore, Miliband, Westergaard, Parkin, and Giddens⁶ have re-interpreted

mobility findings to amplify their own arguments. This has certainly kept mobility a live sociological issue, but only in the narrow context of class: in this view

the study of social mobility is useful in illuminating the operation of the social stratification system in capitalist societies, but it is essentially subordinate to the real stuff of class analysis. (Kelsall *et al.* 1984:116)

Indeed, from a Marxist perspective, mobility (and its study) are undesirable, focusing on the individual rather than on social structure, and creating false consciousness: the 'blinkered chase for the elusive carrot' prevents the donkey from recognising that others are similarly placed (*ibid.*).

The 'blinkered chase' analogy can equally well be applied to the consequences for social mobility of the pursuit of class analysis. Because it had the status of *explanator*, mobility *per se* was left for too long as a relatively undifferentiated concept (except, perhaps in the field of education and mobility), to be used only in one particular set of arguments. We can illustrate some of the consequences of this narrow focus with two examples.

First, it is a commonplace criticism of mobility studies that they ignore women.⁷ One reason for this tendency is the difficulty of making sense of the class position of women, which is what we must do because the mainstream focus has been on mobility as class analysis. Class position is for men given by their normal occupation: some women have never worked, married women commonly take at least a break from employment during the family building stage, some then work part-time, and others never return to paid employment. What then is the class position of these women, and hence how have they been mobile? The recent and continuing debates about women and social class have contested the relative virtues of treating the wife as having her own class, her husband's class, a merged partnership class, and a dominant class calculated on the grounds of full-time rather than part-time and higher status rather than lower, employment, (e.g. see Abbott and Sapsford 1987). The choice involves a decision central to ideas of mobility, namely is the unit of stratification the individual or the household?

The failure to develop a mobility of women derives then from a failure of class conceptualisation. Had mobility and class not been so intimately related, then a female mobility might have emerged earlier, and indeed would have reinforced the need for an alternative perspective on female social class. Had we asked in a less focused way what is it in a woman's life experience that she (and others) perceive as major changes in social identity, then we would have confronted our narrow occupational class definition of mobility much sooner. For example does *marriage* provide a medium for

mobility? Is the father-daughter definition of mobility's origin and destination the best way to account for movements, when men participate in labour market and class processes in a gender-differentiated way? Would not mother-daughter transitions be more interesting, particularly for exploring trends in life experience related to new patterns of education and labour market participation? Most important of all, we would probably have grasped how narrow was our operationalisation of mobility, simply because the mobility experience for women is different. As Sorokin argued more than half a century ago, there are many channels for upward mobility, even if the main dimension is read as that of class: wealth, influence, status and marriage are independent spheres of mobility (1927:133–80).

So too is employment. Gender segregation in the labour market constrains initial opportunity for women (Hakim 1979; Payne *et al.* 1980). Downward mobility occurs later in life, as Dex (1987) cogently shows: re-entry to paid employment for married women with young children is typically on a part-time basis, and at a lower level than before child-bearing. The totality of the woman's situation explains her occupational career: mobility is not uni-dimensional.

Perhaps the best example is the work of the Essex group on the British Class Survey (Marshall *et al.* 1988). Although in other respects firmly centred on class analysis, their treatment of female mobility leads them to distance themselves from Goldthorpe's more traditional position on the unit of mobility analysis. While accepting his view that socio-political class formation needs to take little account of female careers, their interest in demographic class formation and the distinctive work experience of women directs them towards absolute measures of mobility, structural change, gender segregated labour markets and the wider contexts of women's lives. This in turn feeds back into their overall conclusions about contemporary class.

The second case of excessively narrow focus is that of the Marxist view of mobility as bourgeois mystification. Goldthorpe has seen this view as a central block to a proper understanding of the mobility process, and attempts to legitimate his own position at the start of *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain* by, among other things, demonstrating that Marx dealt with mobility. However, in doing so, Goldthorpe addresses the problem of individual movements across a class structure, thus reinforcing the way that it has been read by most Marxists. A closer examination of the actual quotations which Goldthorpe uses shows that Marx wrote more about whole *categories* of persons experiencing structural mobility. Much of his account of the emergence of capitalism is dependent on changes in the types of employers and employees. The growth of *dritte personen*, of bureaucrats and intellectuals, and the decline of the petty bourgeoisie are changes to both class and occupational

structures, requiring changes in circumstances for large sets of personnel. This points away from the narrow focus on class membership towards a broader historical and economic framework. In other words, there is space even in the Marxist canon for an elaborated view of mobility, even if it is not one that is concerned with individual movements.⁸ The Marxists' general antipathy towards mobility research can be seen to be in part due to this restricted conception of mobility which obscures the broader conception of structural mobility as a feature of capitalist society.

MOBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY

In both of these examples, mobility has had the logical status of *explanator* of class mobility. For a long time, the only substantial area of work in which mobility became, at least partially, an *explanandum* was the link between schooling and career, although even here, two of the main theoretical contributions both treat education as basically only one link in a complex chain of class reproduction. Giddens sees educational qualifications as the key determinant in market capacity, and therefore mobility chances assume a significant position in the class structuration process (Giddens 1973:107; 181–6).⁹ Parkin, on the other hand, in shifting the debate away from 'inequalities surrounding the occupational order', places even greater emphasis on credentialism as a strategy of social closure for the middle class. While his position allows for an analysis of closure and movement between other differentiated groups (on the grounds of language, race, gender, or religion) this is not developed, and mobility remains in subordinate position in his argument (Parkin 1979; Payne 1987a:72–5).

Both Giddens and Parkin do, none the less, begin to open up possibilities for an elaboration of mobility as an interesting process in its own right. To some extent this had already begun to emerge elsewhere in the study of education and mobility. Following the initial interest in the consequences of the 1944 Education Act reported in Glass (1954), numerous attempts have been made to explore precisely what parts of the educational process promote or hinder successful employment outcomes. The underlying concern may still be, as Halsey has said, a class one: to what extent is Britain an 'open society'? (Halsey 1979). Nevertheless, the research following from that question has investigated the likely causes of mobility experience in a way that has helped to unpack the idea of mobility itself. It is at this point that our third cluster of mobility research begins to merge into the fourth, with its wider perspective.

The educational process can be sub-divided into three elements: what factors in family of origin promote success in education; what

feature of school systems or events in schooling shape qualification profiles; what do employers actually do when they select individuals from the general supply of qualified manpower? In the first, parental cultural capital has been identified in a number of ways, from the stimulus of intellectual artifacts in the home, through direct attitudinal encouragement, to selection of particular schools or financial investment. Not only are these relevant factors, but they vary over time: work at the Centre for Educational Studies in Edinburgh has recently linked parents' levels of education to the propensity of their children to qualify for higher education, and drawn attention to the rapid, historically-specific rise in education levels among the current generations of parents (*THES* 1989a).

The way in which family background interacts with the school system has been extensively explored. The emphasis in Halsey *et al.* (1980), which has examined IQ, primary schooling, secondary schooling and higher education in some detail, has been on origin and educational destination, but the overall link between education and occupations has also been shown by Halsey (e.g. 1979). Early optimism ('given the diminishing importance of economic and social backgrounds as a determinant of the type of secondary education a child receives, social mobility will increase': Glass 1954:24) has thus been succeeded first by demonstrations of the resilience of class differentials in the face of educational reform (e.g. Little and Westergaard 1964, but also see Gray *et al.* 1982 and the case of comprehensive secondary education in Scotland) and then by more systematic disaggregation of the educational process. Other studies have extended education, from schooling, to include post-secondary education (e.g. Psacharopoulos 1977; Raffe 1979; Blackburn *et al.* 1980) in order to fill the gap left by the more limited definitions used in earlier work.¹⁰

At the risk of colonising other parts of the education field,¹¹ it can also be said that we know a lot more about the social processes within schools which determine qualification outcome. The impact of teacher expectations, the influence of wider culture and peer group, and socialisation into acceptable aspirations have all been documented. To give but one illustration, early subject 'choice' cuts off specific occupational avenues, or even whole classes of career: as the Youth Cohort Study, Sweep Two shows, gender differences become reflected in choices of post-secondary courses and institutions well before the end of compulsory schooling (*THES* 1989b).

The third stage of the progression from infant to employee is the crucial stage of employer selection. Again, early optimism about the meritocratic possibilities of job access through qualifications have been replaced by recognition that the children of the middle classes do well in the educational race, but that formal qualifications are not all they seem.

It could be argued that the association between qualifications and job success comes about not because employers care for qualifications themselves but because employers choose young people with favourable backgrounds, attitudes and behaviour, and that these young people also tend to have good qualifications. (Gray *et al.* 1982)

In this view, qualifications are an indicator not of intellectual achievement, or learned skills ready for employment, but rather of more general attributes, of personality, motivation, manners, or culture. Some of these things may be of direct relevance to work — time-keeping, application, problem-solving, acceptance — but others reflect the preference of employers for ‘people like us’. At the higher levels, this constitutes class preference, which may operate apparently impersonally, or directly (see Kelsall 1974). Reid, in his discussion of the school/work transition, gives considerable weight to this, not least in showing low levels of employer knowledge about the education that lies behind the qualification (Reid 1986).

MOBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

Employers require some mechanisms to enable them to select from among many applicants for employment. In the earlier part of this century, relatively few people had anything other than elementary education, while more firms were small and family-controlled. Selection for the better jobs could be — and indeed had to be — on the basis of personal knowledge or by reference to the type of school and family background, rather than the rarer formal qualifications. Even more to the mobility point, the senior positions tended to be filled by the owners’ offspring who would directly inherit the company as property when their fathers died.¹² The decline of the family firm coincided with an expansion in the supply of education, from which the ‘crown princes’ also benefitted, but on which they did not depend. Rather than describing the expansion of education as a shift towards universalistic values

it would seem more accurate to view it as a new mechanism performing the old function of social reproduction. Social inheritance, whether through the transmission of property or through the transmission of cultural capital, is still social inheritance. (Karabal and Halsey 1977:19)

This view has gained ground over earlier expectations of meritocratic openness, although as Parkin has argued, middle-class strategies of credentialist closure may work against some of the children of the professional middle classes who are less bright

(Parkin 1979:61). But on the whole, the formal education qualifications required 'as professionalisation, bureaucratisation and automation of work proceed' (Little and Westergaard 1964:302) have been more easily obtained by the middle classes.

It is important to note how this educational process occurs alongside, but not at the same rate as, occupational change. The *demand* for 'technically' qualified manpower has increased at the same time that the supply has been increasing. There is, however, no natural 'match' between the supply of highly qualified people and the number of posts that need — ideally — to be filled with highly qualified manpower. With an overall pattern of demand exceeding supply, some posts have to be filled by people lacking formal qualifications. There remain opportunities for non-credentialist mobility, and the association between education and employment is thereby attenuated.

Furthermore, we need to consider how that demand has been constituted. In particular, the shift of employment into large, bureaucratic, and often public sector organisations, and away from small manufacturing companies has created a distinctive demand. The process of occupational transition is not a uniform increase in the proportion of non-manual jobs. Rather, it consists of the creation of certain type of new employment in specific industrial sectors. The broad increase across all sectors between the Wars has been replaced by a growth of employment relatively more concentrated in larger organisations, and in the 'newer' parts of the service sector, such as the welfare state, finance and government agencies. These industries have historically used credentialism as a mechanism for recruitment, so that their expansion has created job opportunities for those with credentials, not least the sons of the middle class. The declining sectors, such as manufacturing, have a smaller work force, and so their traditionally higher rates of upward mobility are now a less significant factor in the total picture (Payne 1987b:122–54).

This view of mobility characterises much of the work in what we have called the fourth cluster of mobility analysis. Here, although an interest in class is not far away, the *explanations* of (class) mobility are being sought in educational and occupational processes. This emphasis on occupational mobility, and hence on labour market process, industrialisation and de-industrialisation is strongly represented in the work of the Scottish Mobility Study. While at one level this approach can be regarded simply as a disaggregation of class processes, the crucial distinction is an interest in mobility in its own right, and the wish to account for its specific forms in an occupational framework. This is clearly shown in such examples as the exploration of short term job changes (Dale *et al.* 1984); the investigation of local labour markets, the careers of clerks, or types of work (Blackburn and Mann 1979; Prandy *et al.* 1982); or

de-industrialisation (Lovatt and Ham 1984). It is also prominent in recent issues of the *BJS*: see for instance the articles by Savage, Green, Bonney, and the debate between Cassis and Chapman, in Volume 39. The same volume also includes an example of an associated area of work which links mobility into the analysis of other, less narrowly class-based, topics, namely Hornsby-Smith and Dale's exploration of the assimilation of Irish immigrants in England (1988). The broader interest is able to draw on a mobility perspective to provide one element in the total picture. Other recent cases are Hutson's account of the farming industry (1987) and Evans's work on language (1987), or the new body of work on women's paid employment (Dex 1987; Chapman 1989).

COMPARATIVE PATTERNS OF MOBILITY

In contrast, much of the comparative analysis of mobility (our fifth and final cluster) has proceeded in a more traditional way. This probably reflects the dominance of American sociology and in particular the development, from Lipset and Zetterberg's work, of the Featherman, Jones and Hauser thesis of underlying cross-national similarity in relative mobility in countries with a market economy and nuclear families. A small number of British sociologists, such as Hope (1982) and Breen (1987) have contributed to the associated debate about modelling the mobility process for cross-national comparisons, but the main strengths of this country's sociology have not lain in statistical analysis. Indeed, without Goldthorpe's efforts in collaboration and through the CASMIN (Comparative Analysis of Social Mobility in Industrial Nations) project at Mannheim, there would be little to show in this, our fifth cluster.

Given what was said earlier about Goldthorpe's preference for relative mobility measures, it will not be surprising to relate that the bulk of the CASMIN output has focused on this approach. Using a recoding of an increasing number of national data sets, the project has identified a commonality, though not a uniformity, of relative mobility rates. Within the range of countries, Britain (or more strictly, England and Wales) falls near the centre of possible outcomes.

Equally, given the preferences of the present author, it will be no surprise if more attention is given here to what CASMIN tells us about *absolute* mobility rates. The occupational distinctiveness of Britain is its low proportion of employment in agriculture, and the high proportion in the industrial manual sector. It follows that the British service class is recruited more from the latter, than is the case in other European countries. Conversely, as a result of our earlier

industrialisation, we have fewer upwardly mobile or manual workers recruited from farming stock. Whereas on these indicators, Britain is top (or bottom) of the 'league', in self-recruitment to the service class and manual class neither England and Wales nor Scotland is distinctive (Goldthorpe *et al.* 1987).

Both absolute and relative mobility measures suggest that there is a core social fluidity, as might be expected from the similarity of industrial structural development identified by convergence theorists, but not a uniformity of occupational or class distributions and processes (see Erikson *et al.* 1979, 1982, 1983; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1987). A longer historical view, using a wider range of smaller studies, has none the less shown more variety in mobility patterns, and a weaker fit between the industrialisation and mobility factors, combined with increasing similarity in the business elite of Britain, America, France, Germany and Sweden (Kaelble 1986). As these four other countries have been identified as displaying characteristic differences in other parts of their mobility regimes, the next step seems to require more detailed and concrete analyses of institutions and processes, much as Müller has recently attempted for educational 'cultures' (1987).

MOVING FORWARD

The comparative analysis of mobility suggests several possibilities for future research in this country. If we are unusual in the size of our manual working class, this not only creates different patterns of mobility flows which are worth studying but also indicates that the process of de-industrialisation requires particular attention. To be more specific, what are the mobility experiences of employees whose industries contract, leaving them geographically and occupationally isolated in a shrinking labour market. Work on former steelworkers has begun to show some of the effects in terms of family life and would-be small businessmen, and the ESRC Economic Life project has also produced some data (see Harris *et al.* 1985). Perhaps it is even now too early to assess the full impact.

Second, if there are distinctive 'credentialist cultures', an examination of how these change over time would seem to be long overdue. The growth of private secondary education in the last decade, the 'flight from the inner city' with its attendant problems of schooling, the new sixth form and Further Education Colleges, the rise in HE applicants from Registrar General's Social Class II, the new qualifications available in HE, the present Government's policy on HE and its obsession with training engineers, and the major new role of the Polytechnics in educating half of our graduates, all cry out for both systematic and contemporary analysis. The supply side of

qualified manpower has not only changed since the national studies of the early 1970s, but continues to change. How it relates to the changing demand side is actually becoming more opaque as both factors move independently.

A special case within this area is the position of young people. Youth unemployment, youth training programmes of various kinds, and a changing labour market have set up new conditions for early life experience of mobility. Again, it may be too early to see if this represents a 'blip' on the normal pattern of class reproduction, or a significant new development: certainly it is only recently that we have been able to see some results from the sociological studies of youth that investigated changes at this end of the market.

Mobility studies have had little to say about early work life experience: following census coding conventions, the tradition has been to ignore 'temporary' jobs before the first 'real job', and to treat apprenticeships as functionally equivalent to skilled manual work. However, the young man who did a year as a butcher's delivery boy before going into the shipyard to serve his time as a turner and setter (to take a characteristic male example from a previous generation) in fact went through two stages of status change by the age of 21; from casual unskilled boy to apprentice, and from dogsbody trainee to skilled man — provided of course he was not laid off as soon as he qualified for a skilled man's wage, when he experienced downward mobility. If mobility *is* about class *behaviour*, a whole area of experience has been virtually ignored.

The same is true at the other end of the life-cycle. Retirement is not only a traumatic status passage, but one which changes patterns of association, calls for re-assessment of self-identity, and causes financial dislocation. The tradition of treating old people as having the class of their former occupation makes a nonsense of understanding the mobility experiences that go on after the age of 64, the age at which the major studies conveniently cut off. Of course, if mobility is treated narrowly as class mobility, as signified by position of a full-time paid job, then the elderly are defined out. This seems doubly unsatisfactory when the retired are already 30 per cent of the population, and will increasingly have a longer life.

This slightly embarrassing intrusion of demography also brings us again to the problem of supply and demand. *Some* of the problems of youth employment in the 1980s was due to the steady rise in numbers of school leavers coming onto the labour market. Equally, *some* of the fall in the numbers of unemployed people is due to the sharp decline in these numbers. Major employers, such as the Army, the banks, and the Health Service are either talking about changing, or have already changed, their recruitment policies, to access different groups or to secure their earlier position against new rivals. These changes come on top of the extensive changes to industrial

and commercial operations based on new technology, which again have only been partially researched from a mobility perspective.

While total mobility goes beyond initial job entry, later outcomes are associated with entry points, and both are — or rather, in our sociology, should be — related to the real life events that shape employment experiences. On the one hand, there is slump, war, long-term unemployment, and the birth of a new underclass as we have belatedly come to recognise (Payne 1987a; Goldthorpe and Payne 1986a). On the other is the new economy of the south-east, the generation which is inheriting domestic property as the norm, the shift to self-employment, and the 'new' establishment (*Observer* 1989). Where is the serious sociology of the Yuppie (do we remember what it stands for)? It is missing precisely because mobility studies have failed to recognise that mobility is not just about movement across jobs, but also, *inter alia*, movements between levels of wealth and income. When a former Conservative Cabinet Minister can call his autobiography *Upwardly Mobile*, surely the time has come to recapture mobility, not just from the politicians, but from the intellectual ghetto of a narrow class orientation. We shall only achieve the goals set for us by those who have sought to understand class processes, by first expanding our understanding of the full complexity of the concept of mobility, and then by analysing our own society and lives to see precisely how this complexity is manifested and remanifested in contemporary Britain.

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NOTES

1. For examples, see respectively Goldthorpe and Payne (1986a); the work of the Stratification and Employment Group at Surrey University, such as Gilbert (1986); Martin and Roberts (1984) and Dex (1987); Abbott and Sapsford (1987); Marshall *et al.* (1988) and Steward, Prandy and Blackburn (1980). This is by no means an exclusive list, but it is not the intention of this article to present an annotated bibliography. The author knows of no current listing, but has found Mack *et al.* (1957), Bibby (1975) and Kaelbe (1981) useful on the older material. If, because of the particular arguments in this article, any fellow mobility analysts are not named,

I hope they will accept my apologies for the omission of their contributions.

2. This brief count covered articles in the two major British journals during 1987 and 1988. Caution should be taken about such small samples: the count for a single 'journal-year' ranged from one to nine in the two successive years. Several of the contributors were not permanently based in Britain, and not all the articles dealt exclusively with British society.

3. Despite the contributions of Benjamin (1958) and Noble (1972), or Runciman (1966) and Richardson (1977), other writers from text books to monographs draw on Glass: see Worsley *et al.* (1977), Giddens (1973), and for a

longer account, Payne (1987a).

4. This article can only select a few results from the several books and many papers which have resulted from the mainstream studies. In making that selection, the intention has been to simplify the issues and make them accessible to the sociologist whose main interest does not lie in this field. Heath's *Social Mobility*, although now a little out of date, is a useful primer to the Nuffield Study.

5. It follows that the account of mobility as presented in the previous section would very probably not be the way in which John Goldthorpe would prefer to present it.

6. Others who have written on class, or reported the debate in general discussion, include Bilton, Frankel, Kelsall, Marshall, Musgrove, Raynor, Swift and Worsley.

7. Although the criticism is largely true, it is in part misplaced. Glass did in fact collect female data, but this was not analysed. We have already noted the gap in research in the 1950s and 60s which applies to men and women. One contribution in this period was the Labour Mobility study by Harris and Clausen (1967) which did include women. While the Nuffield Study did not, the Irish Study did (see for example Hayes (1987) and the Scottish Study interviewed wives of the male respondents.

8. A case in point which relies less on the structural and more on the processual is the Polish work of Mach and Wesolowski, recently translated into English, and which draws heavily on aspects of work by British writers such as Parkin and Giddens.

9. Giddens's model of three main

classes is largely dependent on the assumption that educational qualifications are broadly stratified into three levels, and that mobility patterns also reflect this division. The latter owes a great deal to his use of the Glass data, with its apparent absence of long-range mobility (see Giddens, 181–6). A similar dependence on the 1949 study can be found Parkin (1979).

10. School-centred sociologists tended to ignore 'on the job training'. Apprenticeship, for example, was an educational experience for well over one third of men (at one stage, 45% of male Scottish school leavers took apprenticeship), but which has largely been ignored both as a mobility generator, and as a mobility experience.

11. As noted earlier, mobility has several interfaces with other subject areas, where the exact boundaries are somewhat blurred. It is precisely at these boundaries that some of the most fruitful work can develop, and it is unimportant whether we label the current discussion 'mobility', or gender, or race, or education.

12. Even in the more recent studies, owners of small businesses and farmers were found still to have distinctively high rates of recruitment from fathers of the same occupation. In the Scottish Mobility Study, two thirds of farmers and one third of business men were self-recruited in this way, compared with a rate of 5% self recruitment in the rest of occupations with similar Hope-Goldthorpe scale scores. This is all the more striking as the survey showed less than half as many job opportunities for sons in farming and businesses as found among the fathers' generation.

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