

# Coming of Age in a Changing World. Constellations of Risk and the Dynamics of Agency

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## Strand 3: Youth Transitions and Generational Inequality

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- To what extent do social circumstances and socio-economic factors in the family of origin influence children's life chances in the transition to early adult life?
- Multi-dimensional conceptualization of social disadvantage
  - Multiple indicators
  - Multiple domains
  - Constellations of risk
- Intergenerational transmission of values and behaviours
- Changing intergenerational dynamics

# Some Evidence

## Gender Differences in Aspirations and Attainment

*A Life Course Perspective*

EDITED BY

Ingrid Schoon and Jacquelynne S. Eccles



## Young People's Development and the Great Recession

Uncertain Transitions  
and Precarious Futures

Edited by Ingrid Schoon and John Bynner



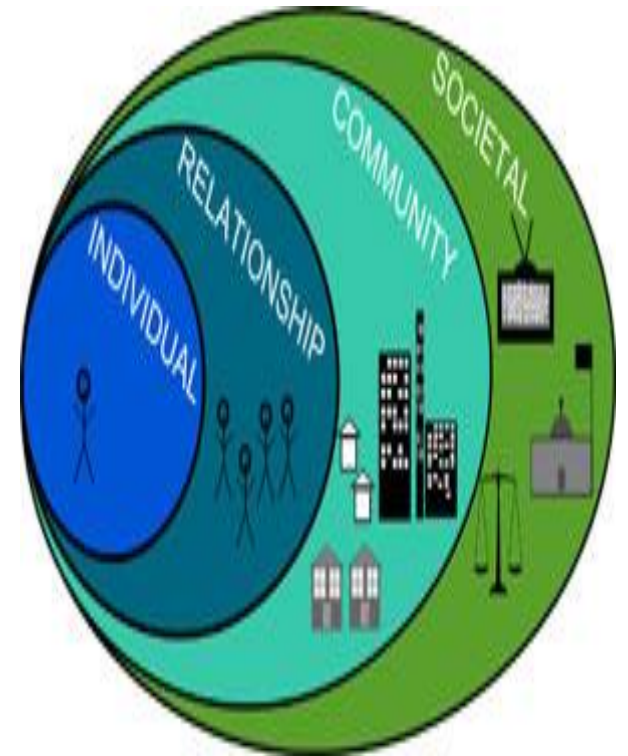
# What have we learned?

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- Young people's life chances are profoundly affected by macroeconomic conditions, area characteristics, social background, gender, and ethnicity
- Societal institutions set up pathways and opportunities
- Social structures moderate access to these opportunities
- Historical events, such as changes in the labour market, economic boom and bust, political instability, etc. play a crucial role
- Given these constraints, individuals construct their own life-course through the choices and actions they take, whereby they both reproduce and transform the structures in which they are embedded
- Efforts to support young people should take a holistic and developmentally appropriate approach

# A Socio-Ecological Developmental Approach

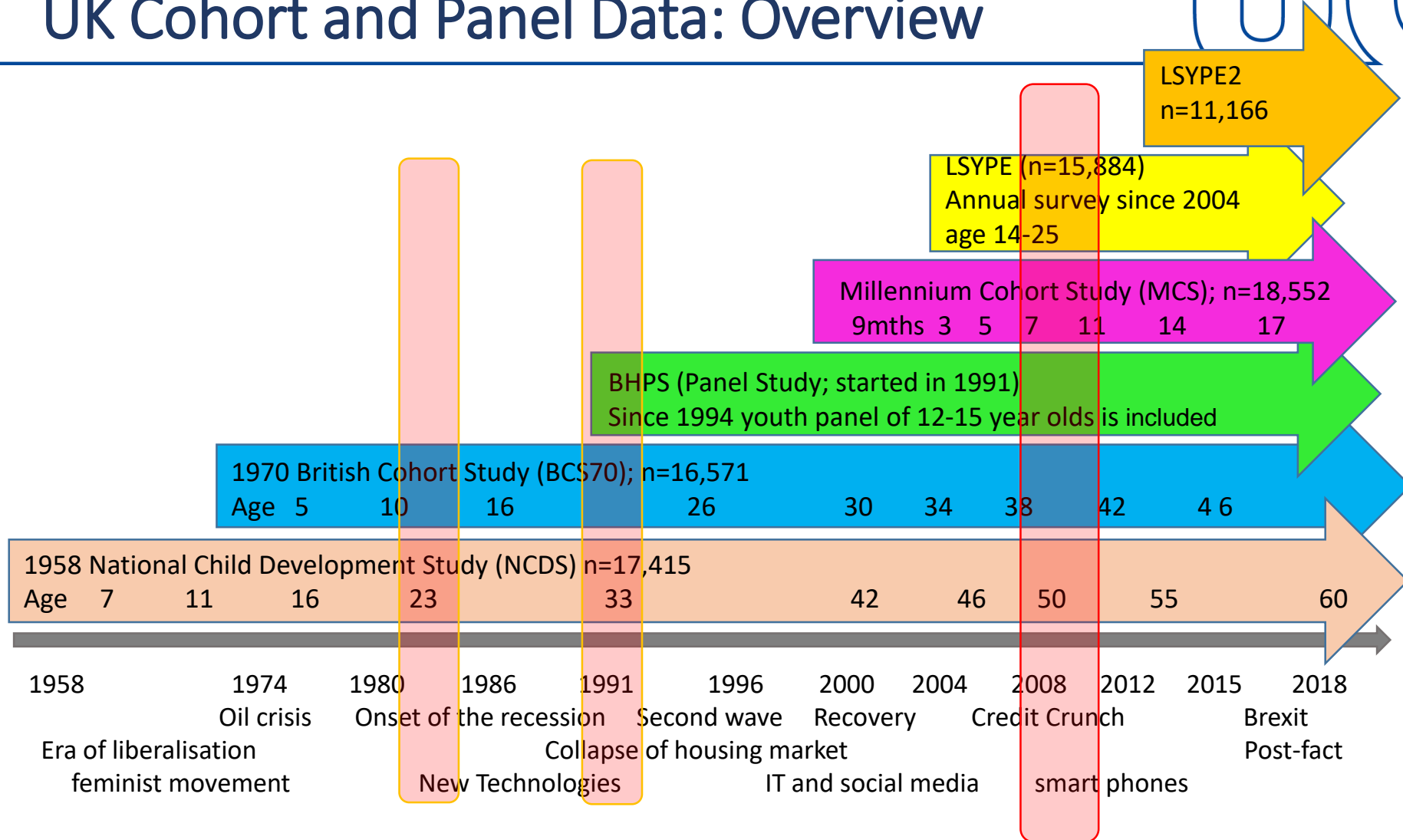
- Ecological theories of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder, 1985):
  - proximal and distal influences
  - Focus on social structures, institutions and wider socio-historical context
- Motivational theories of lifespan development (Brandstädter & Lerner, 1999; Heckhausen, 1999, 2017)
  - Expectancy-value theories of goal selection (Eccles, 1993)
  - Developmental regulation during goal pursuit
- Integrative approach, conceptualising the interactions between structure and agency (Schoon, 2007, 2018; Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017)



## 2 Examples

1. Intergenerational transmission of worklessness
2. Can agency compensate against socioeconomic adversity in the school-to-work transition?

# UK Cohort and Panel Data: Overview



# Example Study 1

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## The Intergenerational Transmission of Worklessness

- Does the experience of growing up with workless parents (G1) affect:
  - Experience of worklessness among young people (G2) themselves
  - Young people's aspirations and achievement orientations
- Can adolescent agency compensate for socio-economic adversity in the school-to-work transition?
- Data Source: Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), born in 1989/90

Schoon, 2014



# Defining Worklessness

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- Parental worklessness was measured at the household level (Gregg & Wadsworth, 2001):
  - parents experiencing unemployment (who are actively looking for work), and
  - parents classified as inactive (either not seeking or not being available for employment)
- G1: A family is defined as workless if:
  - Couple family: Both parents are not in work; or
  - Single-parent family: Parent is not in work
- G2: Worklessness among young people
  - Not in full-time education or employment (NEET)

# Parental Worklessness (2004-7)



	LSYPE % 2004-2007
In work each sweep (work 3) Never workless	79.4
In work at 2 sweeps (work 2)	3.0
In work at 1 sweep (work 1)	2.9
Not in work any sweep (no work) Persistent worklessness	13.7

Before the Great Recession about one in seven young people in England lived with parents who experienced repeated worklessness.

# Interlinked Risks



- **Factors associated with repeated worklessness**

- Single parenthood (2/3 of persistent workless families were single parent families)
- Low income
- Rented housing
- Low qualifications
- Long-standing illness
- Number of partnership transitions
- Number of children in household
- Area deprivation: more people in area receiving Job Seeker Allowance

- **Cumulation of Risks**

# Intergenerational Transmission – Work-NEET

- Parental worklessness showed a significant direct association with a prolonged experience of being NEET
- However, the associations were of moderate size and explained only a small amount of variance
- Moreover, the association between parental worklessness and NEET could largely be explained by the number of other socio-demographic risk factors (e.g. low levels of education, family instability, lack of home ownership, large family size and living in a deprived area)
- The findings point to the role of multiple disadvantage and deprivation rather than worklessness per se



# Intergenerational Transmission – Values –

- Parental worklessness showed a significant (if moderate) direct association with reduced levels of achievement motivation (educational aspirations and expectations)
- Yet, there were significant interactions between parental worklessness and young people's achievement motivation
  - Young people growing up in persistent workless households, who expressed high levels of achievement motivation had a reduced risk of experiencing NEET (after taking into account the other risk factors)
  - The findings do not support the assumption of an inter-generational transmission of 'a culture of worklessness'
  - Children of workless parents potentially recognize the value of higher education and do not want to repeat the predicament of their parents

# Example Study 2

- **Can agency counter balance the experience of socioeconomic adversity in the school-to-work transition?**
- Evidence from 2 age cohorts born in 1970 and 1989/90

	BCS: born 1970, aged 18 in 1988	LSYPE: born 1990, aged 18 in 2009
FT education	25%	45%
Employed (with or without training)	68%	40% (33% paid work, 6% apprenticeships)
Out of the labour force (NEET)	7%	16%

# Indicators of social risk in two age cohorts growing up twenty years apart (at age 16)

	BCS (%) Born 1970	LSYPE (%) Born 1990
Low parent education (<NVQ2)	.49	.16
Low parent SES (routine occupations)	.18	.23
YP lives in a lone parent household	.03	.17
YP was born to a teen parent	.08	.07
YP lives in social housing	.28	.12
YP lives in a workless household	.04	.09

# Predicting experience of NEET

(Logistic regression)

	BCS	LSYPE
Low parent education	1.28*	1.31*
Workless household	1.35**	1.32*
Low SES household	1.44†	1.65***
Lone parent household	.98	1.20*
Born to a teen mum	1.55*	1.33*
Social housing	1.40**	1.90***
Female	1.62**	.84*



# Beating the Odds: Avoiding NEET

Not NEET for 6 months or more between ages 16 – 18 years		
	BCS	LSYPE
Cumulative Social Risk score	.89	.72***
Female	.69***	1.07
Reading (age 10/11)	1.21*	1.19†
Maths (age 10/11)	1.05	1.26**
School motivation (age 16)	1.69**	1.51**
YP wants to stay on in education (age 16)	1.13	1.44***
YP does not truant (age 16)	1.93***	1.66***
YP has part-time job (age 16)	1.95***	1.24
Parent wants YP to stay on (age 16)	1.09	1.23
School characteristics (social indicators )	1.18***	1.20**

# Risk and Resilience

- Risk effects have to be considered in context: changing social realities
- However, cumulative risk is crucial risk factor, especially in younger cohort
- Resilience: not all young people exposed to even severe hardship go on to become NEET
- Factors promoting positive adjustment include:
  - Prior academic attainment
  - Agency (educational aspirations and school engagement)
  - School characteristics
- Importance of social relationships (parents, teachers, peers)
- School context is crucial: Improving school motivation and educational engagement, as well as school characteristics represent possible leverages for intervention as they are malleable and also carry spill-over benefits to capacity building and later attainments

## An Integrative Socio-Ecological Approach

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- How do individual and social context define each other?
- Takes into account
  - a) The role of the wider socio-historical and cultural contexts that shape transition pathways
  - b) Social structures as proximal setting that moderate access to opportunities
  - c) Individual agency identified across multiple dimensions
  - d) Processes linking structure and agency:
    - Cumulative effects
    - Independent effects
    - Compensatory effects
  - e) Overall subjective evaluation of one's life



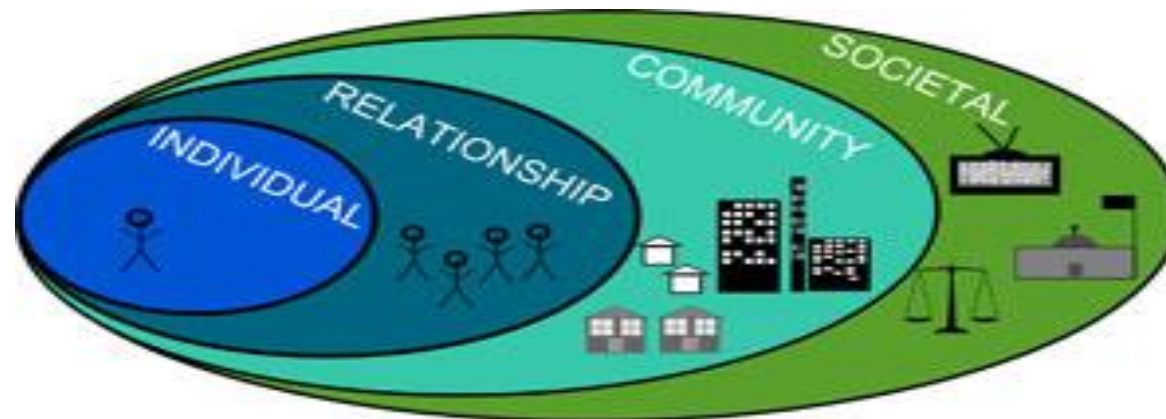
# Under which conditions is agency effective?

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- More prominent if institutional structures are lacking
- When social structures are flexible, enabling switching between tracks
- When individuals leave a pre-structured path
- If socio-economic risks are not overpowering
- If agency is matched to individual competences and capabilities (potential dark side of agency)

# Conclusion

- For a better understanding of the intergenerational transmission of inequality:
  - Important to consider multiple dimensions of risk and adjustment
  - Important to consider changing constellations of risk and adjustment
  - Need for an integrative socio-ecological, developmental theory



Thank you

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