

It's a Decent Bet That Our Children Will Be Professors Too

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Are children born into privilege very likely to end up privileged themselves? Are children born into less privileged families likewise fated to remain in their social class of origin? We care about such questions for many reasons but perhaps primarily because they speak to whether the competition for money, power, and prestige is fairly run. For many people, the brute facts of extreme poverty or inequality are not in themselves problematic or objectionable, and what really matters is simply whether the competition for riches is a fair one in which everyone, no matter how advantaged or disadvantaged their parents may be, has an equal chance to win. This commitment to a fair competition motivates a quite extensive research literature on how much mobility there is, whether some countries have more of it than others, and whether opportunities for mobility are withering away.

The purpose of this chapter is to ask whether conventional methods of monitoring mobility are adequate for the task. We're concerned that they're not and that, in particular, such methods may overlook some of the most important forms and sources of rigidity. The long-standing convention in the field, and one that we regard as problematic, has been to assume that intergenerational reproduction takes one of two forms, either a categorical form that has parents passing on a big-class position (e.g., manager, professional, craft worker) to their children or a gradational form that has parents passing on their socioeconomic standing to their children. We argue here that these standard approaches ignore the important role that detailed occupations play in reproducing inequality.

The conventional wisdom about how to measure mobility was codified a half century ago. The study of mobility bifurcated

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at that time into one camp that represented social structure in gradational terms (e.g., Svalastoga 1959) and another that represented it in big-class terms (e.g., Carlsson 1958; Glass 1954). These competing representations of social structure were subsequently attached to competing understandings of how inequality is reproduced: The class scholar assumed that parents pass on their social class to children, while the gradational scholar assumed that parents pass on their occupational prestige or socioeconomic standing to their children. Under both approaches, detailed occupations were usually treated as the appropriate starting point in representing the underlying structure of inequality, but they were transformed either by aggregating them into big social classes (i.e., the class approach) or by scaling them in terms of their socioeconomic status or prestige (i.e., the gradational approach). The study of mobility has in this sense been reduced to the study of either class or socioeconomic mobility, yet quite strikingly these simplifying assumptions have come to be adopted with little in the way of evidence that they adequately characterize the structure of opportunity.

Is it possible that both class and gradational representations are incomplete and obscure important rigidities in the mobility regime? We suggest that indeed these simplifying representations provide only partial accounts and that the structure of inequality is best revealed by supplementing them with a third representation that treats detailed occupations as fundamental conduits of reproduction. Because the social, cultural, and economic resources conveyed to children depend so fundamentally on the detailed occupations of their parents, one might expect such occupations to play a

featured role in intergenerational reproduction, but in fact this role has gone largely unexplored in most mobility analyses.

It's not just that detailed occupations serve as a main conduit for reproduction. In addition, they index the main communities and identities of workers, and as such they should be understood as a powerful omnibus indicator of the social world within which individuals are located. At a dinner party, we tend to ask a new acquaintance "What do you do?" because the response, almost invariably conveyed in the form of a detailed occupation, provides at once evidence about life chances and capacities (skills and credentials, earnings capacity, networks), honor and esteem (prestige, socioeconomic status), and the social and cultural world within which interactions occur (consumption practices, politics, and attitudes). We care, in other words, about occupations because they are pregnant with information on the life chances, social standing, and social world of their incumbents (see Weeden and Grusky 2005). The (largely untested) bias in this regard is that occupation is far more strongly correlated with these many variables than is income. If we tend to avoid asking acquaintances about their income, it's not just because doing so is viewed as too intrusive and personal but also because we suspect that querying about occupation will yield more in the way of useful information.

Mechanisms of Reproduction

If our main argument, therefore, is that occupations are an important conduit for reproduction, this is obviously not to suggest that inequality is reproduced *exclusively* through occupations. Rather, there's good reason to believe that, while much repro-

duction occurs through occupations, the more frequently studied big-class and socioeconomic mechanisms are also doing important reproductive work. We suggest below that a comprehensive mobility model should examine at once reproduction at the socioeconomic, big-class, and microclass levels. In most mobility analyses, the three levels are confounded, and conclusions about the structure of mobility may conceal possible differences in how these forms of reproduction play out. We develop this argument below by reviewing each of these three mechanisms of reproduction in turn.¹

Gradational regime: The gradational (or socioeconomic) approach to studying mobility has inequality taking on a simple unidimensional form in which families are arrayed in terms of either income or occupational status. The life chances of children growing up within such systems are a function, then, of their standing within this unidimensional queue of families. When children are born high in the queue, they tend to secure high-status and highly rewarded occupations by virtue of (1) their privileged access to the economic resources (e.g., wealth, income) needed either to purchase training for the best occupations (e.g., an elite education) or to "purchase" the jobs themselves (e.g., a proprietorship), (2) their privileged access to social networks providing information about and entrée to the best occupations, and (3) their privileged access to cultural resources (e.g., socialization) that motivate them to acquire the best jobs and provide them with the cognitive and interactional skills (e.g., culture of critical discourse) to succeed in them. Under the gradational model, it is the total *amount* of resources that matters, and children born into privileged circum-

stances are privileged because they have access to so many resources (e.g., Hout and Hauser 1992). The imagery here is accordingly that of two unidimensional hierarchies, one for each generation, smoothly joined together through the mediating mechanism of total resources (economic, social, or cultural). In Figure 54.1a, an ideal-typical gradational regime is depicted by projecting a detailed cross-classification of occupational origins and destinations onto a third dimension, one that represents the densities of mobility and immobility. This graph, which orders origin and destination occupations by socioeconomic score, shows the characteristic falloff in mobility chances as the distance between origin and destination scores increases.

Big-class regime: The big-class regime, by contrast, has inequality taking the form of mutually exclusive and exhaustive classes. These classes are often assumed to convey a package of conditions (e.g., employment relations), a resulting social environment that structures behavior and decision making, and a culture that may be understood as an adaptation (or maladaptation) to this environment. For our purposes, the relevant feature of this formulation is that all children born into the same class will have largely the same mobility chances, even though their parents may hold different occupations with different working conditions and socioeconomic standing. The logic of the class situation is assumed, then, to be overriding and to determine the life chances of the children born into it. Conversely, two big classes of similar status will not necessarily convey to their incumbents identical mobility chances, as they may differ on various nonstatus dimensions that have implications for mobility. For example, even though proprietors and routine

Figure 54.1a
Gradational Regime

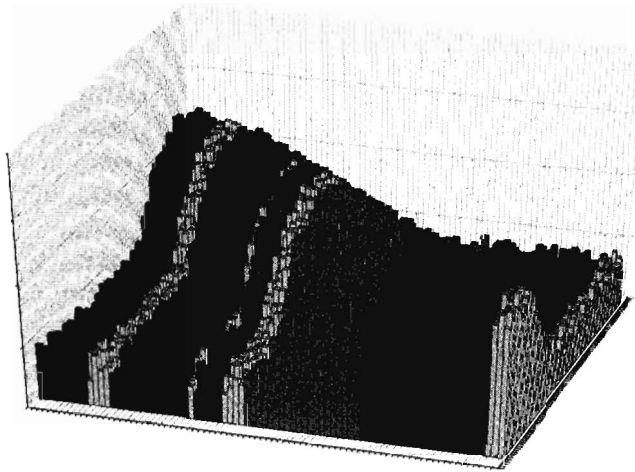


Figure 54.1b
Big-Class Regime

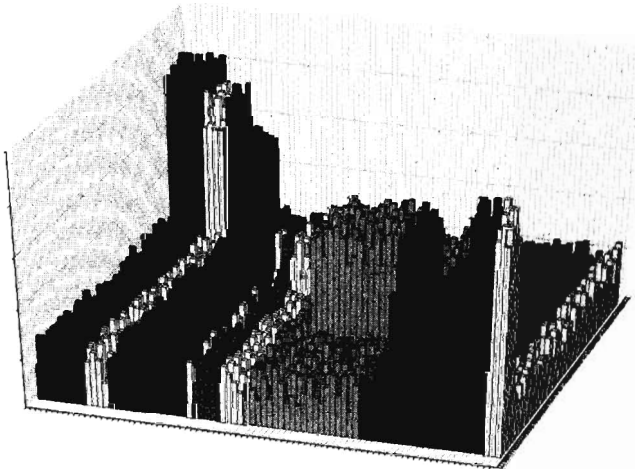
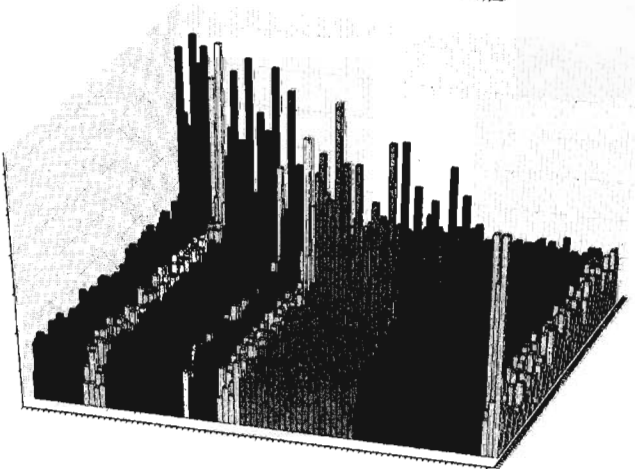


Figure 54.1c
Microclass Regime



Note: The base of each figure indexes occupational origin and destination, while the vertical dimension indexes densities of mobility and immobility for each possible combination of origin and destination.

nonmanuals are roughly similar in socioeconomic status, the children of proprietors will tend to become proprietors and the children of routine nonmanuals will tend to become routine nonmanuals. This pattern arises because tastes and aspirations develop in class-specific ways (e.g., the children of proprietors develop tastes for autonomy, and the children of routine nonmanuals develop tastes for stability), because human capital is cultivated and developed in class-specific ways (e.g., the children of proprietors develop entrepreneurial skills, and the children of routine nonmanuals develop bureaucratic skills), because social capital is distributed in class-specific ways (e.g., the children of proprietors are apprised of entrepreneurial opportunities, and the children of routine nonmanuals are apprised of routine nonmanual opportunities), and because the tangible physical capital (e.g., a shop, business) passed on to children of proprietors motivates them to remain proprietors. By virtue of these processes, children do not have generic access to all occupations of comparable standing (as gradationalists would have it), but instead are especially well positioned to assume occupations that align with the culture, training, contacts, and capital that their class origins entail. We represent an ideal-typical class regime of this sort in Figure 54.1b. Because we are focusing on reproduction, we have assumed here (and in Figure 54.1c) that all off-diagonal cells have the same density, save for random noise.

Microclass regime: The occupational, or “microclass,” approach shares with the big-class model the presumption that contemporary labor markets are balkanized into discrete categories, but such balkanization is assumed to take principally the form of

institutionalized occupations (e.g., doctor, plumber, postal clerk) rather than institutionalized big classes (e.g., routine nonmanuals). By implication, the occupations constituting big classes will have differing propensities for mobility and immobility, a heterogeneity that obtains because the distinctive occupational worlds into which children are born have consequences for the aspirations they develop, the skills they value and to which they have access, and the networks upon which they can draw (see Table 54.1). The children of carpenters, for example, may be especially likely to become carpenters because they are exposed to carpentry skills at home, socialized in ways that render them especially appreciative of carpentry as a vocation, and embedded in social networks that provide them with information about how to become carpenters and how to secure jobs in carpentry. Although a microclass regime again assumes a lumpy class form, the lumpiness is much finer than big-class analysts would allow (see Figure 54.1c). The strong big-class reproduction that we long thought was revealed in mobility tables may instead be artifactual and express little more than the tendency for reproduction at the detailed occupational level.

We have referred above to the occupational skills, culture, and networks that parents transmit to their children. The transmission of skills should, however, be particularly stressed and may well be especially important in understanding why occupations are passed on. The conventional view would have it that the ongoing separation of home and workplace has made it more difficult for parents to transmit such occupational human capital. We agree that its transmission may now be weakened, but this obviously does not mean that it's

altogether precluded. The sociologist, for example, may well talk shop with her or his children at the dinner table, litter the home with books and magazines that betray a sociological orientation, and in all other ways inculcate a sociological perspective in the natural course of everyday child rearing. The engineer, by contrast, may bring home toys that involve building things, focus conversation and inquiry on the world of things, and impart a special interest in understanding "how things work." In the aftermath of the World Trade Center collapse, we can imagine the engineer's family talked mainly about why the building failed structurally, whereas the sociologist's family talked mainly about why there is terrorism.

The transmission of occupation-specific human capital is likely to occur outside the professional sector as well. The mechanic is especially likely to spend time at home engaging in repairs, may take her or his children into the repair shop, and may otherwise encourage an interest in taking things apart and fixing them (i.e., a "practical" engineer). Likewise, the seamstress may talk frequently about fashion at home, take her or his children to fashion shows, and train them in sewing and designing clothes. These examples make the simple point that the occupational commitments of parents can affect what they discuss or practice at home, how they spend time with their children, and hence the skills that they impart to their children.

It would be possible to presume that reproduction takes on an exclusively gradational, big-class, or microclass form and build a mobility model that then capitalizes on the imagery underlying that particular form. The field has indeed often proceeded in just that way: That is, big-class analysts

have often insisted on building purist big-class models, while gradationalists have in turn insisted on building purist gradational models. The model that we develop will, by contrast, combine all three forms (big class, microclass, gradational) and thereby make it possible to tease out the net contribution of each. We apply this approach to ask (1) whether the mobility regime contains pockets of extreme microclass rigidity that are concealed when microclasses are aggregated into big classes and (2) whether such microclass reproduction is the main mechanism through which big classes are reproduced. If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative, it will follow that there is more microclass rigidity than is consistent with the practice of ignoring it and less big-class rigidity than is consistent with the practice of building our analyses exclusively around it.

We suspect that a microclass foundation to reproduction is a generic feature of late industrialism rather than something idiosyncratic to the United States. The mechanisms that we've laid out are, after all, in play to a greater or lesser extent in all countries (see Table 54.1). The relative strength of big-class or microclass reproduction in any given society will be affected by the prevailing mix of institutional forms, some supporting big-class structuration (e.g., trade unions) and others supporting microclass structuration (e.g., state-supported occupational closure). We have chosen to analyze four countries (Germany, the United States, Sweden, and Japan) that, by virtue of this different mix of institutional forms, have mobility regimes that support reproduction of different types.

How might mobility vary by country? Whereas Germany and the United States

Table 54.1 Mechanisms of Intergenerational Reproduction

<i>Type of resources</i>	<i>Type of reproduction</i>	
	<i>Big-class</i>	<i>Micro-class</i>
Human capital	General or abstract skills (e.g., cognitive or verbal abilities)	Occupation-specific skills (e.g., acting skills, carpentry skills)
Cultural capital	Abstract culture and tastes (e.g., "culture of critical discourse")	Occupation-specific culture and tastes (e.g., aspirations to become a medical doctor)
Social networks	Classwide networks (typically developed through neighborhood- or job-related interactions)	Occupation-specific networks (typically developed through on-the-job interactions)
Economic resources	Liquid resources (e.g., stocks, bonds, income)	Fixed resources (e.g., business, farm)

are often understood as the home ground of occupationalization, Sweden has a long tradition of big-class organization, and Japan is typically assumed to be stratified more by family and firm than by big class or occupation. We have sought in this fashion to explore the reach of microclass mechanisms into labor markets, like those of Sweden and Japan, that have not historically been regarded as taking a microclass form. If a microclass mechanism nonetheless emerges as fundamental in Sweden or Japan, the case for building that mechanism more systematically into our models is strengthened. This design allows us to assess the strong claim, as recently advanced by Goldthorpe, that "a reliance on occupationally specific factors, which are likely themselves to be quite variable over time and space, would seem especially inadequate" in explaining class reproduction (2007, 144).

In the present analysis, we will not be exploring the structure of cross-national variation in reproduction, and instead we'll be presenting the shared features that hold in approximate form in all countries. We refer the reader elsewhere (Jonsson et al. 2009, forthcoming) for a discussion of

cross-national variability in microclass mobility.

The Structure of Contemporary Mobility

The analyses presented here will be carried out with data sets that provide information on the father's occupation, the child's occupation and age, and other variables that aid in occupational and big-class coding (e.g., employment status, branch of industry). Because our analyses are pitched at the occupational level, our father-by-son mobility tables will have many cells, and large data sets for each country are needed. We meet this requirement by drawing on multiple surveys in all countries save Sweden. For Sweden, the occupational data for the children come from the 1990 Census, and the occupational data for the parents are recovered by linking to the 1960 and 1970 Censuses (Erikson and Jonsson 1993). The data from the remaining countries come from the sources listed in Table 54.2. For this chapter, we're forced to focus on the mobility of men, as we've found that women experience more complicated mobility processes that are not as

readily summarized in such a short treatment. We have discussed the mobility of women in Jonsson et al. (2009).

We have worked hard to render the data as comparable as possible. Given our need for large data sets, some compromises nonetheless had to be made, most notably pertaining to the period covered and the age of the respondents. The data from the United States, for example, are drawn disproportionately from earlier time periods, although more recent data from the United States are used as well (see Table 54.2 for details). Additionally, the Swedish data set covers only respondents between thirty and forty-seven years old, whereas all other data sets cover respondents between thirty and sixty-four years old. We have elsewhere shown that such differences in coverage don't affect our results much (Jonsson et al. 2009).

The starting point for all of our analyses is the detailed microclass coding scheme represented in Table 54.3. The microclass category may be defined as "a grouping of technically similar jobs that is institutionalized in the labor market through such means as (a) an association or union, (b) licensing or certification requirements, or (c) widely diffused understandings . . . regarding efficient or otherwise preferred ways of organizing production and dividing labor" (Grusky 2005, 66). The scheme used here includes eighty-two microclasses and captures many of the boundaries in the division of labor that are socially recognized and defended. These microclasses were then scaled in terms of the international socioeconomic scale (Ganzeboom, de Graaf, and Treiman 1992). We have applied this scheme to model an 82×82 mobility table formed by cross-classifying the father's and offspring's occupation in data pooled from

the United States, Sweden, Germany, and Japan (for details, see Jonsson et al. 2009). The distinctive feature of the resulting analysis is that microclass effects, represented on the main diagonal of Figure 54.2, are layered over more conventional big-class effects.

Given our suspicion that net big-class effects may be weak, it is clearly important to adopt a big-class scheme that fully captures such big-class effects as can be found, as otherwise any possible shortfall in big-class explanatory power might be attributed to poor operationalization. We have accordingly proceeded by fitting a set of nested big-class contrasts that capture the many and varied big-class distinctions that scholars have identified. As shown in Table 54.3, we begin by distinguishing the manual and nonmanual classes, a big-class distinction so important that early class scholars often focused on it alone. We next identify three "macroclasses" in the nonmanual category (i.e., professional-managerial, proprietor, routine nonmanual) and another two macroclasses in the manual category (i.e., manual, primary). Within three of these macroclasses, we then allow further "mesoclass" distinctions to emerge: the professional-managerial class is divided into classical professions, managers and officials, and other professions; the routine nonmanual class is divided into sales workers and clerks; and the manual class is divided into craft, lower manual, and service workers. The resulting scheme, which embodies three layers of big-class distinctions (i.e., manual-nonmanual, macroclass, and mesoclass), may be understood as a nondominant hybrid of conventional schemes that assembles in one scheme many of the contrasts that have historically been emphasized by big-class scholars.

Table 54.2 Micro-Classes Nested in Manual-Nonmanual Classes, Macro Classes, and Meso Classes

1. NONMANUAL CLASS		2. MANUAL CLASS	
<i>1. Professional-managerial</i>	<i>2. Proprietors</i>	<i>3. Routine nonmanual</i>	<i>4. Manual</i>
1. Classical professions	1. Sales	1. Craft	5. Primary
1. Jurists	1. Proprietors	1. Real estate agents	1. Fisherman
2. Health professionals	2. Agents, n.e.c.	2. Foremen	2. Farmers
3. Professors and instructors	3. Insurance agents	3. Electronics service and repair workers	3. Farm laborers
4. Natural scientists	4. Cashiers	4. Printers and related workers	
5. Statistical and social scientists	5. Sales workers	5. Locomotive operators	
6. Architects	2. Clerical	6. Electricians	
7. Accountants	1. Telephone operators	7. Tailors and related workers	
8. Authors and journalists	2. Bookkeepers	8. Vehicle mechanics	
9. Engineers	3. Office workers	9. Blacksmiths and machinists	
2. Managers and officials	4. Postal clerks	10. Jewelers	
1. Officials, government and non-profit organizations			
2. Other managers		11. Other mechanics	
3. Commercial managers		12. Plumbers and pipe-fitters	
4. Building managers and proprietors		13. Cabinetmakers	
3. Other professions		14. Bakers	
1. Systems analysts and programmers		15. Welders	
2. Aircraft pilots and navigators		16. Painters	
3. Personnel and labor relations workers		17. Butchers	
4. Elementary and secondary teachers		18. Stationary engine operators	
5. Librarians		19. Bricklayers and carpenters	
		20. Heavy machine operators	

(continues)

Table 54.2 (continued)

1. NONMANUAL CLASS	2. MANUAL CLASS
<i>1. Professional-managerial</i>	<i>4. Manual</i>
<i>2. Proprietors</i>	<i>5. Primary</i>
<i>3. Routine nonmanual</i>	
3. Other professions (continued)	2. Lower manual
6. Creative artists	1. Truck drivers
7. Ship officers	2. Chemical processors
8. Professional and technical, n.e.c.	3. Miners and related workers
9. Social and welfare workers	4. Longshoremen
10. Workers in religion	5. Food processing workers
11. Nonmedical technicians	6. Textile workers
12. Health semiprofessionals	7. Sawyers
13. Hospital attendants	8. Metal processors
14. Nursery school teachers and aides	9. Operatives and kindred, n.e.c.
	10. Forestry workers
	3. Service workers
	1. Protective service workers
	2. Transport conductors
	3. Guards and watchmen
	4. Food service workers
	5. Mass transportation operators
	6. Service workers, n.e.c.
	7. Hairdressers
	8. Newsboys and deliverymen
	9. Launderers
	10. Housekeeping workers
	11. Janitors and cleaners
	12. Gardeners

Table 54.3 Surveys for Intergenerational Mobility Analysis

<i>Survey</i> Sample Size	<i>Period</i>	<i>Ages</i>	<i>Birth Cohorts</i>	<i>Occup.</i>	<i>Scheme¹</i>
1. Occupational Changes in a Generation I (OCG I)	1962	30-64	1898-1932	1960 SOC	17,544
2. Occupational Changes in a Generation II (OCG II)	1973	30-64	1909-1943	1960-70 SOC	18,856
3. General Social Survey (GSS)	1972-2003	30-64	1908-1970	1970-80 SOC	9,685
4. Survey of Social Stratification & Mobility (SSM)	1955-1995	30-64	1891-1970	Japanese SCO	6,703
5. Japan General Social Survey (JGSS)	2000-2002	30-64	1936-1972	Japanese SCO	1,917
6. German Social Survey ² (ALLBUS)	1980-2002	30-64	1916-1972	ISCO-68, ISCO-88	5,647
7. German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP)	1986, 1999, 2000	30-64	1922-1970	ISCO-68, ISCO-88	2,886
8. German Life History Study LV I-III	1981-1989	30-64	1921-1959	ISCO-68	1,234
9. ZUMA-Standarddemographic Survey	1976-1982	0-64	1912-1952	ISCO-68	2,929
10. 1990 Swedish Census (linked to 1960 and 1970 Censuses)	1990	30-47	1943-1960	NYK80	184,451

¹ SOC = Standard Occupational Classification; SCO = Standard Classification of Occupations; ISCO = International Standard Classification of Occupations; NYK = Nordisk yrkesklassificering.

² German data exclude respondents from East Germany (GDR). If a respondent was not gainfully employed at the time of the survey, his last occupation was used.

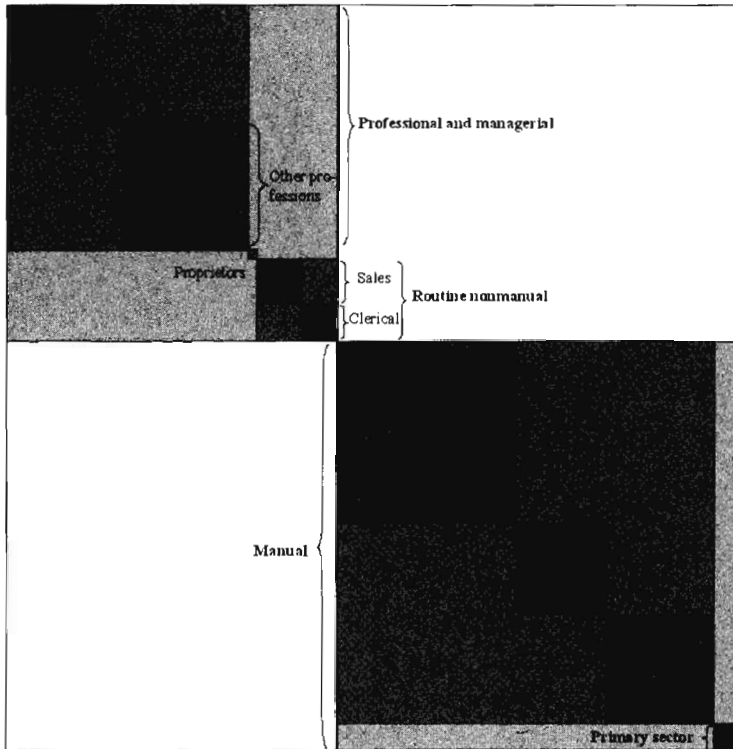


Figure 54.2 Overlapping Inheritance Terms in Mobility Model

Note: The Y axis pertains to occupational origins and the X axis to occupational destinations. The unlabeled microdiagonal squares represent occupational immobility. The size of each big-class category represents the number of microclass categories it encompasses (not the number of workers within the class).

These distinctions are introduced in our mobility models as a nested set of contrasts (see Jonsson et al. 2009). This approach not only allows us to tease out the net residue of reproduction at the mesoclass, macroclass, and manual-nonmanual levels but also allows for patterns of exchange that are more complicated than those conventionally allowed. The stylized parent-to-child mobility table in Figure 54.2 depicts these three sets of overlapping big-class parameters and shows how they capture quite complicated affinities off the microclass diagonal, off the mesoclass diagonal, and even off the macroclass diagonal. If we had

instead proceeded by fitting mesoclass effects alone (as is conventional), we could absorb excess densities in the dark-gray regions of Figure 54.2 but not the surrounding light-gray regions. The cells in the white zones of Figure 54.2 are in fact the only ones that index mobility with respect to *all* class levels. Moreover, even the cells in these zones will be modeled with a gradational term, a parameter that allows us to estimate the extent to which short-distance moves occur more frequently than long-distance ones.

This gradational term captures the tendency of children to assume occupations

that are socioeconomically close to their origins. If the apparent clustering at the microclass, mesoclass, macroclass, or manual-nonmanual levels reflects nothing more than this gradational tendency, then the inheritance parameters represented in Figure 54.2 will become insignificant when the gradational parameter is included. The big-class and microclass parameters, taken together, thus speak to the extent to which the mobility regime is lumpy rather than gradational, while the relative size of these parameters speaks to whether conventional big-class analyses have correctly represented the main type of lumpiness. The following model is therefore yielded:

$$m_{ij} = \alpha\beta_i\gamma_j\varphi^{\mu_i\mu_j}\delta_{ij}^A\delta_{ij}^B\delta_{ij}^C\delta_{ij}^M$$

where i indexes origins, j indexes destinations, m_{ij} refers to the expected value in the ij^{th} cell, α refers to the main effect, β_i and γ_j refer to row and column marginal effects, φ refers to the socioeconomic effect, μ_i (origin) and μ_j (destination) are socioeconomic scale values assigned to each of the eighty-two microclasses, and δ^A , δ^B , δ^C , and δ^M refer to manual-nonmanual, macroclass, mesoclass, and microclass immobility effects, respectively. The latter parameters are fitted simultaneously and therefore capture net effects. The manual-nonmanual parameter, for example, indexes the average density across those cells pertaining to manual or nonmanual inheritance after purging the additional residue of inheritance that may obtain at the macroclass, mesoclass, and microclass levels.

The Structure of Mobility

When this model is applied to our pooled four-nation sample, the microclass and big-

class parameters take on the form represented in Figure 54.3. Although cross-national variations of interest have emerged in our analyses (see Jonsson et al. 2009), Figure 54.3 is based on pooled data that smooth out such variation and thus represent the cross-nationally shared features of mobility.

The most striking feature of this figure is the microdiagonal clustering that appears as a palisade protecting occupational positions from intruders. This palisade bespeaks very substantial departures from equality of opportunity. For example, children born into the classical professions are, on average, 4.2 times more likely to remain in their microclass of origin than to move elsewhere within their mesoclass, while the corresponding coefficients for children born into managerial, craft, and service occupations are 4.6, 7.9, and 5.6, respectively. Although the interior regions of the class structure are typically represented as zones of fluidity (e.g., Featherman and Hauser 1978), we find here substantial microclass reproduction throughout the class structure, even among the "middle classes."

How do the microclass and big-class coefficients compare? Of the fourteen big-class coefficients, the two largest are for proprietors and primary-sector workers, but even these two are smaller than all but the very smallest microclass coefficients. It also bears noting that both of these big classes are big classes in name only. That is, because the proprietor class comprises only shopkeepers, it is not the usual amalgam of many occupations, and there is accordingly good reason to regard proprietors as effectively a microclass. Likewise, the primary sector is not much of an amalgam, dominated as it is by farmers (see Table 54.2). The remaining twelve big-class effects, all of which pertain to true amalgams, are

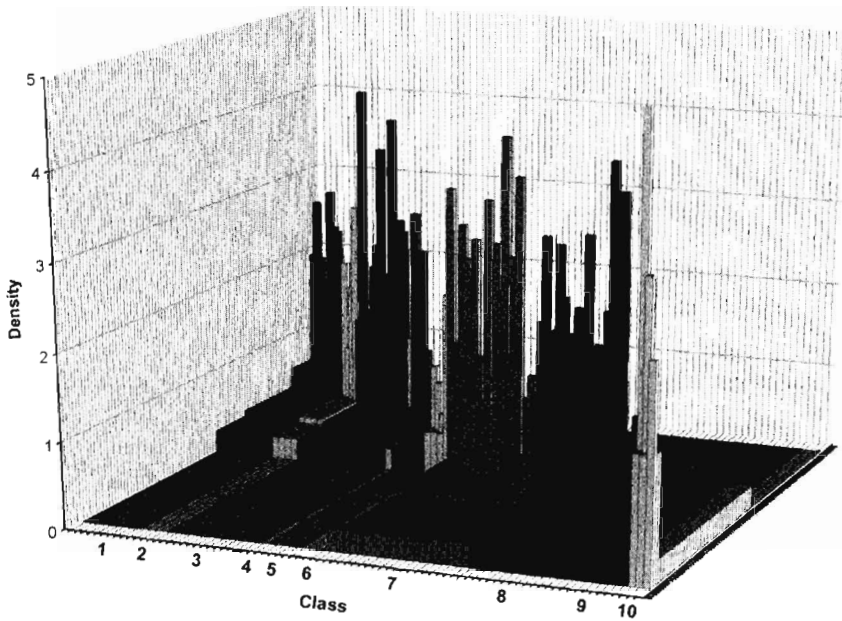


Figure 54.3 The Contours of Class Reproduction for Men

Note: The base indexes occupational origins and destinations, while the vertical dimension indexes densities of mobility and immobility (for each possible combination of origin and destination). 1 = classical professions; 2 = managers and officials; 3 = other professions; 4 = proprietors; 5 = sales; 6 = clerical; 7 = craft; 8 = lower manual; 9 = service; 10 = primary sector.

comparatively weak. The strongest of these effects, those for classical professions, sales work, clerical work, and the manual-non-manual strata, range in size from 1.3 to 1.4 (in multiplicative form).

Is Big-Class Reproduction a Myth?

The foregoing results raise the possibility that the big-class inheritance showing up in generations of mobility studies is largely microclass inheritance in disguise. Have conventional mobility studies indeed created the false impression that big-class reproduction is the dominant form of reproduction? We can address this question

by examining whether the big-class effects that appear in conventional mobility analyses are much reduced in size when microclass effects are overlaid on them. It's useful to proceed by reestimating our model after omitting the microclass inheritance terms. The relevant estimates from this trimmed model, which represents a conventional big-class analysis, are shown in Figure 54.4.

We begin by noting that the mesoclass effects under this trimmed model are indeed strong and consistent with the effects secured in conventional mobility analyses. The coefficient for managers, for example, implies that children born into the managerial class are 1.62 times more likely to remain in that class than to exit it (i.e.,

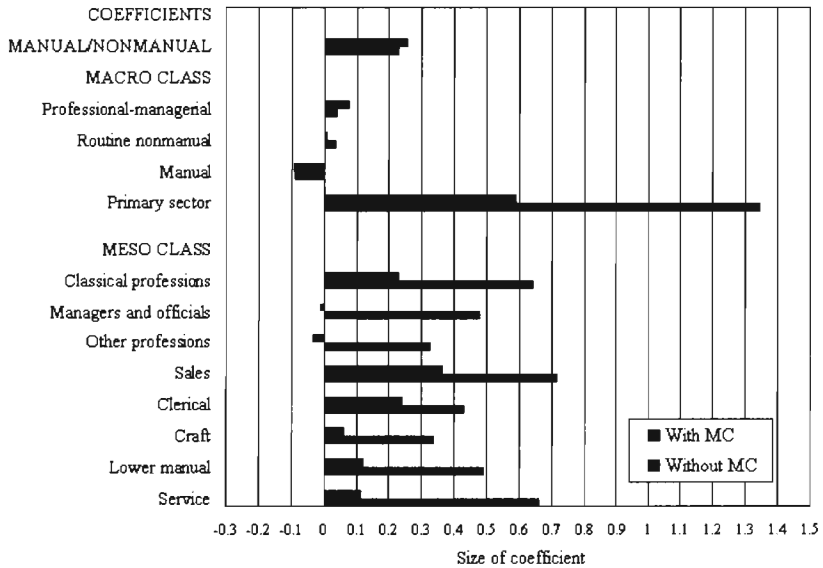


Figure 54.4 Immobility Coefficients With and Without Microclass Controls

Note. For convenience in presentation, the two primary-sector coefficients are each divided by two.

e.⁴⁸ $\cong 1.62$). The corresponding inheritance coefficients for craft workers, lower manual workers, and service workers are 1.40, 1.63, and 1.93, respectively. It is coefficients such as these, all of which are net of gradational effects, that have motivated generations of mobility scholars to regard big-class reproduction as a powerful force.

The results from our full model nonetheless imply that this conclusion is somewhat misleading. When microclass effects are allowed, some of the big-class effects are greatly reduced in strength (i.e., classical professions, sales, clerical), while others disappear altogether or become quite small (i.e., managers and officials, other professionals, craft workers, service workers, lower manual workers). It follows that conventional big-class analyses have generated the appearance of big-class reproduction because it is confounded with microclass reproduction. This is not to suggest that all

big-class reproduction is just microclass reproduction in disguise. Clearly, some big-class reproduction persists even in the presence of microclass controls, a result that was also revealed in Figure 54.3.

We may conclude on the basis of these results that the big-class reproduction appearing in conventional analyses is largely generated by the tendency for children to inherit their microclass. The practical implication of this result is that big-class reproduction may not be easily reduced without interventions that take on inheritance at the occupational level. We return to this issue in the concluding discussion.

Conclusion

The main intellectual backdrop to this analysis is the ongoing sociological debate about the types of social groupings that have taken hold in contemporary industrialism.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, sociologists were fascinated, arguably obsessed, with theorizing about the conditions under which big classes might form, an understandable fascination insofar as individual life chances and even collective outcomes (e.g., revolutions) were believed to depend on class processes. At the same time, class analysts viewed occupations as mere technical positions in the division of labor (rather than meaningful social groups), while scholars in the occupations and professions of literature focused narrowly on individual occupations and how they developed under conditions of professionalization or proletarianization. The occupational form was not understood within either of these traditions as a critical source of inequality and social reproduction (see Grusky 2005). At best, occupations were described as the “backbone” of the inequality system (e.g., Parkin 1971), but such a characterization served principally as an impetus for then reducing occupations to gradational scores (e.g., Hauser and Warren 1997; Ganzeboom, de Graaf, and Treiman 1992) or using them as aggregates in constructing big classes (e.g., Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992).

These characteristic representations of the form of mobility have been treated as assumptions rather than amenable to evidence. The main objective of our research has been to consider whether, when treated as empirical matters, these conventional representations of the structure of mobility are incomplete. We have found that occupations are an important conduit for reproduction and that incorporating this conduit into mobility models can improve our understanding of the mobility process.

There are two main ways in which conventional models misrepresent the structure

of opportunity: (1) The most extreme pockets of rigidity are concealed when analysis is carried out exclusively at the big-class level, and (2) the main rigidities in the big-class mobility table have been taken as evidence of big-class reproduction when in fact occupational reproduction is the principal underlying mechanism. These results suggest that the big-class mobility table, long a fixture in the discipline, obscures important mechanisms behind intergenerational reproduction.

Why are occupations such an important conduit for social reproduction? In all countries, parents accumulate much occupation-specific capital, identify with their occupation, and accordingly “bring home” their occupation in ways, both direct and indirect, that then make it salient to their children and lead them to invest in it. It follows that children develop a taste for occupational reproduction, are trained by their parents in occupation-specific skills, have access to occupational networks that facilitate occupational reproduction, and use those skills and networks to acquire more occupation-specific training outside the home. If children are risk averse and oriented principally to avoiding downward mobility, the safest path to realizing this objective may well be to use their occupation-specific resources on behalf of occupational reproduction. Indeed, even in the absence of any intrinsic interest in occupational reproduction, children may still pursue it because it is the best route to big-class reproduction (Erikson and Jonsson 1996). The son of an embalmer, for example, may not have any particular interest in becoming an embalmer but may decide it’s foolhardy to fail to exploit the in-house training that is available to him.

It might be tempting to take the position that the extreme microclass inequalities uncovered here are not all that objectionable. Should we really care, for example, that the child of the truck driver has a special propensity to become a truck driver while the child of a gardener has a special propensity to become a gardener? Must we truly commit ourselves to equal access to truck driving and gardening? If pressed, we would argue that all ascriptive constraints on choice, even those pertaining to purely horizontal inequalities, are inconsistent with a commitment to an open society. By this logic, *all* types of origin-by-destination association are problematic because they imply that human choice has been circumscribed, a circumscription that is wholly determined by the accident of birth. We care, in other words, that the truck driver is fated to become a truck driver at birth because that amounts to a stripping away of choice, and most of us would embrace an open society in which choices are expanded, not stripped away. Although our illustrative nonchoice (i.e., being a truck driver versus being a gardener) may not have implications for total rewards (of the sort that are *consensually* valued), it is nonetheless a fateful nonchoice that determines the texture and content of a human life. It is this commitment to an open society, sometimes left quite implicit, that underlies the discipline's long-standing interest in monitoring marital homogamy, occupational sex segregation, and many other forms of ascription that are hybrids of vertical and horizontal processes.

It bears emphasizing, however, that such an argument need not be pursued in the present case, given that the horizontal inequalities uncovered here contribute directly to the perpetuation of vertical ones. That is, we should care about the immobility of

truck drivers and gardeners not just because truck driving and gardening imply different styles of life (i.e., "horizontal" inequality), but also because microclass immobility of this sort is the principal mechanism ensuring that the working class reproduces itself. The results from our models make it clear that big-class reproduction arises largely because children frequently remain within their microclass of origin.

We are left with the conclusion that, insofar as microclass reproduction could be eliminated, real declines in big-class reproduction would be observed. It is troubling in this regard that microclass reproduction is deeply rooted in family dynamics and may require unacceptably intrusive policy to root it out. Although our results provide some insight, then, into why contemporary efforts to equalize opportunity have underperformed, they do not necessarily lead us to any wholesale rethinking of those efforts.

NOTE

1. We will often refer to occupations as "microclasses" because they have many of the features and characteristics that are often attributed to big classes.

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