Exploring Complex Transitions: Looking Back at the ‘Golden Age’ of From School to Work ^[1].

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Abstract: Using data from a little known project, '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*', carried out in Leicester between 1962 and 1964, this paper aims to re-examine the extent to which transitions during this time were complex, lengthy, non-linear and single-step and explores the assumed linearity and uncomplicated nature of school to work transitions in the 1960s. It is argued that earlier research on youth transitions has tended to understate the level of complexity that characterised youth transitions in the early 1960s and 1970s. Instead, authors exploring transition during this period concentrated on 'macro' or more structural issues such as class and gender. It is suggested that transitions in the 1960s were characterised by individual level complexity that has largely been ignored by others exploring school to work transitions.

Keywords: Youth transitions, young workers, risk and individualisation, Norbert Elias.

It is now well established that the way youth transitions are conceptualised has changed over the last thirty years or so (Layder *et al* 1991; Roberts 1995; Evans and Furlong 1997; Lawy 2002). Evans and Furlong (1997) reflect on this change by documenting the metaphors emerging from the different theoretical approaches of the last thirty years. They argue ‘each metaphor represents ways of analysing and understanding the young person’s interactions with his or her social milieu and typical sequences of events between adolescence and adulthood’ (Evans and Furlong 1997: 17). For example, they suggest that youth transitions were categorised first, as niches in the 1960s and then pathways in the 1970s, as trajectories in the 1980s, before moving on to the more reflexive and post structuralist metaphor of navigation in the 1990s. In turn these metaphors have given rise to newer metaphors such as structured individualisation (Nagel and Wallace 1997), and rationalised individualisation (Furlong *et al* 2002).

However, underpinning these different metaphors is a view that the individual experience of the transition *has* indeed changed and that the transitional experience of contemporary young people is markedly different to the experiences of previous generations of youth. The implication is that school to work transitions have moved from being a mass, straightforward, linear and a ‘single step’ process (albeit mediated by family background, class and gender) to a complex, fragmented and individualised process dependent on the navigational and negotiating abilities of young people (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Cartmel *et al* 2002). Whereas once young people could leave school, often without qualifications, now young people face uncertainty and have to navigate their way through a variety of experiences and transition options, always reflecting on the risks involved. Young people entering a local labour market

no longer share common transition experiences with others as transitions have become more individualised.

Analysis of the contemporary situation of young adults highlights an increasing fragmentation of opportunities and experience; the processes of youth are highly differentiated, reflecting and constructing social divisions in society in complex ways...As possible pathways out of school have diversified, young people have to find their own ways forward and their own values in education, consumption, politics, work and family life. (Evans and Furlong 1997: 33)

The evidence put forward to support the view that young people's transitional experiences have changed usually appears in the form of drastic labour market transformations (Ashton 1991; Roberts 1995, 1997), the rise in youth unemployment (Furlong 1993; Roberts 1997), the emergence of youth training schemes, the increased availability of post-compulsory education (Furlong 1993; Roberts 1997), changes in social security legislation (Pilcher 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997), and the increased complexity (and risk) of choice (Nagel and Wallace 1997; Lawy 2002). However, with new studies collecting reflexive accounts of past transitional experiences, and via the secondary analysis of historical young worker data, it has become possible to re-examine the individual transitional experience and question the extent to which past youth transitions were individualised and complex. For example, Vickerstaff (2001:3) has explored the assumed linearity and uncomplicated nature of transitions for post-war apprentices. In this research she has demonstrated that past transitions were anything but straightforward, unproblematic or single step. For some of the respondents in her study, the experience of apprenticeship was unpleasant, violent, fragmented and as much the result of 'chance' as choice. She suggests, compared to contemporary transitions

The range of choices may have been different, leading to a greater homogenisation of possible pathways and individuals may have had less expectation of being able to design their own trail but the individual still had to negotiate and manage their own trajectory, whether it was of their own choosing or not. Indeed, the absence of apparent choice might be hypothesized to have brought its own risks and dilemmas. (Vickerstaff 2001: 3)

Using data from the little known project from the 1960s, this paper aims to examine the complexity of past transitions and to question their assumed linearity. The argument offered is that previous research on youth transitions has understated the level of complexity that characterised youth transitions in the early 1960s and 1970s. From the secondary analysis of the 1960s data the individual level complexity that underpinned school to work transitions is documented. For many in this study, the transition process was not as smooth, uncomplicated or as linear as has been previously argued. Throughout this paper the concept of a 'golden age' is used as a shorthand term to describe the post-war period (between the 1950s and the late 1960) which has been characterised by many authors as a time of mass employment and straightforward school to work transitions (Vickerstaff 2003). Certainly in Leicester, the focus of this paper, the 1960s was a period of excellent employment prospects for young unqualified workers with the wealth of low skilled jobs available and a low rate of unemployment (Pye 1972: 375). However, this orthodox view of the past ignores the fact that many local labour markets were characterised by large fluctuations in their buoyancy and prosperity. Even in the Leicester labour market of the 1960s our data reveals that there was a fear of unemployment regardless of those accounts which suggest that during this 'golden age' jobs for school leavers were plentiful (Kiernan 1992; Roberts 1984, 1995; Unwin and Wellington 2001). Indeed,

as Pollard (1983) has argued unemployment elsewhere was substantial during this period suggesting that the young workers fears were justified.

Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations

Approaching his final year in the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester, Norbert Elias was successful in applying to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (D.S.I.R) for a grant of £15,000 to fund the project '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*'. Better known for books like *The Civilising Process* (1939) and *What is Sociology* (1970), undertaking a large-scale, government sponsored survey on youth transitions may seem something of a departure for Elias who tended to support his works with the secondary analysis of historical data. However, whilst Elias's writings on young workers remain unpublished and embedded within his own notes, minutes of meetings and memoranda, Goodwin and O'Connor (2002) and Krieken (1998) argue that the transition from childhood to adulthood is closely interwoven with Elias's other sociological concerns. For example, Elias suggests that human beings are 'interdependent, forming figurations or networks with each other which connect the psychological with the social, or habitus with social relations' (Krieken, 1998: 49) and

...it is the web of social relations in which individuals live during their most impressionable phase, that is childhood and youth, which imprints itself upon their unfolding personality in the form of the relationship between their controlling agencies, super-ego and ego and their libidinal impulses. The

resulting balance...determines how an individual person steers him or herself in his or her social relations with others... However, there is no end to the intertwining... (Elias, 2000: 377)

Elias conceptualised the intertwining as the inter-relationship between *sociogenesis* (the processes of development and transformation in social relations) and *psychogenesis* (transformation in habitus that accompanies such social changes) (Krieken 1998). In this sense habitus is not inherent but 'habituated' and becomes a constituent part of the individual by learning through social experience. In Elias's work childhood is the main 'transmission belt' for the development of the habitus (Krieken 1998; 156). The '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*' can be seen as a project through which Elias sought to gain further support for his own theorising and, therefore, has both historical and theoretical significance for those interested in his sociological enquiry.

Picking up themes from his other writings, Elias argued that the transition from school to work not only required the young person to learn new technical skills and the skills required to do the job but also to make adjustments 'to relationships with older workers, supervisors...learning new codes of behaviour (Elias 1961: 1). For Elias this transition process was not a smooth one and he speculated that many of the young people would experience difficulties, anxiety or even 'shock' when entering the adult world of work. The reason for this is that schools do not prepare the young people for adulthood or work. Elias suggested that

The central problem arises from the fact that a complex society such as ours requires customarily a prolonged period of indirect preparation and training for adult life. By indirect I mean from the age of 5 to 14,15 or 16 the growing up children of our society are trained for their adult tasks in special institutions which we call schools,

where they learn, where they acquire the knowledge about the adult world past, present and future not by direct contact with it, but largely from books. Their actual knowledge of the adult world, their only contacts with adults, is relatively limited (Young Worker Project 1962: 2)^[2].

To explore these issues data was collected via interviews with a sample of young people drawn from the Youth Employment Office index of all Leicester school leavers from the summer and Christmas of 1960 and the summer and Christmas of 1962. The target group was to include all those with one years further education. This sample was then further stratified by the school attended (secondary, technical, grammar or other), by the size of firm entered in first job and whether they were trainees or not. The sample was divided up into five sub-groups and using a table of random numbers a target sample of 1150 young people were identified. The sample is summarised in table one.

****Table One Here ****

From the 1150 individuals, the research team completed 882 interviews. With the exception of Ashton and Field (1976) who used a sample of the cases, the bulk of the interview data has never been fully analysed or published. In the mid 1970s Ashton archived the interview schedules, where they have remained untouched until recently, when 851 of the original interview schedules were rediscovered.

Initial analysis of the data has revealed that the project provides a fascinating insight into the individual experiences of young people during the transition from school to

work during the 1960s and facilitates a re-examination of transitions made during this period. In this paper we now go on to use the data to explore the following questions:

- i) to what extent were transitions in the 1960s ‘non-linear’, involving breaks, changes of direction, extended or repeated periods of unemployment, frequent moves between jobs, returns to education and training after labour market participation and any unusual sequences of events (Furlong *et al* 2002);
- ii) To what extent were transitions in the 1960s homogenised or differentiated at the individual level;
- iii) To what extent were transitions in the 1960s single-step or prolonged.

From School to Work: Linear and Smooth or Non-linear and Complex?

Furlong *et al.* (2002) reflect on transition experiences that can be defined as either linear or non-linear. They suggest that linearity involves fairly smooth, straightforward transitions from school to work in which there are no major breaks, divergences or reversals (Furlong *et al.* 2002: 7). However, they note that this has changed over time and once uncommon experiences, such as unemployment have become normalised. They suggest, for example, that few young people have managed to avoid unemployment altogether and a young person now ‘who has a short period of unemployment between leaving education and gaining a job can still be seen as having made a linear transition’ (Furlong *et al* 2002: 7). Conversely, they argue that non-linear or complex transitions ‘involve breaks, changes of direction and unusual sequences of events’ (Furlong *et al* 2002: 8) and can include extended or

repeated periods of unemployment, frequent moves between jobs and returns to education and training after periods in the labour market (Furlong *et al* 2002: 8).

Using this typology, Furlong *et al* (2002) have successfully questioned the assumed non-linearity and complexity of all *contemporary* transitions and argue that some young people still follow smooth and linear routes. They suggest that the routes young people take still depend, to some extent, on educational attainment, gender and class, arguing that ‘those who experience complex transition tend to be disadvantaged educationally and socially and are over represented in areas of deprivation’ (Furlong *et al* 2002: 13).

Given Furlong *et al*’s (2002) critique of the assumed non-linearity of current transitions, it is possible to question the assumed linearity of past transitions using the same typology. This typology implies that the transitions of the 1960s were linear and straightforward involving no major breaks, divergences or reversals. It would also be fair to suggest that a linear transition of the past would not have involved any periods of unemployment or employment breaks, changes of direction, frequent moves between jobs or returns to education as, at this time, these were relatively uncommon experiences.

Frequent Job Moves

Data relating to the number of jobs held immediately after leaving school and prior to the interview is presented in Table 2. Usually the respondents were interviewed within one to two years of leaving school and as such the number of jobs broadly

represents the numbers of jobs held in their first two years of working life. Data on the number of jobs held is presented by gender, age and education.

At the time of the interview the majority of the young workers were still in their first jobs, although a sizeable group had worked in at least two jobs. Interestingly, the numbers of young people who had held four or more jobs is not insignificant. Whilst the data provides no evidence of young people returning to education, this data does suggest that some of the young workers did engage in frequent job moves, with many of those interviewed changing jobs anywhere between every month and every four to six months. Indeed, taking the sample as a whole there were a small number of individuals who had held between seven and eleven jobs between leaving school and the time of the interview.

There is an important gender difference here, with girls experiencing a greater number of job changes than boys in the same period. Over 43 per cent of the girls interviewed were on their second or third job and 10 per cent were on their fourth job or more, whilst the majority of young males were still in their first job, 37 per cent had held more than one job and nearly 6 per cent had held four or more jobs. Given the fact that the majority of these young workers were actually in their first year of employment, for this small group it implies a job move at least every three months.

****Table TWO Here ****

From Table 2 it appears that most young people had remained in their first job. However, of those aged 18, 16 per cent had held three jobs and nearly 10 per cent had held four jobs or more. Educational experience also had an impact. The data appears to suggest that those young workers with less than one years education (in this sample

the majority) were more likely to be on to their second or third job whilst those with a higher level of education were more likely to have remained with their first employer.

Frequent Moves and Changes of Direction

The changes in direction that such frequent job moves entailed are also evident in the data presented in Table 3. Although not fully representative of the sample, this data provides some insight into the early career histories of the school leavers interviewed and individual level complexities. This data is typical of many of those young workers who had not remained in their first job. The data in this table is presented in order of job reading from right to left.

The data clearly indicates that some of the young people interviewed did experience significant changes in direction during the early part of their career. For example, respondent A464, aged 16 and interviewed in April 1964 had a total of seven jobs since leaving school sixteen months earlier. On average this respondent changed jobs every two months. He started work as a shop assistant before spending one month as a machinist in a large boot and shoe factory. He then went to work in a crisp factory, returning to boot and shoe work for three months before subsequent moves through positions in a plastics factory, a sweet factory and an engineering works before becoming unemployed.

Respondent E87 is similar. Aged 18 at the time of interview this respondent had held nine different positions in just over two years in the labour market. On average she stayed in each job for just under three months. She began her working life as a shop assistant before moving into a position as a cutter in a hosiery factory.

****Table Three Here ****

She left the hosiery factory because she wanted to become a nurse and then spent six months working as a domestic assistant in a nursing home. She went on to become a machinist in a boot and shoe factory. Subsequently she moved into positions as chambermaid, maid, groom and a hotel assistant before returning to work as a shoe machinist.

Breaks and Unemployment

A further factor identified as being central to a linear smooth transition from school to work is the absence of periods of unemployment or breaks in employment from work histories. The assumption in much of the literature is that young people in the 1960s moved seamlessly from school to work without a break. From the data it appears that many of the young people did not experience any significant breaks in employment and avoided unemployment. However, this may mean that for some unemployment and the fear of unemployment added to the individual level complexity of their own transition from school to work. Indeed, although while perhaps not the norm, individuals in this study did experience breaks in employment and periods of unemployment.

The respondent gave the impression of being very insecure. He had 7 sisters and 4 brothers, but his mother was a widower. For the last few years of his school career, he had lived at a council home because he often played truant from school while he was living with his mother. Since he had been out to work, he had had 7 jobs but he was now out of work...At the end of the interview, respondent

mentioned that he may get a job with a fair that was due to leave Leicester in the next few days. (Unemployed Male 1964, A464)

***** had a good school career, and with five passes at GCE started out with the intention of making a good career for himself. He was very pleased to get the position with a firm of chartered accountants and felt he was on the road to becoming a professionally qualified man. It came as a great shock when he was dismissed for having a Saturday job on a market stall. He was unemployed for five weeks and had to take a job simply to earn some money. (Clerk 1963, B155)*

It also appears from the data that the fear of unemployment was a real issue for some of the young people. As the quotes below illustrate, a group of the respondents professed their anxieties about being unemployed when leaving school or becoming unemployed in the future. For some the concern was so great that they took the first job that they could.

...respondent has had fears of unemployment and general economic insecurity. It came out several times in the interview. As his father realised...respondent has also been afraid of becoming a drifter, if not a "delinquent"...(Apprentice Gas Fitter 1963, A532)

Worried when it came to leaving school in case he didn't get a job: took the first he could get because it was better than being unemployed. (Trainee Knitter 1963, A636)

I used to worry that I would get the sack because I wasn't underlined. [Did any boys get the sack?] Oh yes. (Stock Controller 1963, C509)

In this study, the respondents were asked whether they had secured a job whilst they were still at school or whether they secured the job after leaving school. Over 170

respondents reported that they did not secure a job until after leaving school. The length of time after leaving school until they found work could vary anywhere between two and five weeks or between two and six months. This suggests that quite a sizable group did not leave school and walk straight into a job. As the interviewer notes record:

...after leaving school- he couldn't get a job to start with so he had an uncle in carpentry who took him around with him and gave him pocket money. (Motor Mechanic 1964, A344)

Or as a respondent suggested

Long time after I left. Two months [didn't you have job during that time ?] No. (Boot and Shoe Worker 1963, A944)

In terms of movements between their first and second job, of those who were in their second job, 117 suggested that they have only heard about the current position after leaving their previous position. It is also clear that some of the young people in the survey experienced periods of unemployment.

Straightforward Transitions?

A key characteristic of non-linear transitions is the risk and uncertainty experienced by the young person. Again, the assumption here is that young people making school to work transitions in the 1960s did not experience the process as being characterised by risk and uncertainty. Instead it was relatively straightforward. However the data for this study suggests that some of the young people did indeed perceive the risks and uncertainties of life beyond the school playground and as with Vickerstaff (2001)

and Carter (1962), quite a large proportion of the young workers did not feel that they had been prepared for entering employment for the first time. The respondents were asked ‘when you were at school, what were you told about work?’

That it was terrible, had to work long hours. Pretty general idea that it was a horrible thing to do, that nobody would ever want to leave school when been to work. (Receptionist 1963, E590)

We had a few talks but very little really until you come to the real thing. Went on a few trips but they never really told you much. (Hosiery Packer 1964, A836)

YEO told us it wasn't as easy as it seemed to be. When at school tend to see just payday side - don't look into hours and how hard you have to work. (Grocery Worker 1964, B266)

That I would wish that I were back at school. (Butcher 1963, C711)

For many, their preparation for working life was *ad hoc* and was largely dependent upon the whims of the teachers, schools and youth employment officers. For others, the mere prospect of entering employment brought with it feelings of risk and uncertainty.

I had no idea what it would be like. It's like going to a new town- you just don't know what it's going to be like (Trainee Electrician 1963, A536)

I thought I'd have to work quite hard- If I didn't work fast enough I'd have to leave the job (Shoe Worker 1964, A531)

I was a bit frightened going into big factory and not knowing anybody, and people being older than you, - not quite sure what to expect (Knitwear Machinist 1964, E334)

During the first few months of work the risk and uncertainty remained for many. For example, a large number of those who had left school to become apprentices experienced real anxiety and a heightened sense of risk in simply getting their apprenticeship papers actually signed. The risk for these young workers was that without the signed apprenticeship paper they could lose their job, have difficulties in gaining access to college, or as one respondent reported they would be ‘mucked about, the new lads are used as cheap labour’ (Cabinet Maker 1963, C125).

...you have to push them to sign your apprenticeship...[what did you do?]. You tell them and they put your name down and they forget it you have to keep urging them on and keep telling them till they get fed up and they let you go. [Is yours sorted out?]. Yes I keep going up and telling them, but me dad has gotta go up and see him and sign them. [How soon?]. It has to be done not much before and not much after 16 because your apprenticeship finishes when you're 21 1/2 years. (Plumber 1964, A541)

The only difficulty was getting my apprenticeship papers. It wasn't difficult getting into tech but I had to go to my boss and ask about apprenticeship on a years approval to start with and if you are satisfactory you start apprenticeship. ...[what did you do?]. Asked my boss... he said that at the moment the problem is getting into tech. There was a meeting of apprentices with the boss and he said he could only let a few go and it was a question of who...the first thing I knew was a member of staff coming to me with the papers and telling me to get them signed. As far as I know there has only been trouble about being an apprentice. (Apprentice Painter and Decorator 1963, A792)

I was worried about my apprenticeship papers not being signed. After I had been there about 9 months I went to see the boss about it. He said he would make it all right and he backdated the papers for me. (Apprentice Machine Minder 1963, A866)

Homogenised or Differentiated Transition?

A crude measure of individualization is the proportion of age peers in a person's social network with whom he or she shares a common biography having grown up in the same district, attended the same schools, and entered similar types of employment at the same ages. Virtually everything that every individual does and experiences is still shared with many other people, but nowadays in a variety of individualized sequences and combinations. (Roberts 1995:113)

As suggested above, alongside the debates relating to the relative complexity of school to work transitions is an assertion that transitions in the past were more homogenised and less individualised. Roberts (1995) provides a useful discussion of this, pointing to the shared characteristics of a homogenous transition – same biography, similar education, growing up in the same area and entering similar types of employment.

The relative homogeneity of transitions can also be explored using the *Adjustment of Young Workers* data. During the interviews the young workers were asked two questions that could be used as broad indicators of the homogeneity thesis. First, the young workers were asked 'did anyone else you know have the same sort of jobs as you?'. Such a question touches upon Roberts' notions of individuals sharing a common biography, growing up in the same area, attending the same schools and

entering the same types of employment as the question is specifically directed at the respondent's relatives, friends and neighbours. Likewise, the same 'type' of employment that Roberts refers to is also captured in this question as the question deals with types of jobs rather than dealing with specific employers. The second question deals with the latter issue by asking the respondents 'was there anyone you knew working in the same firm?'. The data relating to these two questions is presented in Table 4.

****Table Four Here ****

From Table 4 it is clear that approximately fifty per cent young workers in 1960s Leicester may not have made the homogenised transitions suggested by authors such as Roberts. For example, forty nine percent of the respondents suggested that they did not work in the same sort of job as their friends or relatives. Although such a question may under represent the ability of respondents to fully differentiate between types of jobs in terms of their 'similarities' such as working conditions and rewards and should be treated with some caution, the findings do suggest that past transitions may not have been as homogenous as previously thought. Likewise, the fact that fifty two percent of the respondents indicated that they did not know anybody working in the same firm raises questions about the extent to which biographies were shared by those growing up in the same area.

Single-step or Prolonged Transitions?

Vickerstaff (2001) argues that earlier studies assume that transitions in the 1950s and 1960s were 'single step'. It is suggested that the buoyancy of the labour market in the early 1960s enabled young people to make a direct and single-step transition from school to work. Once the young people had entered work, they tended to leave home,

achieve some state of financial independence, marry and have children in a relatively short period of time, making what Coles (1995) has called three interrelated transitions; from school to work, from family of origin to family of destination and from childhood home to independent living. This pattern was particularly true for the working class (Jones 1995, Furlong and Cartmel 1997), with working class youth more likely to become economically independent earlier than middle class youth (Pilcher 1995).

However, forty years later it has become widely accepted that youth transitions are now extended and more diversified with young people remaining dependent on their families for a longer period of time (Roberts 1995, 1997; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Pilcher 1995; Lawy 2002). The protracted transition from school to work has left young people remaining dependent on the family and state for longer (Pilcher 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Lawy 2002) as the possibility of early financial independence has become more remote. Furlong and Cartmel (1997) also suggest that domestic and housing transitions have become more complex. Explanations for such extended transitions range from labour market restructuring, the rise of youth unemployment, changes in social welfare legislation, and the increased numbers of young people staying on in education, either because of limited employment opportunities or because of family pressure.

There is little evidence to suggest that the young workers in Leicester were prolonging their transitional experience by staying on in education, as the vast majority left school at the first opportunity. Indeed, instead of family pressure to stay in education, there was a great deal of pressure from family and friends to leave education as soon as possible. Yet the single step hypothesis, relating to past

transitions, is questionable when one considers the data relating to dependence on the family, financial independence and housing transitions.

One characteristic of independence or self-responsibility, we suggest, would be the ability of the young people to make decisions about their own futures and resolve any difficulties that arose in work or life. However, many of the young people interviewed in the young worker project still relied heavily on family members in obtaining work or in resolving difficulties of conflicts at work.

... The forewoman has to sign the ticket if you make your own price out - she signed the ticket and I sent them down then swore blind she hadn't signed them. My Dad went up because they'd accused me of putting the tickets in which I didn't...(Shoe Worker 1964, D989)

*Father went to see Mr ***** and the Station Master and it was settled by them.*
(British Rail Messenger 1964, A237)

We started at Tech for one year and then he stopped us going the following year. My father got the TU in and the secretary went to see the boss. [Father] got it so that we shall carry on at Tech next September. (Apprentice Compositor 1964, C693)

[Have you had any difficulties in this job?] Not really - if I have, I talked to mother or people at work, e.g. problems with tax. (Stockman 1963, Pilot Survey)

In these examples, the young workers did not attempt to resolve their difficulties themselves or display independent behaviour. Instead they relied heavily on the interventions of family members. There are other examples in the data where parents intervene in obtaining employment, getting apprenticeship papers signed, negotiating

pay and even helping the employers to discipline the young workers. When asked how they got to know about their first job, such responses were typical:

My dad got the job for me. My dads in the job and I've been interested in it since I was at school. (Apprentice Joiner 1963, A821)

Dad got me the job. At least he got me the interview, which I had to go to. Dad works for the gas board. (Apprentice Fitter 1964, A776)

My mum used to work there and they said I could have a job if I wanted it.
(Machinist 1964, D52)

The influence of personal networks was extremely important amongst this sample and many of the young workers did indicate that their parents, siblings and members of their wider family network had helped them to find their first jobs. Friends were also important sources of information about workplace vacancies. This pattern of obtaining employment through personal contacts has been noted in other studies and can perhaps be attributed more to strong community ties (Grieco 1987) than to dependence on family. However, we would argue that this pattern, combined with the tendency of the young workers to talk over problems at work with their parents, was an indicator that the important transitional step of ‘disengaging ‘ with their families of origin (Hubbard 2000) had not been made.

The single step hypothesis is also questionable in terms of economic independence. When asked what happened to their wages, the data reveals that far from being domestically and financially independent fewer than half the respondents kept the money themselves. Rather than paying a certain amount of board and lodging as if they had moved to alternative accommodation, many had to pass their wage packet to their mother or to share it equally with her or, for a small number, give it to their

father. Their parents would then allocate a small proportion of the pay packet to the child as 'pocket money'. For many their own money was not spent on the pursuit of an independent life style but on 'sweets', 'going out' and buying clothes, records and cigarettes.

I have £1 she has the rest- she buys my food and clothes out of that. It's better than if I kept her and gave her board, she'd want my packet and everything else besides. So at moment better to give it to her. (Audit Clerk 1963, B27)

I get £7 and bring home £6-11 according to tax and I give it to her and she gives me £2-15 spending money. (Mechanic 1964, C356)

Give it all to her [mother] and she gives me spending money - about a £1 and if I want something (Hand Finisher 1963, E476)

For a start until my 17th birthday gave Mother all my wages and she gave me spending money. Started paying board at 17. Now has £2 a week. (Typist 1963, E386)

These quotes suggest that the young workers had not financially 'disengaged with their family of origin' (Hubbard 2000:9.7) and illustrate the way in which the young workers to some extent remained financially dependent upon their parents. Equally, in some families the parents were financially dependent on the young worker and relied upon their wages as essential family income, supporting parents, siblings and other relatives.

Respondent has morning paper round and keeps this for pocket money. (Mechanic 1963, A303)

Mother explains that she keeps the money and gives him what he needs as he is not responsible with money. (Warehouse Man 1963, A372)

Jones (1995) has argued that historically young workers made the transition to domestic independence soon after beginning full time paid work, however, domestic or housing transitions were not a feature of the young workers lives. These young workers had neither financially disengaged with their families of origin, nor disengaged domestically, either by leaving home to live independently or by becoming part of a family of destination. Certainly none of the respondents had made a housing transition; all of the interviews were undertaken in the family home where the respondents continued to live, despite the fact that many were aged eighteen or over and three had already married.

Conclusion

In this article we have attempted to demonstrate the complexity of past school to work transitions via a secondary analysis of data from the 1960s. Despite assertions that past school to work transitions were single step, simple and homogenous, data from the *Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles* project provides clear evidence of frequent job moves (often to very different job roles and different industries), with many young people having four or more jobs within the first year or so of employment. The findings also question the assumed seamless transition from school to work as it appears that transitional experiences during this time period were not straightforward. The data reveals that many of the young workers already felt disillusioned with work and were anxious about their future prospects or concerned about their lack of training. Some of the young people had experienced periods of unemployment either before entering work or between jobs. The young people interviewed also clearly felt increased levels of insecurity (and

risk) brought on by being out of work, or when threatened by unemployment. Likewise, the view that young people in the past made homogenised transitions to work, sharing the same experiences with friends, neighbours and relatives is also problematic. For example, over half of the sample interviewed here clearly had individualised experiences entering different firms at different times during the first years of their working life. The data also suggests that many of the young people in this survey had not made the step of disengaging with the family of origin and consequently they remained very dependent on their parents and family for housing, money and decision making long after they had made the transition from school to work.

However, there are also three broader conclusions that can be drawn from our analyses. First, whilst most authors agree that youth transitions have moved away from a process that is linear and smooth or uncomplicated to a process that is both non-linear and complex or problematic, many authors have merely confirmed an established view about the past. Indeed, as Furlong *et al* (2002) and Vickerstaff (2001) suggest, the consensus view on the changing nature of transitions, from linear and smooth to non-linear and complex, has largely remained unchallenged. Given the individual level complexity uncovered in the transitional experiences outlined above, one has to question why this is. Why have ideas relating to the ‘golden age’ of employment and notions of smooth transitions remained unquestioned? Moreover, why did sociologists at the time choose not to highlight the complexities contained within the data? These can perhaps be explained perhaps by the changing nature of the theoretical and methodological approaches to transitions over the last few years, as outlined above. This conceptual shift from exploring the impact of social structure

to the more contemporary individualised approaches actually means that in conceptual terms we are not comparing like for like when we compare current and transitional experiences of forty years ago. To put it simply, those currently involved in trying to understand transitions have become concerned with different phenomenon and have different academic pre-occupations. Past scholars were *not looking* for the individualised, subjective, complex transitional experience and the over-concentration on macro process as being central determinants of the transitional process meant that the individual experiences were largely ignored or hidden in a broader analysis. For example, in Ashton and Field (1976) the over riding concern was to explore how an individual's social and educational experience led to a continuity of experiences at work. Likewise, the dominant structural view of the 1980s viewed labour market destinations as being determined by social forces outside the control of individuals. Evans and Furlong (1997:18) suggest that, with the collapse of the youth labour market, transition experiences were explained 'more in terms of structural forces such as social class, race, gender, educational attainment and labour market conditions rather than by reference to individual characteristics or aspirations'.

A related conclusion, therefore, must be that a secondary analysis of old sociological data and the re-reading of classic studies is both worthwhile and insightful. Being able to interrogate historical data with contemporary ideas and concepts has obvious value and can change (or contribute to) previous understandings of the social world (Roberts 1997). However, with the exception of Vickerstaff (2001) and the current study, the value of applying and exploring contemporary notions and ideas against the transition experiences of youth for previous generations, and questioning the assumed linearity has not been considered.

Finally, and again a related conclusion, is that the interrogation of historical sociological data facilitates reflection on the adequacy of contemporary theories and debates. For example, this data does question aspects of the youth, risk and individualisation debates so dominant since the publication of Beck's *Risk Society* (1992). When Beck locates the problems of risk and individualisation in late modernity there is an assumption that the experiences of young people during this time are essentially different to the experiences of those who have gone before and the notion of late modernity implies a unique time period separate from other epochs - what Furlong and Cartmel (1997) refer to as the 'epistemological fallacy of late modernity'. Again the data presented above challenges this assumption. Past transitional experiences were not uniformly simple, linear or as single step as previously suggested and many transitions were characterised by individual level complexities similar to those of contemporary youth. This is not to suggest that all past transitions were 'individualised' but more simply that the past could be a complex, risky and problematic place for young people making the transition from school to work. Given Elias's (1987) assertion that 'one cannot ignore the fact that present society has grown out of earlier societies' (Elias 1987:226), the past cannot be ignored and it needs to be re-interrogated.

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Notes

[1] This paper is part of an ESRC project '*From Young Workers To Older Workers: Reflections on Work in the Life Course*' (R000223653).

[2] Elias' s view that schools and families did not prepare young people for work was central to his shock hypothesis, arguing that it was the disjuncture between what young people's expectations of work and what work was actually like that caused a shock experience. Given that young people had limited knowledge of work, he argued, they had to rely on fantasies that invariably differed from the realities of work. The shock hypothesis now has limited credibility now in the study of youth transitions with many suggesting that young people do have a clear idea of what work will be like before they arrive. For example, a number of authors have identified the 'anticipatory socialisation' or 'cultural apprenticeships' that many working class young people go through as a preparation for working life (see Cohen 1984; Griffin 1985; Penn 1995; Fuller and Unwin 2002) and, as such, many young people did have realistic expectations of working life.

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