



## Patterns of intergenerational mobility of the old and new middle classes in a post-industrial society: Netherlands 1970–2006

Ayse Güveli<sup>a,\*</sup>, Ruud Luijkx<sup>b</sup>, Harry B.G. Ganzeboom<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Sociology, University of Essex, UK

<sup>b</sup> Department of Sociology, University of Tilburg, The Netherlands

<sup>c</sup> Department of Sociology, Free University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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### ABSTRACT

It has often been proposed that new cleavages have emerged within the middle class. In this paper, we examine the distinction between social and cultural specialists and technocrats, and investigate whether these new and old middle class fractions are differentiated by their patterns of intergenerational mobility. *To what extent do these newly distinguished middle class fractions have specific external and internal intergenerational mobility patterns? And to what extent have mobility boundaries between them been rising over time?* To answer these questions, we use 47 Dutch national population sample surveys with detailed occupation codes collected between 1970 and 2006 ( $N = 60,978$ ). Our analyses of internal and external homogeneity show that the middle class fractions each have characteristic mobility and immobility patterns and therefore a necessary condition is satisfied to declare them as separate classes. Furthermore, in the early periods, the social and cultural specialists were differentiated by a high level of immobility but in the later periods, the distance between the old and new middle classes has decreased significantly.

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### 1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, many students of stratification have argued that there exist multiple fractions within the middle class and that in post-industrial societies some of these fractions have become social classes in their own right. However, to what extent have these fractions of the middle class acquired separate demographic identities? Following Weber's (1978 [1922], p. 302) famous *dictum* that “a ‘social class’ makes up the totality of those class situations within which individual and generational mobility is easy and typical”, mobility analysts (Breiger, 1981; Goldthorpe, 2000) have argued that a social category does not constitute a social class proper unless there is considerable intergenerational reproduction of class membership. Members of social classes experience similar upward and downward mobility patterns within a society. Conversely, only occupational categories that are similar with respect to intergenerational mobility flows constitute a single social class. By implication, if the fractions within the middle class do indeed constitute distinct classes, their intergenerational mobility patterns should clearly differ.

In this paper, we examine the intergenerational reproduction and mobility patterns of middle-class fractions in the Netherlands, an advanced post-industrial society for which a wealth of detailed intergenerational mobility data are available. We concentrate on the distinction between the middle-class fractions of ‘technocrats’ and ‘social and cultural specialists’ that was proposed by Kriesi (1989a,b) and which has been rigorously operationalized by Güveli (2006). While only one specific form of new class formation, we maintain that Kriesi’s distinction is a fair summary of many of the new class conceptions

\* Corresponding author. Address: Department of Sociology, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ, UK. Fax: +44 1206 873410.  
E-mail address: [aguveli@essex.ca.uk](mailto:aguveli@essex.ca.uk) (A. Güveli).

proposed by others. Earlier research by Güveli and associates has confirmed its validity with respect to external criteria, such as political preferences (Güveli et al., 2007a; Lubbers and Güveli, 2007), life styles (Güveli et al., 2007b) and life course development (Güveli and De Graaf, 2007). To do this research, we add a validation with respect to intergenerational occupational mobility, which we believe – in line with Weber's *dictum* – is the core issue in assessing class boundaries.

### 1.1. Theoretical background: The 'new class' debate

Views have varied on how to conceptualize middle-class fractions and how to validate the distinctions made between them. Before notable others (Gouldner, 1979), Bell (1973) was among the first to announce the coming of the post-industrial society and to discuss the emergence of new classes in this context. He argues that post-industrial societies depend on knowledge-based services that invoke an increased demand for 'quality of life' in health, education, social services, research and the arts. Bell claims that "the major class of the emerging new society is primarily a professional class, based on knowledge rather than property" (Bell, 1973, p. 374). The new social class does not necessarily include newly emerging occupations. In fact, professional occupations have been there from ancient times. Social trends and modes of production prevailing in post-industrial societies make these occupations develop new class interests and specific mobility patterns.

A host of new class theorists has followed Bell's lead and used knowledge criteria to delineate the new class. Brint (1984) compares several conceptualisations of the "old" and "new" middle class to explain why some middle-class members have liberal attitudes and concludes that educational differences explain most of the variations. Accordingly, the class fractions Brint distinguishes are based on educational criteria, a view that concurs with Wright's (1985, p. 87) conception that uses organizational and skill/credential "assets" as a way to introduce professional work into an otherwise Marxist class scheme. Lamont (1987) considers "cultural capital workers" as a new class, with a claim that a common class interest explains their progressive attitudes. These common interests are to maintain and increase intellectual autonomy, to have a powerful and large public sector, to raise taxes for the public good and implement liberal policies regarding 'post-materialist issues' such as lesbian/gay rights, euthanasia and environmentalism. Similar views are typically held by authors who see educational credentials as the primary source of new class differentiation.

Other new class theorists have concentrated on the nature of the employment relations that arise in post-industrial societies and which traditionally form the primary theoretical basis of the linkage between occupation and social class. Esping-Andersen (1993) claims that managers within the middle class "reflect a fordist logic of the division of labour", whereas the professionals within the middle class reveal the post-fordist logic of the division of labor (Esping-Andersen, 1993, p. 13). Consequently, he (1993, p. 24) delineates the class cleavages of the (post) industrial societies along two hierarchies, "broadly reflecting the degree of authority, responsibility" versus "level of human capital applied" to work tasks in different sectors. Note that the equivalent of Wright's (1985) "organizational assets" enter here as "responsibility and authority" and provide a way to define the 'old' middle class. Goldthorpe (2000) justifies his class schema on the basis of two similar dimensions: controllability of the work tasks and human capital needed to perform these tasks. Although Esping-Andersen (1993) had criticized Goldthorpe's class schema because it would not reflect the post-industrial class cleavages, both authors base their class distinctions on employment relations and end up with similar conceptions.

These views echo Kriesi's (1989a,b) earlier use of a 'new class' concept to explain support for social movements. This author locates the major middle class divide between "technocrats" and "social and cultural specialists", alluding to a distinction that is implicit in Esping-Andersen's and Goldthorpe's later discussion of the logics of post-industrial production. Kriesi (1989a, p. 1081) asserts that there exists "a basic antagonism of interest" between technocrats and social and cultural specialists. Technocrats are supposed to preserve the integrity of the organization they work for, while social and cultural specialists are more client-oriented and act within the body of knowledge of their discipline. Social and cultural specialists are supposed to constitute a 'new class' and they are likely to support new social movements because "the specialists try to defend their own and their clients' relative autonomy" against the interventions of the technocratic controllers (Kriesi, 1989a, pp. 1085–1086).

Bourdieu (1984) makes a distinction between an economic and a cultural status hierarchy and uses occupations to measure people's positions on these. His model effectively distinguishes two separate but correlated hierarchical dimensions to represent status differences among occupations. Occupations with low social status, such as unskilled workers, score low on both hierarchies, whereas some high-grade occupations score high on the cultural dimension, and other high-grade occupations score high on the economic dimension. The hierarchical status of occupations is primarily determined by the volume of resources required in a particular field of work. These resources themselves are divided into cultural resources (such as knowledge) and economic resources (such as managerial and organizational skills, but also inherited property). High-grade workers in education, health care and social services, in particular, are assumed to command cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 128–129) and would constitute the 'new class' of post-industrial societies. Occupations assumed to have relatively greater economic resources are those of the 'old' middle class, such as management, proprietorship, and other commercial and administrative occupations. Bourdieu (1984) then continues by showing pervasive distinctions between the two status hierarchies in the realms of taste, consumption and political orientation.

Whether interpreted as an opposition between the educated and the propertied classes (Brint, 1984), cultural and economic elites (Bourdieu, 1984), professionals and managers (Wright, 1997; Hout et al., 1995), controllers and human-capital workers (Goldthorpe, 2000), technocrats and social and cultural specialists (Kriesi, 1989a,b), all of these distinctions imply similar cleavages within the middle class. Bell's (1973) post-industrial society, Bourdieu's (1984) cultural and economic cap-

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