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Doing gender through imagined gendered futures? Using a mixed methods approach to the analysis of essays written by members of the 1958 British Birth Cohort at Age 11

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CLS is an ESRC Resource Centre based at the Institute of Education

Aims of the presentation

Present findings from a project to analyse a subset of essays written by 1958 cohort members at age 11 in 1969

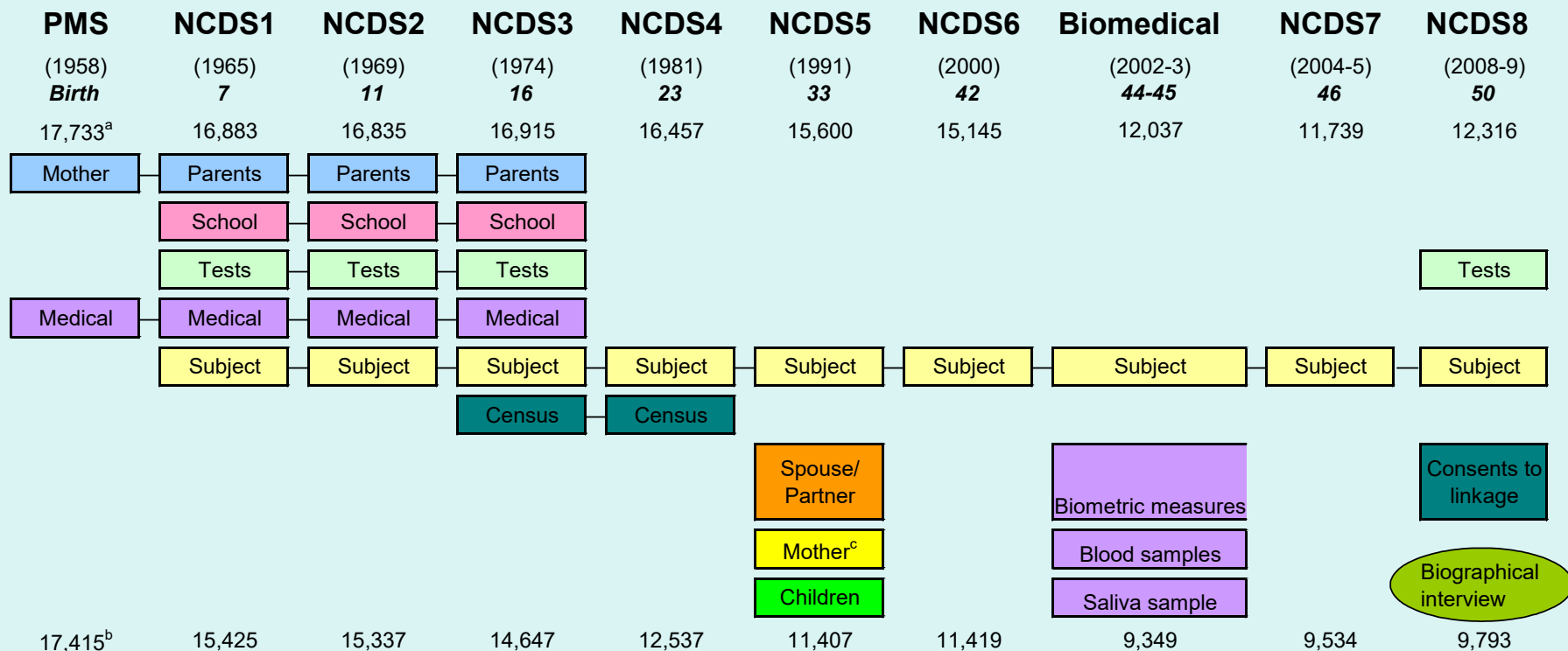
Investigate the gendered nature of the essays (and the aspirations of the children) using a mixed methods approach

Introduce the essays written by children as a resource for other researchers

Discuss the value of the methodological approach taken

NCDS Follow-ups and sources of information 1958-2010

Original sample: all living in GB born in one week in 1958



Notes

a: Target sample - Excludes emigrants, refusals & deaths. Includes immigrants at NCDS1-3.

b: Achieved sample - At least on survey instrument partially completed

c: Mother - Could be Cohort Member or spouse/partner

NCDS 11-year old Essays

At age 11, in 1969 NCDS Cohort members completed a short questionnaire (at school) about leisure interests, preferred school subjects and expectations on leaving school

They were also asked to write an essay on the following topic:

'Imagine you are now 25 years old. Write about the life you are leading, your interests, your home life and your work at the age of 25. (You have 30 minutes to do this).'

13669 essays completed, mean length 204 words

Copies of the original essays (in children's handwriting) are available on microfiche at CLS and have been digitised.

7. Imagine that you are now 25 years old. Write about the life you are leading, your interests, your home life and your work at the age of 25. (You have 30 minutes to do this).

I am now 25 and I have a farm in Sussex it is a ~~small~~ dairy dairy farm, I have 12 cows and 9 chickens on 20 acres & so it is hard work I have to get up at 5 o'clock every day to milk the cows but I have help, I have 3 men and a woman called Sam, Pete, Ginger and Susan after milking we have breakfast then we have to plow the ~~the~~ fields which Sam does. Susan goes and get the egg from the

Existing research on the essays

A small sample of 521 essays have been coded for word count

- Boys 180 words
- Girls 228 words

All essays have been coded for employment aspirations, over 90% give a classifiable occupation

No other systematic coding and analysis of the essays has been carried out to date

Approaches to the analysis of gender within the essays

- 1) **Comparison of topics covered by boys and girls**
- 2) **Focus on occupational aspiration of boys and girls**
 - **Both these approaches, even when applied to qualitative material might be thought to assume that gender is a fixed attribute and axis on which essays can be compared**
 - **Alternative approach is to think of gender as performative**
 - How do the children 'do gender' within the context of the essay writing task?
 - Are there children who do gender differently? What are the characteristics of these children and their essays
- 7 Are children who do gender differently innovators? (Janet Giele)

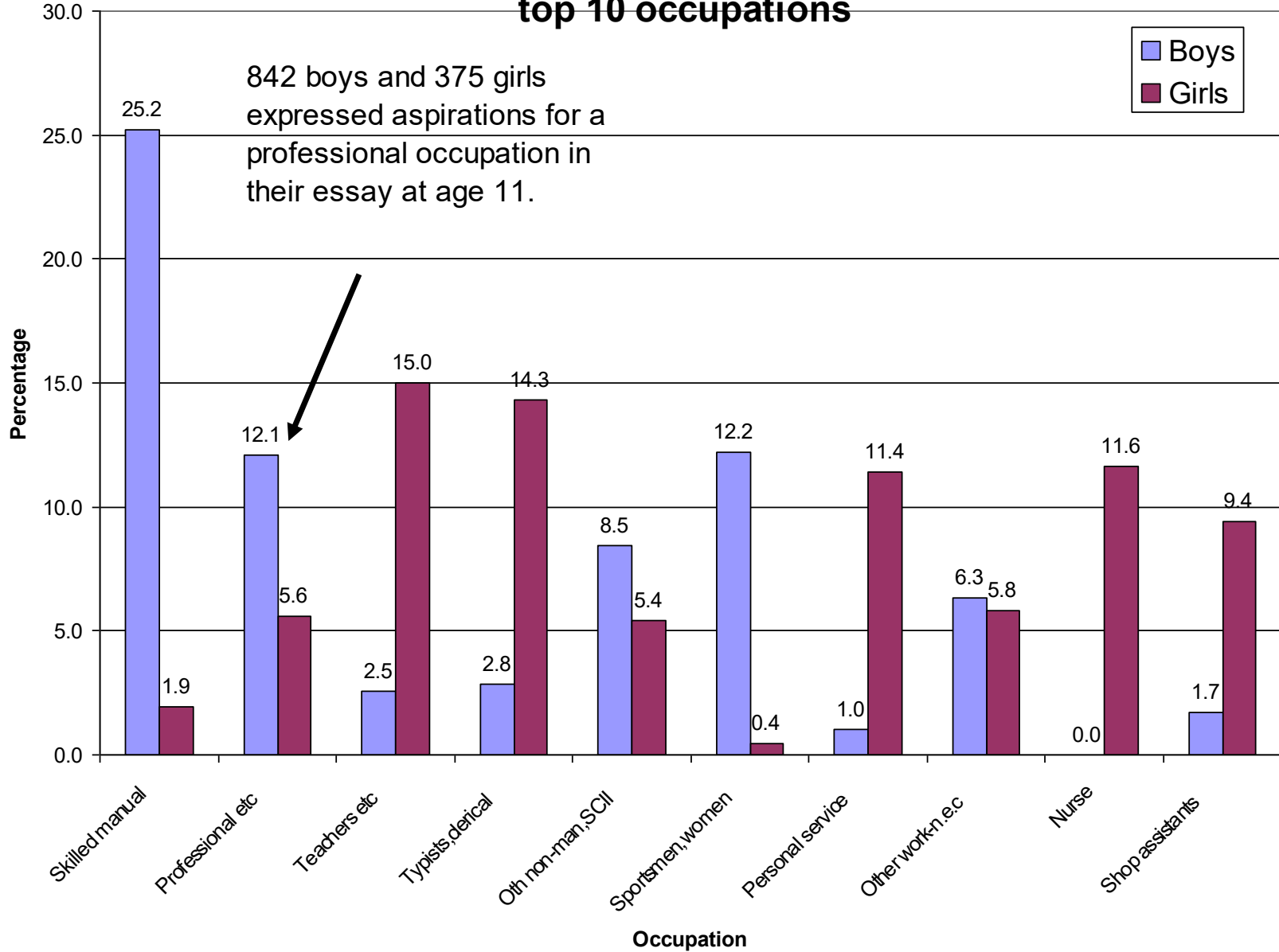
Key research questions

- 1) To what extent is it possible to classify the essays as being written by boys or girls using the main themes within the essays and the expressed occupational aspirations?**
- 2) Which themes and topics allow us to distinguish between boys' essays and girls' essays? – and does this vary by social class?**
- 3) How can we characterise the essays of the girls and boys who do not fit clearly within the gendered categories?**

Coding the content of the essays

- 1) All essays were coded for occupational aspirations in the early 1970s (21 categories)**
- 2) A coding frame for the main themes within the essays was developed by Elliott and Morrow**
- 3) A subsample of approximately 500 essays have been transcribed and coded for these key themes (and are available from the UK Data Archive)**

Aspirations of boys and girls at age 11- top 10 occupations



Results: themes in boys' and girls' essays

Gender differences in themes and topics included in children's essays		
	Boys (N=243)	Girls (N=252)
Mother	19%	37%
Siblings	7%	20%
Friends	18%	29%
Domestic labour (Child care etc)	22%	55%
Cars	41%	18%
Money/earnings/savings etc	42%	25%
Occupational skills/nature of work	46%	32%
Working hours	27%	35%
Husband/Wife's occupation	10%	23%
Football	39%	2%

Discriminant function analysis

Linear discriminant analysis can be used to discover whether two mutually-exclusive groups (e.g. boys and girls) can be distinguished from each other using a linear combination of a set of predictor variables

Actual group membership must be known

Predicted group membership can be compared with actual group membership

Identifies a subset of predictor variables which in combination will separate the cases of interest into two separate groups

Classification results

Classification Results^a

Sex of child		Predicted Group Membership		Total
		1 Male	2 Female	
Original	Count	1 Male	20	243
		2 Female	216	251
	%	1 Male	8.2	100.0
		2 Female	86.1	100.0

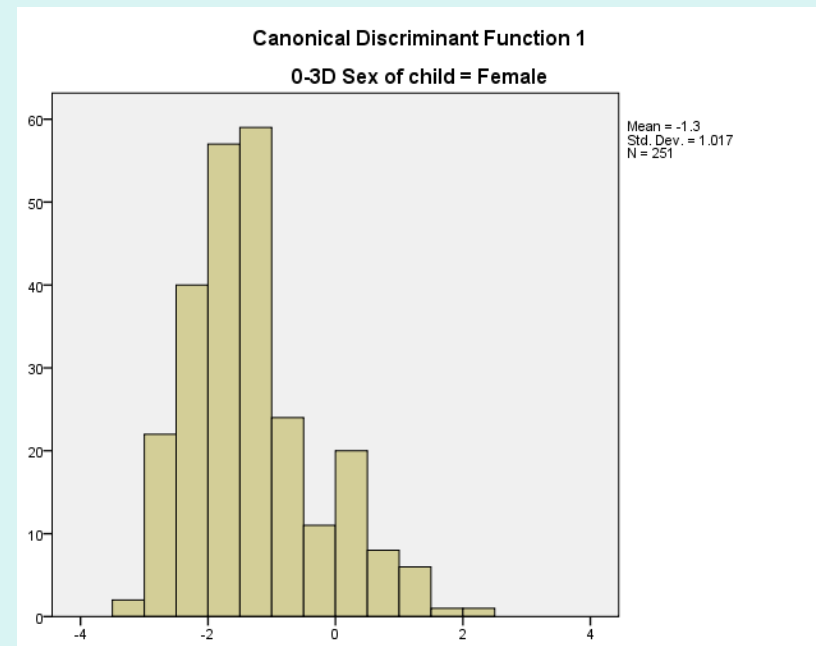
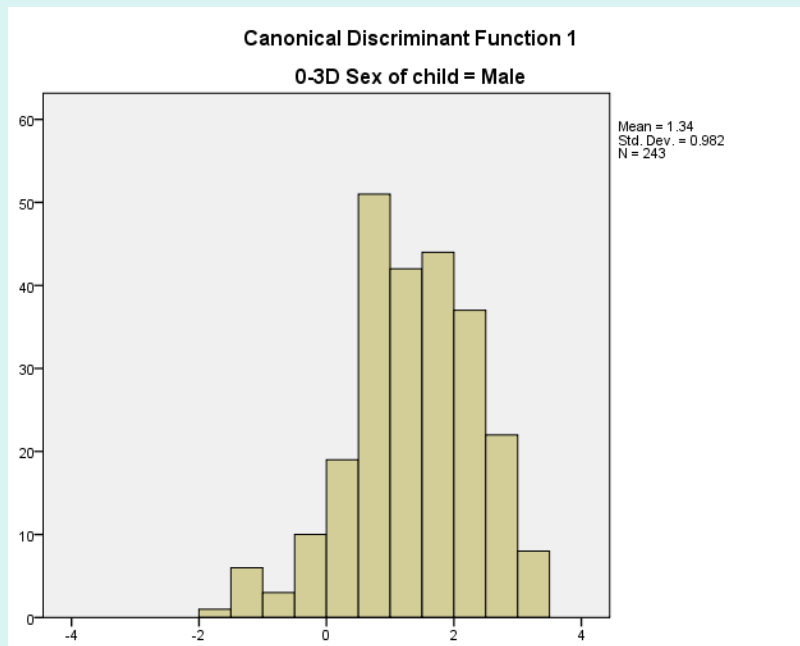
a. 88.9% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

90% of essays have been correctly classified as written by boys or girls.

8.2% (20) boys' essays are misclassified

13.9% (35) girls' essays are misclassified

Distribution of scores for boys and girls



Variables identified as distinguishing boys' essays and girls' essays

- **Occupational aspirations: professional; other non-manual sc II; junior non manual; foreman manual; skilled manual; self employed; farm workers; forces; sportsmen and women; other and unclassifiable(boys more likely to choose one of these occupations)**
- **Number of words in the essay (girls write longer essays)**
- **Football discussed in the essay (boys' essays)**
- **Skills discussed in relation to occupation (boys' essays)**
- **Make of car mentioned in the essay**
- **Domestic labour mentioned (girls' essays) Cooking and cleaning; multiple tasks; sewing and knitting**

Ideal typical boy's essay

Serial number: 750140D (score 3.14)

My job is an astronomer I've got my own observatory at Rusper, I've got two telescopes one is a refractor and one is a reflector, made made by myself. My house is a cottage on a hill without much trees around because it would stop me from observing the stars. I,m engaged to a girl of 24. I like gardening very much, also I like sport like Badminton, tennis Football and cricket. I like going to race meetings (Greyhound and horse race meetings). I,ve got a dog which is a boxer to guard the house. I have a car, and I like going to the public bar to have a drink or two.

Word count: 113

What characterises the essays by girls that are classified as being written by boys?

Of the 35 essays wrongly classified as being by boys,

three mention football (but negatively)

three mention the make of a car

the majority seem to have been misclassified due to coding of occupation, for example:

five want to be vets and give details of the job & what it involves

three want to be farm workers (e.g. Stable hand/kennel maid)

three want to be skilled manual workers (specific factory jobs)

In summary there are no clear examples of essays that suggest a differently gendered future

What characterises the essays by boys that are classified as being written by girls?

Of the 20 essays misclassified as being by girls it is often the occupation that appeared to have caused the misclassification.

For example:

7 were coded as shop assistants

3 were coded as office workers

3 were coded as teachers

Refining the discriminant function analysis – separate analysis for children with non-manual and manual fathers

Classification Results^a

n622c 0-3D Sex of child			Predicted Group Membership		Total
			1 Male	2 Female	
Original	Count	1 Male	97	9	106
		2 Female	15	86	101
	%	1 Male	91.5	8.5	100.0
		2 Female	14.9	85.1	100.0

Children with non-manual fathers

a. 88.4% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Classification Results^a

n622c 0-3D Sex of child			Predicted Group Membership		Total
			1 Male	2 Female	
Original	Count	1 Male	92	12	104
		2 Female	9	101	110
	%	1 Male	88.5	11.5	100.0
		2 Female	8.2	91.8	100.0

Children with manual fathers

a. 90.2% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Total misclassified cases = 45 compared with 55 for amalgamated analysis

Variables identified as distinguishing boys' essays and girls' essays (middle-class families)

- **Occupational aspirations: teacher; nurse; typists; shop assistants personal service; farm workers; housewife (girls more likely to choose one of these occupations)**
- **Number of words in the essay (girls write longer essays)**
- **Other family members mentioned (girls' essays)**
- **Football discussed in the essay (boys' essays)**
- **Skills discussed in relation to occupation (boys' essays)**
- **Make of car mentioned in the essay (boys' essay)**
- **Domestic labour mentioned (girls' essays) Cooking and cleaning; multiple tasks; sewing and knitting; other**

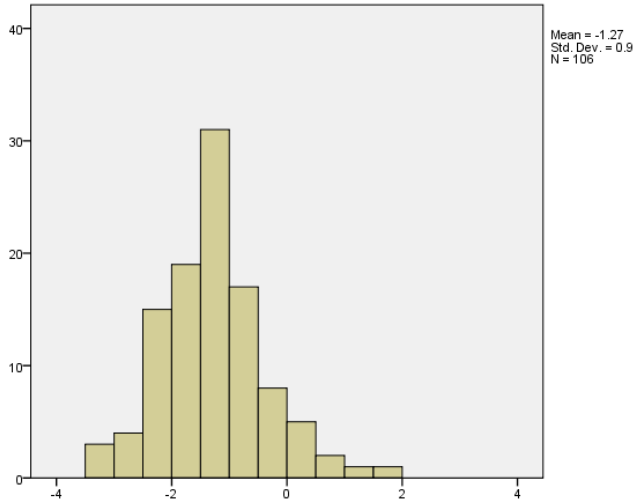
Variables identified as distinguishing boys' essays and girls' essays (working-class families)

- **Occupational aspirations: professional; other non-manual sc II; junior non manual; foreman manual; skilled manual; semi-skilled manual; farm workers; forces; sportsmen and women; other and unclassifiable(boys more likely to choose one of these occupations)**
- **Football discussed in the essay (boys' essays)**
- **Skills discussed in relation to occupation (boys' essays)**
- **Domestic labour mentioned (girls' essays) childcare and cooking and cleaning; multiple tasks**
- **Domestic tasks (boys' essays) 'other' domestic tasks**

Distribution of scores for boys and girls

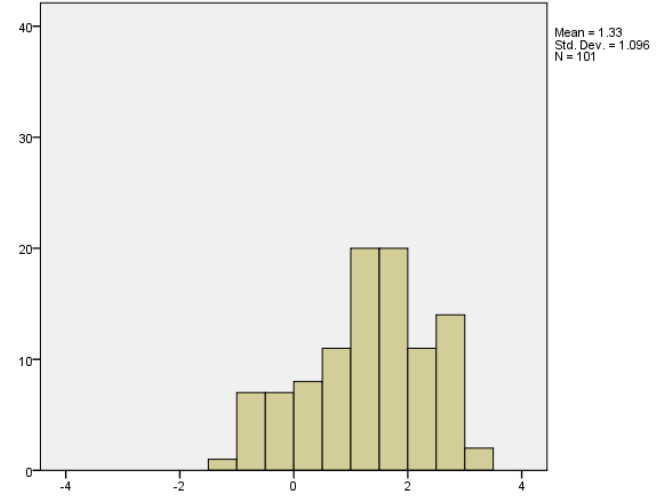
Canonical Discriminant Function 1

0-3D Sex of child = Male



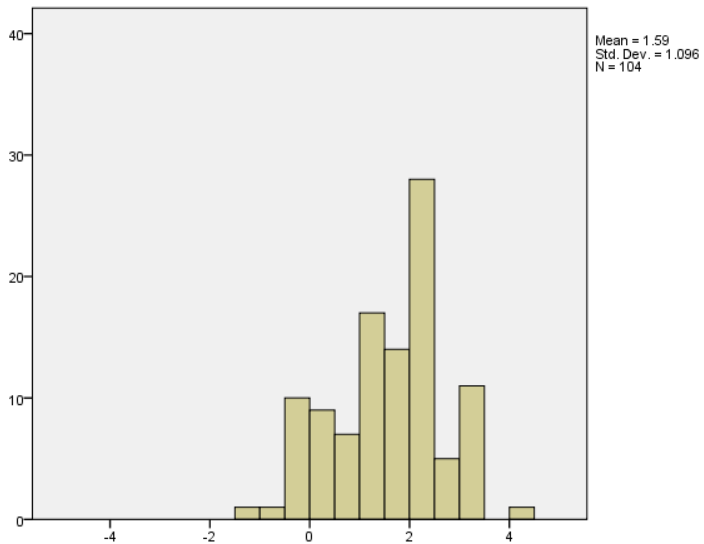
Canonical Discriminant Function 1

0-3D Sex of child = Female



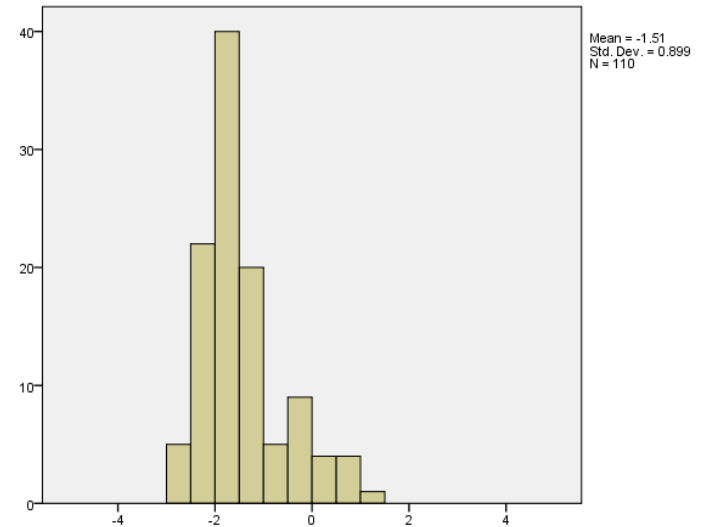
Canonical Discriminant Function 1

0-3D Sex of child = Male



Canonical Discriminant Function 1

0-3D Sex of child = Female



Middle class boy's essay misclassified as a girl's essay

I am now 25 years old I am married and got 1 child. I live in Salford and I work as a shop assistant and on Saturdays I play football for a league team in the first division somtimes I play in the week days.

I am a shop assistant for a post office for a part-time Job.

I am interested in keeping up to date of the teams in the first division and I am very interested in reading books. There are many other interests for me to think about such as cricket, Rugby, swimming tennis and many other sports I like.

At home I help a lot with the housework and other things.

We have a big back garden and I do the garden by planting the seeds for the grass and planting the bushes and putting up a fence.

Inside the home we do all sorts of things moving the furniture about decorating the bathroom, dining room, almost every room we have to decorate.

I can never get up in the morning early because I get to bed so late through meeting's I just can't get up to go to schools to present trophy's and cups.

And nearly every morning I get boys and girls crowding outside my door.

Going back to home again I have to feed the baby while my wife goes shopping and I have to get some dog meat for our dog and I have to go to the shop somtimes to get some. When my wife comes home I get shouted at because I didn't feed the baby properly. After we've had our argument we have our dinner and then I nave no dinner because the baby eat's it all.

What life you have when you first get married. You have to cool your own dinner, tea and breakfast. And when your wife gets home what a sign of relief but its not because you have to do the cooking until she get's better.

332 words

Middle-class girl's essay misclassified as a boy's essay

My special interest is music. I play the guitar. I am a guitar soloist. I still read alot. I spend most of my time practising the guitar. Sometimes I invite my friends to my house to give them tea and after that I play my guitar to them. I have a part time job as a secutary. I have a little cottage of my own. I live in the country. I have quite a big garden because, also in my spare time I do some gardening. I like gardening very much. my neighbours like some nice quiet work they sometimes come and help me. One of my neighbours has a little girl who is very sweet. Sometimes she comes in my cottage and I play my guitar to her. This little girl is 4yrs her name is Kim. Sometimes in my spare time on a Sunday (after I had been to church) I would take her into the nearby-by park. I have a big pond in the bottom of my garden with 12 fish in. I like fish very much. I did have 13 fish but one died of fungus. I am not very superstious but 13 is an unlucky number. My cottage is'nt very big but it is nice. It is a 3 bedroom cottage although the third bedroom is'nt very big. I am married and my husband also likes music and he can play the clarinet but he dosent play the clarinet for his living he is an engineer he is the manager of his department. I had also wanted to be a teacher but I decided to be a guitarist. It was quiet hard to choose which one to be. I have a Cortina Estate car. My husband and I can both drive. It is lovely here in Spring when all the flowers are in bloom. I go for walks in some nearby woods.

Words: 317

Working-class boy's essay misclassified as a girl's essay

My wife is going to do the beds and I am going to work I do all cars. When I come home I do the gardens I come home at 5o cock. My wife is a nice wife we are going to have a baby. some times she works but now she his haveing a baby she does not. I am going to have some days off to help her at home. She might help in the gaerden but I do not wont her to Thats how nice she his we have got a big houes. ane my wife mother lives with us she is very nice and she gets on with my mothe my mothe lives with my sister I do the gaerden for my mothe when I can it has a big goerder. My sister does [illegible] but she [illegible] mother I have [illegible] dogs [illegible] dog [illegible] we have 3 bed rooms. and 4 room down serp.

155 words

Working class girl's essay misclassified as a boy's essay



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I am married and I have no children. At the moment I am working in a pet shop. with all the animals arond me I am very fond of animals I have a dog and two tortories at home.

in my spare time I bird watch and in my holidays I like going abroad. To Holland or fance. or even Spain. Some time in my spare time I cook or go for a long walk. My Husband and I live in a town. Mr. Harisson is the manger of the pet shop. We also have birds in the pet shop and dogs. cats. hampers, mice, Ginea pigs and all other kinds of animals. Also we have got athor girl she has just lelf school.

124 words

Gendered essays: conclusions

In summary the essays appear to be very clearly gendered

Even the minority of essays that are wrongly categorised by the discriminant function provide limited evidence of innovation or doing gender differently

Despite the gendered nature of the essays, both boys and girls have aspirations for family life

There appear to be subtle differences in how children 'do' gender depending on their social class

There is much less evidence of social class than gender within the essays

The use of discriminant function analysis is an innovative and useful tool in mixed methods research

Website

www.cls.ioe.ac.uk

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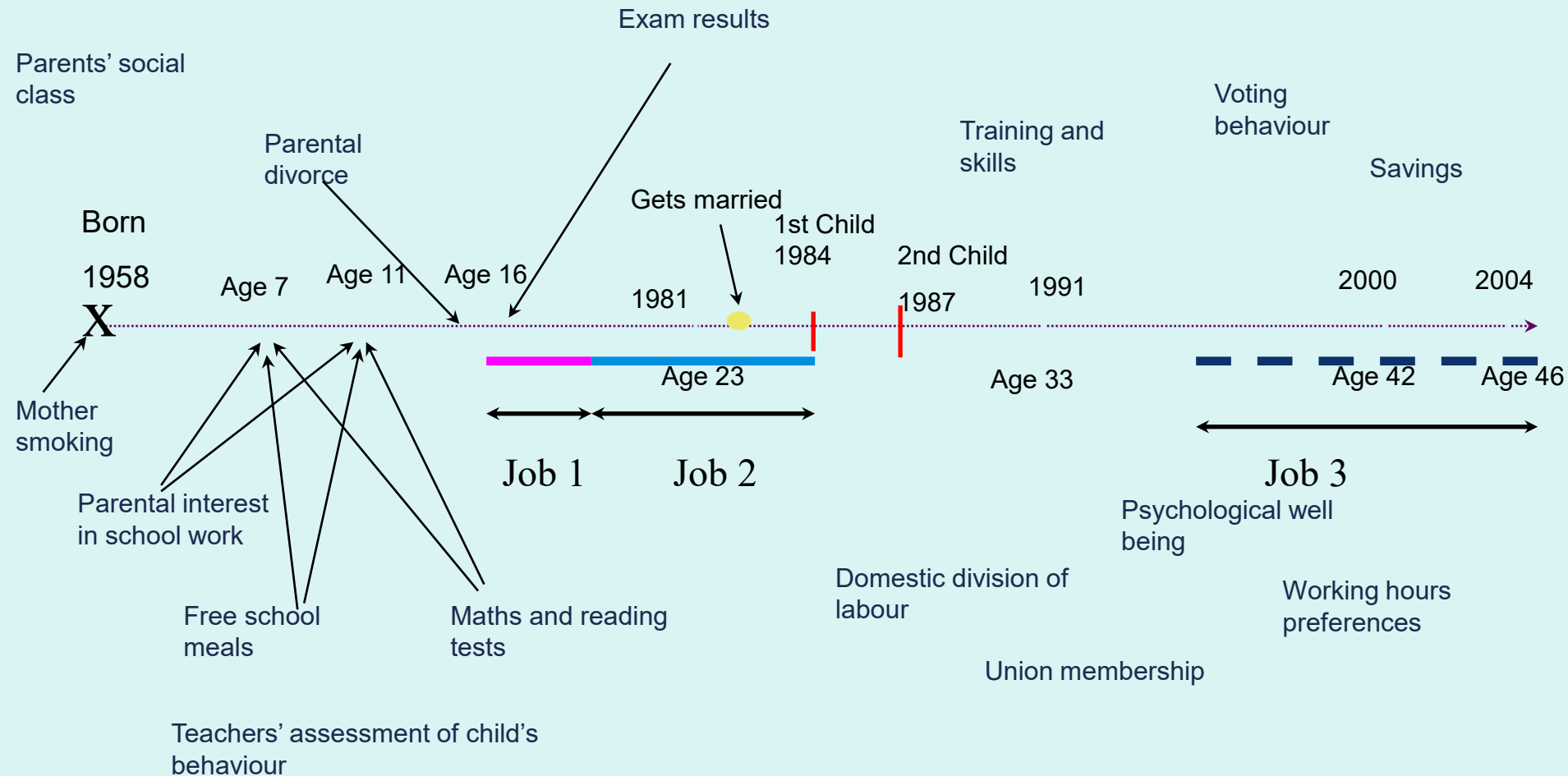
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Appendix

Hypothetical life history



Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function	
	1	
occ0	.645	
occ3	.526	
occ6	.232	
occ8	.167	
occ9	.902	
occ10	.437	
occ12	.218	
occ13	.279	
occ15	.540	
occ16	.604	
occ18	.439	
occ20	.192	
car2	.239	
words	Number of words in essay	-.290
occsk	Are skillsdiscussed in relation to occupation?	.239
football	Football discussed	.503

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

	Function		
	1		
occ0	.625		
occ3	.519		
occ6	.231		
occ8	.158		
occ9	.870		
occ10	.428		
occ12	.213		
occ13	.271		
occ15	.512		
occ16	.590		
occ18	.453		
occ20	.174		
car2	.203		
words	Number of words in essay	-.215	
othfam	Are other family members mentioned?	-.117	
occsk	Are skillsdiscussed in relation to occupation?		.208
football	Football discussed	.469	
domlab2		-.211	
domlab5		-.189	
domlab6		-.180	