

conceptualised and measured – that is, in absolute or in relative terms. Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 are then all concerned with a more detailed examination of the issues raised in Chapter 5. How far do social origins condition educational attainment in such a way as to lead to inequalities of opportunity and thus a wastage of talent? How far in an emerging postindustrial society are the chances of upward mobility in the course of working life declining, so that education obtained before entry into the labour market becomes increasingly class destiny? How far do individuals' social origins still influence the class destinations they eventually reach independently of their educational attainment: that is, through 'glass floors' that protect those from more advantaged origins against downward mobility and 'glass ceilings' that prevent those from less advantaged origins from achieving upward mobility? And how far does further education in the course of working life – lifelong learning – either provide opportunities for individuals to compensate for low levels of initial educational attainment, or, rather, build on higher levels and thus, from an intergenerational perspective, operate less as a source of mobility than of immobility?

In Chapter 10 we return to questions of levels of absolute and relative class mobility, but in a cross-national, comparative context. As indicated earlier, we consider how far Britain can be regarded as a low mobility society, and further what more general conclusions about the future of social mobility in Britain are suggested by comparative analyses.

Finally, in Chapter 11 we summarise the main findings that emerge from the research we have reviewed; we indicate again the various ways in which a disconnect is apparent between these findings and the political discussion of social mobility; and we try to give some indication of how this discussion might be reoriented, with a greater respect for empirical evidence, and of the implications for policy that would follow.

## 1 | Social Class as the Context of Social Mobility

Social mobility is the movement of individuals over time between different social positions. Insofar as positions are taken to be in some way more or less advantaged, mobility can be characterised as being upward or downward in direction: that is, as being from a less to a more advantaged position or vice versa. To this extent, the understanding of social mobility in the social sciences is on much the same lines as it is in everyday life. However, where questions arise concerning actual rates, patterns and trends of mobility, and the systematic collection and analysis of relevant data have to be undertaken, it is necessary for social scientists to think about mobility in ways that are conceptually more explicit and precise than those that serve for less demanding purposes.

First and foremost, it is essential that the *context* of mobility – that is, the positions between which mobility is seen as occurring – should be clearly specified. Within the social sciences there are in fact significant differences in this regard. Sociologists, who, as indicated in the Introduction, have thus far carried out the greater part of research into social mobility, tend to focus on mobility between social strata, as characterised, for example, in terms of social class. In contrast, economists, among whom a sustained interest in social mobility is, at least in Britain, a relatively recent development, focus on mobility in terms of income – that is, on the mobility of individuals between different levels within the overall income distribution.

In this book we will, as sociologists, be concerned primarily with social class mobility: that is, with mobility between different class positions. The main aims of this chapter are therefore to set out the rationale for this approach and the advantages that we believe stem from it, and further to indicate how we conceptualise social class and how this conceptual understanding is made operational in the main body of research that we will subsequently discuss.



Where one is dealing with social mobility between positions that are more or less advantaged, or, in other words, unequal, it is important to recognise that social inequality can be expressed in two different forms: what may be called *attributional* inequality and *relational* inequality. Attributional inequality arises simply insofar as individuals have, as an attribute, more or less of something that is socially valued. Inequality in income or in wealth would be prime examples. Relational inequality, in contrast, arises where the positions of a more or less advantaged kind that individuals hold derive from certain social relations in which they are involved. Class inequality, as we would understand it, is relational. More specifically, we take class positions as deriving from the social relations in which individuals are involved *in labour markets and workplaces*: that is, from what we will refer to as their *employment relations*. While individuals' class positions are in this way associated with their income levels, they are also associated, via differences in their employment relations, with various other aspects of their incomes: in particular, as we will show in some detail, with income security or insecurity, with short-term income stability or instability and with longer-term income prospects.

We might add here that another form of relational inequality that we treat as distinct from, and only imperfectly correlated with, class is that of social status. In popular discourse, 'class' and 'status' are often used more or less synonymously. But sociologists would see the relational basis of status as lying not in labour markets and workplaces but rather in differential association in the more intimate aspects of social life – status equals are those who eat together and sleep together – and also in participation in, and perhaps exclusion from, distinctive lifestyles. Class and status are thus qualitatively different forms of social stratification. Some sociologists have in fact studied social mobility in terms of status rather than class, and although we will concentrate on social class mobility, we will at various points indicate how this may be influenced by social status.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For more on the distinction between class and status, see Chan and Goldthorpe (2004, 2007). Sociologists have also treated mobility in terms of what is referred to as socioeconomic status – in effect, on the basis of occupations scaled in some way according to the average earnings and educational levels of the individuals holding them. However, both the concept of socioeconomic status and its measurement have become subject to increasing criticism (see Bukodi, Dex and

We would argue that in general inequality that is embedded in social relations is at least as *consequential* in individuals' lives as is attributional inequality; and further that, so far as economic life is concerned, social class provides a fuller and more revealing context for the study of social mobility than does income. Again, this is a matter to which we will return at various points subsequently. However, two issues arise that may be taken up at once.

First, it is sometimes held that treating mobility in terms of income is preferable to treating it in terms of class because 'everybody knows' what income is, whereas the concept of social class is vague or contested. In response, we would observe that in the study of income mobility major problems in conceptualisation and making concepts operational are in fact encountered. For example, there are many forms of income, but the work on income mobility that has been carried out by economists has for the most part been limited to just one form: that is, to 'labour income' or earnings. Income from other sources, such as, say, investments, has only rather rarely been taken into account. Moreover, while economists would evidently wish to think of mobility in regard not simply to current income or earnings but rather to 'permanent income' or 'lifetime earnings', these more ambitious concepts have not so far been effectively implemented in empirical research. At most, what has been measured is income or earnings averaged over a number of years in order to iron out transitional variation.<sup>2</sup>

Second, serious difficulties are encountered in obtaining reliable data on income mobility. In social surveys there is an unusually high rate of non-response to questions on income, even in the form only of earnings. And where intergenerational mobility is being studied a yet greater problem arises in that survey respondents cannot be expected to recall – or even to have known – the level of their parents' incomes when they were growing up. Attempts that have been made to 'impute' parents' incomes from information obtained from children on their

Goldthorpe, 2011), and would appear best avoided, at all events in mobility research.

<sup>2</sup> For penetrating reviews of the methodological problems involved in studying income mobility, written by economists, see Jäntti and Jenkins (2015) and Winship (2017).



parents' education and occupation are scarcely adequate.<sup>3</sup> The only data on income mobility of high reliability are in fact those derived either from birth cohort or other longitudinal studies focused on this question or from cumulated taxation records or other forms of income registration through which the incomes of children and their parents can be linked. It has to be recognised that, as of now, *no such data exist for Britain*; and the study of income mobility can therefore make little progress.<sup>4</sup>

None of the foregoing should of course be taken to imply that the analysis of social mobility in terms of class is free of conceptual and data issues. Such issues do indeed present themselves, and it is to these that we now turn.

It is certainly the case that social class has been conceptualised in many different ways. Indeed, a large and disputatious literature on the matter has developed since the controversies over Marxist class analysis of the earlier twentieth century. The arguments that have arisen, and that continue, are, however, ones for the most part conducted at a quite abstract level or, at best, with only a loose articulation with empirical research, and we do not seek here to enter into them. The

<sup>3</sup> Imputing an entire variable is a quite different proposition from using imputation to deal with missing cases on variables, as we have done (see Introduction, n. 10 above). Jerrim et al. (2016) show how estimates of income mobility based on the imputed incomes of parents are highly dependent on, and consequently can vary significantly with, the imputation models that are used. In the Social Mobility Commission's Annual Report for 2016, intergenerational earnings mobility tables are given a prominent place without it being indicated where parental earnings have been imputed rather than actually observed (Social Mobility Commission, 2016: tables 02 and 03); the imputation then turns out to be based on a very limited and thus quite unreliable model (Friedman, Laurison and Macmillan, 2017: 8). Such tables could be thought as likely to mislead as to inform.

<sup>4</sup> In the 1958 and 1970 birth cohort studies referred to in the Introduction some information is available on cohort members' family incomes when they were age 16 and their own earnings in their adult lives. However, the extent of missing data is disturbing, the questions asked on family income differ significantly from one cohort to the other, and the self-employed have to be excluded from consideration because of the known unreliability of the income information they provide. Despite the valiant efforts economists have made to overcome these problems, the results they obtain on intergenerational income mobility remain open to doubt (see further Chapter 3 below). And still more doubtful are the efforts that have been made by some economists to infer future income mobility from the relation between parental income and children's educational attainment, which rest on a range of question-begging assumptions.

conceptualisation of class that we adopt is one that has by now some wide acceptance in sociology, and also, increasingly, in official statistics, and chiefly for the following reasons. It has a clear theoretical basis; it can be effectively made operational for research purposes; and, perhaps most importantly, when applied in research it has been found to give consistent and revealing results. The ultimate test of any conceptual approach has to lie in the empirical findings that it makes possible.

As we have already indicated, we take class positions as deriving from the relations in which individuals are involved in labour markets and workplaces or, that is, from their employment relations. As understood in this way, class positions are differentiated at two levels. At the most basic level, they are differentiated in terms of *employment status*: employers, the self-employed and employees have clearly different positions in labour markets and workplaces.<sup>5</sup> Employers buy and control the labour of employees, the self-employed sell their own labour to customers or clients, and employees sell their labour to, and accept the control of, employers or their agents. However, in the case of employees, who in modern economies make up the large majority of the economically active population, a further level of differentiation is required. In this regard, what is taken as crucial is the form of the *employment contracts*, considered in regard to both their explicit and implicit elements, under which employees work.

At one extreme of this differentiation, one can identify a contract that is in effect a 'spot' contract for labour: that is, a contract that entails a certain amount of labour being exchanged for a certain amount of pay, and that, even if perhaps recurrent, does not suppose any commitment by employer or employee to the future of the relationship. Contracts of this kind have traditionally applied in the case of 'day labourers' or other casual workers, and today find their most extreme expression in increasingly used zero-hours contracts, under which workers are simply on call for employers who have no obligation to employ them for any fixed amount of time. Further, though, the employment relations of large numbers of other workers in jobs of a manual or entirely routine non-manual kind have always

<sup>5</sup> Employment status is a term used in official statistics in relation to differences of the kind referred to in the text. It has no connection with the concept of social status as previously discussed in this chapter.



approximated this basic form of labour contract. Payment is through wages that are directly related to amount of work done on the basis of piece rates or of hourly, daily or shift rates together with overtime rates; and no greater degree of continuity of employment is implied beyond that provided for by minimum legal requirements concerning dismissal and redundancy.

Contracts of the kind in question in effect serve as far as possible to *commodify* labour: that is, to enable it to be bought like any other commodity regardless of its human embodiment. Such contracts have obvious attractions for employers in increasing 'flexibility' and reducing economic risk – by in effect transferring it to their employees. But at the same time they represent an efficient form of contract only in the case of certain types of work: that is, work that is easily monitored as regards worker effort and quality of output and that calls for only relatively low-level, unspecialised and widely available capacities and skills.

This latter point is best brought out by considering the form of employment contract that can be taken as standing at the opposite extreme to a spot contract. This entails what might be called a 'service relationship' and is found in its most developed form in the case of higher-level managerial and professional employees. Managers are engaged to exercise delegated authority, and professionals to exercise specialised knowledge and expertise, on behalf of their employers; it is therefore of advantage to employers if these employees are motivated to act consistently in the interests of the employing organisation and to adapt and develop their abilities and skills over time in its particular context. Thus, what is in these circumstances appropriate is a contract that goes beyond simply a recurrent 'money for effort' bargain and implies an exchange between employer and employee of a relatively diffuse and long-term kind. Employees 'render service' to their employer – and if necessary in excess of any formally contracted requirements – in return for 'compensation' which comprises a fixed salary together usually with a range of fringe benefits and, in addition, important *prospective* elements: for example, regular salary increments, expectations of continuity of employment or at least of employability and, above all, relatively well-defined promotion and career opportunities. That is to say, the employment contract is aimed at creating a general and forward-looking employee commitment to organisational goals by establishing a clear connection between such commitment and the employee's economic security and advancement.

What could be regarded as modified versions of both the basic labour contract and the service relationship are also in wide operation. Thus, on the one hand, workers who are paid on a wage basis but who are in more skilled occupations often have a greater degree of security of employment than less skilled wage-workers, as through 'last in, first out' agreements, and perhaps also some possibility of promotion, say to supervisory positions; while, on the other hand, employees in the lower levels of the managerial and professional salariat may enjoy the advantages of a service relationship only in a limited form. In addition, various 'mixed' forms of employment contract, involving some kind of compromise between the logics of the labour contract and service relationship, can be identified. Typically, these are found with occupations that, in terms of the capacities and skills they require and the responsibilities they entail, lie in between those of managers and professionals and of essentially routine workers. Thus, employees in such occupations – mainly lower administrative, technical or supervisory occupations – may be salaried yet have few promotion opportunities, and with any overtime working or other extra-contractual contributions being compensated for by generally relaxed time-keeping arrangements, 'time off in lieu' or *ex gratia* payments, and also perhaps through admission at the workplace to 'staff' status and facilities.<sup>6</sup>

What in the present context is of importance is that, in the case of employees, *type of occupation can be taken as a fairly reliable indicator of prevailing employment relations*, and occupation can thus be used, along with employment status, as a basis for identifying class positions as defined in terms of employment relations.

It is in fact in this way that the particular class schema that will most frequently figure in the chapters that follow has been constructed: that is, the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) which from 2001 became the main social classification in use in British official statistics, in succession to the Registrar-General's Social Classes which, as originally formulated, dated back to 1911.

<sup>6</sup> The theory behind the differentiation of the class positions of employees according to forms of employment contract does in fact derive essentially from developments in economics, in particular organisational, personnel and transaction-cost economics (Goldthorpe, 2007: vol. II, ch. 5; McGovern et al., 2007: ch. 3). This being the case, the apparent reluctance of economists to utilise the concept of class – even when it would appear more relevant to their concerns than that of income – is puzzling.



Figure 1.1 shows the derivation, in terms of employment relations, of the seven-class version of NS-SEC, which is that in most common use, and this version is then set out in Table 1.1.<sup>7</sup> In Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1 we take the liberty of relabelling Class 3, officially ‘Intermediate’, as ‘Ancillary professional and administrative’ so as to give a more specific idea of its coverage. Table 1.1 also shows for each class some representative present-day occupations, although it should be recognised that other occupations would be more representative insofar as the classification is applied to earlier periods – as it is in effect when applied to parental generations in mobility analyses.

It may be noted that in the seven-class version of NS-SEC a number of ‘collapses’ of categories of a more extended version of the classification are implied. Thus, Class 1 includes, in addition to higher managerial and professional employees, both ‘large’ employers – that is, those with twenty-five or more employees (who are in fact predominantly owners of only medium-size, unincorporated concerns) – and also self-employed professionals. This is because, in most available datasets, the number of such employers and self-employed professionals is too small to allow for separate analysis; and further because distinctions between employers and managers, on the one hand, and between self-employed and employee professionals, on the other, may not be easily made or in any event involve legal or fiscal considerations rather than being of any great sociological significance. Further, Class 4 brings together both small employers – those with less than twenty-five employees – and also own-account workers without employees. This is chiefly because of difficulties that arise in distinguishing in the case of small concerns between employees proper and ‘family

<sup>7</sup> In the development of NS-SEC, a crucial role was played by analyses, drawing on data collected through the Labour Force Survey, that sought to test the ‘construct validity’ of the classification: that is, the validity of inferring employment relations from data on employment status and occupation. These analyses produced generally satisfactory results, although the need was emphasised for regular revisions of the official classification of occupations and in turn for the rebasing of NS-SEC to reflect changes in employment relations (Rose and Pevalin, eds., 2003; Rose, Pevalin and O’Reilly 2005; ONS, 2005). Such rebasing is now in fact in progress in preparation for the 2021 Census, and is aimed at taking account of the growth of temporary employment contracts, portfolio working and bogus self-employment. Some further modifications may also be necessary in consequence of ongoing technological change (Williams, 2017b). But for the period with which we are concerned, NS-SEC in its present form can be regarded as an appropriate classification.

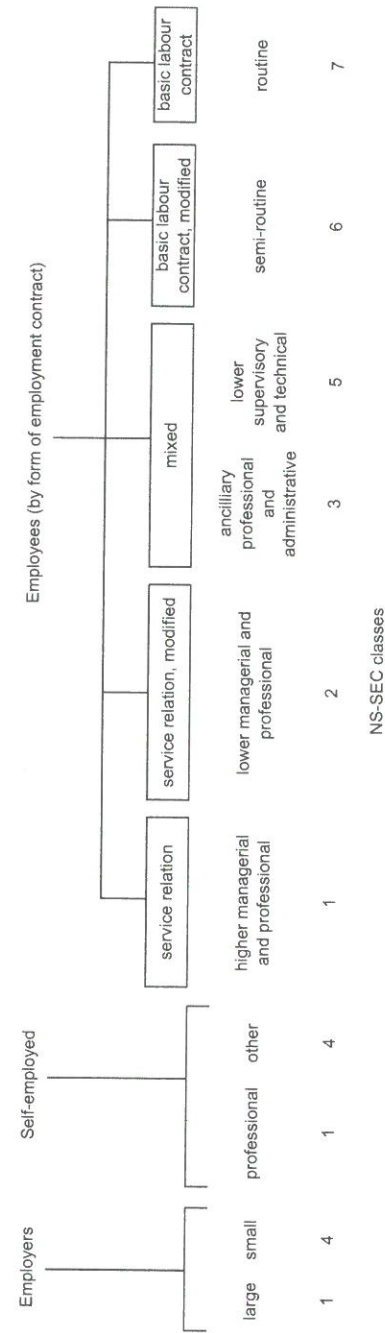


Figure 1.1 Derivation of NS-SEC, 7-class version

Table 1.1 NS-SEC 7-class version and representative occupations<sup>(a)</sup>

Class	Description	Representative occupations
Class 1	Higher managers and professionals	General managers in large companies and organisations, higher-grade civil servants and local government officials, architects, lawyers; medical practitioners, professional engineers, scientists, university teachers
Class 2	Lower managers and professionals	General managers in small companies and organisations, site managers, office managers, workshop managers, lower-grade civil servants and local government officers, librarians, nurses, physiotherapists, school teachers, social workers, surveyors
Class 3	Ancillary professional and administrative	Computer maintenance staff, draughtspersons, library assistants, nursery nurses, paramedical staff, cashiers, clerical workers, data processing operators, personal assistants, secretaries
Class 4	Small employers and own account workers	Garage proprietors, builders, café proprietors, craftsmen, market traders, publicans, shopkeepers
Class 5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	Foremen, site and works supervisors, auto engineers, heating engineers, instrument technicians, laboratory technicians, printers, tool- and pattern-makers, TV and video engineers
Class 6	Semi-routine occupations	Care assistants, caretakers and housekeepers, chefs and cooks, chemical process workers, crane drivers, factory machinists, fitters, postal workers, receptionists, sales assistants, store controllers and despatchers, traffic wardens
Class 7	Routine occupations	Bus and van drivers, construction site and other labourers, craftsmen's mates, food process workers, counter and bar staff, house and office cleaners, kitchen assistants, packers and fillers, porters and attendants, refuse collectors, warehouse workers

workers': that is, workers who may not be paid regular wages but share in some way in the proceeds of the business.

In understanding NS-SEC, and analyses of social mobility that are based on it, there are two points in particular that need to be kept in mind. The first is that NS-SEC does not relate in any direct way to the particular nature or content of the work done in different occupations – only indirectly insofar as different kinds of work tasks and roles are associated with different forms of employment contract.<sup>8</sup> One consequence of this is that NS-SEC, unlike the Registrar General's Social Classes and other earlier social classifications in both official and academic use, does not embody any systematic manual/non-manual distinction – as is brought out in Table 1.1.

The second point is that the seven NS-SEC classes as presented in Table 1.1 should not be regarded as completely ordered. In particular, while Class 4 positions, those of small employers and own account workers, are clearly differentiated from the employee positions of Classes 3 and 5, it would be difficult to claim that these positions are, overall, more or less advantaged. Although, then, mobility between Class 3 or Class 5, on the one hand, and Class 4, on the other, would certainly involve a change in employment relations and thus class position, this could be better regarded as 'horizontal' rather than as upward or downward mobility. And much the same could be said about mobility between Classes 3 and 5 themselves. In what follows we therefore treat as upward or downward mobility only that which occurs across the five 'hierarchical' divisions of NS-SEC, as are indicated by the dashed lines in Table 1.1. We will also refer to Classes 1 and 2 taken together as the salariat and to Classes 6 and 7 taken together as the working class.

<sup>8</sup> This point is missed by economists (e.g. Blanden, Gregg and Machin, 2005a), who argue that an occupation-based classification, such as NS-SEC, is unsuitable for the study of intergenerational class mobility since over time the occupational composition of classes will change. While such change does indeed occur, as noted earlier, it is not of relevance provided that employment relations in the occupations included within a class remain the same. Thus, four or five decades ago representative occupations in Classes 6 and 7 of NS-SEC would certainly be different from those given in Table 1.1: coal miners, iron and steel workers, shipyard workers, dockers, textiles workers and bus conductors could well figure. But what is important is that essentially the same employment relations could be taken to be in operation – i.e. those of wage-workers under something closely resembling the basic form of labour contract.



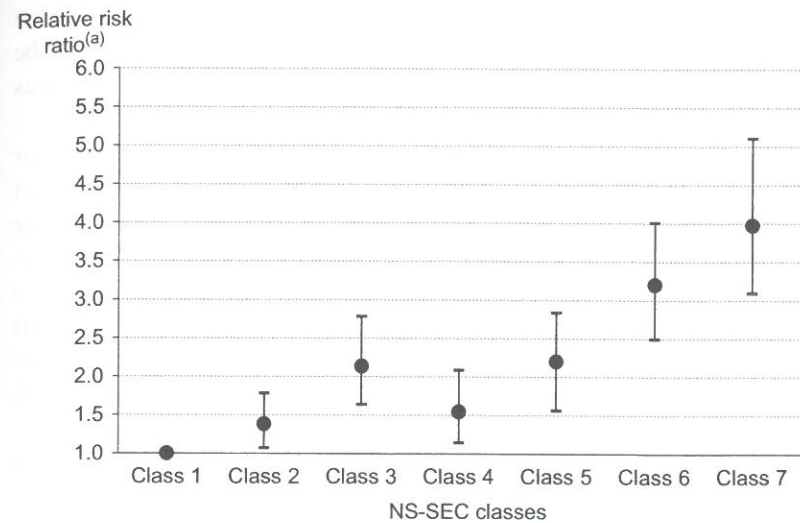
In the research we subsequently discuss, it is NS-SEC that chiefly serves to implement our concept of class and that in turn provides the basis for analyses of mobility between different class positions. What remains for us to do now is to set out the grounds on which we believe that we thus have, for the historical period that concerns us, a context for the study of social mobility that is distinctively revealing. This entails showing the various ways in which different class positions, as we would define them, confer advantage or impose disadvantage, in particular of an economic kind, on the individual men and women who hold them, and in turn exert a major influence on their life-chances.

We earlier claimed that as well as individuals' class positions being associated with their income levels, they are also associated with their income (in)security, their short-term income (in)stability and their longer-term income prospects. We aim now to provide the basis for these claims.

The impact of class on income security comes about primarily from the strong association that exists between class, understood in terms of employment relations, and the risk of job loss and unemployment. Various studies from the 1970s onwards have clearly revealed that these risks are greatest for those whose employment relations most closely approximate the basic labour contract – that is, where no long-term commitment exists between employer and employee, even of an implicit kind – and these findings can be fully confirmed by research, based on NS-SEC, for the early twentieth-first century.<sup>9</sup>

In Figure 1.2 we show, using data from the Labour Force Survey for 2014, the relative risks of men and women being unemployed by the class of their last employment. Class effects, following the hierarchical divisions of NS-SEC, are clearly revealed. While there is some overlap of the confidence intervals around our point estimates

<sup>9</sup> For earlier work, see White (1991) and Gallie et al. (1998). The most important previous analysis based on NS-SEC is Elias and McKnight (2003) but see also Goldthorpe and McKnight (2006) and Chan and Goldthorpe (2007). Using what could be regarded as a European version of NS-SEC, Lucchini and Schizzerotto (2010) provide a revealing comparative analysis of the impact of class on unemployment in Austria, Denmark, Italy and the UK. And it is of further interest that in the two latter studies cited, educational qualifications are included as a control variable without this seriously modifying the association between class and the risk of unemployment.



Note

(a) Based on a statistical model which includes gender, age, marital status and number of dependent children

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2014, January–March

Figure 1.2 Relative risk of being unemployed by class position of last employment, Class 1 as reference, with 95% confidence intervals

so far as the intermediate classes are concerned, clear contrasts still emerge between the salariat and the working class.<sup>10</sup> At the extreme, the risk of being found in unemployment for individuals whose last employment was in Class 7 – where labour is most completely commodified – is estimated as four times greater than the corresponding risk for those last employed in Class 1 positions.<sup>11</sup> As regards

<sup>10</sup> Confidence intervals as shown here, and in subsequent figures in the book, indicate the range within which we would expect the true value to have a 95 per cent chance of occurring. We do not, however, show confidence intervals in cases where they are very small and so have no bearing on the interpretation of the point estimates.

<sup>11</sup> Another possible source of income insecurity is employment on the basis of a temporary contract. While such contracts have become generally more common in the recent past, a close link with class exists. Further analyses of Labour Force Survey data that we have undertaken reveal that they are significantly more often found among men and women in the entirely routine occupations of Class 7 than among those in occupations comprised by other classes.

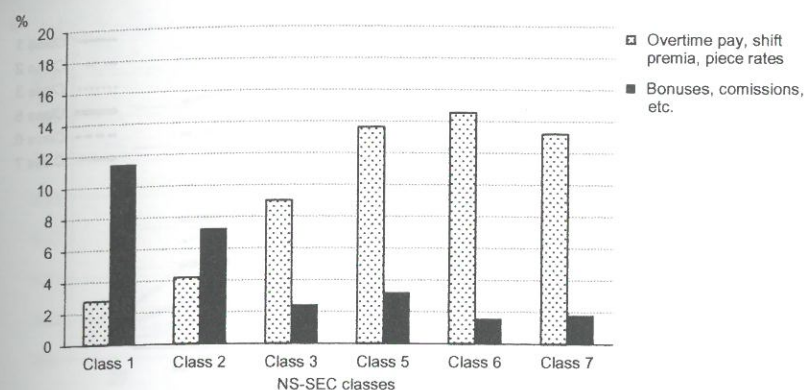


the rather low relative risk of unemployment that is indicated for the small employers and own-account workers of Class 4, it should be kept in mind that in their case *underemployment* can also be a serious threat to income security.

The association between class and short-term income stability or instability again derives from differences in employment relations: that is, from typical differences in methods of payment. Where, under employment relations approximating the basic labour contract, payment is in the form of wages determined by piece rates or, more commonly today, by time rates of some kind plus overtime and shift premia, it can only be expected that earnings will be subject to more short-term variation than where a fixed, usually annual, salary is paid; and previous research has established that this is indeed the case.<sup>12</sup> There is evidence that of late 'payment for performance' systems have become more extensively applied, and in such a way that class differences might be thought to have been reduced. However, insofar as with managerial or professional employees a variable pay element is introduced, it has to be noted that this is most likely to come in the form of performance payments – bonuses, commission and so forth – that are *additional to* basic salary.

In Figure 1.3 we show, again using Labour Force Survey data for 2014, the importance of variable components of earnings by class for men of employee status (the results for women are on much the same pattern). Class differences are evident. Overtime pay, shift premia and piece rates amount to around 14 per cent of the earnings of men in Classes 5, 6 and 7 but are of slight importance for men in Classes 1 and 2, while bonuses and commission payments count for little among men in any class other than Classes 1 and 2. In the case of men in Class 1 these forms of payment amount to over 10 per cent of their average earnings. Where earnings have significant variable components and are also at a low average level, as especially with employees in Classes 6 and 7, serious difficulties are then likely to arise both in the management of day-to-day family budgets and in any kind of longer-term financial planning. Figure 1.3 does not cover the small employers and own-account workers of Class 4 but from other research it emerges, not surprisingly, that their incomes too are liable

<sup>12</sup> See Goldthorpe and McKnight (2006).



Source: Labour Force Survey, 2014, January–March

Figure 1.3 Variable components of average gross weekly earnings, men in full-time employment

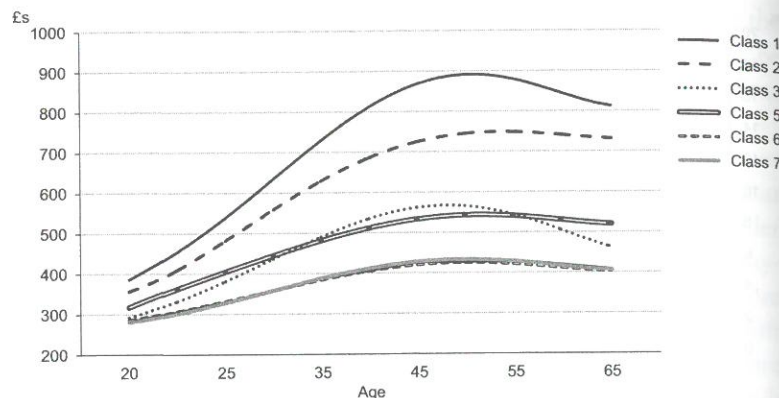
to significant fluctuation and that maintaining 'custom' or the 'flow of work' are common concerns.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the association between class and income prospects is perhaps that of greatest significance. Under the basic employment contract, or employment relations that approximate to it, there is little reason why earnings should increase with time in employment, except perhaps over a fairly short initial period during which workers acquire such training and experience as may be necessary in the jobs typically involved. In contrast, it is part of the logic of a service relationship that relatively well-defined opportunities for economic advancement, through salary increases and career progression, should exist in order to encourage and reward employees' continuing commitment to organisational goals. What follows is that within different classes clearly different 'age-earnings curves' are created.

In Figures 1.4 and 1.5 we show such curves for men and women of employee status based on recent data, which in fact are essentially the same as those that have been found in earlier analyses extending back to the 1970s. As can be seen, with men and women in Classes 6 and 7, earnings increase – relatively slowly – with age up to around

<sup>13</sup> See Scase and Goffee (1980, 1982) and Boden and Corden (1994). The earnings of workers on zero-hour contracts are of course also likely to be subject to much instability. For an analysis of zero-hour contracts as an emergent special case of the basic labour contract, see Williams and Koumenta (2016).





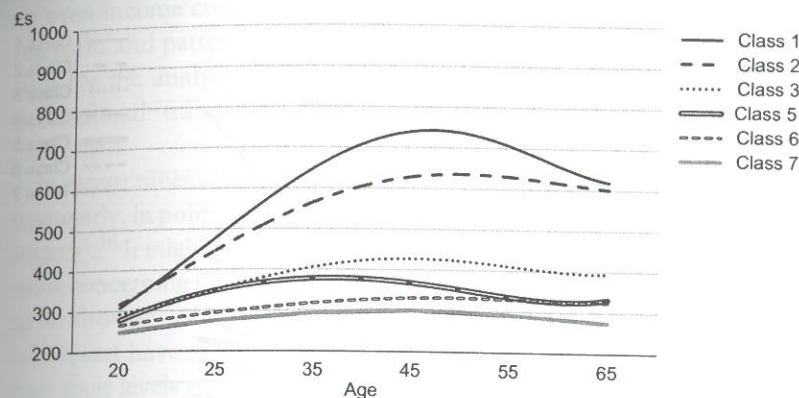
Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2014

**Figure 1.4** Median gross weekly earnings by social class and age, full-time male employees

age 35 and then tend to level out, whereas with men and women in Classes 1 and 2, earnings rise far more sharply, and until around age 50: that is to say, up to this age earnings inequalities between the salariat and the working class steadily widen over the life course. The curves for men and women in Classes 3 and 5 lie in intermediate positions.<sup>14</sup>

Two additional points regarding the relationship between class and income might be made here. First, despite the stability over time of class differences in age-earnings curves, it has been suggested that as earnings inequalities in Britain widened from the mid 1970s earnings differences *between* occupations and in turn between classes decreased, while earnings differences *within* occupations, and classes, increased. However, this view is not borne out by the most detailed empirical research that has been undertaken. To the contrary, what this

<sup>14</sup> For earlier results, see Goldthorpe and McKnight (2006) and also the work of Phelps-Brown (1977), a member of a generation of labour economists who readily recognised the fact, and the significance, of occupational differences in age-earnings curves. It should be understood that the curves shown are not based on individual 'biographical' data but, as indicated, on medians by age. The downturns in the curves for Class 1 after age 50 are most likely the result of semi-retirement; and the downturn in the curve for Class 3 for men from around age 40 onwards reflects the fact, we suspect, that men who have not achieved upward mobility from this class by this age are in some way negatively selected.



Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2014

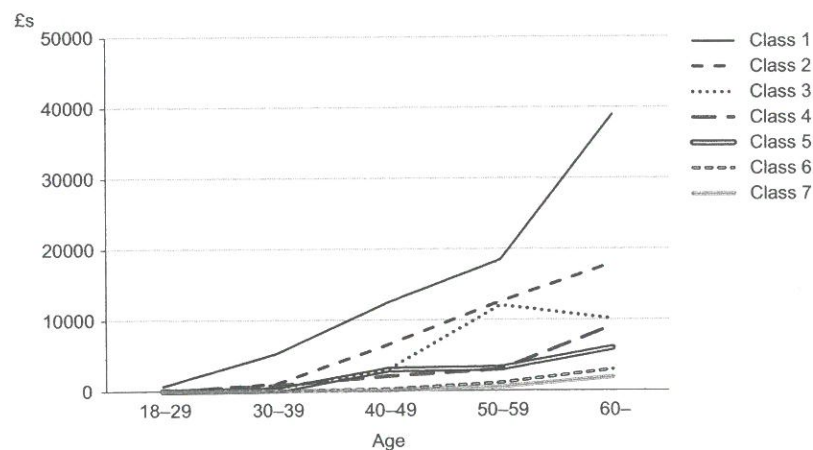
**Figure 1.5** Median gross weekly earnings by social class and age, full-time female employees

shows is that widening earnings inequality has been in large part occupation-based. It has resulted from widening differences in average earnings between occupations and, further, from the 'earnings polarisation' of the occupational structure. Occupations with an intermediate range of earnings have contracted, while both low-paying and high-paying occupations have expanded. And this same pattern of change is then replicated at the level of social classes.<sup>15</sup>

Second, recognition of class-specific age-earnings curves serves in another way to bring out the limitations of representing economic inequality simply in terms of current earnings. What can be inferred from the curves shown in Figures 1.4 and 1.5 is that individuals who are found at any one time at a similar level within the overall earnings distribution may well be, in terms of age and class, quite heterogeneous. Especially with men, the lower to middle levels of the earnings distribution are likely to comprise managers and professionals at the start of their careers, together, say, with somewhat older clerical and sales workers and technicians, and also semi-routine or routine

<sup>15</sup> See Williams (2013, 2017a). The main exception to this general finding that should be recognised comes with the marked increase in income inequality within Class 1, associated mainly with the rise of so-called 'super-managers' (Piketty, 2015: ch. 9), who, however, represent only a very small minority – probably less than 1 per cent – of all those in this class.





Source: British Household Panel Survey, 2000; using variables constructed by Banks, Smith and Wakefield (2002)

Figure 1.6 Household median net financial wealth by social class and age of head of household

wage-workers who are at their earnings peak. In other words, individuals are being grouped together in income bands who, as regards their income security and stability, as well as their income prospects, could be said to be living in significantly different economic worlds.

Finally, moving on from the association between class position and the different aspects of income that we have considered, it is also relevant to take up a matter on which, so far, rather little information has been produced: that is, the association between class and wealth. In Figure 1.6 we show estimates of households' median net financial wealth – defined as savings plus investments minus debts – by social class and age group of head of household. The distinctive situation of households headed by members of Class 1 is apparent, and especially on account of the 'surge' in their wealth that occurs in later life – as a result, one may suppose, of accumulating income but also of bequests from those similarly advantaged in the previous generation. The gap in wealth between, on the one hand, Class 1 – and to a lesser extent Class 2 – households and, on the other hand, Class 5, 6 and 7 households is especially notable; again, a clear indication of different economic worlds.

The foregoing are, then, the grounds on which we would argue that social class provides a more comprehensive basis than does earnings,

or even income considered more generally, for displaying the prevailing form and pattern of economic advantage and disadvantage, and in turn for the analysis of social mobility insofar as the degree of inter-generational transmission of such advantage and disadvantage is concerned.

In recent times it has been claimed, in some academic as well as, more frequently, in political and media circles, that Britain is no longer a 'class society'.<sup>16</sup> It might therefore appear appropriate for us to add something more concerning the still wider consequences of class than those we have so far shown for individuals' life-chances. In the chapters that follow, we will in fact have much to say about how individuals' class origins influence their levels of educational attainment and in turn their opportunities in labour markets. For now, therefore, we will limit ourselves to showing how class directly conditions individuals' lives in one other different, but crucial, respect: that is, via their risks of mortality or, in other words, their life-chances in a quite literal sense.

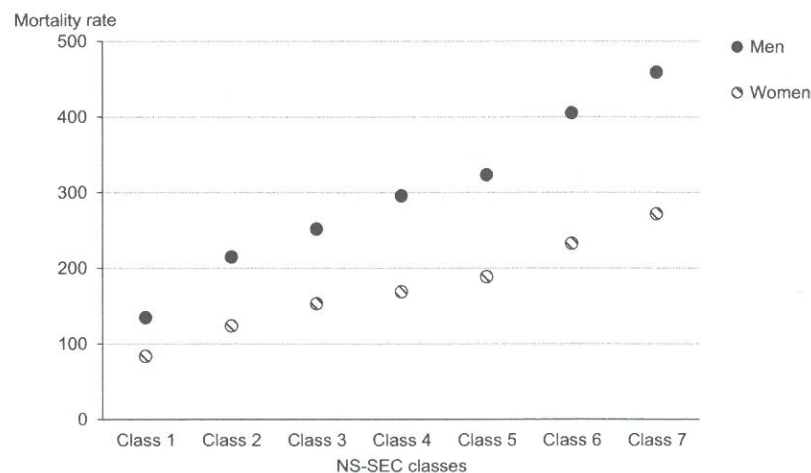
In Figure 1.7 we graph age-standardised mortality rates by NS-SEC classes for men and women aged 25–64. The differences that are revealed are striking, and especially notable is that which shows up between men in Class 1 and in Class 7. It is difficult to think of any way in which class inequalities could be more starkly expressed than in what amounts to a substantial disparity in allotted lifetimes.

It is of course the case that the causal pathways underlying the association between class and mortality are complex, and other factors, such as income, social status and education, are known to be involved. Nonetheless, strong evidence exists of social, psychological and physiological processes that do causally connect class with the risk of premature death: that is, ones operating in part through the damaging effects on health of the adverse physical conditions of some forms of wage-work but, more generally, through the increased stress, resulting from subordination, 'effort–reward imbalance' and, above all, economic insecurity, that are associated with the employment relations of more disadvantaged class positions.<sup>17</sup> It is with mortality

<sup>16</sup> Among academic works, see, e.g., Bauman (1982), Beck (1992), Giddens (1994). The arguments advanced are largely 'data free'.

<sup>17</sup> See the extensive literature on these issues referred to in White et al. (2007), one of the first and still most detailed analyses of mortality differences carried out on the basis of NS-SEC, and in particular the work cited of epidemiologists such as Davey-Smith and Siegrist and their associates.





Source: Office for National Statistics (2013)

**Figure 1.7** Age-standardised mortality rates per 100,000 population aged 25 to 64 by social class, England and Wales, 2008–10

statistics that any attempt to represent present-day Britain as a classless society can be most obviously and effectively confronted.

One last issue on which we should comment in this chapter is that of the consequences for individuals not of social class itself but, rather, of the actual experience of class mobility. This is relevant because, from the pioneering work of Sorokin onwards, the question has been raised of the effects of mobility on individuals' social lives and psychological states. Sorokin himself regarded mobility as being in fact 'dis-sociative', separating individuals from their families and communities of origin and thus often leading to isolation, loneliness and personal distress. And in British sociology there has been a long-standing concern with the social and psychological costs of upward mobility in particular – with, as one author has put it, 'the price of the ticket'. In turn, it has been queried whether equalising opportunities and raising levels of mobility should be so unequivocally taken as prime policy objectives.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Sorokin (1959: 515–24). The phrase 'the price of the ticket' is taken from Friedman (2014, 2016). For arguments to the effect that a more 'holistic' approach to social mobility is needed, and that the idea of 'success' should be re-evaluated, see Atherton (2017).

However, what has to be noted is that claims of the negative effects of upward class mobility, although rather insistently repeated, are not well grounded at all. They derive almost entirely from small-scale qualitative studies – or even 'auto-ethnographies' – the reliability and representativeness of which have to be regarded as highly questionable. There can be little doubt that the individual experience of mobility is highly variable. But large-scale research based on population samples, while able to accommodate this variability, has rather consistently supported what has been called the 'mid-way' hypothesis: that is, the hypothesis that on most outcomes of interest, including social relations and psychological well-being, mobile individuals lie somewhere in between the average for their class of origin and that for their class of destination. Given, then, that men and women in more advantaged class positions do report higher levels of both social participation and general life satisfaction than those in less advantaged positions – as well as certainly enjoying better physical and mental health – individuals who are upwardly mobile can be regarded as, overall, tending to benefit in these regards, rather than suffering costs.<sup>19</sup>

It does of course also follow that it is downward rather than upward class mobility that is more likely to be damaging. And this is important since, as will become apparent as this book proceeds, both the actuality and also the perceived threat of downward mobility are in various ways crucially involved in the class mobility trends and processes in operation in British society today.

<sup>19</sup> For an extensive review of the field and for new research findings on class mobility and individual well-being in British society, based on a nationally representative sample, which leads to a forceful critique of the work of Friedman as cited in the previous note, see Chan (2018).