

Youth Transitions in the 21st Century – future directions for data, methods and theory

Centre for Population Change

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Motivation & structure of this talk

- Largely discursive (I prefer neurotic presentation of β)
- Intended to stimulate debate today (and beyond)
 - in no way intended to be the final word
 - link with other thinking / research in the CPC
 - e.g. Berrington, Stone, Falkingham – excellent working paper using LFS
-
- Some general thoughts on ‘youth’ and transitions
- Some assertions on theory
- Some prescriptions on data
- A few statements on methods

- Material mainly from UK, a little from other European states
 - stimulate thought on ‘industrial’/western/modern (minority) world
 - thoughts in relation to the ‘majority’ (developing) world

Youth

Old cliché

children are twenty per cent of the present population but a hundred per cent of our future

'Youth' - a problematic concept

- Chronological definitions (little agreement)
 - Contextually specific
 - education, sex, driving, alcohol, marriage
 - Nationally specific
 - Historically varying
 - rising school leaving age

'Youth' - a problematic concept

- Youth is a 'relational' concept
- Sandwiched between 'childhood' and 'adulthood'
 - maybe not for the millions of child-workers in the majority world however
- Generational concept
 - often same cohort as another sibling
 - Usually at least one cohort behind parents

The Youth Phase

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23
the teenage years

- Extending earlier into childhood (perhaps)?
- Extending further into 'traditional' adulthood
- Adults engage in previously youthful behaviours
- Teenagers now have youthful (old) parents
 - music, popular culture, dope smoking?
 - when did the VC of Aberdeen stop wearing trainers?

Changing location of youth

With the exception of climate change... The biggest change for young people growing up in the 21st Century might be their location in the population structure

Countries like Britain have ageing populations
– with declining fertility and ageing adults

Population:¹ by sex and age

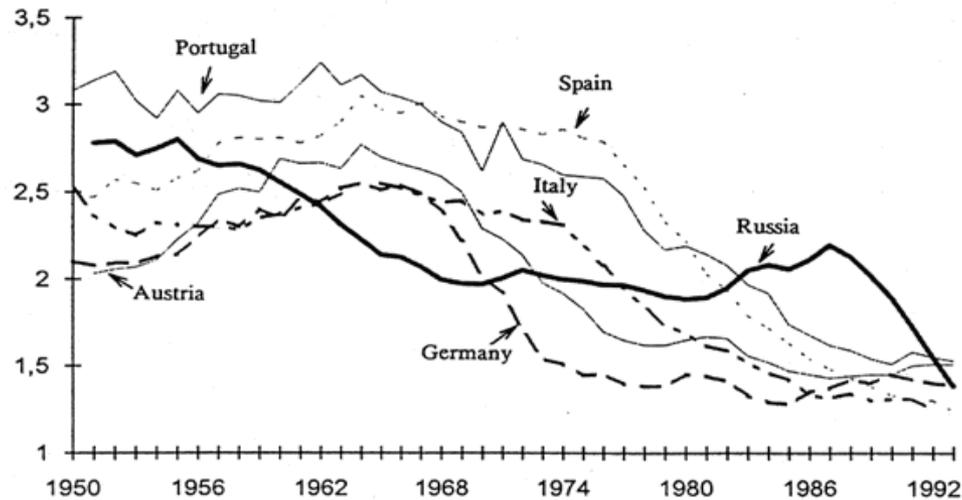
United Kingdom

Thousands

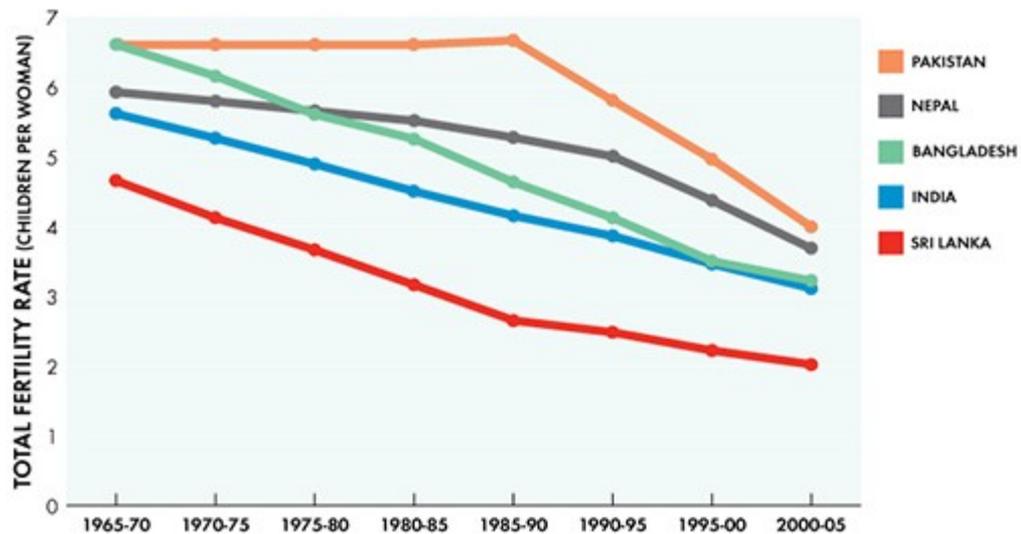
	Under 16	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75 and over	All ages
Males									
1971	7,318	3,730	3,530	3,271	3,354	3,123	1,999	842	27,167
1981	6,439	4,114	4,036	3,409	3,121	2,967	2,264	1,063	27,412
1991	5,976	3,800	4,432	3,950	3,287	2,835	2,272	1,358	27,909
2001	6,077	3,284	4,215	4,382	3,856	3,090	2,308	1,621	28,832
2007	5,895	3,788	3,936	4,578	3,941	3,546	2,398	1,835	29,916
2011	5,961	3,846	4,235	4,314	4,292	3,592	2,636	2,018	30,893
2016	6,187	3,647	4,707	4,043	4,487	3,642	3,052	2,324	32,088
2021	6,485	3,490	4,784	4,318	4,217	4,045	3,153	2,761	33,253
2026	6,557	3,670	4,553	4,787	3,957	4,238	3,230	3,322	34,313
Females									
1971	6,938	3,626	3,441	3,241	3,482	3,465	2,765	1,802	28,761
1981	6,104	3,966	3,975	3,365	3,148	3,240	2,931	2,218	28,946
1991	5,709	3,691	4,466	3,968	3,296	2,971	2,795	2,634	29,530
2001	5,786	3,220	4,260	4,465	3,920	3,186	2,640	2,805	30,281
2007	5,615	3,580	3,924	4,670	4,039	3,686	2,660	2,887	31,059
2011	5,682	3,613	4,200	4,375	4,413	3,744	2,883	2,958	31,868
2016	5,909	3,420	4,572	4,092	4,620	3,796	3,323	3,156	32,887
2021	6,202	3,272	4,591	4,321	4,323	4,242	3,438	3,549	33,938
2026	6,271	3,453	4,368	4,691	4,048	4,448	3,512	4,155	34,946

¹ Mid-year estimates for 1971 to 2007; 2006-based projections for 2011 to 2026. See Appendix, Part 1: Population estimates and projections.

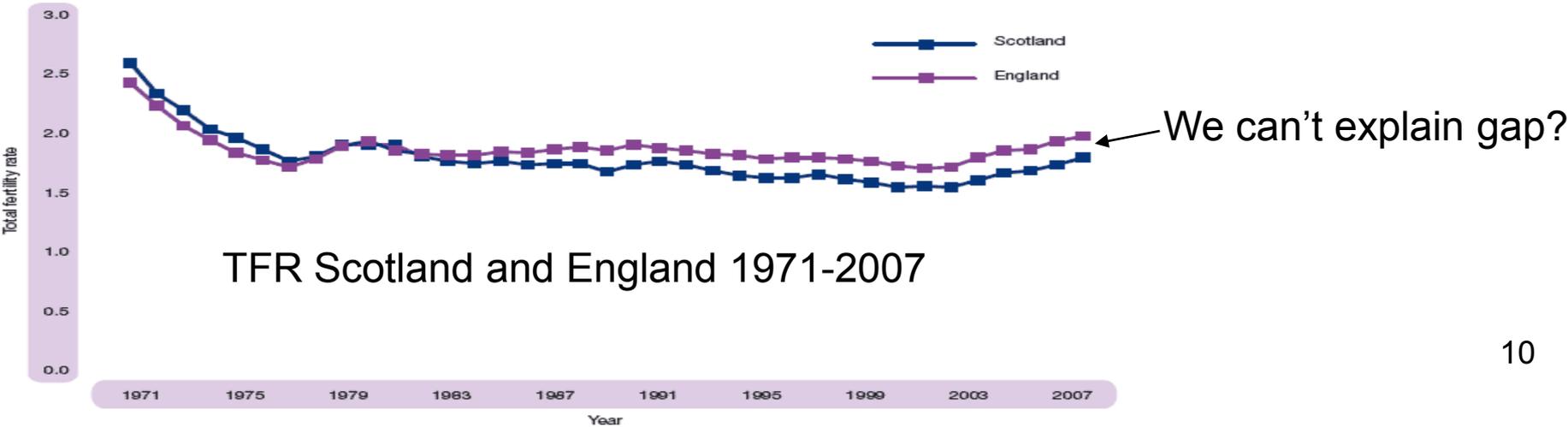
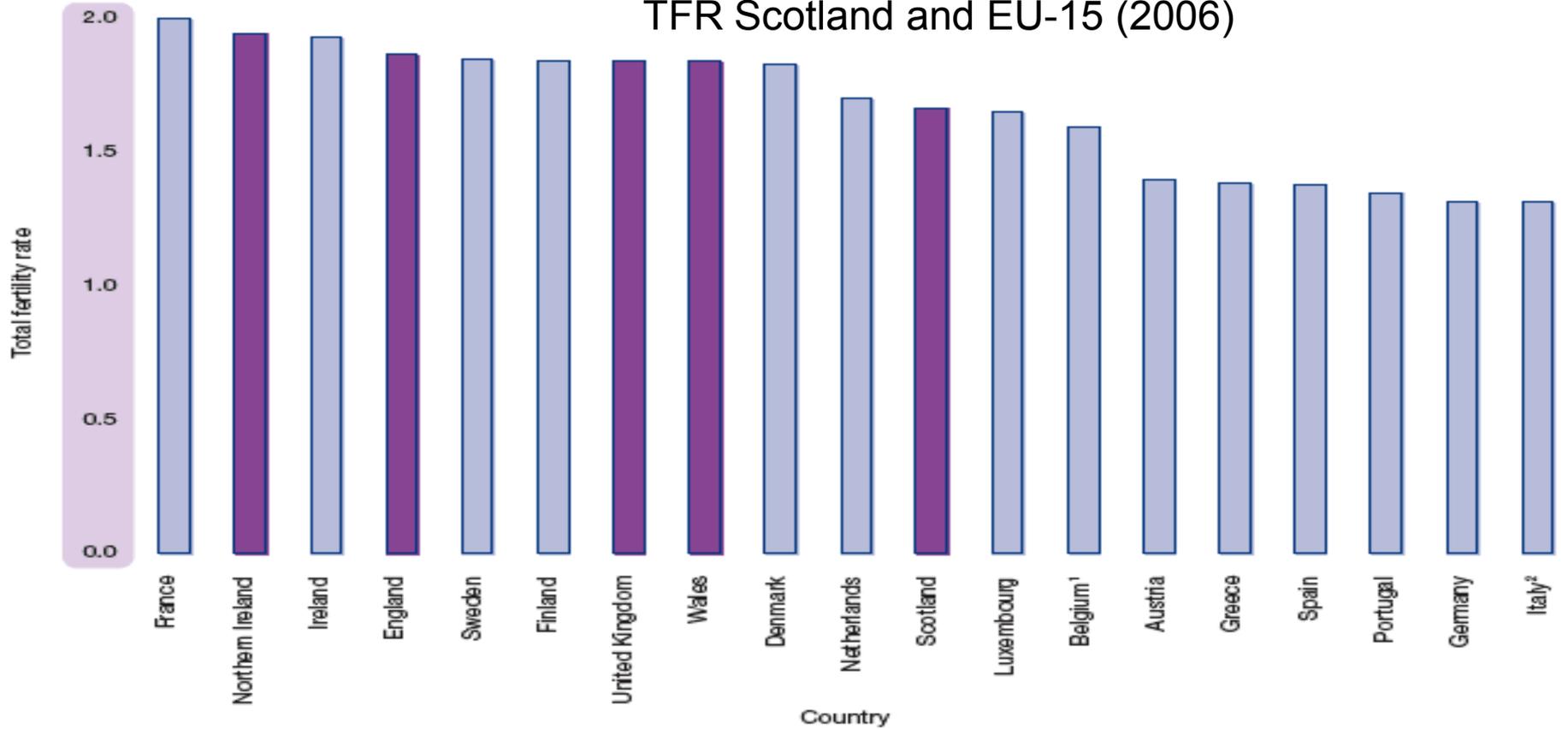
Source: Office for National Statistics; Government Actuary's Department; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency



Total Fertility Rate in Russia and Selected Western Countries, 1950-1993, Russia and Countries of More Recent Demographic Transition



TFR Scotland and EU-15 (2006)



TFR Scotland and England 1971-2007

What are 'youth transitions'?

Traditionally...

- The move into more permanent 'adult' status
 - School to work (education to employment)
 - Move from family home to independent living
 - Marriage

'School to Work'

- In countries like Britain the minimum school leaving age has increased
 - Elementary Ed Act 1880 age 10
 - Elementary Ed Act 1893 age 11
 - Elementary Ed Act 1899 age 12

 - The Fisher Act 1918 age 14
 - The Butler Act 1944 age 15

 - (Crossland) 1971 age 16 (from 1973)

 - *England now rising to 17 and then to 18*

Table 3.9**Students in further and higher education:¹ by type of course and sex**

United Kingdom

Thousands

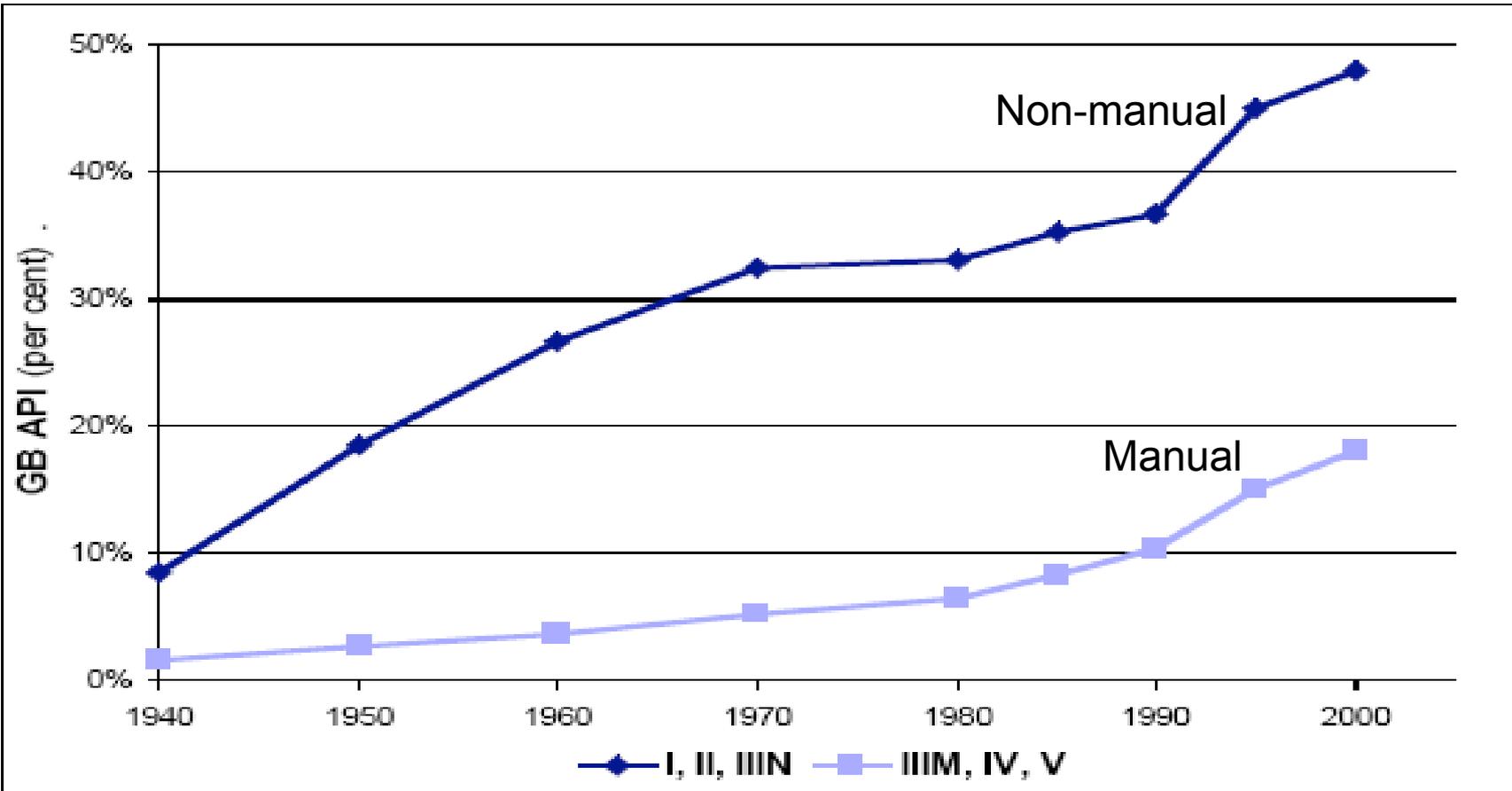
	Men				Women			
	1970/71	1980/81	1990/91	2006/07	1970/71	1980/81	1990/91	2006/07
Further education								
Full-time	116	154	219	515	95	196	261	531
Part-time	891	697	768	1,027	630	624	986	1,567
All further education	1,007	851	986	1,542	725	820	1,247	2,098
Higher education								
Undergraduate								
Full-time	241	277	345	563	173	196	319	706
Part-time	127	176	148	267	19	71	106	451
Postgraduate								
Full-time	33	41	50	120	10	21	34	124
Part-time	15	32	46	143	3	13	33	181
All higher education ²	416	526	588	1,094	205	301	491	1,463

1 Home and overseas students attending further education or higher education institutions. See Appendix, Part 3: Stages of education.

2 Figures for 2006/07 include a small number of higher education students for whom details are not available by level.

Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families; Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills; Welsh Assembly Government; Scottish Government; Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning

Figure 1: Chart showing the API by Social Class for the period 1940 to 2000:

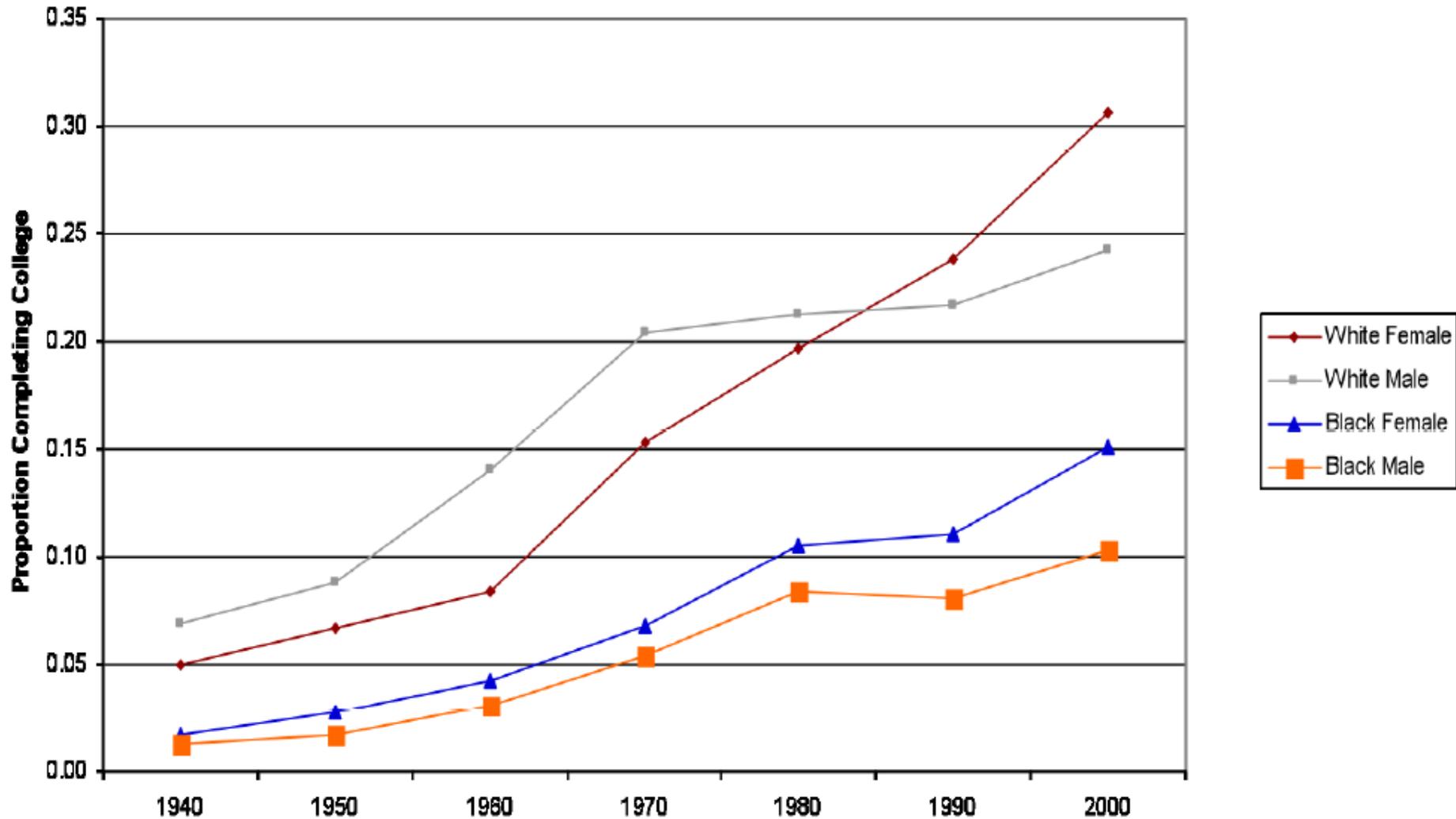


British Measure - Age Participation Index is number of UK students (under 21) entering undergraduate courses expressed as a percentage of 18/19 year old population

Source: Kelly and Cook (2007)

Trends for Blacks and Whites, U.S. Census, 1940-2000

Proportion of 22-28 Year Olds with Bachelor's Degree



UK Students in higher education by subject and sex 2006/7

	% Male Students	% Female Students	% Male	% Female
Business	16	11	51	49
Allied Medicine	6	18	18	82
Education	5	12	25	75
Social Studies	8	9	38	62
Biological Studies	6	8	36	64
Creative arts and design	6	7	39	61
Engineering and technology	12	2	84	16
Languages	5	7	32	68
Computer science	8	2	78	22
Historical and philosophical studies	5	4	45	55
Law	4	4	41	59
Physical sciences	5	3	58	42
Medicine and dentistry	3	3	42	58
Architecture, building and planning	4	1	69	31
Mass communications and documentation	2	2	42	58
Mathematical sciences	2	1	64	36
Agriculture and related subjects	1	1	39	61
Veterinary science	<1	<1	20	80
Combined	5	5	39	61
Overall	100	100	43	57
n	1008990	1354704		

Note: Students ft and pt, ug and pg, home and overseas in higher education institutions only.

Source: Higher Education Statistical Agency.

Author's own analyses

‘School to Work’

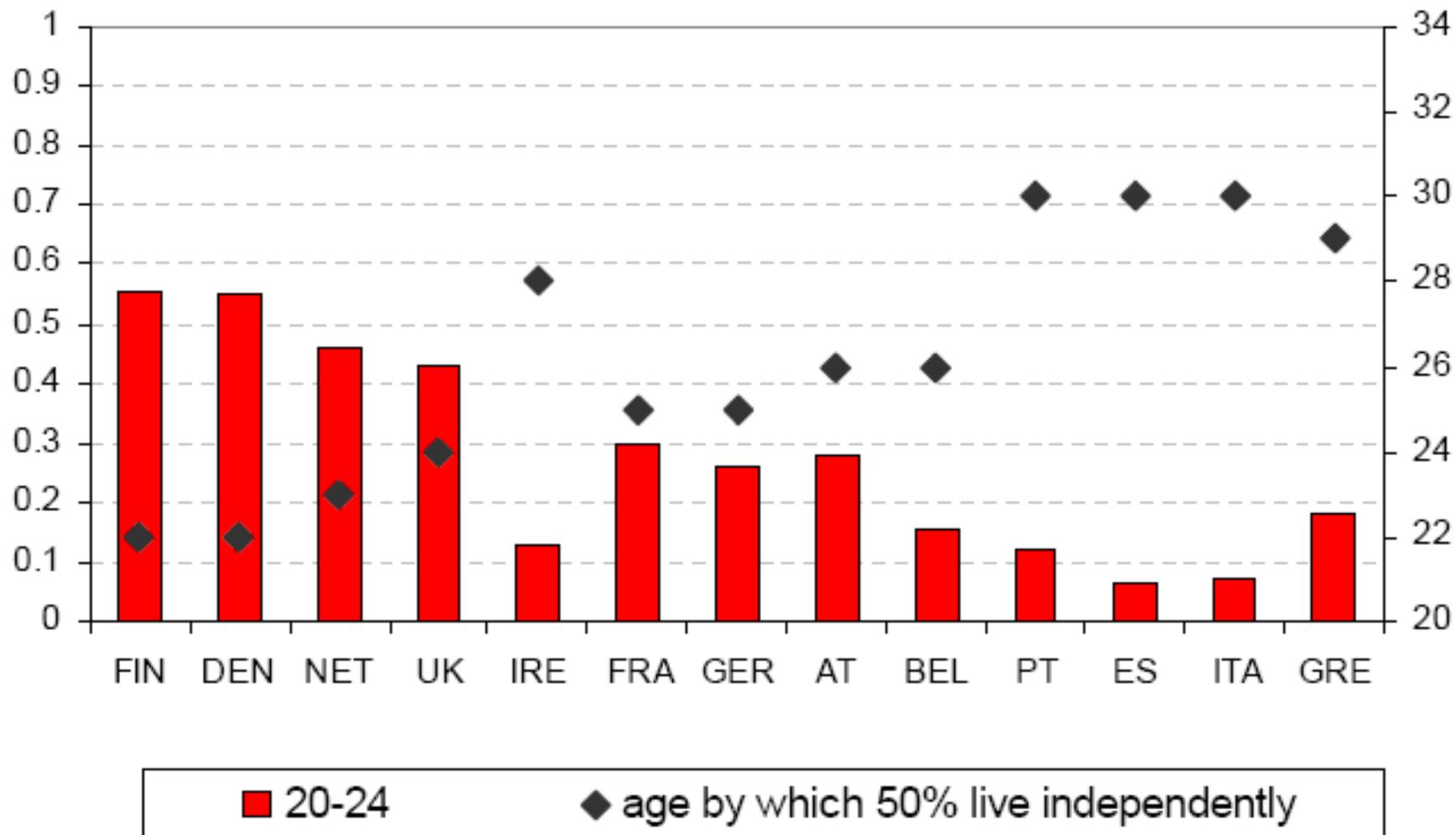
- A key transition to ‘adulthood’
 - *“Studying this was simple when I started, some kids stayed on but most went to work” – Ken Robert in a pub in Cardiff*
- In Britain (and many other countries) we witness
 - the educational period getting longer
 - more young people remaining in education
- Early transitions is stratified
 - educational attainment, social background etc
- Early transition to the labour market relating to later disadvantage
 - pay, occupational status and even health

Craine (1997) notes that sociologists have deployed a series of adjectives such as 'long', 'broken', 'fractured' and 'uneasy', in order to capture the changes which have occurred in youth transitions

Leaving the parental home

- Traditionally leaving at marriage
 - Increasing numbers going to university
 - Increasing proportion of living independently
 - Increasing numbers cohabiting with partners

Proportion of youths (20-24 year olds) living independently from parents (1994-2001)

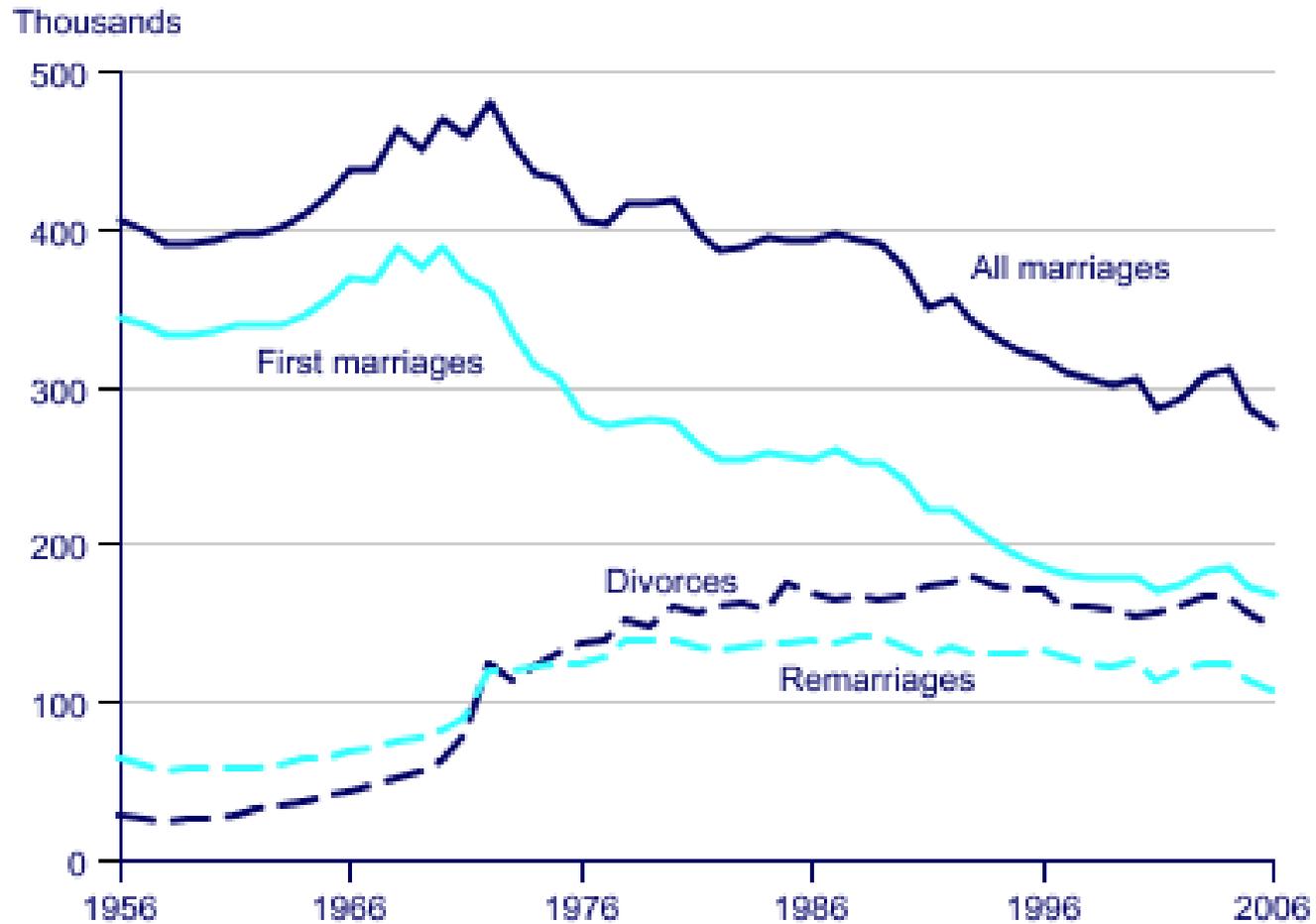


Families and relationships

The late 20th Century characterised by

- Later marriages
- Rise in divorce
- Rise in cohabitation

Marriages & Divorces, United Kingdom, 1956 - 2006



Attitudes to marriage¹

Great Britain

Percentages

	Agreed with statement 2000	Agreed with statement 2006
Married couples make better parents than unmarried ones	28	29
Even though it might not work out for some people, marriage is still the best kind of relationship	59	56
Marriage gives couples more financial security than living together	49	64
There is no point getting married – it's only a piece of paper	9	9

1 Adults aged 18 and over were asked if they agreed with the above statements. Excludes those who responded 'don't know' or did not answer.

Source: *British Social Attitudes Survey, National Centre for Social Research*

Sociologists frequently incorrectly assume social change!

Average age at first marriage

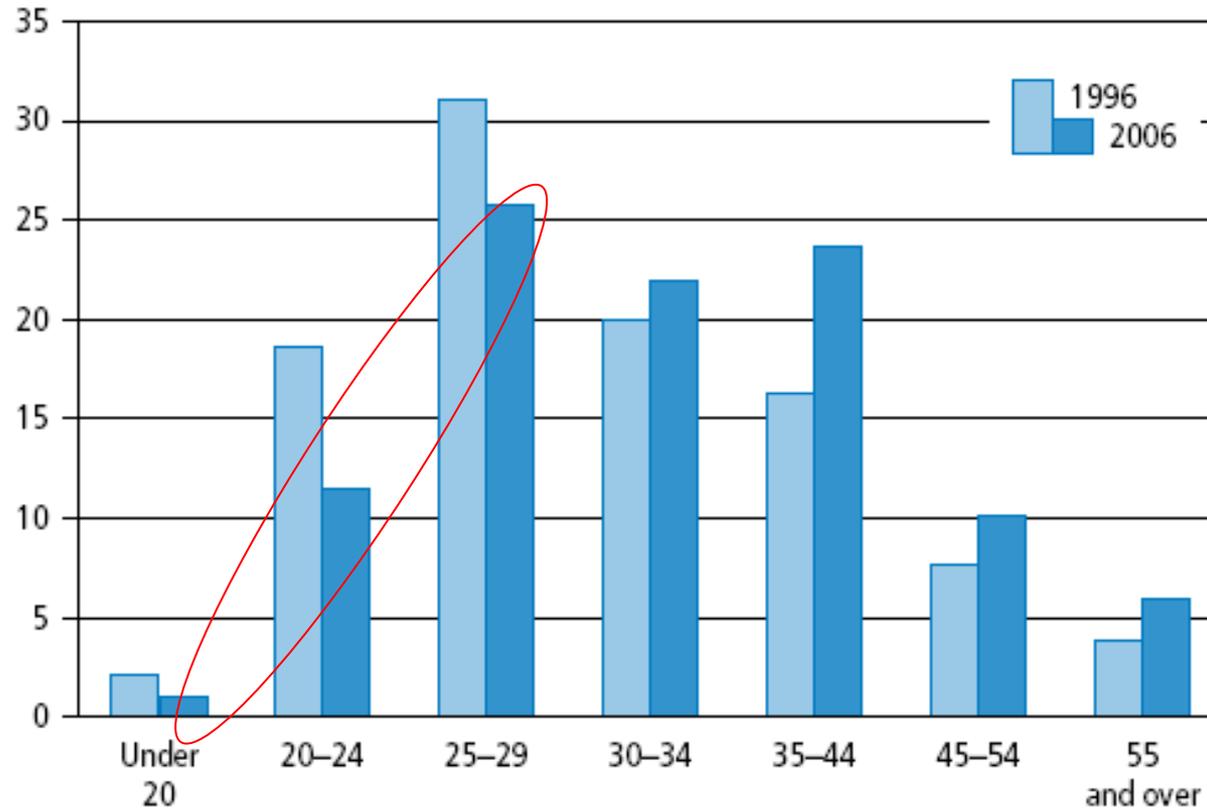
Country	Males 1961	Males 1998	Females 1961	Females 1998
Denmark	25.7	31.7	22.8	29.4
Sweden	26.6	31.7	23.8	29.3
Greece	29.2	30.3	25.2	26.5
Italy	28.5	30	24.7	27.1
Irish Republic	30.8	30	27.6	28.2
Netherlands	26.4	30	24.1	27.6
Germany	25.4	29.5	23.4	26.9
Finland	25.8	29.5	23.6	27.5
France	25.6	29.6	23.0	27.6
Spain	28.8	29.4	26.1	27.4
Austria	26.5	29.2	23.8	26.7
England & Wales	25.6	29.1	23.1	27.0
Belgium	25.0	27.8	22.8	25.7
Portugal	26.9	27.1	24.8	25.1
Average EU	26.7	29.6	24.1	27.3

Figure 2.12

Age distribution of marriages¹

United Kingdom

Percentages



1 Includes first marriages and remarriages.

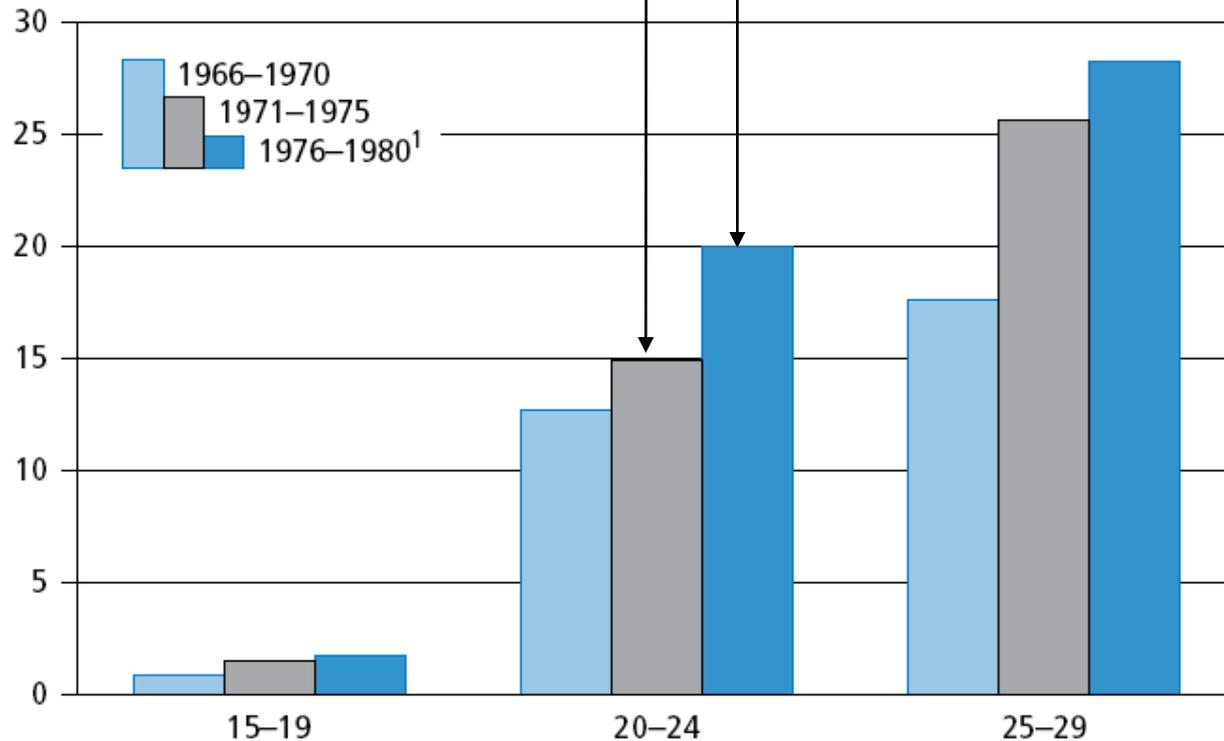
Source: Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Figure 2.16

Proportion of individuals cohabiting: by year of birth and age at survey, 2006

Great Britain

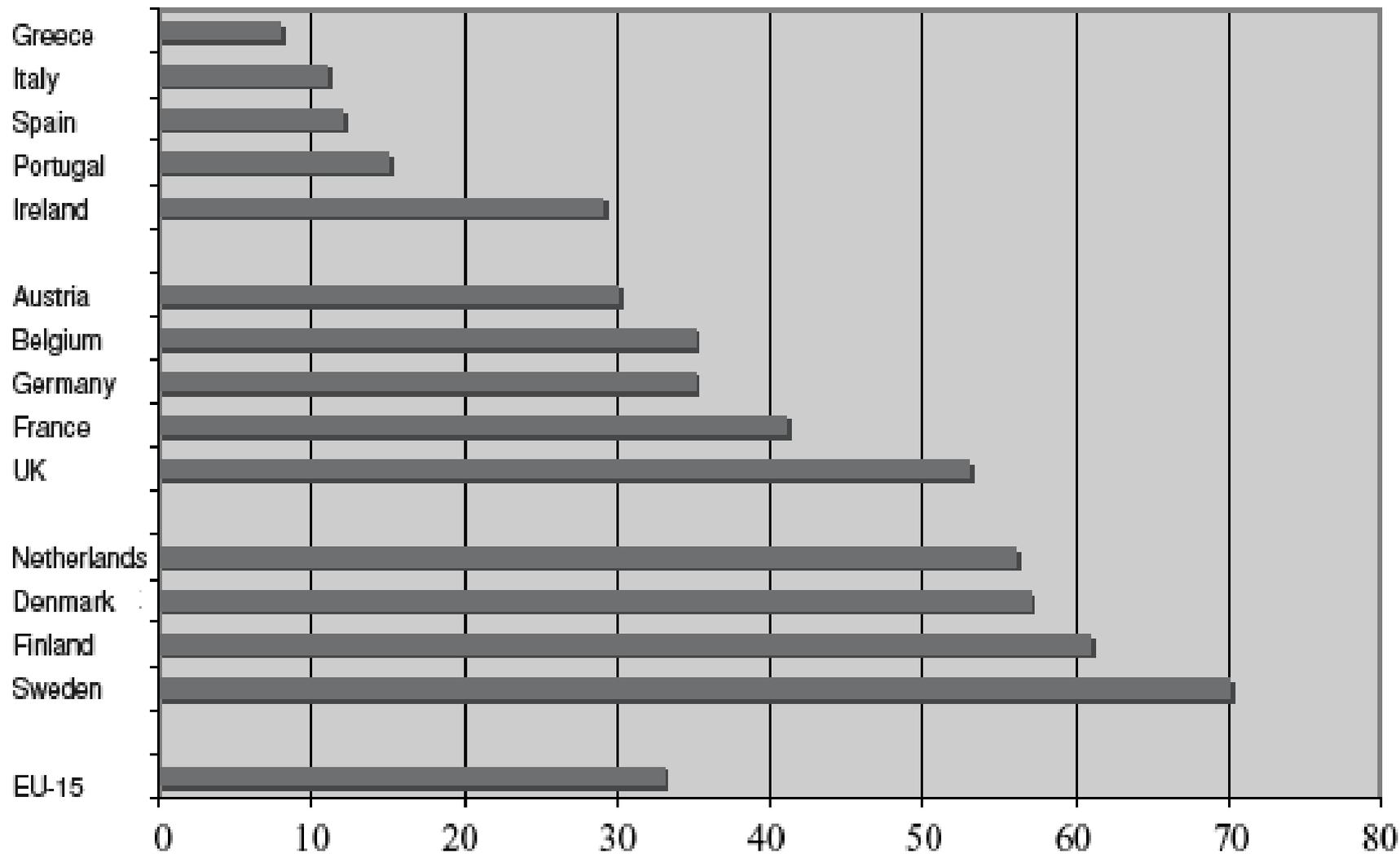
Percentages



1 Data are not yet complete for age 25 to 29 where individuals were born between 1976 and 1980.

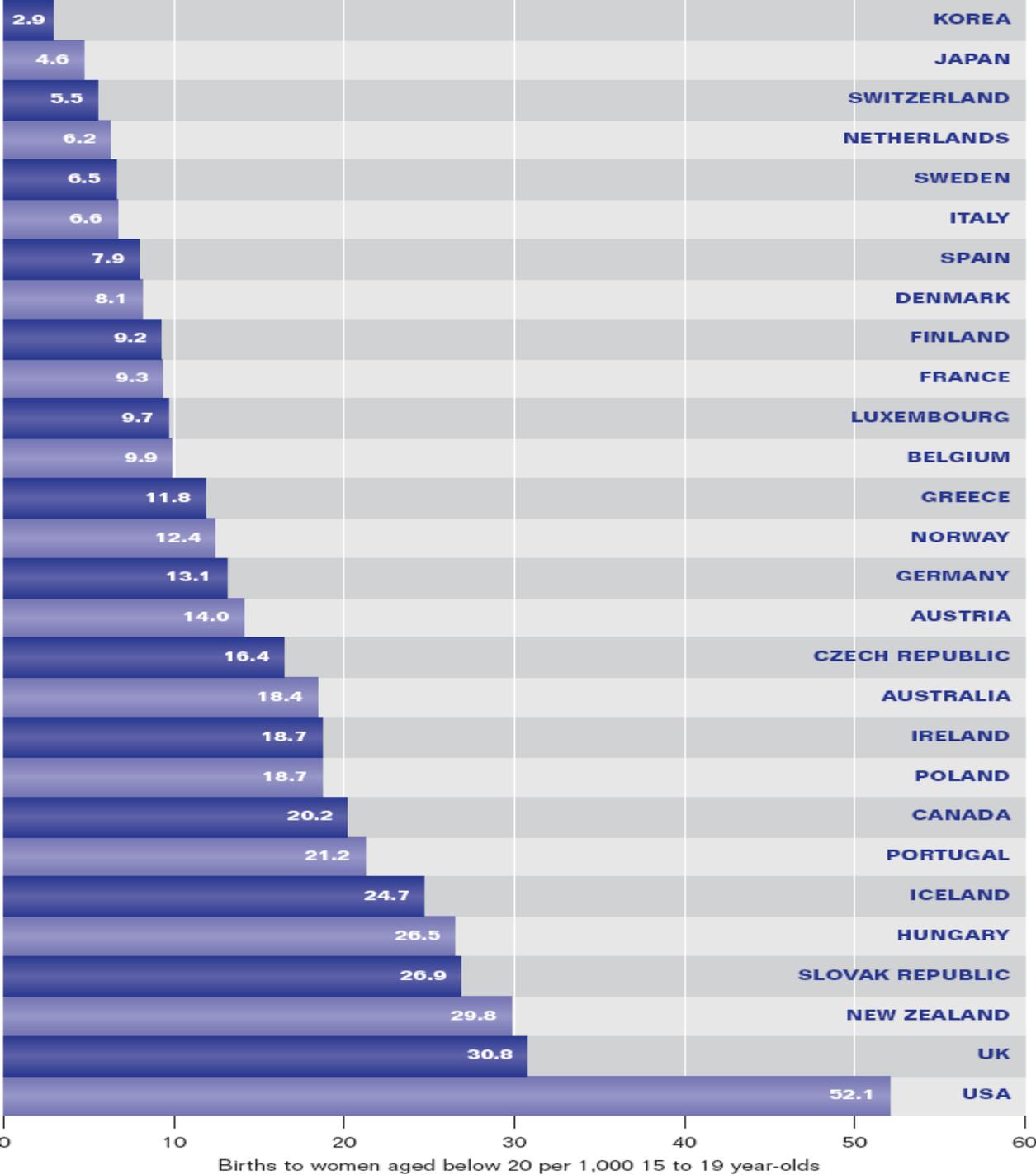
Source: General Household Survey (Longitudinal), Office for National Statistics

Percentage of couples aged 16-29 who are cohabiting, EU-15, 1998



Having babies

- Might have an early birth (nationally dependent)
- First birth likely to be later than early generations
- Likely to have less children than previous generations
- Increasingly likely first birth will be outside marriage
 - subsequent births may also be outside of marriage
 - subsequent births may not be with the same partner



Unicef (2001)
 A League Table of Teenage
 Births in Rich Nations –

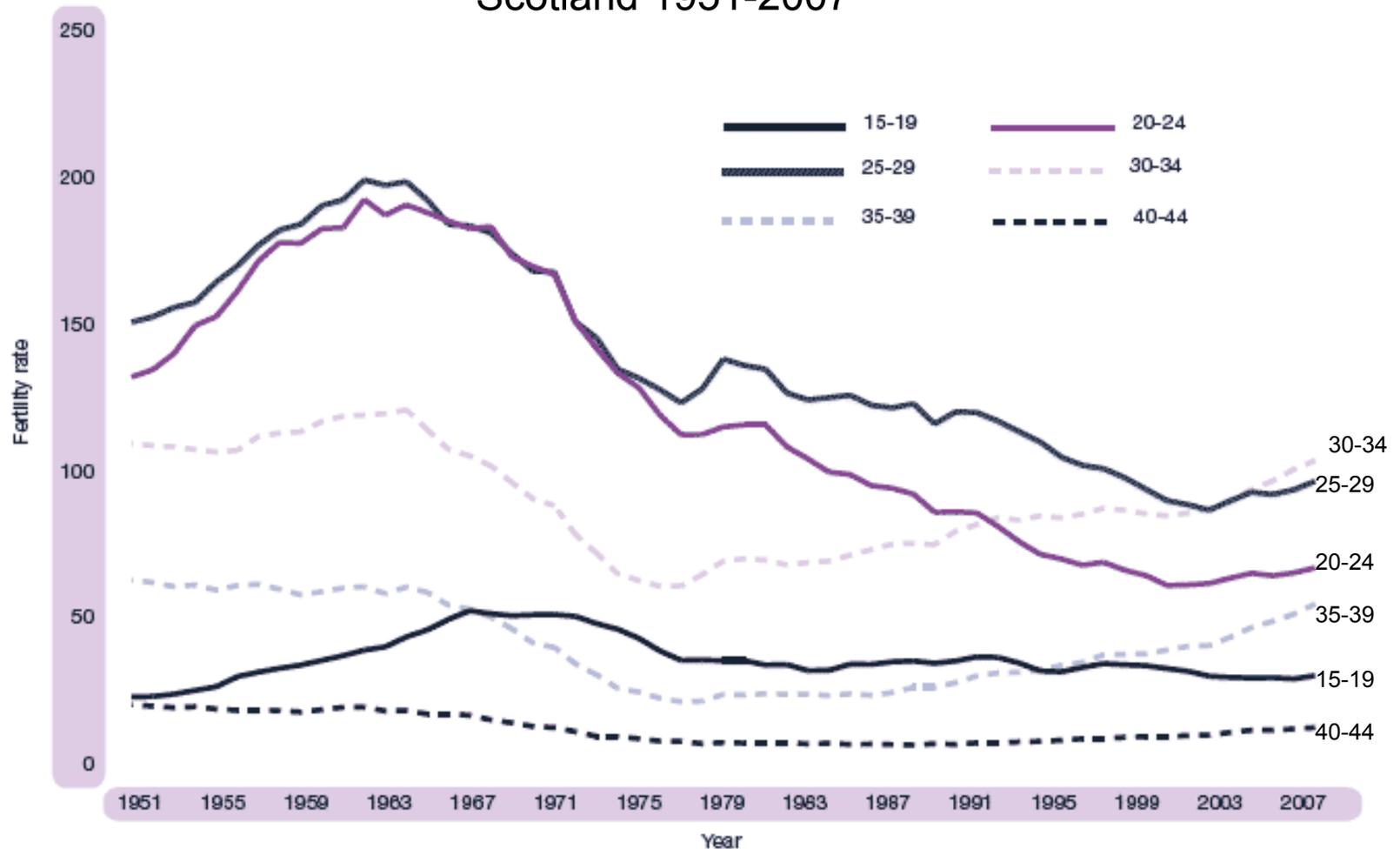
Average age of mother : by birth order¹

England & Wales	Average age (years)				
	1971	1981	1991	2001	2002
1st child	23.7	24.8	25.6	26.5	26.7
2nd child	26.4	27.3	28.2	29.3	29.5
3rd child	29.0	29.2	29.9	30.7	30.7
4th child	30.9	30.9	31.2	31.7	31.8
5th child and higher	33.6	33.8	33.3	34.1	34.1
All births	26.6	27.0	27.7	28.6	28.7

Source: Office for National Statistics

Live births per 1,000 women, by age of mother

Scotland 1951-2007



Births outside marriage: EU comparison

	Percentages			
	1980	1990	2000	2002 ¹
Sweden	40	47	55	56
Denmark	33	46	45	45
France	11	30	43	44
United Kingdom	12	28	40	41
Finland	13	25	39	40
Austria	18	24	31	34
Ireland	5	15	32	31
Netherlands	4	11	25	29
Belgium	4	12	26	28
Portugal	9	15	22	26
Germany	12	15	23	25
Luxembourg	6	13	22	23
Spain	4	10	18	19
Italy	4	7	10	10
Greece	2	2	4	4
EU average	10	20	29	29

¹ Data for Belgium, Spain, Italy, and EU average are for 2001.

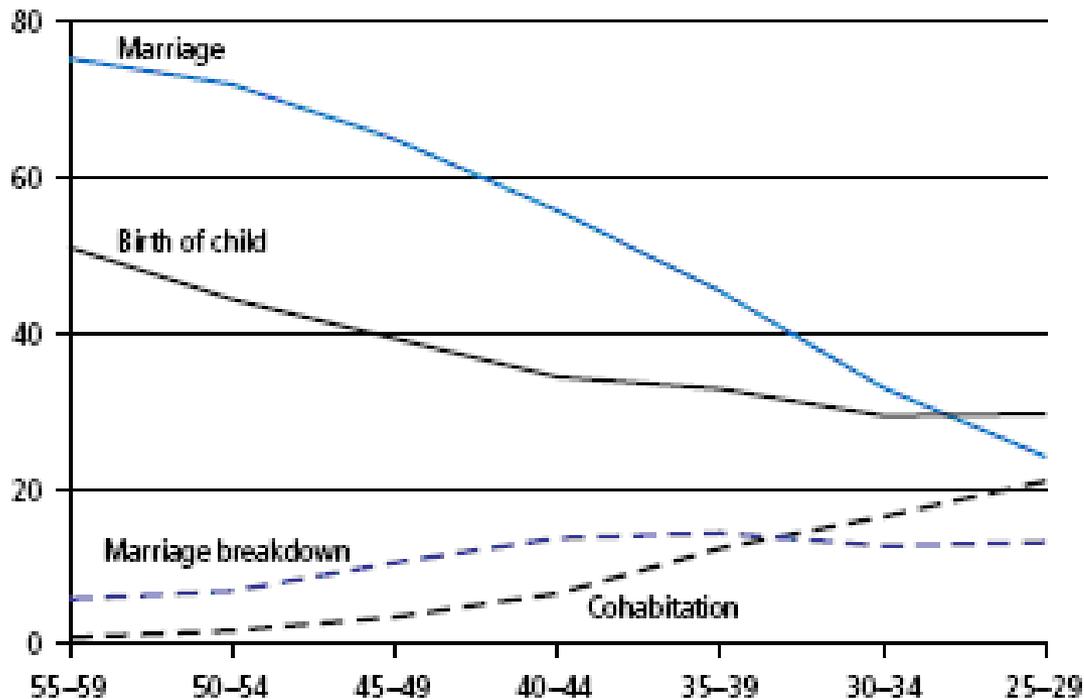
Source: Eurostat

Upward trend for all EU countries

Experience of family events by women when aged 25: by age¹ in 2001–03²

Great Britain

Percentages



1 Age at time of interview.

2 Combined years: 2001, 2002 and 2003.

Source: *General Household Survey (Longitudinal)*, Office for National Statistics

Growing up in the early 21st Century

Key transitions compared with 20th Century...

- Changing patterns
 - social structures may become less important (detraditionalisation)
 - these claims need detailed empirical evaluation!
- Stay in education longer
- Increased chance of university education
- Independent living before marriage
 - reasons and timing may vary though
 - a 'boomerang' relationship with the parental home?
- Cohabitation (often multiple)
- Marriage (after cohabitation)
- Childbirth outside of marriage
- Delayed child birth
- Less children

Researching youth transitions

- UK Changing Times Consensus (1980s)
 - collapse of the youth labour market
 - the sharp decline in the number of apprenticeships and suitable jobs for young people
 - the introduction of youth training schemes
 - changes to state benefits
 - expansion of F.E. (and later H.E.)
- Moving beyond and into 21st Century context of new demography (outlined above)
 - current economic climate
 - potentially rising youth unemployment

Some of my views on theory

- Convinced that studies of youth transitions should engage in ‘middle range’ theory (R.K. Merton)
- Increasingly less persuaded by (often totally abstract) ‘grand theory’
 - Do we need dead Frenchmen to tell us what to think?
- Physicist Richard Feynman – “empirical guys are the most important, they tell us theoretical guys where to look”
- ‘If applied econometrics were easy, theorist would do it’ (Angrist and Pischke 2009 p.327, *Mostly Harmless Econometrics – An Empiricist’s Companion*)

Some of my views on theory

- Persuaded by Goldthorpe's idea of attempting to establish 'empirical regularities'
- Slow attention to detail – better quality analyses
(Paul Atkinson “don't get it right, get it published”)

Theories within the sociology of youth

In UK and in Europe...

End of social structure?

Individualisation theses

(e.g. drawing on Beck & Giddens)

Detraditionalisation thesis...

individuals have a greater scope beyond traditional markers of class, race and gender to create complex subjectivities and lifestyles

Critiques youth transitions approaches

“The field of study has produced little of substance and certainly nothing fresh or original for nearly two decades. It has become more inward-looking. As a sub-discipline it is unlikely to disappear (although perhaps it should) as too many have invested too much in it...[but] it is likely to become increasingly irrelevant. Exhausted, reduced to picking over the minutiae of young people’s lives and reworking its own tired models [of transition] it will stagger on...”
(Jeffs and Smith 1998, p.59)

Critiques youth transitions approaches

“Empiricist youth research...By insisting on the persistence of class divisions (even if only as conventionally defined), by tracking the gendered patterns of adolescent transition strategies, and (to some extent) racial inequalities in educational outcomes, this body of work provided a skeletal picture of social realities...” (Cohen & Ainley 2000, p.81)

I share the view of Roberts (2003)

“In the course of making school-to-work transitions social class, gender and ethnic divisions among young people widen, deepen and are consolidated... These divisions are then reproduced... It is impossible to explain what is occurring elsewhere until the substructure of young people’s lives has been analysed properly”
(see p.19)

A common position in the sociology of youth is that transitions are no longer linear?

Where transition ever neat?

The current boomerang generation? In the 1950s thousands of boys left home at 18 for military service and returned a few years later (rather than for university)

(if time..) when do couples start living together - Anna B. The Hitchhiker's Guide to Galaxy 1981

The lack of resolution in the precise timing of an event is not in itself an argument against conceptualising a process as moving in a linear fashion

From transition to epiphany

Jazz has spirals, soul has sharp edges – The Commitments 1991

Epiphanies are interactional moments, or a series of moments which leave marks on people's lives

Norman Denzin (1989) *Interpretive Biography*

My small piece of work on cancer patients (1995); Humphrey (1993) older people in Durham

Drawing on Denzin's terminology

Many markers associated with the move towards a more permanent 'adult' lifestyle are less like 'major' epiphanies and more like 'cumulative' epiphanies that occur as the result of a series of events that have built up in the young persons life...

But they are 'transitions' none the less

Data

- We need higher quality data
- Trends over time (progress with cross-sectional data)
- Link administrative (and official) data
 - (these data can help with analysing trends over time)
- Transitions are inherently longitudinal
 - Repeated contacts data are essential
- Think about novel modes of data collection
 - but they must lead to high quality research data

Data

- We must have data with a suitable observation window
 - must follow young people in their 20s and beyond
 - likely start earlier in the youth phase (10 UKHLS)
- We must improve the scope of our data
 - households, parents, step-parents (other relatives)
 - siblings, peer groups, friendship networks
 - school, scouts, sports clubs (computer networks)

Data

- We must continue to collect data
 - harder to argue in the current economic climate
 - nationally representative data are important
 - cross-national comparisons increasingly important
- Much data does not maximise its full analytical potential
 - training staff with appropriate skills
 - capacity building (UK problem)

Data

- My dream...birth to death cohort datasets
 - When do social divisions really open up?
 - teenage years, early childhood, before birth
 - Which interventions might be effective?
 - 22nd Century social researchers!

Methods

(in brief this is another 1hr talk!)

Surveys in particular....

- Concentrate on statistical models from the GLMM family
- Model repeated contacts data more effectively
 - (and hierarchical data)
- Think more about multivariate outcomes
 - and latent variable approaches
- Spend much more energy interpreting results
- Put more effort into communicating results
 - especially to policy makers and the public

Conclusions

- Demographic landscape of 21st Century is different
- The role and effects of key transitions might be different
 - I suspect that they will remain important overall
- Changing patterns
 - social structures may become less important (detraditionalisation)
 - I doubt this
 - these claims need detailed empirical evaluation!
- Detailed empirical investigation is essential
- We need
 - Suitable data resources
 - Suitably skilled researchers
 - Extended analytical techniques
 - More appropriate, and empirically informed, theorising

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