Exploring Complex Transitions: Looking Back at the 'Golden Age' of

From School to Work [1]

John Goodwin and Henrietta O'Connor
Centre for Labour Market Studies
University of Leicester

Address for correspondence:
Centre for Labour Market Studies
University of Leicester
7-9 Salisbury Road, Leicester, LE1 7QR

Tel: (UK) 0116-252-5950
Fax: (UK) 0116-252-5953
Email: jdg3@le.ac.uk

Abstract

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

Introduction

> Young people in late modernity…live in a world which is very different to that of the 1950s and 1960s. Transitions into adult statuses, through employment or unemployment, or more commonly through some measure of post-16 education or training, are more protracted, less certain and more ambiguous than they were in the past (Lawy 2002: 210)

It is now well established that the way youth transitions are conceptualised has changed over the last thirty years or so (Layder *et al* 1991; Roberts 1995; Evans and Furlong 1997; Lawy 2002), with more recent literature on youth transitions focusing on three main conceptual debates. First, the extent to which youth transitions have become individualised and characterised by risk and uncertainty. Second, a consideration of how previous researchers have tended to conceptualise youth transitions solely in terms of the influence of social structures *or* individual action – either structure *or* agency. Third, a consideration of how the individualisation thesis when combined with structural interpretations can be best used to understand youth transitions (Nagel and Wallace 1997). Evans and Furlong (1997) reflect on this change by documenting the metaphors emerging from the different theoretical approaches of the last thirty years. They argue 'each metaphor represents ways of analysing and understanding the young person's interactions with his or her social milieu and typical sequences of events between adolescence and adulthood' (Evans and Furlong 1997: 17). For example, they suggest that youth transitions were categorised first, as niches in the 1960s and then pathways in 1970s, as trajectories in the 1980s, before moving on to the more reflexive and post structuralist metaphor of navigation in the 1990s. In turn theses metaphors have given rise to newer metaphors such as structured individualisation (Nagel and Wallace 1997), and rationalised individualisation (Furlong *et al* 2002).

However, underpinning these different metaphors is a view that the individual experience of the transition *has* indeed changed and that the transitional experience of contemporary young people is markedly different to the experiences of previous generations of youth. The implication is that school to work transitions have moved from being a mass, straightforward, linear and a 'single step' process (albeit mediated by family background, class and gender) to a complex, fragmented and individualised process dependent on the navigational and negotiating abilities of young people (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Cartmel *et al* 2002). Whereas once young people could leave school, with or (most often) without qualifications, and enter the labour market in a seemingly 'golden age' of employment, now young people face uncertainty and

have to navigate their way through a variety of experiences and transition options (Vickerstaff 2001), always reflecting on the risks involved. Whereas before young people entering a local labour market would share common transition experiences and biographies with others, transitions have now become more individualised and are less of a shared experience.

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

> (Evans and Furlong 1997: 33)

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

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

> (Vickerstaff 2001: 3)

In line with Vickersatff (2001), by using data from the little known project from the 1960s, *Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*, this paper aims to re-examine the extent to which transitions were complex, lengthy, non-linear and single-step and question the assumed linearity and uncomplicated nature of transitions in the 1960s. The argument offered here is that research on youth transitions has tended to understate the level of complexity that characterised youth transitions in the early 1960s and 1970s. Earlier works, such as Carter 1962, tended to ignore the individual level complexities, and focused instead on 'macro' or more structural issues such as class and gender. Later works have also continued to portray (and perhaps overstate) the past transitional experiences as smoother, linear, uncomplicated and short, re-stating the myth of the past as a 'golden age' for employment. From the secondary analysis of the 1960s data it is hoped to document the individual level complexity that underpinned school to work transitions. For many in this study, the transition process was not smooth, uncomplicated or as linear as others may have previously assumed.

Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations

The data for this paper is drawn from the '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*' study that was undertaken in Leicester between 1962 and 1964. This project was

> concerned with the problems which young male and female workers encounter during their adjustment to their work situation and their entry into the world of adults. When they go to work, or begin to train for work, young workers have to make a wider adjustment to a situation and to roles which are new to them, whose implications are often imperfectly understood by them and by the adults concerned, and for which they are in many cases not too well prepared.
>
> (Young Worker Project 1962: 2)

Approaching his final year in the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester, Norbert Elias was successful in applying to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (D.S.I.R) for a grant of £15,000 to fund the project '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*'. Better known for books such as *The Civilising Process* (1939) and *What is Sociology* (1970), an application to carry out a large-scale survey, government sponsored, research on youth transitions may seem something of a departure for Elias. Despite this, a large research undertaking began

with the aim of exploring how young people experienced work and adjusted their lives to the work role. One of the main issues that Elias was interested in during the original phase of the research was the role that the transition to work played in the broader process of the transition to adulthood. Elias suggested that the transition from school to work not only required the young person to learn new technical skills and the skills required to do the job but also to make adjustments 'to relationships with older workers, supervisors…learning new codes of behaviour (Elias 1961: 1). For Elias this transition process was not a smooth one and he speculated that many of the young people would experience difficulties, anxiety or even 'shock' when entering the adult world of work. The reason for this is that schools do not prepare young people for adulthood or work. Elias suggested that

> The central problem arises from the fact that a complex society such as ours requires customarily a prolonged period of indirect preparation and training for adult life. By indirect I mean from the age of 5 to 14, 15 or 16 the growing up children of our society are trained for their adult tasks in special institutions which we call schools, where they learn, where they acquire the knowledge about the adult world past, present and future not by direct contact with it, but largely from books. Their actual knowledge of the adult world, their only contacts with adults, is relatively limited.

(Young Worker Project 1962: 2)

To explore these issues (amongst others) data was collected via interviews with a sample of young people drawn from the Youth Employment Office index of all Leicester school leavers from the summer and Christmas of 1960 and the summer and Christmas of 1962. The target group was to include all those with one year's further education. This sample was then further stratified by the school attended (secondary, technical, grammar or other), by the size of firm entered in first job and whether they were trainees or not. The sample was divided up into five sub-groups and using a table of random numbers a target sample of 1150 young people were identified. The sample is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Descriptions and Composition

Group	Original Target Sample	Archive Sample
Pilot Study	*28*	*0*
Practice*	*-*	*16*
Actual Study		
'A' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with less than one year's further education	330	243
'B' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with more than one year's further education	160	130
'C' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1960, with less than one year's further education	300	202
'D' – girls who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with less than one year's further education	200	155
'E' – girls who had left school in summer or Christmas 1960, with less than one year's further education	160	105
	1150 *(28)***	851 *(16)***

Note: *The practice schedules appeared to by 'dry-run' interviews with actual respondents. Some vary in the degree to which they were completed. **Totals including practice/pilot surveys.

From the 1150 individuals, the research team were successful in contacting 987 of which 105 refused to be interviewed and 882 interviews were completed. With the exception of Ashton and Field (1976) in which a sample of the cases were used to supplement other data, the bulk of the interview data has never been fully analysed or published. In the mid 1970s Ashton archived the interview schedules, where it has remained untouched until recently, when 851 of the original interview schedules were rediscovered [2].

From the initial analysis what becomes clear is that this project provides a fascinating insight into the individual experiences of young people during the transition from school to work during the 1960s and as such facilitates a re-examination of transitions made during this period. As such, we aim to explore the overarching questions in this paper by exploring the following:

i)   To what extent were transitions in the 1960s non-linear or complex involving breaks, changes of direction, extended or repeated periods of unemployment, frequent moves between jobs, returns to education and training after labour market participation and any unusual sequences of events? (Furlong *et al* 2002)

ii) To what extent were transitions in the 1960s homogenised or differentiated at the individual level?

iii) To what extent were transitions in the 1960s single-step or prolonged?

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

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

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

Given Furlong *et al's* (2002) critique of the assumed non-linearity of current transitions, it should be possible to question the assumed linearity of past transitions using the same typology. This typology implies that the linear transitions, so characteristic of the 1960s, were fairly smooth, straightforward transitions that involved no major breaks, divergences or reversals. It would also be fair to suggest that a linear transition of the past would not involve any periods of unemployment as for the time this was still a relatively uncommon experience. Likewise, when compared to today it would be unusual for young people in the 1960s to experience breaks, changes of direction, frequent moves between jobs or returns to education.

Frequent Job Moves

Data relating to the number of jobs held immediately after leaving school and prior to the interview is presented in Table 2. Usually the respondents were interviewed within one to two years of leaving school and as such the number of jobs broadly represents the number of jobs held in their first two years of working life. Data on the number of jobs held is presented by gender, age and education.

A number of interesting findings emerge from this data. Whilst it is clear that the vast majority of the young workers were still in their first jobs at the point of interview, a sizeable group had worked in at least two jobs. Interestingly, the numbers of young people working in four or more jobs is also not insignificant.

There appears to be an important gender difference here. Whilst the majority of young males were still in their first job, 37 per cent had held more than one job and nearly six per cent had held four or more jobs. Given the fact that the majority of these young men were actually in their first year of employment, for this small group it implies a job move at least every three months. From the data it also appears that over 43 per cent of the girls interviewed were likely to be on their second or third job and 10 per cent were on their fourth job or more.

Table 2: Number of Jobs by Gender, Age and Education

| | Number of Jobs | | | |
	1	2	3	4
Gender				
Male	63.0	22.1	9.2	5.7
Female	46.1	27.3	16.5	10.1
Age				
14*	33.3	-	66.7	-
15	57.5	30.0	5.0	7.5
16	61.8	22.4	9.9	6.0
17	62.1	29.1	5.8	2.9
18	49.8	24.1	16.6	9.6
19	68.9	17.8	8.9	4.4
20*	100.0	-	-	-
21*	-	100.0	-	-
Education				
More than 1 year's further education	77.7	18.5	2.3	1.5
Less than 1 year's further education	53.8	25.0	13.2	8.1
Total Percentage	57.3	24.0	11.5	7.1
N	488	204	98	60
Missing = 1				

Note: *The numbers in each of these categories were very small (2-3 in each).

In terms of age, it appears that most young people had remained in their first job. However, of those aged 18, 16 per cent had held three jobs and nearly 10 per cent had held four jobs or more. The data also appears to suggest that those young workers with less than one year's education (in this sample the majority) were less likely to still be in their first job and more likely to be on to their second or third job.

Whilst the data provides no evidence of young people returning to education, this data does suggest that some of the young workers did engage in frequent jobs moves, with many of those interviewed changing jobs anywhere between every month and every four to six months. Indeed, taking the sample as a whole there were a small number of individuals who had held between seven and eleven jobs between leaving school and the time of the interview.

Frequent Moves and Changes of Direction

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

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

Table 3: Job Movements

ID	Job Types		
A464	Shop Assistant Potatoes/crisps Manufacturing	Shoe Machinist Boot & Shoe* Engineering Works	Inspector of Plastic Works Unemployed
A544	Boot & Shoe Leather Worker	Bakery Assistant	Hosiery*
A601	Apprentice Joiner Shop Assistant	Trainee Hairdresser Trainee Caravan Fitter	Farm Worker
A762	Shop Manager Trawler Fisherman	Apprentice Butcher Hosiery	Boot & Shoe
A806	Apprentice Carpenter Grocery Worker	Apprentice Butcher Labourer	Grocery Worker Boot & Shoe
B207	Warehouse man TV Repairs	Chemist's Assistant	Milkman
C331	Pattern Maker Boot & Shoe	Army Packer	Tyre Fitter Labourer
C510	Van boy Shop Assistant	Painter Army	Shop Fitter
C538	Car Sales Warehouse Man	Warehouse Man Shop Assistant	Butcher's Boy Assistant Shop Manager
D579	Hosiery	Shop Assistant	Nurse
E87	Shop assistant Machinist Groom	Cutter Chamber Maid Hotel Assistant	Domestic Assistant Maid Shoe Machinist
Practice	Boot & Shoe Car wash foreman Driver's Mate Labourer	Painter Gardener Hosiery	Driver's Mate Ice-cream Seller Driver's Mate

Note: Boot & Shoe and Hosiery has been summarised here as it could involve a number of different functions including cutting, overlocking stitching etc. All other jobs are recorded according to respondent's definition.

Respondent E87 is similar. Aged 18 at the time of interview this respondent had held nine different positions in just over two years in the labour market. On average this respondent stayed in each job for just under three months. She began her working life as a shop assistant before moving into a position as a cutter in a hosiery factory. She left the hosiery factory suggesting that she wanted to become a nurse and spent the next six months working as a domestic assistant in a nursing home. She then said she couldn't stand seeing people suffer and went on to a job as a machinist in a large boot and shoe factory. Subsequently she moved into positions as chambermaid, maid, groom, hotel assistant (a position described as peeling potatoes), before returning to work as a shoe machinist.

Breaks and Unemployment

A further factor identified as being central to a linear smooth transition from school to work is the absence of periods of unemployment and individuals not experiencing breaks in their employment history. The assumption in much of the literature is that young people in the 1960s moved seamlessly from school to work without a break. From the data it appears that many of the young people did not experience any significant breaks in employment and avoided being unemployed. However, this may mean that for some, unemployment, the fear of unemployment and breaks in employment, did add to the individual level complexity of their own transition from school to work. Indeed, although perhaps not the norm, individuals in this study did experience breaks in employment and periods of unemployment. Additionally a large group of the respondents also professed their anxieties about being unemployed when leaving school or becoming unemployed in the future.

In this study, the respondents were asked whether they had secured a job whilst they were still at school or whether they secured the job after leaving school. Over 170 respondents reported that they did not secure a job until after leaving school. The length of time after leaving school until they found work could vary anywhere between two and five weeks or between two and six months. This suggests that quite a sizable group did not leave school and walk straight into a job. As the interviewer notes record

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

Or as a respondent suggested

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

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

> *The respondent gave the impression of being very insecure. He had 7 sisters and 4 brothers, but his mother was a widower. For the last few years of his school career, he had lived at a council home because he often played truant from school while he was living with his mother. Since he had been out to work, he had had 7 jobs but he was now out of work…At the end of the interview, respondent mentioned that he may get a job with a fair that was due to leave Leicester in the next few days.* (Unemployed Male 1964, A464)

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

It also appears from the data that the fear of unemployment was a real issue for some of the young people. For some the concern was so great that they took the first job that they could. For example, according to the interviewer notes

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

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

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

Straightforward Transitions ?

A key characteristic of non-linear transitions is the risk and uncertainty experienced by the young person. Again, the assumption here is that young people making school to work transitions in the 1960s did not experience the process as one characterised by risk and uncertainty. Instead it was relatively straightforward. However the data for this study suggests that some of the young people did indeed perceive the risks and uncertainties of life beyond the school playground. For example, as with Vickerstaff (2001) and Carter (1962), quite a large proportion of the young workers did not feel that they had been prepared for entering employment for the first time. The respondents were asked 'when you were at school, what were you told about work?'

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

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

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

> *I don't think we were told very much at all. We didn't have special classes to do with...like some schools have shorthand-typing classes. They have things like that while they're still at school but we hadn't. I don't think we had much teaching on working life until the Y.E.O cam round and told us all about it.* (Typist 1963, E386)

> *That I would wish that I was back at school.* (Butcher 1963, C711)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

just about becoming an apprentice (?) knew had to do a year before I could become one but I haven't signed papers yet. (Painter and Decorator 1964, A799)

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

Homogenised or Differentiated Transition?

A crude measure of individualization is the proportion of age peers in a person's social network with whom he or she shares a common biography having grown up in the same district, attended the same schools, and entered similar types of employment at the same ages. Virtually everything that

every individual does and experiences is still shared with many other people, but nowadays in a variety of individualized sequences and combinations.

(Roberts 1995:113)

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

Interestingly, the relative homogeneity of transitions can also be explored using the *Adjustment of Young Workers* data. During the interviews the young workers were asked two questions that could be used as broad indicators of the homogeneity thesis. First, the young workers were asked 'did anyone else you know have the same sort of jobs as you?'. Such a question touches upon Roberts' notions of individuals sharing a common biography, growing up in the same area, attending the same schools and entering the same types of employment as the question is specifically directed at the respondent's relatives, friends and neighbours. Likewise, the same 'type' of employment that Roberts refers to is also captured in this question as the question deals with types of jobs rather than dealing with specific employers. The second question deals with the later issue by asking the respondents 'was there anyone you knew working in the same firm?'. The data relating to these two questions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Working with Friends, Family and Neighbours

	Yes	No
Did anyone else you know have the same sort of job as you (any relatives, friends, neighbours)?	410	423
Was there anyone you knew working in the same firm?	372	449
N 851		

From Table 4 it is clear that roughly 50 per cent of young workers in 1960's Leicester did not make the homogenised transitions that authors such as Roberts suggest. Forty nine per cent of the respondents suggested that this did not work in the same sort of job as their friends or relatives and 52 per cent indicated that they did not know anybody working in the same firm.

Single-step or Prolonged Transitions?

Vickerstaff argues that earlier authors assume that transitions in the 1950s and 1960s were 'single-step'. It is suggested that the buoyancy of the labour market in the early 1960s enabled young people to make a direct and single-step transition from school to work. Once the young people had entered work, they tended to leave home, achieve some state of financial independence, marry and have children in a relatively short period of time. This was particularly true for the working-class (Jones 1995; Furlong and Cartmel 1997), with working class youth more likely to become economically independent earlier than middle class youth (Pilcher 1995).

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

There is little evidence to suggest that the young workers in Leicester were prolonging their transitional experience by staying on in education, and the vast majority did not stay on at school but instead left at the first opportunity. Indeed, instead of family pressure to stay in education, for many young people in the 1960s there was a great deal of pressure from family and friends to leave education at the first opportunity and enter work. Yet the single step hypothesis, relating to past transitions, is questionable when one considers the data relating to dependence on the family, financial independence and housing transition.

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

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

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

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

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

In these examples, the young workers did not attempt to resolve their difficulties themselves or display independent behaviour. Instead they relied heavily on the interventions of family members. There are other examples in the data where parents intervene constantly in terms of obtaining employment, getting apprenticeship papers signed, negotiating pay and even helping the employers to discipline the young workers. When asked how they got to know about their first job, such responses were typical

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

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

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

The single step hypothesis is also questionable in terms of economic independence. When asked what happened to their wages, the data reveals that far from being domestically and financially independent fewer than half the respondents kept the money themselves (47%). Many had to pass their wage packet to their mother (45%) or to share it equally with her (5.5%) or, for a small number, give it to their father

(2.5%). Their parents would then allocate 'pocket money' for the young workers to spend on themselves, usually around two pounds per week. In terms of expenditure, for many their own money was not spent on the pursuit of an independent life style but on 'sweets' or 'going out' and buying clothes, records and cigarettes.

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

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

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

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

For many, the allocation of money within the family and the handing over of wage packets suggests that many of the young workers were still financially dependent upon their parents. Although they earned their own money, all that they had to spend was a weekly allowance and the custodian of this was usually the mother and it was the mother who decided how much the young worker received back. In some cases the respondents received very little money back from their parents and it was clear that the parents did not trust their child with money or to be financially independent. In other cases the parents only allocated pocket money as the young workers were providing essential family income, supporting parents, siblings and other relatives.

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

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

In terms of housing transitions, the young workers in this study do not seem to conform to the assertions made by others. All of the interviews were undertaken in the family home, despite the fact that some of these young people were aged eighteen or over at the time of the interview. In the whole sample, only two of the men were married. However, although married they were still dependent on others as they lived in either their own family home or the family home of their partners.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is clear that most authors now agree that youth transitions have moved away from a process that is linear and smooth or uncomplicated to a process that is both non-linear and complex or problematic. Lawy (2002:201) suggests, that past 'transitions into adult statuses and roles were relatively uncomplicated and uncluttered by the objects and ephemera of modern living'. However, whilst many of the points Lawy (2002) and others make are without doubt based on the reality of many young people's experiences today, they merely confirm an established view about the past and present. Indeed, as Furlong *et al* (2002) and Vickerstaff (2001) suggest, the consensus view on the changing nature of transition, from liner and smooth to non-linear and complex, has largely remained unchallenged. Likewise, with the exception of Vickerstaff (2001), the value of applying and exploring contemporary notions and ideas against the transition experiences of youth for previous generations, and questioning the assumed linearity has not been considered. However, there is an obvious value in re-examining past transitions and challenging the current consensus areas on linearity and, as Roberts (1997) suggests, can new concepts relating to youth transitions be operationalised in order that they be applied to and measured in young people's actual lives and experiences (Roberts 1997: 56). This must apply to the past as well as the present. As Vickerstaff suggests 'it cannot be assumed that the school to work transitions of the past were experienced as easy, comfortable or unproblematic at the time' (Vickerstaff 2001: 3). However, using data from the '*Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*' project it has become possible to clearly see the extent to which past transitions were individually complex.

For example, this data provides evidence of frequent job moves, with many young people having four or more jobs within the first years of employment. Young women appeared to have between two and four jobs in the early phase of their working life and that education was also linked to the frequency of job moves. Likewise, the data also provides evidence to suggest that young people engaged in frequent changes of direction, moving between jobs that were very different in nature.

Nor were the transitional experiences as straightforward as originally believed. Again for some of the young workers interviewed, the transitional experience was not straightforward with many feeling disillusioned with work, having anxieties about their future prospects, and of being concerned with their lack of training. The assumed seamless transition from school to work also seems problematic when one considers the evidence presented above. Some of the young people did experience periods of

unemployment before entering work or between jobs. The young people interviewed also clearly felt increased levels of insecurity (and risk) brought about by being out of work, or threatened unemployment.

The view that young people in the past made homogenised transitions to work, sharing the same experiences with friends, neighbours and relatives, also seems questionable. Over half of the sample interviewed here clearly had individualised experiences entering different firms at different times during the first years of their working life. The data also provides evidence to suggest that many of the young people in this survey remained very dependent on their parents and family for housing, the allocation of money, and decision making long after they had made the transition from school to work.

Given the individual level complexity found in the transitional experiences outlined above, one has to question why ideas relating to the 'golden age' of employment and notions of smooth transition remained unquestioned? One possible reason why previous transitional experiences have not been questioned or challenged relates, perhaps, to the changing nature of the theoretical and methodological approaches to transitions over the last few years, as outlined above. This conceptual shift from exploring the impact of social structure to the more contemporary individualised approaches actually means that in conceptual terms we are not comparing like for like when we compare current and transitional experiences of 40 years ago. To put it simply, those currently involved in trying to understand transitions have become concerned with different phenomenon and have different academic pre-occupations. Past scholars were *not looking* for the individualised, subjective, complex transitional experience, and the over-concentration on the macro process as being central determinants of the transitional process meant that the individual experiences were largely ignored or hidden in a broader analysis. For example, in Ashton and Field (1976) the over riding concern was to explore how an individual's social, educational experience led to a continuity of experiences at work. That is to say how social class, family and education largely determined the transitional experiences of young people and their point of labour market entry. Likewise, the dominant structural view of the 1980s viewed labour market destinations as being determined by social forces that are outside the control of individuals. Evans and Furlong (1997) suggest that, with the collapse of the youth labour market, transition experiences was explained 'more in terms of structural forces such as social class, race, gender, educational attainment and labour market conditions rather than by reference to individual characteristics or

aspirations' (Evans and Furlong 1997: 18). This means that in many early studies, the individual complexity of past transitions was not highlighted and remained unquestioned. Yet, the only evidence that past transitions were smooth and linear emerges, largely, from those who explored transitions with an over-arching concern for social structure and in particular social class. However, just because past researchers were not concerned with individual complexity in past transitions does not mean that it was not there or was not experienced.

In line with the data outlined above, it is our assertion that past transitional experiences were not uniformly simple, linear or as single-step as previously suggested and that individual level complexities have been hidden in previous analysis. This is not to suggest that all past transitions were 'individualised' or that more macro issues, such as class, have no impact on the transitional experience. More simply, the past could be a complex, risky and problematic place for young people making the transition from school to work.

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Notes

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

[2]   See Goodwin, J. and O'Connor, H. (2002) Forty years on: Norbert Elias and the Young Worker Project, Working Paper No. 35, The Centre For Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester

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