Career and Identity: The role of teenage aspirations

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Outline

- Evidence from 3 UK age cohorts (quantitative and qualitative)
- Teenage aspirations as motor and compass
- Predicting career outcomes
- Changing aspirations
- Living the dream?
- Discussion of career and identity

Teenage aspirations

- Adolescence critical phase
- Decisions about future
  - Life planning
  - direction for future transitions
  - Investments
- Long term consequences
  - Influencing consequent behaviour

Differences in life planning

- Life course as personal construction
- Selective processes
- Interests and goals
- Role expectations and demands

Aspirations in social context

- Family background
- School context
- Changing labour markets and opportunities

Research Questions

- Have career aspirations changed across the three age cohorts?

- Do aspirations predict adult attainment?

- Do career aspirations define a more general outlook to life?

Aspiration and Attainment

- Attainment gap
  - Role of gender
  - Role of social class
- Developmental regulation (Baltes, 1987): Selection, optimisation, compromise
- Self esteem as the ratio of success to aspirations
  (William James, 1890)

Lives in Context
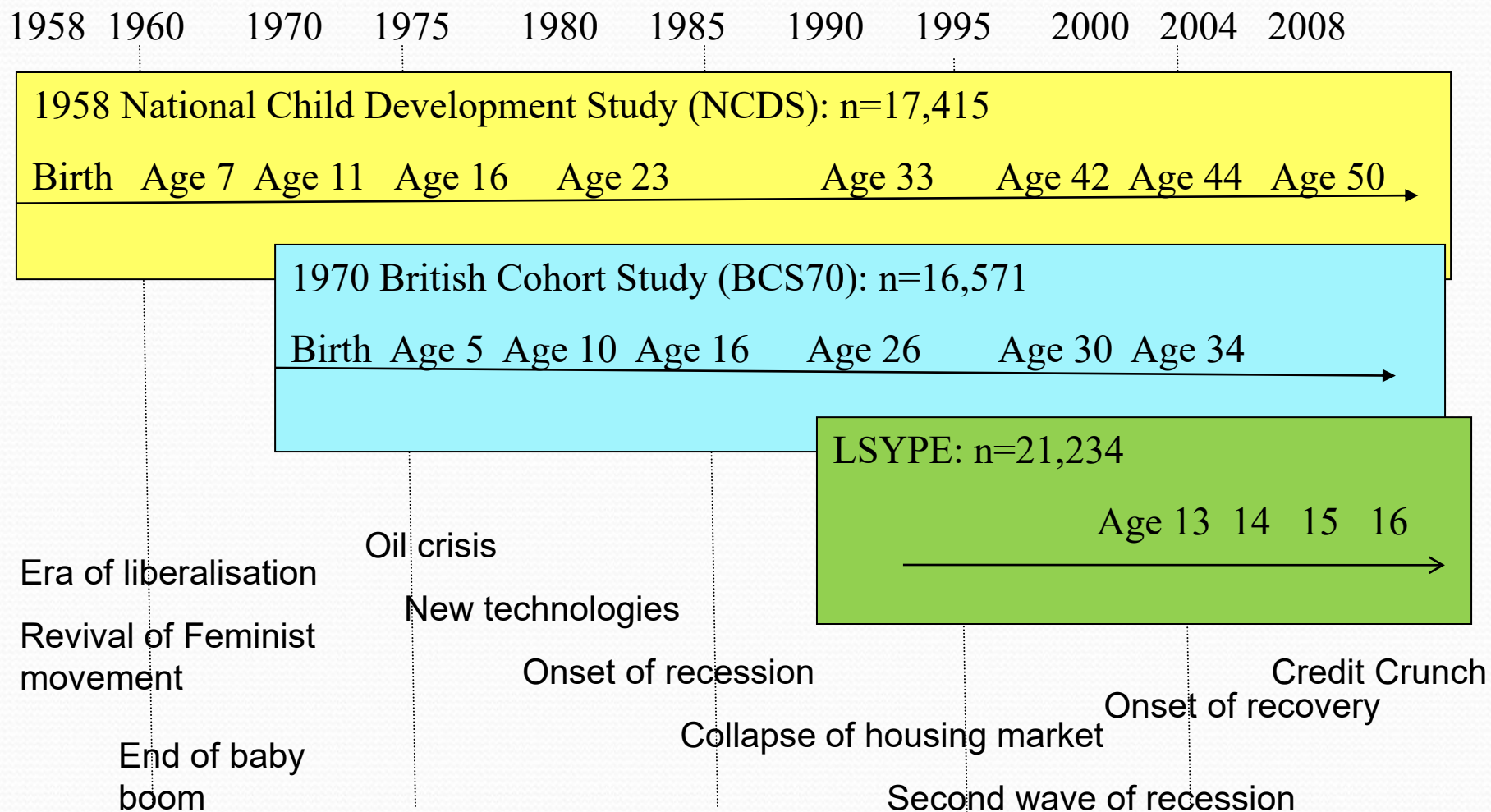
Three British Age Cohorts:

- From 'Golden Age' to 'Crisis Decades'
- Changing labour market
- Expansion of the education system
- Increasing participation of women in the labour market

→ how does social context influence aspirations and subsequent developmental transitions?
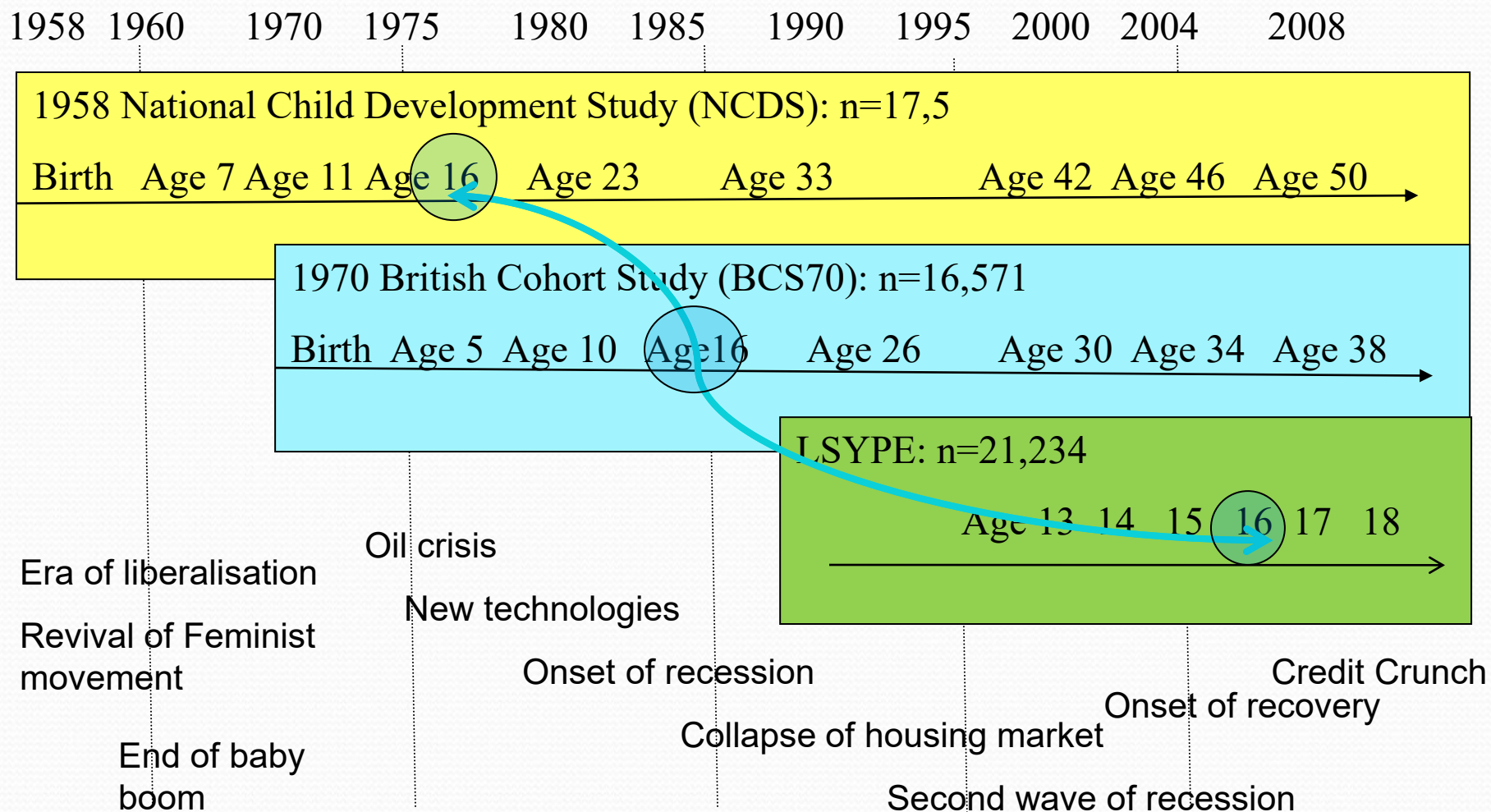
Two National British Birth Cohorts
Age of Cohort Members by Historical Events

1958 1960 1970 1975 1980 1985 1990 1995 2000 2004 2008

1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS): n=17,415

Birth Age 7 Age 11 Age 16 Age 23 Age 33 Age 42 Age 44 Age 50

1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70): n=16,571

Birth Age 5 Age 10 Age 16 Age 26 Age 30 Age 34

LSYPE: n=21,234

Age 13 14 15 16

Oil crisis

Era of liberalisation

New technologies

Revival of Feminist movement

Onset of recession

Credit Crunch
Onset of recovery

Collapse of housing market
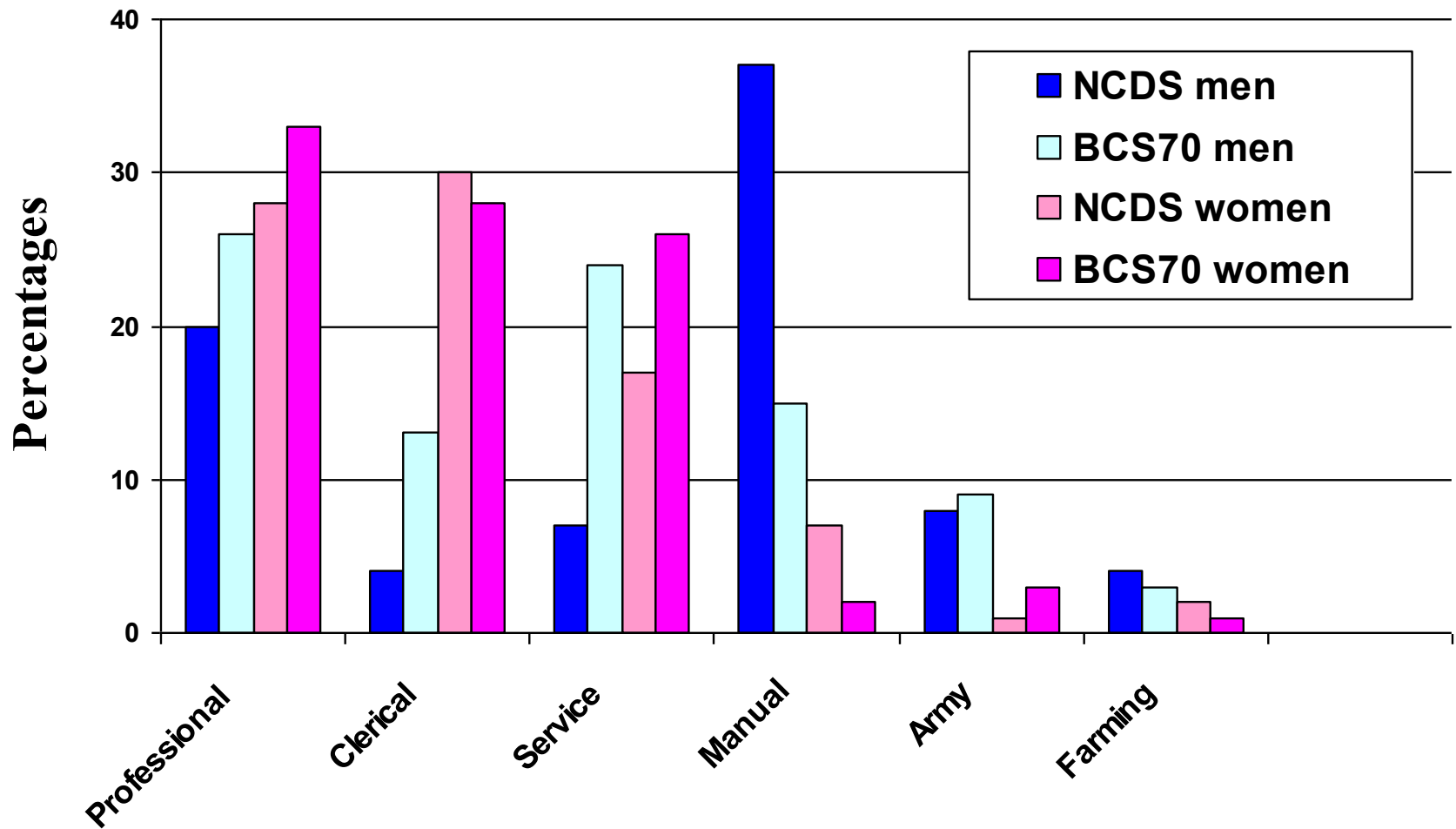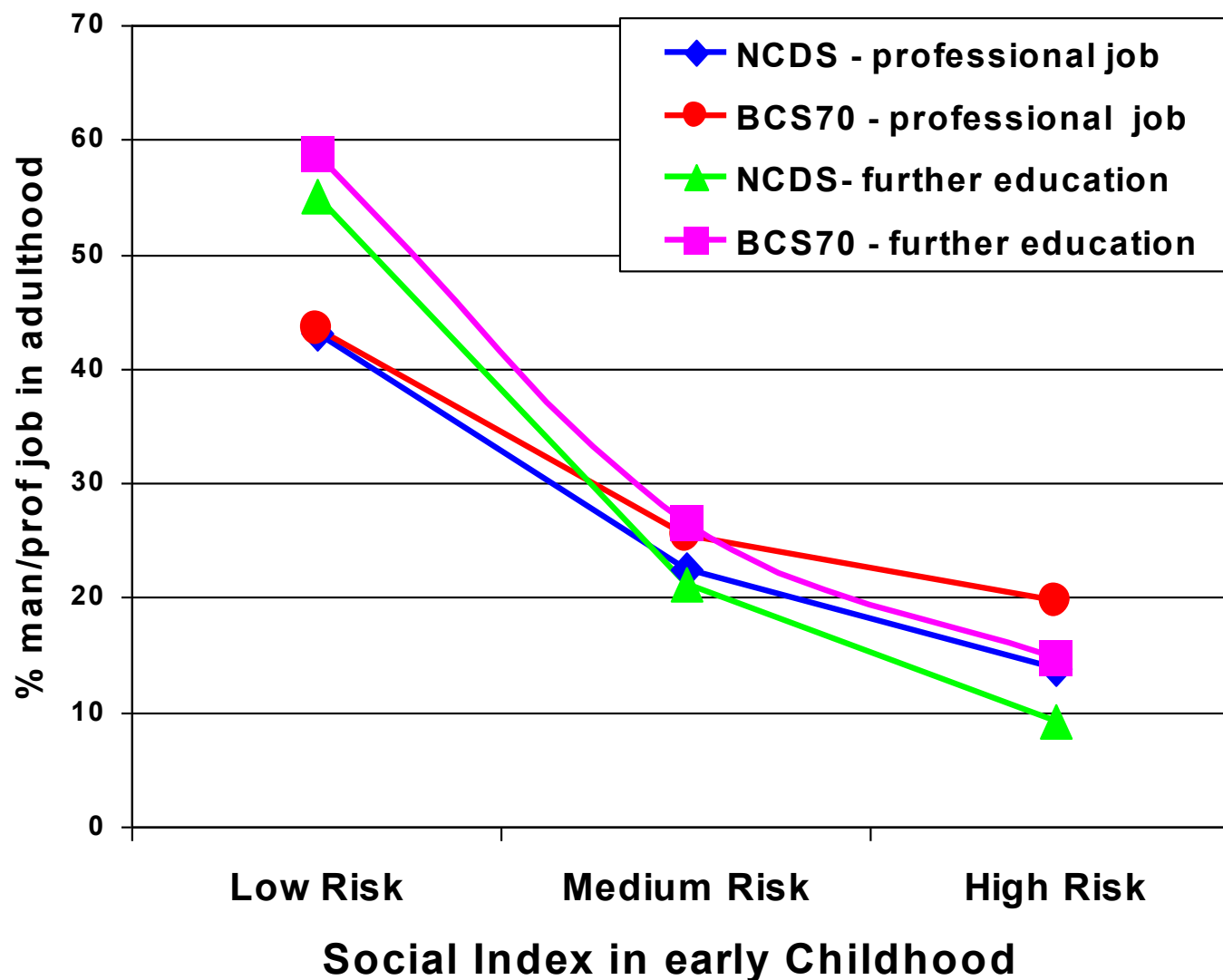
End of baby boom

Second wave of recession

Changes in teenage career aspirations

Teenage Occupational Aspirations in NCDS and BCS70

Schoon, 2006

The Aspiration Gradient:
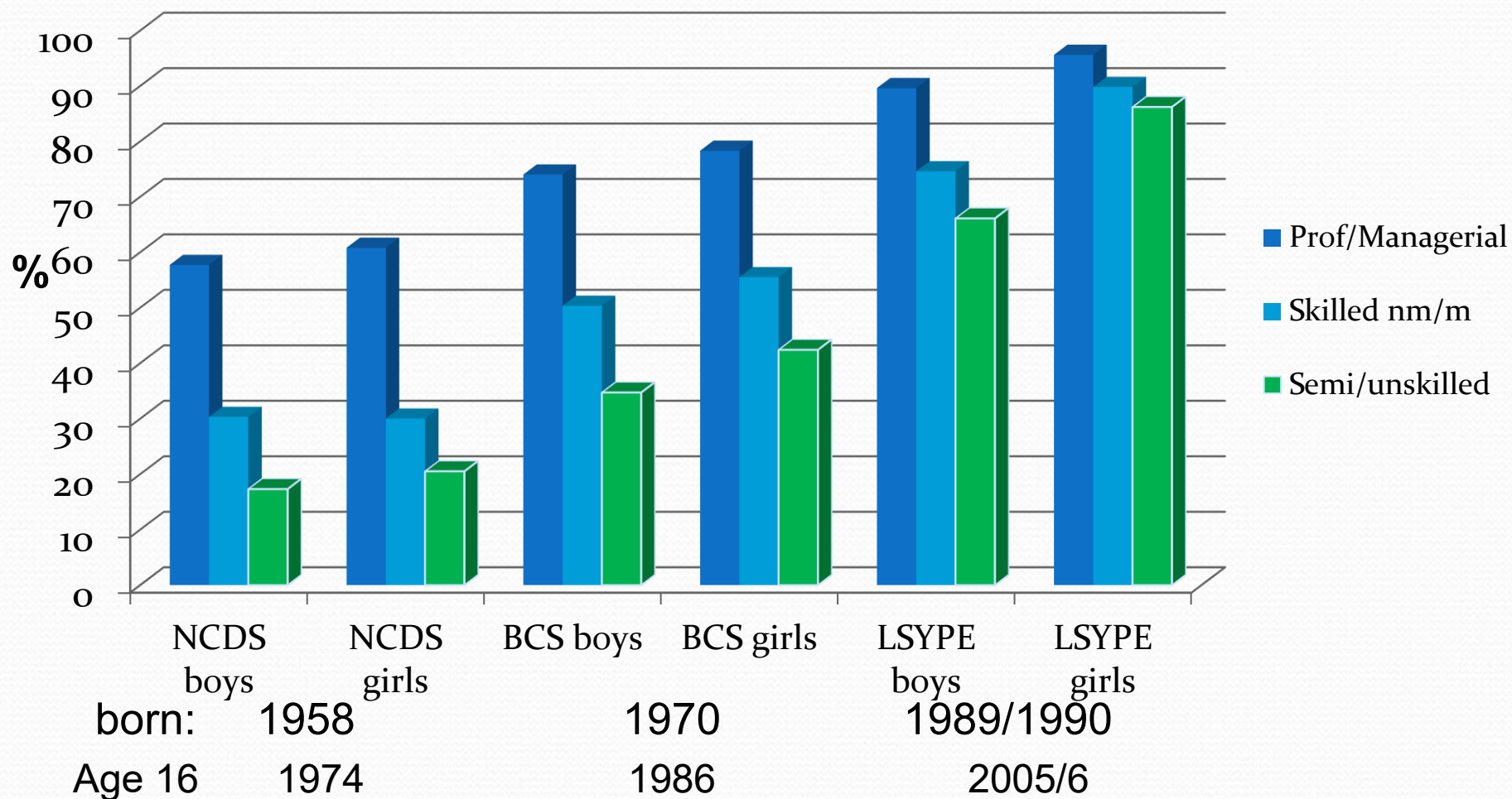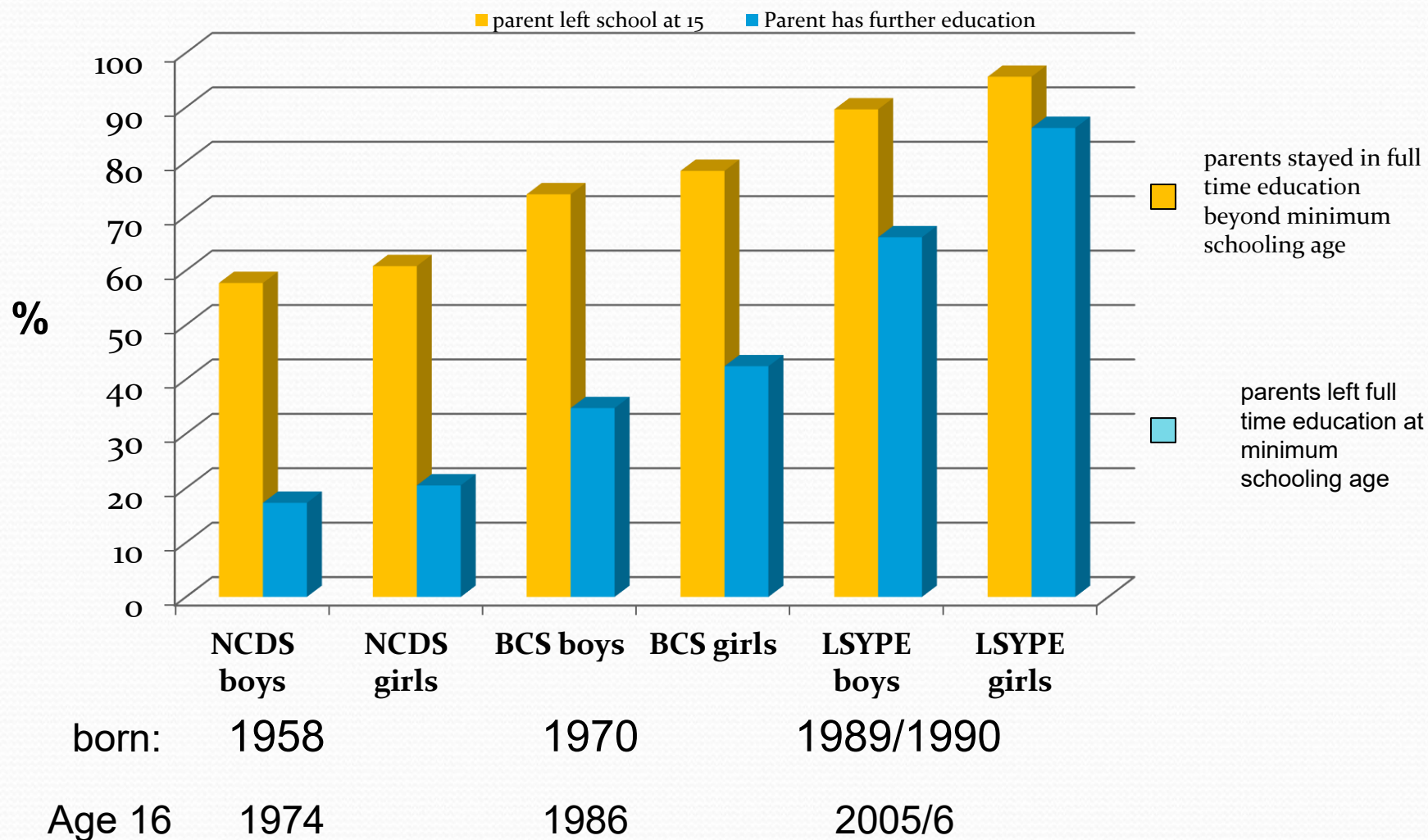Teenage aspirations by early social risk

Education aspirations

Social Gradient in Teenage Education Expectation:

Expectations to continue in further education by gender and social class in 3 age cohorts

Parental Expectations that a child will continue full time education after age 16 by gender and parental education.

Legend: ■ parent left school at 15 ■ Parent has further education

■ parents stayed in full time education beyond minimum schooling age

■ parents left full time education at minimum schooling age

%

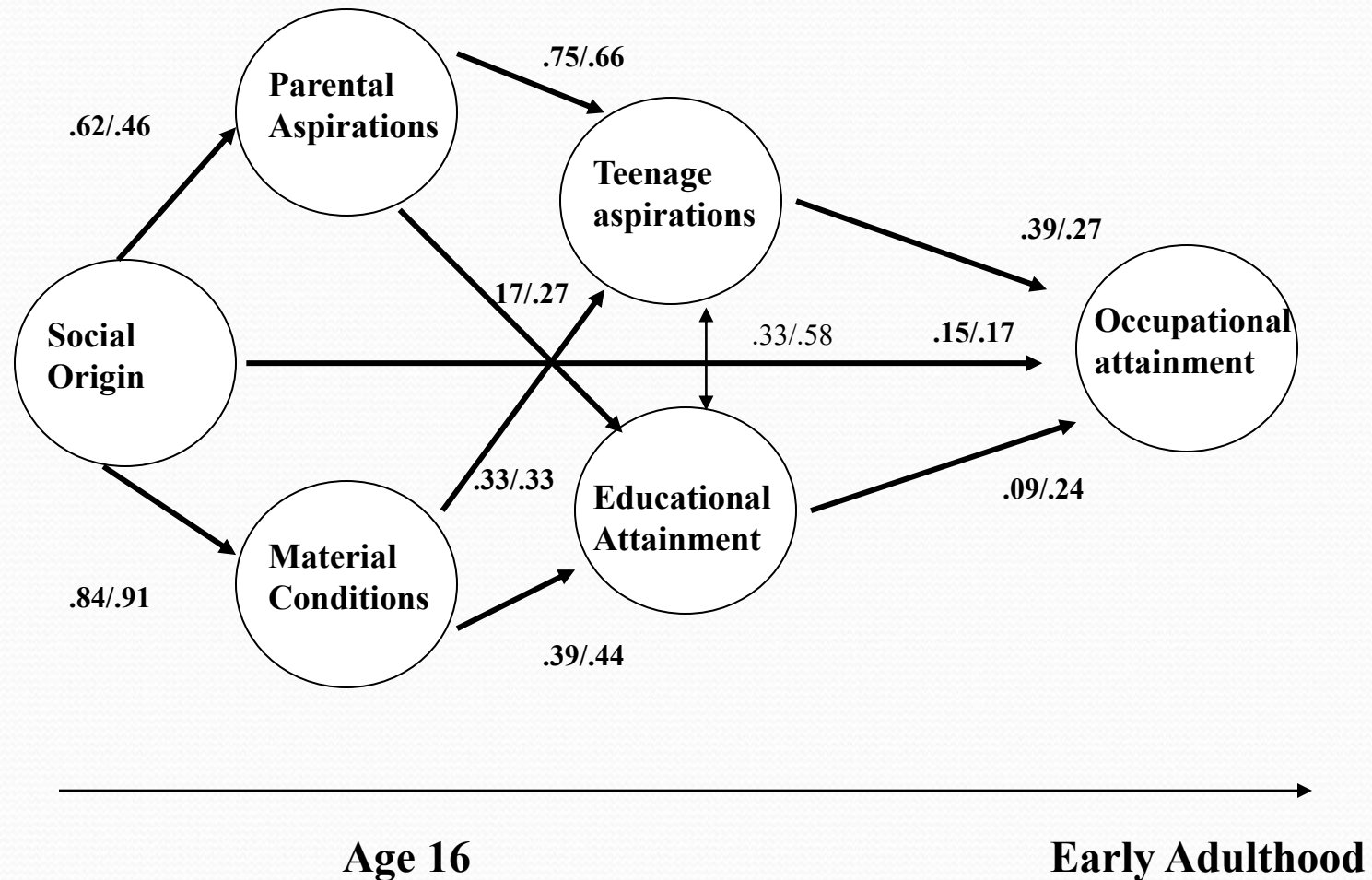|	NCDS boys	NCDS girls	BCS boys	BCS girls	LSYPE boys	LSYPE girls
born:	1958		1970		1989/1990	
Age 16	1974		1986		2005/6	

Conclusion 1

- Later born cohort has become more ambitious in their occupational and educational aspirations
- Girls are more ambitious than boys – and are supported in their strivings by their parents
- Changes in occupational preferences may reflect changes in labour market opportunities
- Changes in educational aspirations may reflect a new norm
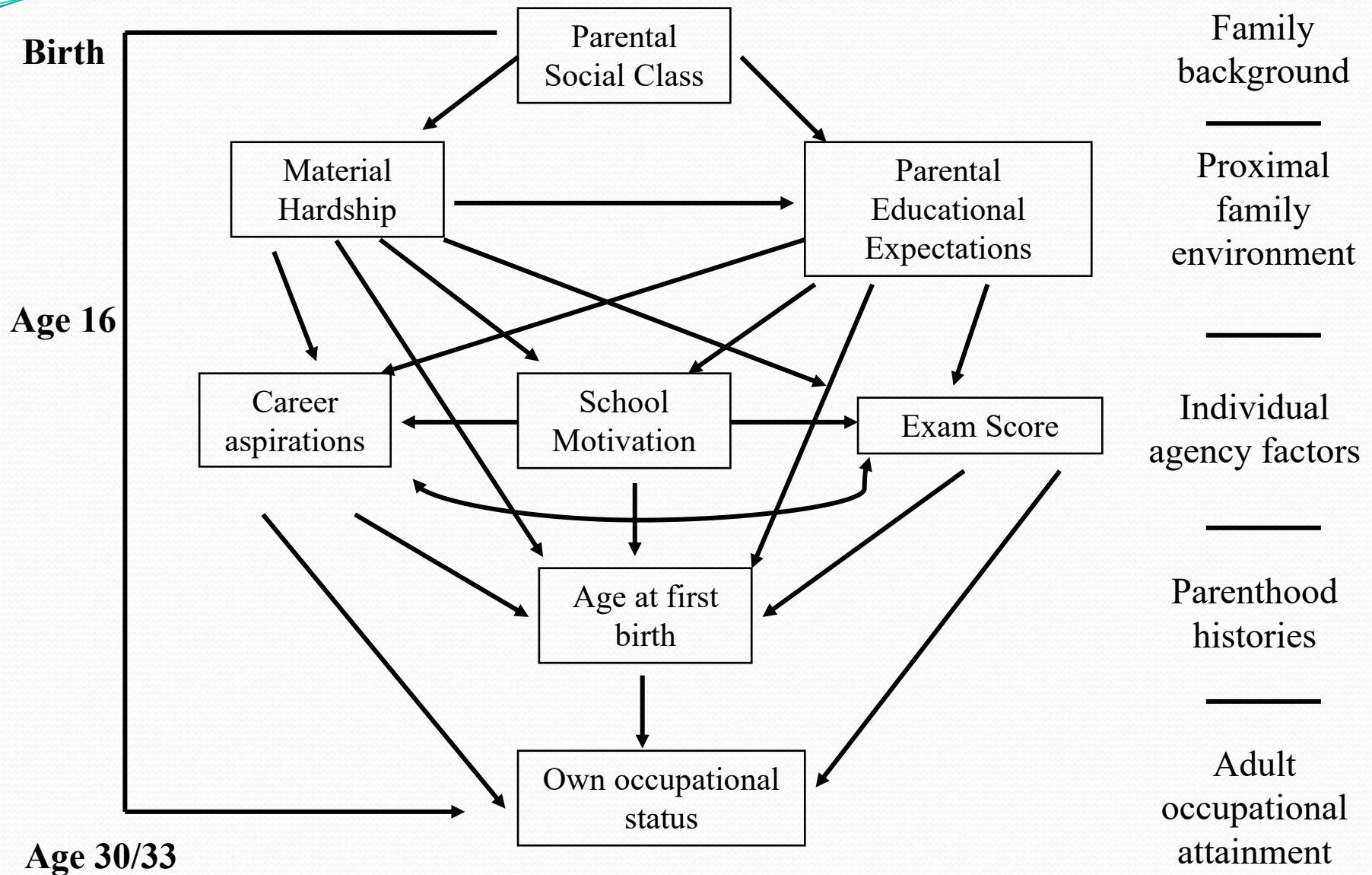- Persisting influence of structural forces

Long-Term Consequences of Teenage Career Aspirations

A Developmental-Contextual Systems Model of Career Development: The role of family environment (NCDS/BCS70)
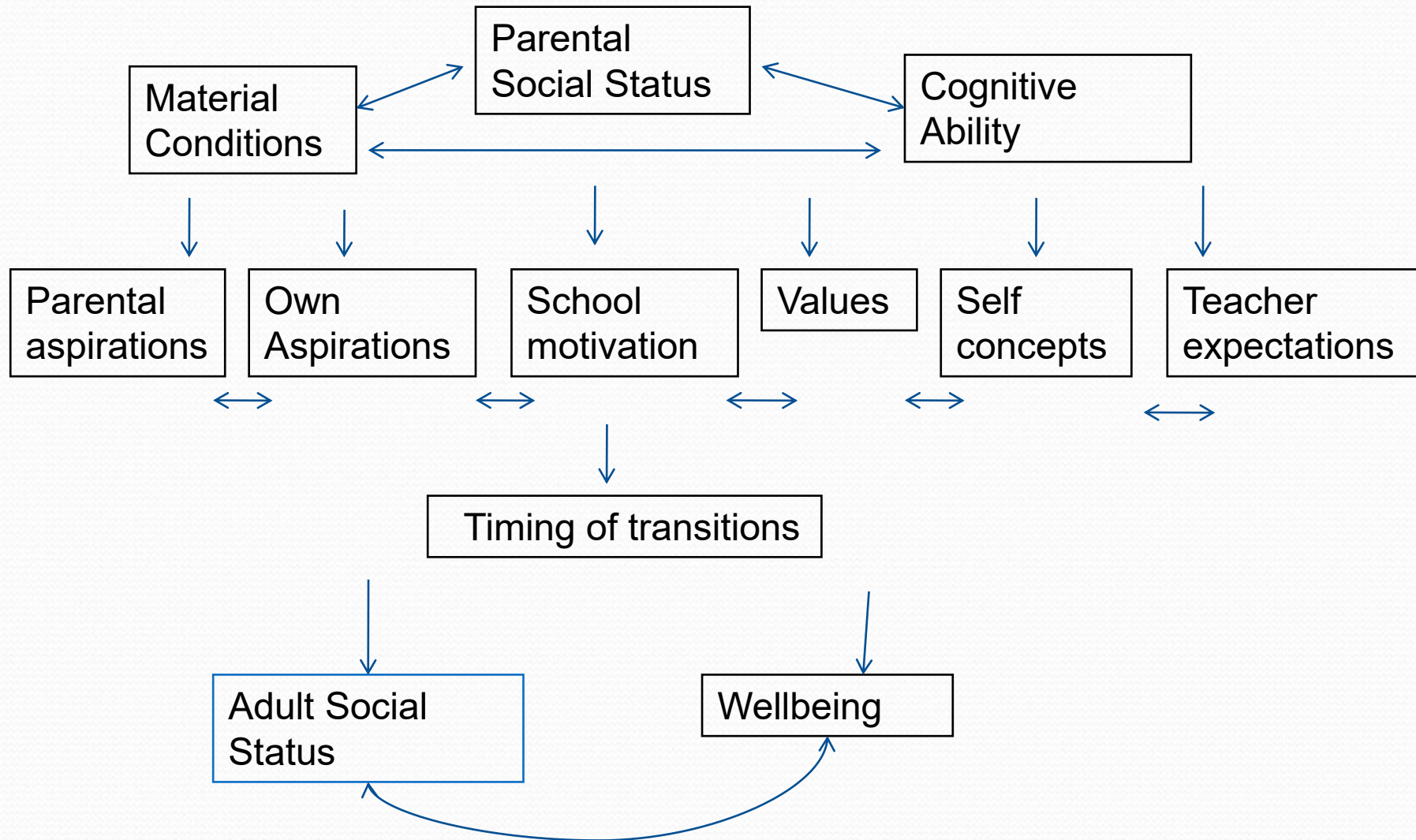

Schoon & Parsons, 2002

Developmental-Contextual Model of Career Development

Birth

Age 16

Age 30/33

Parental Social Class

Material Hardship

Parental Educational Expectations

Career aspirations

School Motivation

Exam Score

Age at first birth

Own occupational status

Family background

Proximal family environment

Individual agency factors

Parenthood histories

Adult occupational attainment

Schoon, Martin, Ross (2007), JVB

Career Development: Multiple Influences over time

Conclusion 2:
## Aspirations within a Life Course Perspective

- Career aspirations are shaped through early influences and experiences
- Are associated with wider values and preferences
- Play a crucial role in shaping future transitions
- Are significant predictors of adult attainment
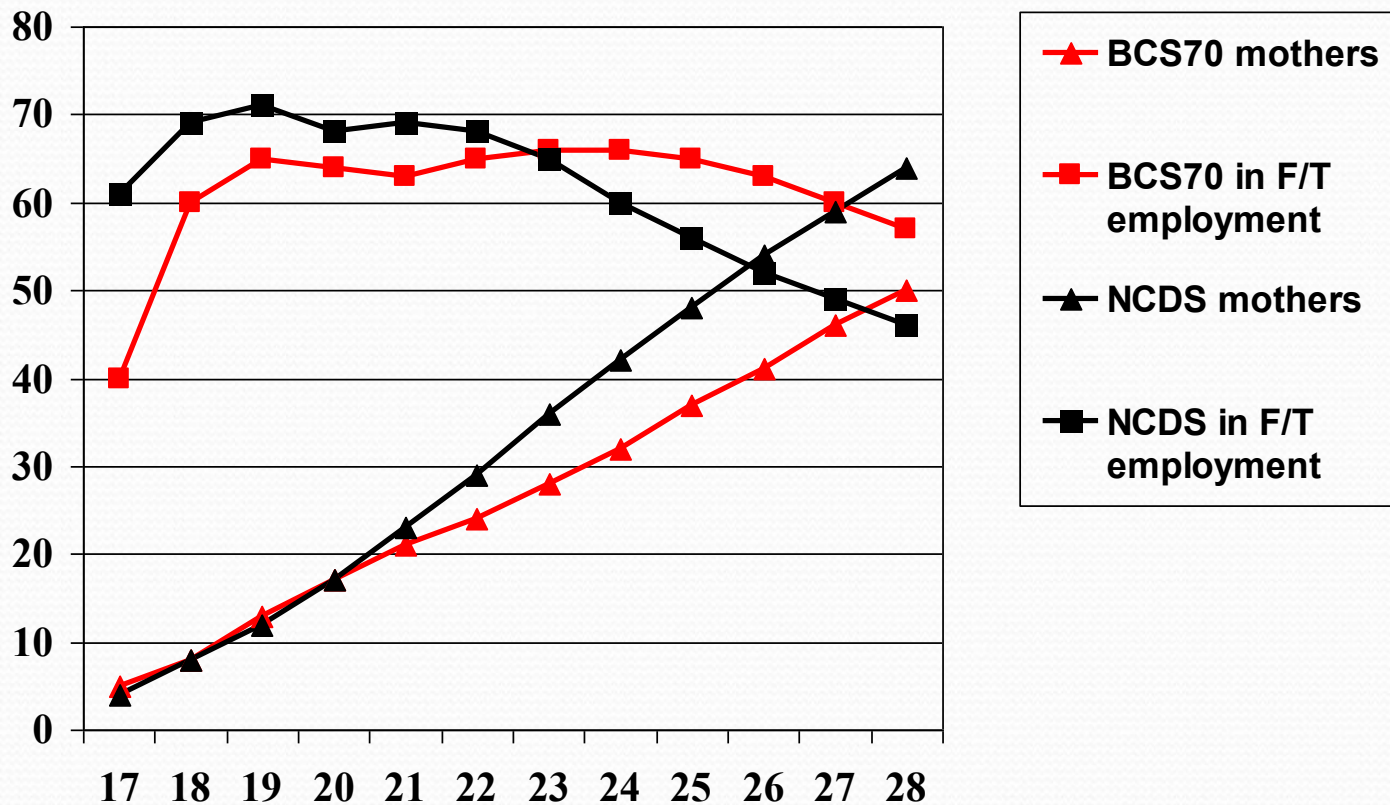
Challenges

- Multiple interlinked transitions:
  - Completing full time education
  - Move into employment
  - Independent living
  - Committed relationship
  - Parenthood

Employment & Parenthood (Men only)
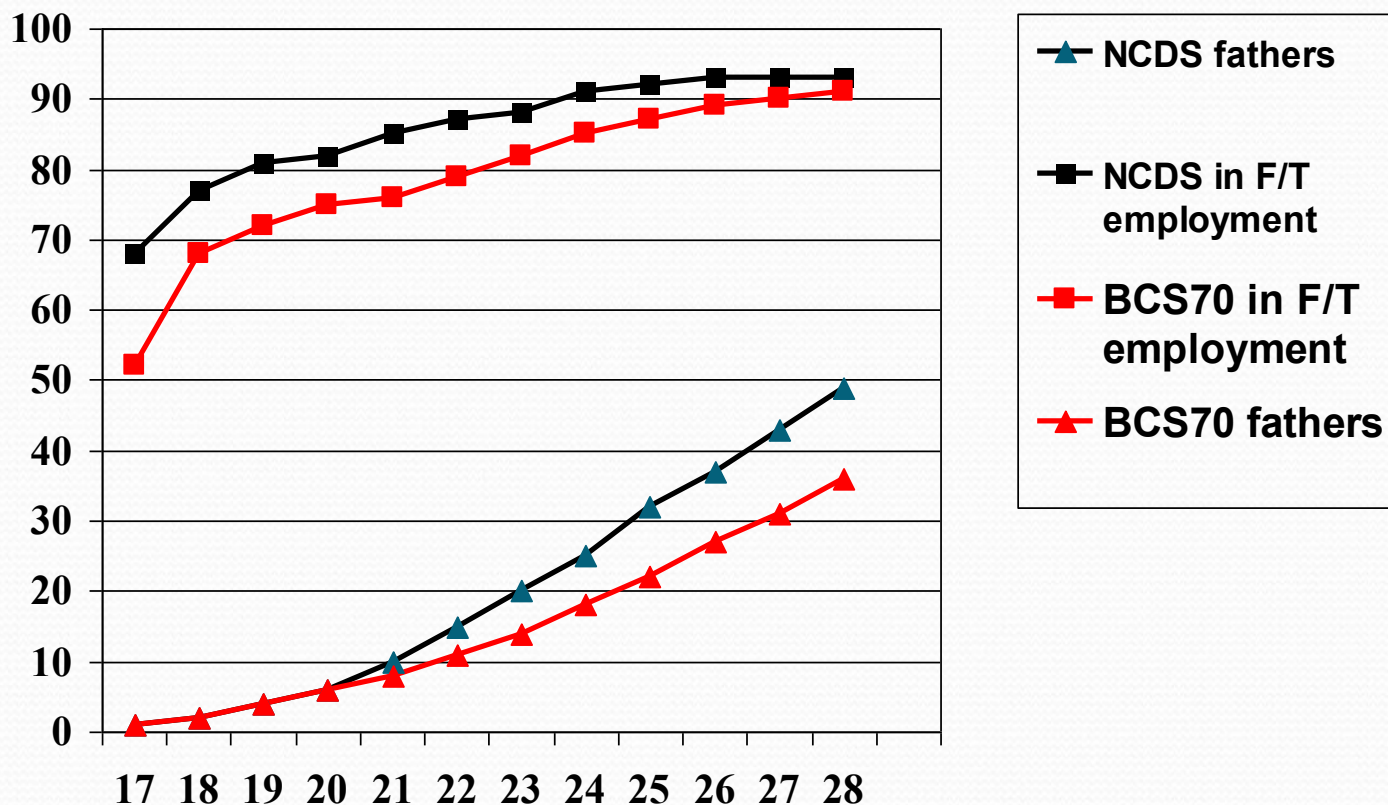
Employment & Parenthood (Women only)

Schoon, 2010

Status Biographies

Combination of multiple transition outcomes within an individual

Transition outcomes at age 30/33: Combination of roles

- Employment (full-time, part-time, home carers, other [including unemployed]
- Parenthood (no child, 1-2 children, 3+ children)
- Partnership status (single, cohabiting, married)
- Housing (lives with parents, owner occupier, renting)
- Highest Qualifications

Latent Class Analysis

- Latent Class Analysis (LCA) will be used as a method for grouping individuals by their different combinations of adult roles

- LCA can be regarded as the categorical counterpart of factor analysis for continuous variables

- The aim of LCA is to find the smallest number of latent classes that can describe the associations among a set of observed categorical variables

- Requires neither multivariate normality nor the assumption of continuity of measurement

MIMIC-LCA Model of Biographical Agency

Ross, Schoon, Martin & Sacker, 2009
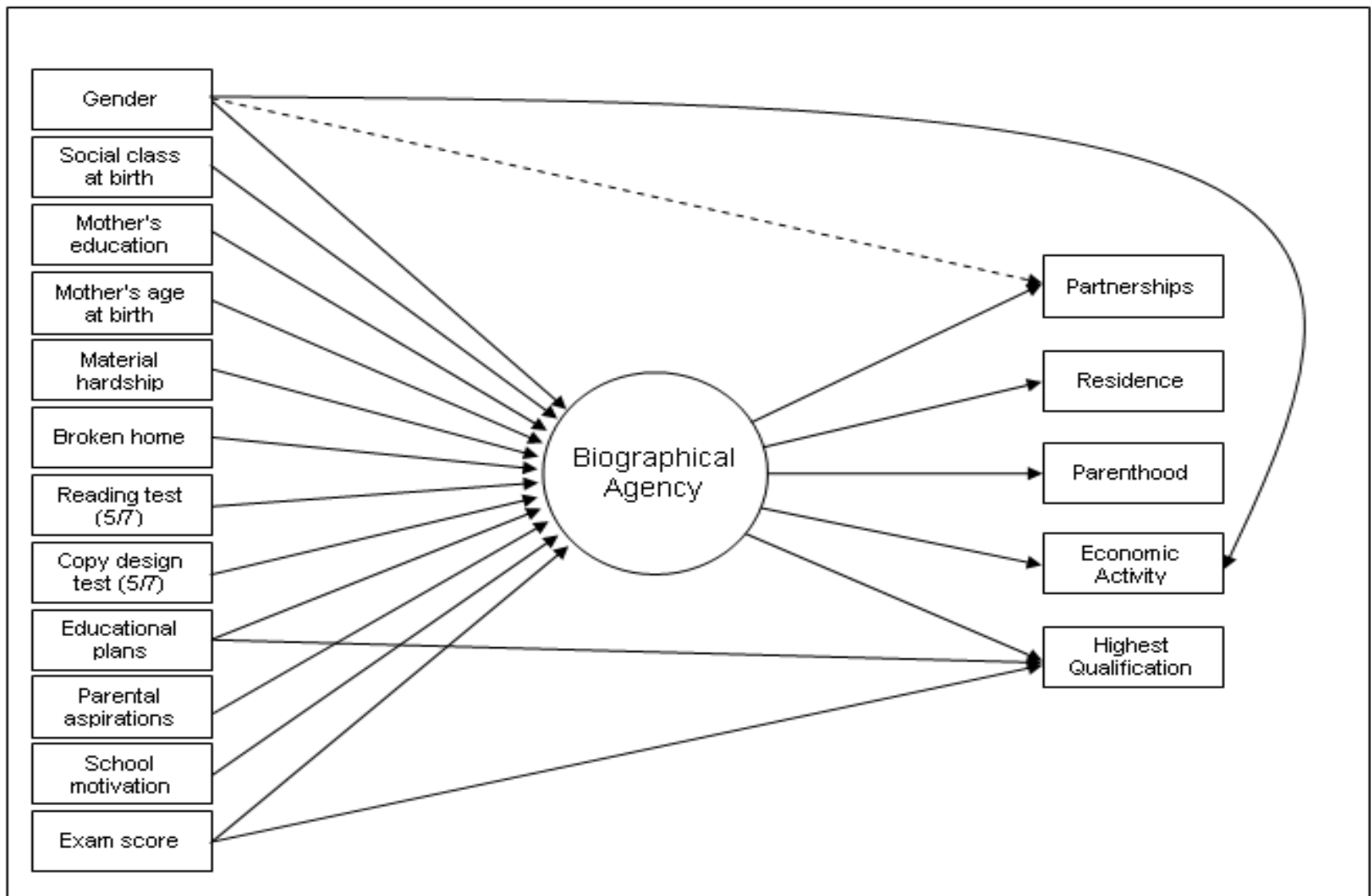
Pathways into Adulthood

Status combinations of cohort members in their early 30's	NCDS %	BCS70 %
Traditional Families: typically married, own home, 1 or 2 children	52	32
Career no Children: typically in full-time employment, high qualifications, no children, own home	22	37
Disadvantaged Families: least educated, larger families, living in rented accommodation, more women	18	14
Singles: typically single, mostly male, no children, living either in parental home or in rented accommodation, full-time work or out of the labour force	7	17

Antecedents predicting class membership

|	Traditional Families	Career no kids	Precarious Families	Singles
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age of mother		Older	Younger	Older
Material hardship	Less hardship	Less	More	*more*
Family stability	Stable		Less stable	
School motivation	High		Low	Low
School attainment	*low*	High	Low	Low
Own ed.aspirations	*low*	High	Low	*High*
Parental aspirations	*low*	High	*low*	*high*

Role combinations
and subjective well-being
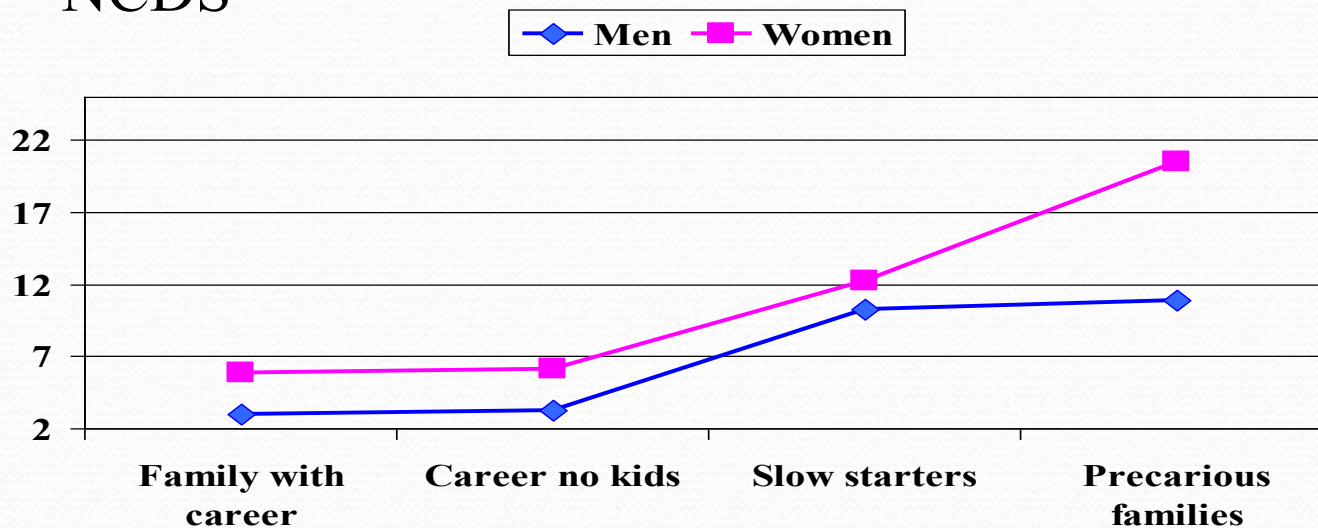
Subjective Well-being among LC's

Life Satisfaction - NCDS
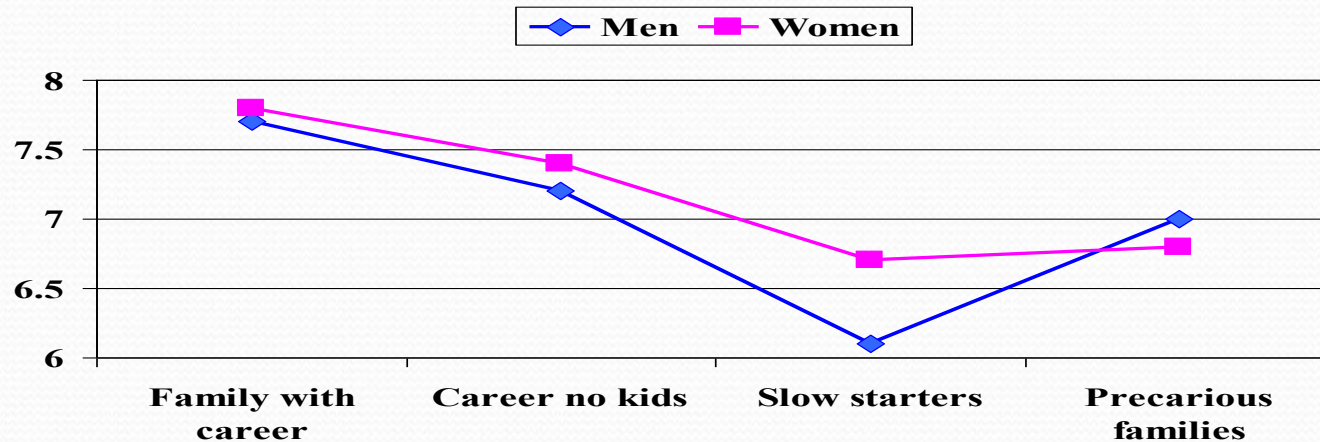
Life Satisfaction – BCS70

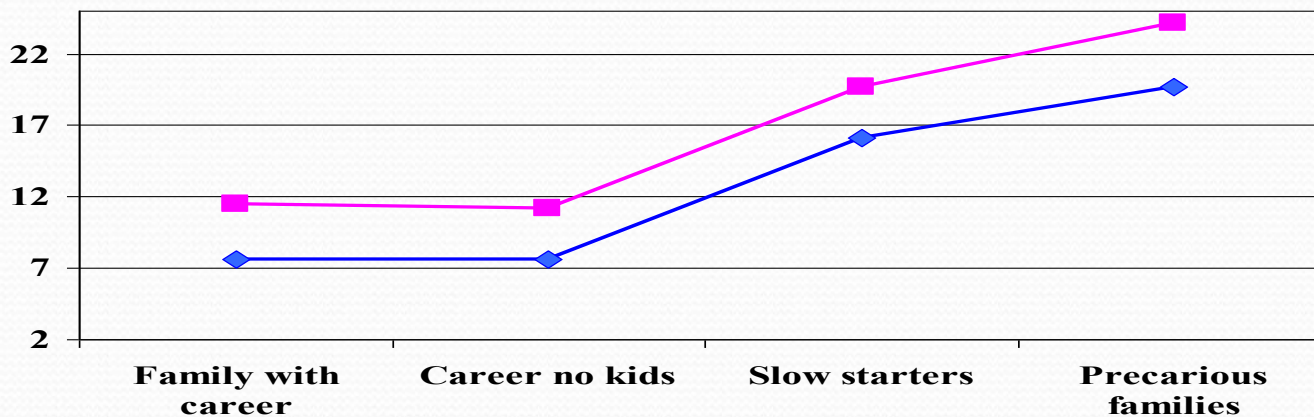Schoon et al, 2009
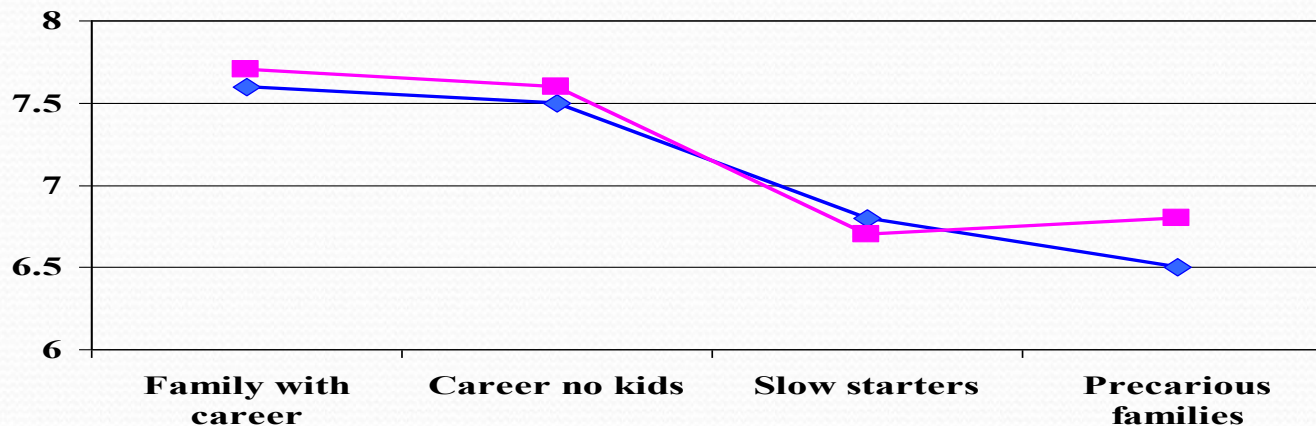
Psychological Distress among LC's

NCDS

Schoon et al. 2009

Summary

- Transitions have to be understood in context
- Young people do not necessarily follow a standard route in their transition to adulthood
- Polarisation into fast versus slow transitions
- Persisting social and gender inequalities determine pathways and transition strategies
- Variations between as well as within social groups

Conclusion 3:

- There is more than one way into adulthood
- Need to reconsider definitions of adaptive or successful transitions
- There are differences within fast- and slow track transitions:
  - Early assumption of adult roles not necessarily associated with negative outcomes, neither is an extended moratorium necessarily associated with greater life satisfaction or well-being
- Focus on changes, turning points, and diversity

Aspirations and Attainment

- Beyond career and income:

- Need for a more in-depth understanding of how individual lives are lived

- Using interviews with NCDS cohort members at age 50 (19 in-depth interviews in 2008)

- Thematic analysis: Subjective perceptions of the role of early career aspirations in shaping adult identity

Living the dream

- Great variation in pathways through life
- Nearly everyone of the 19 interviewees fulfilled (or exceeded) their teenage aspirations and values in some way or another:
  - aspire professional/manual → professional/manual
  - aspire exact profession → exact profession
  - aspire career value → job reflects this value
  - aspire family first → prioritised family not job

Living the dream

- "we've achieved everything we want to do. We're happy with--, we're not people that like to be flamboyant and go here, there and everywhere. Simple things please us--, we work hard and what we get we put back in to our family. No, I don't think there's anything that I can honestly say I would change or do differently or--, I think I've had really--, I've had a very good life and continue to see it being good."
- Natalie (wanted to do clerical worker and did become clerical worker)

Living the dream

- "… this secretarial course … has been a brilliant background for all my jobs. I worked at a little village store when I was at {PLACE1}, and actually when I left it--, because we moved once my mum had died to {PLACE2} but I kept my job up 'cause I loved it so much, so I trundled up to {PLACE1} to work [laughs] at the little village store. And it was actually through somebody there that I got my very first job at--, oh what was it--, insurance company, I worked in the car insurance department."

- Liz (wanted clerical job and did do clerical work)

Slight diversions

- And so at the point I was like, you know--, I had a place at Guildhall to do music and so my whole world was shattered. And then I really flunked my other A-Levels as well, so I worked for a year and then when I was sort of like--, I went back to Sixth Form, I thought no I'm not going to--, you know, I want to do something else, so I'm going to Sixth Form, and I was trying to think of what else I could do alongside music, 'cause by this point I'd managed to pass the bit so I thought what else could I do, and I was interested in art so I thought oh I'll give it go, and from there I got really interested, then I did an Art Foundation and everything sort of went from there really.

Having a job versus having a career

- I mean I suppose I tend to think of a career as more vocational, like a teacher or a nurse or a doctor or a lawyer. My jobs have just been jobs to me to be honest, and again I think in most cases I've stayed because of the people rather than the job (aspire clerical → clerical)

- I've never been striving for a career, I've always been happy to have a job. I've never wanted to keep going onwards and upwards (aspire clerical office → receptionist)

- In my mind I would think a career is something where you're constantly striving to do better, get a better job with more money

Career as identity …

- It (job) gave me a very strong sense of identity. I was teaching, well teaching in a college and making things. I was happy with what I did and managed just to make enough to live on. And, you know, I was--, yes, very happy and satisfied with work for a long time (aspire art → art teacher now catering related job)

- Possibly because I've stayed a nurse, that's had quite an impact on, on how I see the world and the bad things in it, you know, the way people behave towards each other. Working in an intensive care unit you get to see that day in and day out, man's inhumanity to man and what they do to each other to end up in the intensive care units

Importance of work changes over time

- I had the career that I wanted to have and was happy to let family life take over without any regrets. If I was younger I would get--, I would've been striving to do both and I don't think- and I couldn't have done both (aspire nurse/professional → nurse but now educational assistant)

- A lot of people would probably say, "Cor, someone in your position you're--, you've got to be a bit like that", it depends what you're after in life, doesn't it, to some extent? I've got a good job, good income and yet I'm jealous of people that are earning a tenth of what I've got that are happily married with two kids, you know, or a--, I haven't got that side of life (aspire banking/professional job → accountant/professional)

Summary

- Career path complex and constantly evolving
- Multiple possible pathways
- Aspirations as compass: the role of life planning (Clausen, 2001)
- Certainty more important than level of aspirations
- Selection, optimisation, compromise (Baltes, 1987)
- Need to assess relevance of aspirations (their subjective value within wider context of the self: Eccles, 1993)

Conclusion

- New perspective in life course studies:
  - Focus on multiple, interlocking pathways
  - Heterogeneity in transition experiences between as well as within subgroups
  - Understand diversity on an individual level

Thank You

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