Why have relative rates of class mobility become more equal among women in Britain?

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Abstract

In a previous paper it has been shown that across three cohorts of men and women born in Britain in 1946, 1958 and 1970 a gender difference exists in regard to relative rates of class mobility. For men these rates display an essential stability but for women they become more equal. The aim of the present paper is to shed light on the causes of this trend - or, that is, of increasing social fluidity - among women. We begin by considering a refined version of the perverse fluidity hypothesis: i.e. one that proposes that part-time work leads to increasing downward worklife mobility among women that also entails downward intergenerational mobility and thus promotes greater fluidity. We do in fact find that the increase in fluidity is very largely, if not entirely, confined to women who have had at least one period of part-time work. However, a more direct test of the hypothesis is not supportive. We are then led to investigate whether it is not that part-time working itself is the crucial factor but rather that women who subsequently work part-time already differ from those who do not at entry into employment. We find that eventual full- and part-timers do not differ in their class origins nor, in any systematics way, in their educational qualifications. But there is a marked and increasing difference in the levels of employment at which they make their labour market entry. Eventual part-timers are more likely than eventual full-timers to enter in working class positions, regardless of their class origins and qualifications. Insofar as these women are from more advantaged origins, they would appear not to seek to exploit their advantages to the same extent as do full-timers in order to advance their own work careers. And it is, then, in the downward mobility accepted by these women - who increase in number across the cohorts - that we would locate the main source of the weakening association between class origins and destinations that is revealed among women at large.

Keywords: social mobility, gender difference, social class, birth cohort studies

Introduction

In a previous paper (Bukodi et al., 2015), an analysis has been made of long-term trends in Britain in absolute and relative rates of intergenerational class mobility. In comparing results for men and women, a rather problematic situation is found. In the case of absolute rates, a large degree of cross-gender similarity is revealed. Although the total mobility rate - the proportion of individuals found in class positions different to those in which they originated - does rise slightly for women while being essentially stable for men, of greater importance is the fact that for men and women alike the upward and downward components of total mobility change in the same way: i.e. the upward component tends to decrease and the downward component to increase. In other words, in the lives of individual men and women the experience of upward class mobility has over recent decades tended to become less frequent, and that of downward class mobility more frequent. This is a direct consequence, it can be shown, of the pattern and rate of change in the shape of the British class structure. However, in the case of relative mobility rates it is the divergence in the results for men and women that is most striking. For men, it is possible to confirm - and extend into the twenty-first century - the finding of earlier research (e.g. Goldthorpe and Mills, 2004, 2008; Paterson and Ianelli, 2007) that these rates, like the total mobility rate, display a long-term stability or at all events only trendless fluctuation. But for women, in contrast, clear evidence is found that relative rates have tended to become more equal or, that is, evidence of greater social fluidity in the sense of a general weakening in the association that exists between

women's class origins and their class destinations when considered net of all effects of class structural change. Similar findings for women, we may add, have been subsequently reported by Sturgis and Buscha (2015) based on analyses of the ONS Longitudinal Study dataset.

The question to which we turn in the present paper is then that of how this gender difference in the trend in relative mobility rates is to be explained. Of the possibilities we previously put forward, two implied a greater equality of opportunity among women. It could be that in the case of women, though not of men, the association between class origins and destinations is being reduced through educational attainment becoming less strongly associated with origins but more strongly associated with destinations - or, in other words, through women's mobility chances becoming determined in a more 'meritocratic' way. Or it could be that various policy interventions favouring more continuous worklife participation and advancement on the part of women have proved especially beneficial to those of less advantaged origins, thus improving their relative chances of upward mobility.

However, another possibility was also recognised. It could be that the greater fluidity evident among women is to a significant extent perverse fluidity, as in fact earlier suggested by Goldthorpe and Mills (2004). Social fluidity is usually thought of as being positively associated with opportunity; but fluidity – perverse fluidity - may in fact also derive from constraints in the form of *limits on* opportunity.[1] In this case, what is envisaged is that women, after leaving the labour market during the

early years of motherhood, may not, on their return, be able to find employment at a similar level to that in which they were formerly engaged. They may often have to take up jobs that imply downward mobility relative to their previous employment and thus, in some cases, downward mobility *relative also to their class origins*. Given that growing numbers of women are in fact returning to work after periods of early motherhood, rather than remaining out of the labour market, the increased fluidity that we are trying to explain could then be brought about in this way.[2] That is to say, changing patterns of absolute mobility among women in an *intra*generational, or worklife, perspective could, *insofar as they also weaken the net association between their class origins and destinations*, lead to more equal relative rates - or to greater social fluidity - in an *inter*generational perspective.

Finally, though, if greater social fluidity among women is to be envisaged as resulting from an increasing propensity for downward rather than for upward mobility, one further possible explanation for this trend should be considered in which the emphasis is less on constraint than on choice. Hakim (2000, 2004) has argued that there is a large and, if anything, growing heterogeneity among women in their orientations to work. At one pole are women who are 'work-centred', in a similar way to men, and at the opposite pole - with a range of 'drifters' in-between - are women who are 'home-centred': that is, women who are not inclined to pursue opportunities that may be available to them in labour markets because of a prior commitment to marriage or partnership, child-bearing and child-rearing. We know

that, as a result of class structural change, the number of individuals coming from more advantaged class origins is steadily growing (Bukodi et al., 2015); and if, then, among women of such origins the proportion of those who are home- rather than work-centred at least holds steady, the lack of concern of these women to maintain for themselves their parents' class position could also be a source of greater fluidity.

In testing these different ways in which our finding of increasing fluidity among women might be explained, we opt to start with the perverse fluidity hypothesis. This provides the least complex explanation and can be tested on the basis of data on women's worklife and intergenerational mobility that are available to us in our current dataset.

Data and variables

Since the data we use and the variables we derive from these data have for the most part been described in detail elsewhere (Bukodi et al., 2015), we provide here only a brief account.

Our analyses are based on women represented in the three earliest British birth cohort studies: the National Survey of Health and Development (NSHD), the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the British Cohort Study 1970 (BCS), which have followed through their life-courses children born in Britain in one week in 1946, 1958 and 1970, respectively. The actual data-set that we analyse is one

obtained from a multiple imputation exercise undertaken in order to compensate for the extent of missing data in these studies resulting primarily from cohort attrition.[3]

Our two key variables are those of women's social class origins and destinations. Class origins are indexed by father's class when cohort members were aged 10 or 11 (or 15 or 16 if this earlier information is not available). We would have preferred to bring mother's class into consideration also, as through the dominance method (Erikson, 1984) but data limitations prevent this with the 1946 cohort. However, for the 1958 and 1970 cohorts we have compared results using father's class only and the dominance method, and these show no significant differences in the overall strength or pattern of the association between class origins and destinations. Social class destinations are indexed by the class positions in which women were found at age 38 (or, if not then in employment, when last in employment).[4] Age 38 is the latest for which we have relevant information available in our data-set for women in the 1970 cohort. Class origins and class destinations are alike operationalised according to the 7-class version of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). This classification is based on individuals' employment status and occupation which are together taken as indicators of their positions in the social relations of labour markets and production units or, in short, of their employment relations. We work with the SOC90 occupational classification which can be applied in all three of our cohorts (for further details of the coding scheme involved, see ONS, 2005: Table 17).

In addition, our concern with perverse fluidity requires analysis of women's intragenerational, or worklife, class mobility: that is, as between their labour market entry and age 38. We have therefore created a further variable of 'entry class'. This derives from the employment status and occupation of a woman's first 'significant' job - i. e. a job lasting for at least six months - using the same version of NS-SEC as with class origins and destinations.

Perverse fluidity: refining and testing the hypothesis

In suggesting that an observed increase in fluidity among women might result from more women experiencing perverse fluidity, Goldthorpe and Mills (2004) focused on the growing numbers of women likely to be downwardly mobile, in intergenerational as well as worklife terms, as a result of the jobs they take up when returning to the labour market after breaks in employment associated with their early years of motherhood. However, in more recent years a substantial body of research (see e.g. Smeaton, 2006; Connolly and Gregory, 2008; Dex, Ward and Joshi, 2008; Dex and Bukodi, 2012) has made clearer than before that the risk of women experiencing downward mobility is linked not so much with their childbearing histories and movement in and out of the labour market but, more specifically, *with their taking up of part-time employment*, and *regardless of whether or not this is associated with family commitments*.

For our present purposes, we seek to exploit these findings in the following way. What is implied is that insofar as increasing social fluidity among women reflects perverse fluidity, one should expect this increase to be more apparent among those women who have at some point worked part-time than among those who have always worked full-time. We can then, on the basis of this expectation, undertake an initial test of what could be regarded as a more informed version of the perverse fluidity hypothesis than that put forward by Goldthorpe and Mills. In this version it is a move from full- to part-time working, rather than a move back to the labour market after a period of absence, that is seen as involved in downward worklife mobility which may also result in downward intergenerational mobility and thus in a weakening association between women's class origins and destinations.

Since we have been able to reconstruct the employment histories of women in our three cohorts from their entry into the labour market up to age 38, we can divide these women into sub-groups according to their experience of full- and part time working. In regard to part-time working, we do not have information on the actual number of hours worked but only on whether women reported that they were employed part-time. This 'self-identification' approach to what should count as part-time working has, however, been regarded as having some advantages in capturing women's own perceptions of their position in the labour market (van Bastelaar, Lemaître and Marianna, 1997).

We can then produce separate intergenerational class mobility tables for women in each sub-group, and, through using the same statistical models as previously, we can determine whether or not differences in relative mobility among the sub-groups do appear in ways that would be consistent with our refined version of the perverse fluidity hypothesis.

For the purposes in question, we distinguish three sub-groups among women in each cohort (excluding those who have never worked).

(1) Women who from labour market entry to age 38 have been continuously in full-time employment.

(2) Women who from labour market entry to age 38 have not been continuously in employment but who when in employment have always worked full-time.

(3) Women who from labour market entry to age 38 have had at least one period of part-time employment lasting at least three months.

We would in principle have liked also to divide women in this third group into those who had and had not been in continuous employment. But in fact the numbers who had remained continuously in employment while at some point working part-time proved to be too small for separate analysis, amounting to only around 5 per cent in the 1946 and 1958 cohorts and 15 per cent in the 1970 cohort.

Table 1 shows the distribution of women in the above three sub-groups across the three cohorts. While the proportion of women who have worked continuously full-

time is more or less stable, the proportion of those who have always worked full-time, though not continuously, is decreasing and the proportion of those who have some experience of part-time work is increasing.

[Table 1 here]

What then are the results we obtain when we investigate trends in relative intergenerational mobility for women in the three sub-groups that we have distinguished? In order to maintain adequate cell counts in the mobility tables we construct, we need to make a fivefold collapse of the 7-class version of NS-SEC, as shown in Table 2. Classes 3, 4 and 5 are combined as 'intermediate classes' lying between Class 1 and Class 2, which can be regarded as the higher and lower levels of the professional and managerial salariat, and Classes 6 and 7, the higher and lower levels of what could be regarded as the broadly defined working class.[5]

[Table 2 here]

The models we apply are the following.

(1) The loglinear model of conditional independence of women's class origins and destinations

$$\log F_{ijk} = \mu + \lambda_i^O + \lambda_j^D + \lambda_k^C + \lambda_{ik}^{OC} + \lambda_{jk}^{DC}$$

where F_{ijk} is the expected frequency in cell ijk of a three-way table comprising origin i (O), destination j (D) and cohort k (C) and, on the right-hand side of the equation, μ

is a scale factor, λ_i^O , λ_j^D , λ_k^C represent the main effects of the distributions of women over origins, destinations and cohorts and the λ_{ik}^{OC} and λ_{jk}^{DC} terms refer to the associations between origin and cohort and destination and cohort, respectively. This model, stating that no association exists between women's class origins and destinations, serves essentially as a baseline.

(2) The loglinear model of constant association between women's class origins and destinations across cohorts, usually known as the constant social fluidity (CSF) model

$$\log F_{ijk} = \mu + \lambda_i^O + \lambda_j^D + \lambda_k^C + \lambda_{ik}^{OC} + \lambda_{jk}^{DC} + \lambda_{ij}^{OD}$$

This model recognises that an association exists between origins and destinations - the further two-way association λ_{ij}^{OD} is added to model (1) - but requires that the strength of this association is the same from one cohort to another - or, that is, that the log odds ratios defining this association are constant.

(3) The logmultiplicative model, known as the UNIDIFF model (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992)

$$\log F_{ijk} = \mu + \lambda_i^O + \lambda_j^D + \lambda_k^C + \lambda_{ik}^{OC} + \lambda_{jk}^{DC} + \beta_k X_{ij}^{OD}$$

where X_{ij}^{OD} represents the general pattern of the origin-destination association across cohorts and β_k the relative strength of this association *that is specific to a particular cohort*.

In Table 3 we report the results of fitting these models to our 5-class mobility tables across the three cohorts for each of the three sub-groups of women with which we are concerned. The first panel of the table relates to women who have been in continuous full-time employment. It can be seen that the CSF model gives a good fit to the data and that the UNIDIFF model makes no significant improvement on it. In other words, we here obtain the same result as we previously did for men: that no change in relative rates of class mobility occurs or, in other words, that constant social fluidity prevails. The second panel of the table relates to women who have not been in continuous employment but who, when in employment, have always worked full-time. The results are essentially the same as those in the first panel: the CSF model gives a good fit and is preferred to UNIDIFF.

[Table 3 here]

However, it may be noted that with each of these two sub-groups of women who have never worked part-time the β parameters under the UNIDIFF model do in fact show some decline across the cohorts - i.e. suggest an increase in fluidity - even though this model does not improve significantly on that of constant association. In the third panel of the table we therefore bring together women in the two sub-groups in question - henceforth referred to as 'full-timers' - in order to check whether, with the larger numbers thus involved, UNIDIFF might become preferred to the CSF model. In fact, as shown, this turns out not to be so. We cannot of course rule out the possibility that, had we yet greater statistical power, some significant

increase in social fluidity among full timers might be shown up; but it may be taken that any such increase would be very small.

Finally, then, in the fourth panel of Table 3 we present our results for the sub-group of women who have at some stage worked part-time - henceforth 'part-timers'. With these women we find a situation very different to that with full-timers. While the CSF model fits the data quite well, UNIDIFF still makes a clearly significant improvement on it, and also, it may be noted, leads to a relatively large reduction in the dissimilarity index - the proportion of all cases misclassified - from 2.7 to 1.9 per cent. Furthermore, the UNIDIFF β parameters that are reported indicate a trend towards greater fluidity which, while not great between the 1946 and 1958 cohorts - and not in itself significant - then becomes much more pronounced between the 1958 and 1970 cohorts.[6]

On the basis of these results, we can then say the following. The increase in fluidity earlier demonstrated among women at large is very substantially, if not entirely, *confined to part-timers* - i.e. to those women who have at least for a period been in part-time employment. This we would regard as a finding that is of some importance it itself, and it is at the same time one that is consistent with the perverse fluidity hypothesis in the refined form in which we have developed it. However, the support that is actually provided for this hypothesis is still of only a quite indirect kind. It remains to be seen if any more direct confirmation of it can be obtained. In this regard, we proceed as follows.

As earlier stated, perverse fluidity, in the form of interest to us, is fluidity that results from women's downward mobility in the course of their working lives that also implies their downward mobility intergenerationally. If we construct *three-way* mobility tables that relate women's class origins to their class positions on labour market entry - i.e. their 'entry class' as earlier defined - and in turn to their class destinations at age 38, we can use these 5 x 5 x 5 tables to define actual perverse fluidity paths, as is shown in Table 4.

[Table 4 here]

The 10 paths in question include all those where immobility is maintained as between origin and entry class but then disrupted by downward worklife mobility - as, say, with the origin-entry-destination sequence of Class 1 - Class 1 - Class 2; and also all those where upward mobility as between origin and entry class is followed by downward worklife mobility such that downward intergenerational mobility also results - as, say, with the sequence of Class 2 - Class 1 - Class 3. It should be noted that this operationalisation is quite generous to the perverse fluidity hypothesis in not requiring downward worklife mobility to be *subsequent to* part-time working: i.e. we allow for the possibility that taking up a job that implies such mobility might be *in anticipation of* a move from full- to part-time working.

On the basis of Table 4, we can identify the women in each cohort who have followed perverse fluidity paths, and we can then remove these women from our

original two-way intergenerational mobility tables for part-timers, and repeat our previous modelling exercise. The logic of this procedure is that insofar as the increase in fluidity across the cohorts that we previously observed among part-timers does derive from perverse fluidity, this increase should now disappear.

In taking this further step in our analyses, what we may first of all note from Table 4 is that the proportion of part-timers who have in fact followed perverse fluidity paths, while greater than among full-timers, is still quite small and, moreover, not on the increase across the cohorts. What is therefore suggested at the outset is that any impact of perverse fluidity on women's overall rates of relative mobility is unlikely to be large. And clear confirmation of this is then provided by the results of our modelling. The removal from among part-timers of those women who have followed perverse fluidity paths proves to be of little consequence. As shown in Table 5, the β parameters under the UNIDIFF model, which still improves significantly on the CSF model, indicate fluidity increasing across the cohorts to more or less the same extent as when *all* part-timers are considered.

[Table 5 here]

These results are therefore, in contrast to those previously reported, clearly damaging to the perverse fluidity hypothesis. Perverse fluidity, it is indicated, cannot be the sole or the dominant process involved in the general increase in fluidity that is found among women who have worked part-time. If perverse fluidity

plays any part at all, this can only be alongside other, more widely operating, processes that also make for a weakening association between these women's class origins and destinations.

In view of this outcome, a different approach to the explanatory problem that we address is evidently called for. In focusing thus far on perverse fluidity as the possible source of increasing fluidity among part-timers, we have in effect accepted the assumptions that, up to the point of entering such work, these women are no different from other women in the labour market and in turn that it is part-time working itself that is the crucial factor leading to the weakening association between their class origins and destinations. But we must now query these assumptions. There is in fact a body of evidence that women who work part-time tend to differ from those in full-time employment in their attitudes towards work and in their labour market behaviour: for example, in showing higher levels of satisfaction with low grade and poorly paid jobs, although also lower levels of job commitment (Booth and van Ours, 2008). Could it be that these differences, even if to some extent reflecting the actual experience of part-time work, also reflect the fact that women who, at some point, take up part-time work are, in line with the arguments of Hakim outlined in the Introduction, *already different from other women in their orientations to work, even from their first entry into the labour market*: that is, in prioritising home and family life rather than their own work careers? And could it in turn be that it is the processes of selection - primarily self-selection - that are at work here that are key to

explaining why increasing fluidity is essentially confined to women with experience of part-time work?

An alternative approach

In order to examine the possibility that we have raised, we begin by asking whether women who become part-timers already differ from those who become full-timers in any of the following respects: their social class origins, their educational qualifications at the time of their labour market entry, and their 'entry class' - i.e. the class position they held as a result of their first significant job. In Table 6 we show the results of a binary logistic regression analysis in which for women in each of our three cohorts being a part-timer rather than a full-timer is the dependent variable and social class origins, educational qualifications and entry class are the independent variables. To overcome problems of sparsity, we have in this analysis to collapse our social class variable further to just three classes - i.e. now combining NS-SEC Classes 1 and 2 and Classes 6 and 7 as well as Classes 3, 4 and 5; and we use a four-level educational qualifications variable.

[Table 6 here]

It can be seen, first of all, that across the cohorts women's class of origin has no statistically significant effect on whether or not they become part-timers - a perhaps surprising finding but one which, as will emerge, takes on a particular importance

for us. In the case of educational qualifications at time of labour market entry, there is a clear effect in the 1946 cohort in that women with, especially, higher secondary or tertiary qualifications are less likely to become part-timers than those with no qualifications; but this effect is then far less strong or systematic in the two later cohorts. In contrast, labour market entry class has no significant effect on the probability of becoming a part-timer in the 1946 cohort but has a significant and increasingly strong effect in the 1958 and 1970 cohorts: women who enter in Class 6 or 7 positions - routine wage-earning, working class positions - are more likely than others to become part-timers, independently, that is, of their class origins and educational qualifications. From additional analyses that we have undertaken (available on request) we also find that the number of part-timers who actually *enter* the labour market in part-time work, though only 3% in the 1946 cohort, rises to 5% in the 1958 cohort and to 11% in the 1970 cohort, and that labour market entry via part-time work is increasingly strongly associated with entry via working class jobs.

How then do these results help us understand the increasing fluidity that shows up among women who have worked part-time?

As a first step, it is of interest simply to examine the distributions of full- and part-timers in each cohort across class origins, entry class and class destinations. These distributions are shown in Table 7 together with dissimilarity indices and indices of net differences. The latter (see Lieberson, 1976) show the probability that a randomly

selected full-timer will be found in a higher class position than a randomly selected part-timer.

[Table 7 here]

As would be expected from the results reported in Table 6, there is little difference across the cohorts in the class origins distributions of full- and part-timers. However, as would also be expected, marked differences do occur in the entry class distributions with, in general, fewer part-timers being found in Class 1 and 2 positions and more in Class 6 and 7 positions (see also Connolly and Gregory, 2008). Moreover, as indicated by the dissimilarity and net difference indices, these differences *widen across the cohorts*, and especially as between the 1958 and 1970 cohorts. Finally, then, with the class destination distributions at age 38 it can be seen that while the dissimilarity and net difference indices show no particular trend, a lower proportion of part-timers than of full-timers is always found in Class 1 and 2 positions. In other words, there is little indication that part-timers offset their generally lower entry class positions by relative high rates of upward worklife mobility, at least up to age 38.

Here, then, we would see the main source of the increasing fluidity - the weakening association between class origins and destinations - that we observe across our three cohorts among women who have worked part-time. This weakening comes about because, while there is no association between class origins and becoming a part-

timer, those women who do become part-timers are, as compared to full-timers, more likely to enter the labour market in disadvantaged class positions and then show no greater tendency than full-timers to be upwardly mobile from these positions - i.e. to be 'counter-mobile' (Girod, 1971). In the case of those women from more advantaged class origins who become part-timers, what this can be taken to mean is that they do not, to the same extent as women from similar backgrounds who become full-timers, *exploit the advantages of their origins, and including perhaps their educational qualifications, in their own working lives.* Thus, the intergenerational mobility chances of these women, as measured in terms of odds ratios, become closer to those of women from less advantaged origins. And as, then, the number of part-timers of relatively advantaged class origins has tended to grow, some overall weakening in the association between the class origins and class destinations of part-timers is brought about.

How this process works out in detail across the cohorts can be illustrated graphically as in Figure 1. Here we show the standardised residuals from the fit of the CSF model (see Table 3 above) - i.e. the model requiring no cross-cohort change in fluidity - to our 5 x 5 class intergenerational mobility tables for part-timers, with the cell dimensions being drawn proportionate to the origins and destinations marginal distributions. That the residuals are in general small should not be found surprising since it may be recalled that the CSF model does give an acceptable fit to the data,

although one on which UNIDIFF significantly improves. Our focus here is not so much on the size of the residuals as on their *sign* and *pattern*.

[Figure 1 here]

In the case of the 1946 cohort it can be seen that positive residuals, implying that the CSF model underfits, occur in all the diagonal cells of the table - i.e. there is in this cohort a greater propensity for *immobility* than the CSF model would suppose. Negative residuals, implying overfits, then most commonly occur in the small cells indicating downward mobility from Classes 1 and 2 and in the generally much larger cells indicating upward mobility to all other classes from Class 7. With the 1958 cohort, this picture does not change much. Again all diagonal cells are underfitted and the overfits are mostly in the same cells as before. But in moving to the 1970 cohort, with which, we know, the increase in fluidity among part-timers most clearly occurs, we find a very different situation. Now, all cells on the main diagonal show negative residuals, or overfits, - i.e. there is for this cohort a lesser propensity for immobility than the CSF model would suppose; and while overfits also occur in several other cells adjacent to those on the main diagonal, the remaining cells, with one exception, show underfits. Of particular interest in this regard are then the overfits in the - now much expanded - cells indicating both immobility within and also mobility between Classes 1 and 2, and in turn *the underfits in cells, indicating downward mobility from these two classes.*

As suggested elsewhere (Goldthorpe, 2007: vol. 2, ch. 7), what can be seen as the key factor in the resistance to change that is shown by relative rates of class mobility is the capacity of families in more advantaged class positions to be able to draw on their superior resources as necessary in order to prevent their children from experiencing any downward mobility of a serious kind. However, if, as would appear here to be the case, some proportion of women originating in the professional and managerial salariat, as represented by Classes 1 and 2 - those who become part-timers - do not seek to draw advantage from their parental backgrounds already from the time of their entry into the labour market, a major barrier to increasing social fluidity is in this way weakened.

An explanation on these lines for the increasing equality in relative rates of women's intergenerational class mobility might then appear to fit well with Hakim's argument, as outlined in the Introduction, emphasising the degree of heterogeneity that exists among women in their preferences for different combinations of family work and paid employment. The part-timers from Class 1 and 2 backgrounds - who play the crucial role in our argument - could be taken as exemplars of Hakim's 'home-centred' as opposed to 'work-centred' women. However, while not wishing to deny the possibility of what Charles (2011) has referred to as 'free choice by equal but different' women, we would still think it unduly simplistic to treat preferences of the kind in question as being formed entirely *in vacuo*, regardless of social context. As critics of Hakim (e.g. McRae, 2003; Kangas and Rostgaard, 2007; Dex and Bukodi,

2012) have observed, under different institutional arrangements - regarding, say, child care provision, maternity (and paternity) leave and flexible working hours - and with wider-ranging and more attractive opportunities available for full-time employment - women's orientations to work could also be different.

Moreover, the question can be raised of how far women from more advantaged social backgrounds are less constrained in their choices regarding the balance of work and family life as a result of the class positions of their husbands or partners. We do not have adequate data to address this question for women in the 1946 cohort but for women in the 1958 and 1970 cohorts we can report some relevant findings. In Table 8 we show for women in these cohorts who are of Class 1 and 2 origins the class distributions of their husbands or partners in relation to these women's own class positions at age 38 and to whether or not they have worked part-time.

[Table 8 here]

It can be seen that with women of Class 1 or 2 origins who are themselves either in Class 1 or 2 or in Class 3, 4 or 5 positions, there is no great difference as between full- and part-timers in the class positions of their husbands or partners, and especially not as regards the proportion in Class 1 or 2. However, with women of Class 1 or 2 origins who are in Class 6 or 7 positions, and thus in terms of their own employment significantly downwardly mobile, a marked difference is found: part-timers - increasingly in the majority - are clearly more likely than full-timers to have husbands or partners in Classes 1 or 2: that is, in managerial or professional

employment. These women could then be regarded as having greater freedom than others to choose to pursue a primarily home-centred life: that is, in still in being able to enjoy a relatively high standard of living without needing to maximise their own returns from paid employment. There is obviously scope here for research of a more detailed, micro-level kind.

Conclusions

In this paper our concern has been to account for the increasing equality in relative rates of intergenerational class mobility - or, that is, of increasing social fluidity - that has previously been shown to occur across three cohorts of women born in Britain in 1946, 1958 and 1970 - in contrast to the essential constancy in such rates that prevails among their male counterparts. We began by considering what we have termed the perverse fluidity hypothesis, as earlier suggested by Goldthorpe and Mills, although with part-time rather than intermittent employment being taken as the main source of downward worklife mobility among women that also entails downward intergenerational mobility and thus promotes social fluidity. In an initial test of the perverse fluidity hypothesis in this form, we obtained supportive results. It proved to be the case that the increase in social fluidity among women across the three cohorts we study is essentially confined to those who had at least one period of part-time work. However, a further, more specific test of the hypothesis was not

supportive. When we identified those part-timers who had actually followed perverse fluidity paths - only, as it turned out, a small minority in each cohort - and removed them from the analysis, increasing social fluidity among the remaining part-timers was still apparent to much the same extent as before.

We then took alternative approach to our explanatory problem. Rather than supposing that it is part-time working that itself in some way leads to a weakening between women's class origins and class destinations, we raised the question of whether those women who subsequently work part-time might already differ, at the point of their entry into the labour market, from women who do not go on to work part-time. What we find is that eventual full- and part-timers do not differ in their class origins and, in the two later cohorts we study, only to a rather uncertain extent in their educational qualifications. However, where in the two later cohorts a marked and increasing difference does show up is in the levels of employment at which they make their labour market entry - regardless of their class origins or qualifications. There is a clear association between entering in Class 6 and 7 - essentially working class - positions and later becoming a part-timer. It is then essentially from these findings that our explanation of increasing fluidity among part-timers derives. Part-timers are as likely to come from more advantaged as from less advantaged class origins; but those from more advantaged backgrounds tend to enter the labour market in clearly less advantaged positions than do their counterparts who later remain in full-time work and, further, show no particular

propensity - so far as we can follow their work histories - to be counter-mobile back to their class of origin. In other words, it is these women, who appear not to draw on the advantages of their backgrounds in order to advance their own work careers and whose numerical importance increases across the cohorts, who are the source of the weakening association that we find between class origins and destinations among women at large.

If this conclusion is accepted, there are then two different implications of it that should be noted.

First, the explanation that we put forward for increasing social fluidity among women stands in opposition not only to that represented by the perverse fluidity hypothesis but also to the two other scenarios that we initially outlined: i.e. that education may be playing a greater role in reducing the association between class origins and destinations among women than among men or that policy interventions may have distinctively favoured the worklife advancement, and thus intergenerational mobility chances, of women of less advantaged class origins. In our present explanation the focus is, rather, on the downward mobility of women of more advantaged class origins, resulting from a tendency for some of their number not to exploit the advantages of their social backgrounds as fully as they might in the context of their working lives.

Second, the way in which we have accounted for the increase in social fluidity among women has implications for how we should view the wider social significance of this development. In this regard, we would caution against attaching too much importance to it as an indicator of greater societal openness.

On the one hand, our current data-set allows us to follow the work histories of women only up to age 38. It has, however, been shown (Dex and Bukodi, 2012) that women who have been downwardly mobile as a result of taking up part-time work do have realistic chances of reversing this process if and when they return to full-time employment. The possibility has then to be recognised that if in future research the work histories of women in our three cohorts were to be considered up to, say, age 50, the increase in intergenerational social fluidity that we have observed would be reduced or even perhaps eliminated. For it should again be emphasised that women's orientations to work and family life need not be regarded as fixed, and that there seems no reason why they should not change over the life-course.

On the other hand, insofar as women from more advantaged class backgrounds who could be counted as downwardly mobile by reference to their own employment are married to or partnered with men in managerial or professional positions, then it might well be thought that at the level of the conjugal unit or nuclear family rather little in the way of greater fluidity within the class structure is entailed.

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Table 1: *Distribution of women by type of employment history and cohort (%)*

	Birth cohort		
	1946	1958	1970
Full-time jobs only - continuous employment	18.5	19.6	17.1
Full-time jobs only - intermittent employment	35.2	30.2	23.1
Some part-time experience	46.3	50.2	59.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	2112	7094	6049

Table 2: *NS-SEC 7-class version and 5-class collapse*

Class	Description
Class 1	Higher managers and professionals
Class 2	Lower managers and professionals
Class 3	Intermediate occupations
Class 4	Small employers and own account workers
Class 5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
Class 6	Semi-routine occupations
Class 7	Routine occupations

Table 3: *Fit of models to intergenerational class mobility tables for women in three cohorts at age 38 by employment history*

	MI LR[a]	d.f.1	p	DI
FULL-TIME jobs only - CONTINUOUS employment				
1) Independence: CO, CD	2.230	48	0.000	0.088
2) Constant associations: CO CD OD	0.308	32	0.980	0.031
3) Unidiff: CO CD β_cOD	0.318	30	0.980	0.031
3) versus 2)	0.129	2	0.879	
β (1946)	*1.000*			
β (1958)	*0.917*			
β (1970)	*0.854*			
FULL-TIME jobs only - INTERMITTENT employment				
1) Independence: CO, CD	6.175	48	0.000	0.114
2) Constant associations: CO CD OD	0.507	32	0.991	0.031
3) Unidiff: CO CD β_cOD	0.459	30	0.995	0.029
3) versus 2)	1.258	2	0.288	
β (1946)	*1.000*			
β (1958)	*0.815*			
β (1970)	*0.719*			
FULL-TIME jobs only – ALL				
1) Independence: CO, CD	7.799	48	0.000	0.101
2) Constant associations: CO CD OD	0.518	32	0.989	0.023
3) Unidiff: CO CD β_cOD	0.471	30	0.994	0.022
3) versus 2)	1.214	2	0.302	
β (1946)	*1.000*			
β (1958)	*0.819*			
β (1970)	*0.736*			
Some PART-TIME work experience				
1) Independence: CO, CD	9.649	48	0.000	0.092
2) Constant associations: CO CD OD	1.025	32	0.429	0.027
3) Unidiff: CO CD β_cOD	0.482	30	0.992	0.019
3) versus 2)	15.556	2	0.000	
β (1946)	*1.000*			
β (1958)	*0.887*			
β (1970)	*0.595*			

Note: a. The likelihood ratio was calculated using the method for multiply imputed data proposed by Meng and Rubin (1992). The p-value of the test statistic is obtained from an F distribution. Only its first degrees of freedom are reported. These are identical to the degrees of freedom for the likelihood ratio test if the data were complete.

Table 4: *Construction and distribution of perverse fluidity paths (% by column)*

Class of origin	First class	Class at age 38	1946		1958		1970	
			Full-timers	Part-timers	Full-timers	Part-timers	Full-timers	Part-timers
Class 1	Class 1	Class 2 or lower	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.5
Class 2	Class 1	Class 3/4/5 or lower	..	..	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
	Class 2	Class 3/4/5 or lower	0.2	0.1	0.5	1.0	0.7	0.9
Class 3/4/5	Class 1	Class 6 or Class 7	..	..	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
	Class 2	Class 6 or Class 7	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.8
	Class 3/4/5	Class 6 or Class 7	1.4	6.4	1.6	6.5	0.9	3.7
Class 6	Class 1	Class 7	..	..	..	..	..	..
	Class 2	Class 7	..	..	..	..	0.1	0.0
	Class 3/4/5	Class 7	0.5	1.4	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.4
	Class 6	Class 7	0.7	2.1	0.3	0.7	0.2	0.7
Total			*2.8*	*10.2*	*3.6*	*9.6*	*2.8*	*7.3*

Table 5: *UNIDIFF parameters when removing perverse fluidity paths –*
women with some part-time work experience [a]

Birth cohort	UNIDIFF parameters
1946	1.000
1958	0.847
1970	0.597

Note:
a: UNIDIFF vs CFS model:
LR difference: 13.11; d.f.: 2; $p < 0.00$.

Table 6: *Probability of having part-time job up to age 38, average marginal effects with 95% CI from multinomial logit model, coefficients multiplied by 100*

	1946		1958		1970	
Class of origin						
Class 1 & 2	-0.414		-2.687		-0.462	
	[-6.34-5.51]		[-6.52-1.15]		[-3.98-3.06]	
Class 3 & 4 & 5 (ref.)						
Class 6 & 7	-0.473		-1.723		-2.440	
	[-3.88-2.93]		[-4.84-1.40]		[-5.78-0.91]	
Entry education						
No qualification; sub-secondary (ref.)						
Lower secondary	-8.077	**	4.897	**	-3.321	*
	[-11.73- (-4.42)]		[1.72-8.07]		[-6.58-(-0.06)]	
Higher sec.; lower tertiary	-24.548	**	2.094		-4.544	
	[-34.4-(-14.6)]		[-2.78-6.97]		[-9.64-0.55]	
Higher tertiary	-20.800	**	1.698		-6.987	**
	[-36.5-(-5.2)]		[-4.69-8.09]		[-11.95-(-2.02)]	
Entry class						
Class 1 & 2	-1.549		-7.817	**	-2.396	
	[-8.94-5.84]		[-12.51-(-3.13)]		[-6.54-1.75]	
Class 3 & 4 & 5 (ref.)						
Class 6 & 7	2.342		7.292	**	11.630	**
	[-1.38-5.96]		[4.27-10.31]		[8.58-14.67]	

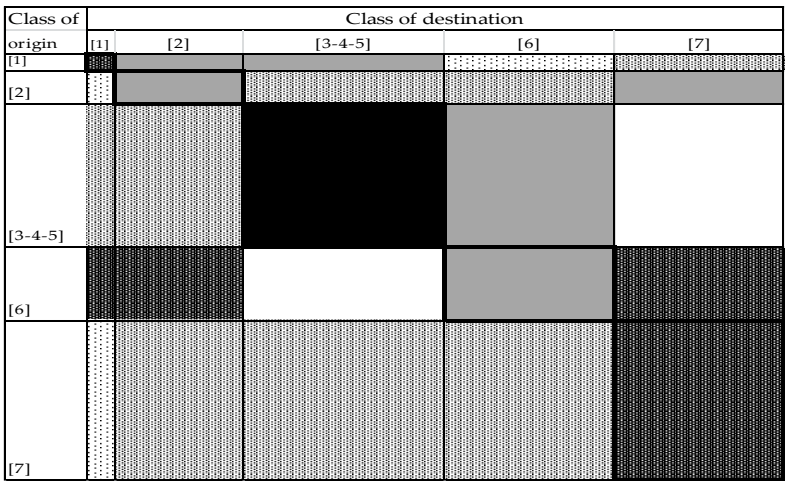
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 7: *Distribution of women by class of origin, entry class and class at age 38 (% by column)*

	1946		1958		1970	
	Full-timers	Part-timers	Full-timers	Part-timers	Full-timers	Part-timers
Class of origin						
Class 1	4	3	6	5	12	12
Class 2	8	7	17	16	19	17
Class 3 & 4 & 5	33	32	37	40	34	35
Class 6	20	18	10	11	14	14
Class 7	36	41	29	27	22	22
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Dissimilarity index between full-timers and part-timers	4.8		4.1		1.7	
Index of net differences (%)	3.1		1.4		1.6	
Entry class						
Class 1	0	1	4	2	6	3
Class 2	11	7	13	8	15	11
Class 3 & 4 & 5	53	50	44	43	43	36
Class 6	21	24	23	28	21	29
Class 7	15	19	16	19	16	21
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Dissimilarity index between full-timers and part-timers	6.6		8.3		13.8	
Index of net differences (%)	11.4		12.5		15.0	
Class at age 38						
Class 1	2	1	7	4	13	8
Class 2	20	15	23	19	28	24
Class 3 & 4 & 5	44	33	36	35	36	33
Class 6	17	24	19	25	16	25
Class 7	17	26	14	16	8	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Dissimilarity index between full-timers and part-timers	15.8		8.8		10.9	
Index of net differences (%)	15.5		12.7		13.5	

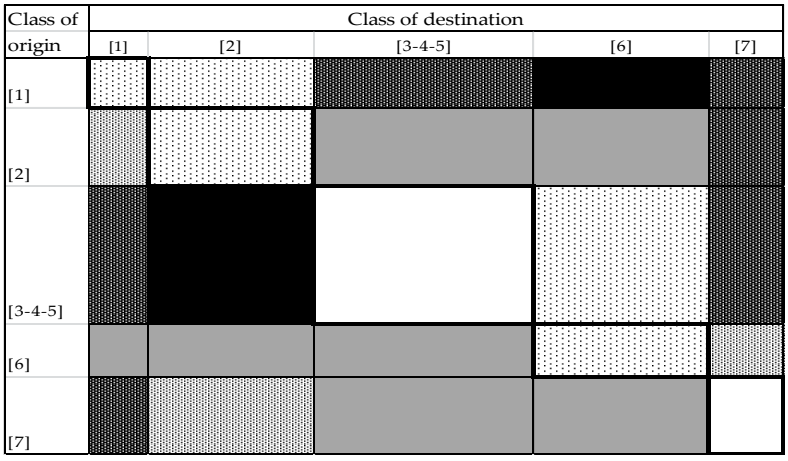
Figure 1: *Standardised residuals under the constant social fluidity model for women with part-time work experience, cell dimensions drawn proportionately to marginal distributions*

1946 cohort



1958 cohort

1970 cohort



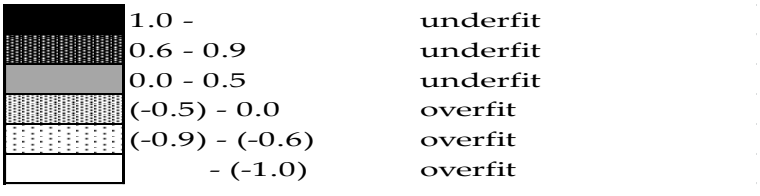


Table 8: *Distribution of women of Class 1 and 2 origin by own class at age 38, part-time or only full-time work experience, and partner's class, 1958 and 1970 cohorts (% by row)*

Class at age 38	Work experience		Partner's class				
			Class 1/2	Class 3/4/5	Class 6/7	Total	N
Class 1/2	Part-time	1958	73	20	6	100	207
		1970	73	22	5	100	231
	Full-time only	1958	73	22	5	100	157
		1970	69	22	9	100	155
Class 3/4/5	Part-time	1958	53	31	15	100	181
		1970	55	39	6	100	173
	Full-time only	1958	54	37	10	100	115
		1970	55	35	10	100	78
Class 6/7	Part-time	1958	46	37	17	100	121
		1970	52	25	23	100	116
	Full-time only	1958	34	43	22	100	58
		1970	28	44	28	100	18

Notes

[1] The idea of perverse fluidity initially emerged in discussion of the difficulties experienced by black families in the US, on account of racial inequalities in educational and employment opportunities, of maintaining any upward social mobility achieved in one generation through into the next. For discussion of this issue, see Blau and Duncan (1962: ch. 6).

[2] It should in this connection be noted that in studies of intergenerational mobility women (and likewise men) not currently in the labour force are usually either left out of account or - as in the analyses we have ourselves previously undertaken - allocated to a class destination on the basis of their *last* employment.

[3] We perform multiple imputation separately by cohort and gender, allowing for 20 sets of imputations. See further Kuha (2013).

[4] The proportion of women who have never worked up to age 38 is negligible in all three cohorts, 2 per cent in the 1946 and 1970 cohorts and 6 per cent in the 1958 cohort. In the 1946 cohort 30 per cent of women were coded according to a 'last employment' recorded before age 30, but this proportion falls to 17 per cent in the 1958 cohort and to 14 per cent in the 1970 cohort.

[5] We should add that when applying this five-class version of NS-SEC to our mobility tables for all women in each cohort, we still observe the same increase in fluidity across the cohorts as was earlier reported on the basis of the full 7-class version. The results of this analysis and of all others referred to in the text but not presented in full are available on request.

[6] When in Bukodi et al. (2015) all women are considered, we find that the increase in fluidity is fairly even across the cohorts rather than being, as in the case of part-timers, most marked between the 1958 and 1970 cohorts. This difference mainly comes about because the - non-significant - increase in fluidity in the case of full-timers that is noted in the text above is most apparent between the 1946 and 1958 cohorts.