

# A Look Back:

## A Retrospective Analysis of the Sequence of Life Course Events Over 22 Years

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*Prepared for BCCAT by Lesley Andres, University of British Columbia*

*January 2015*



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# A Retrospective Analysis of the Sequence of Life Course Events Over 22 Years

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## Introduction



At both the provincial and federal levels, a lively policy debate on the types of education, training, and skill acquisition required to meet the demands of the British Columbia and Canadian workforce is taking place. Despite acknowledgement of the need for lifelong learning and reskilling in light of frequent career changes over the life course, typically this debate finds its locus around the transition from school to work. Very little policy or research effort strives to examine, over the long term, the relationship between education and employment, let alone other life course activities such as unemployment and “other” activities. Also, it is rare to examine retrospectively the trajectories that led individuals to their current life space location. Also, a gender lens is critical when asking and answering

questions about education and work. The *Paths on Life’s Way* data set (<http://blogs.ubc.ca/paths/>) allows for such a detailed retrospective examination of transitions and trajectories.

The *Paths on Life’s Way* project is the only longitudinal database of its kind in British Columbia and one of the few longitudinal studies of youth in Canada. Spanning over 22 years, this data set contains detailed education, work and life course related information collected at five points in time – 1989, 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2010. In this report, information reported monthly (i.e., at 259 time points) on post-secondary education, employment, unemployment, and “other”<sup>1</sup> activities are employed. In these analyses, I employ responses to

mail out survey questionnaires and use data from the 574 respondents who participated in all phases of data collection and present analyses of the entire 22 years between September 1988 and March 2010 – this time in reverse order; that is, beginning in March 2010 and extending back to September 1988. The analyses employ 540 valid cases. I have conducted analyses by highest post-secondary credential earned, parental educational background, and geographic location of origin for both men and women.

In this report, the fourth in a series, I use the technique of sequence analysis to capture the complex types and nature of various trajectories of individuals over a 22 year period. Sequence analysis allows for the examination of all the elements in a sequence simultaneously<sup>2</sup> and for the visual presentation that facilitates

the detection of patterns. The main purpose of the analysis is to build on previous research<sup>3</sup> by providing a more fine grained analysis of trajectories experienced by individuals across the course of their lives. I conclude by offering policy implications for BC and beyond.

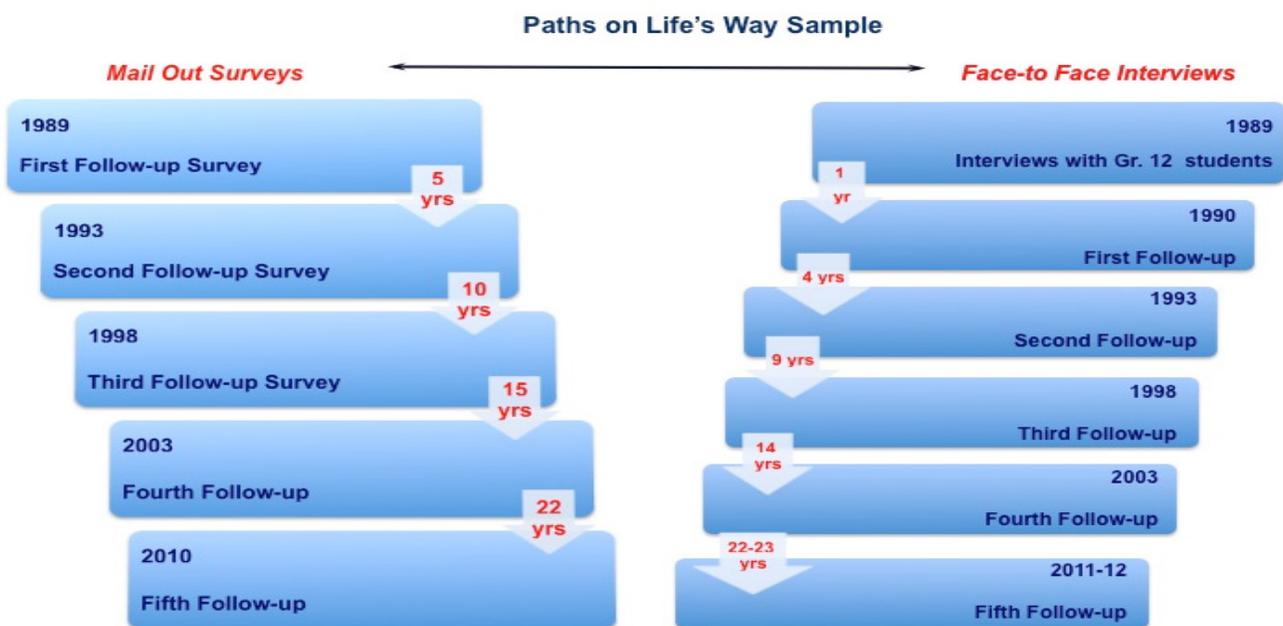
In Figure 1, a schema of the *Paths on Life's Way* project is portrayed. In these analyses, I focus on the states located at the far left hand side of Figure 1 and examine the impact of previous states and employ responses to mail out survey questionnaires.

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**Details of the *Paths* project can be found at the *Paths on Life's Way* Project website:**  
<http://blogs.ubc.ca/paths/>

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Figure 1. *Paths on Life's Way* Sample



<sup>1</sup> "Other" is a wide-ranging category. Examples include childcare, homemaker, maternity leave, illness, travelling, disability, setting up a practice/business, parental care, and volunteer.

<sup>2</sup> See Brzinsky-Fay, Kohler, & Luniak (2006), Aisenbrey & Fasang (2007) for an in depth description.

<sup>3</sup> See Andres (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2013), Andres & Offerhaus (2012, 2013), Andres & Adamuti-Trache (2008), and Andres & Wyn (2010).

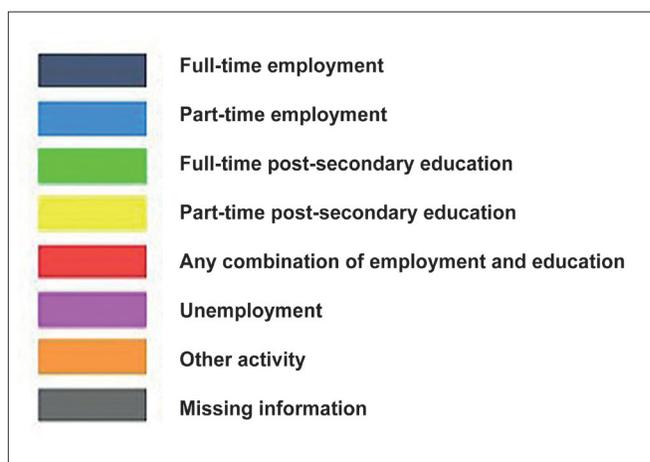
## Analyses

Each type of life course activity is considered a “state.” Individuals could have participated in more than one state at a given time (e.g., full-time post-secondary education and part-time work); however, each state must be mutually exclusive. For reasons of mutual exclusivity and ease of interpretation, the categories are collapsed into eight different states, as portrayed in Figure 2 <sup>4</sup>.

## How to Read the Graphs

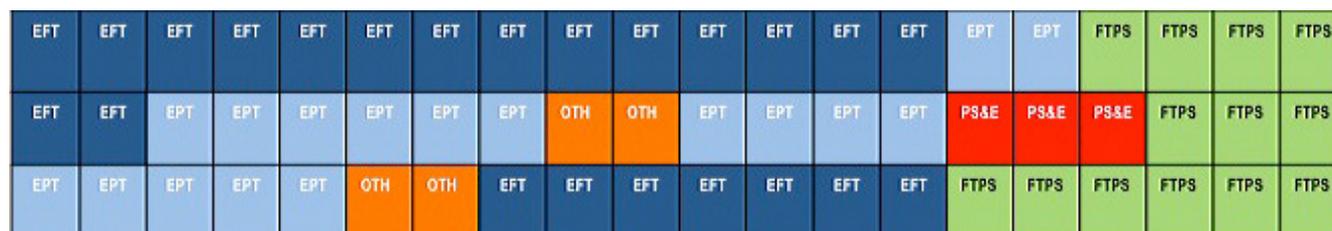
In Figure 3, three examples of month-by-month states over 20 (of a total of 259 used in this report) monthly time points are portrayed. Each row represents an individual in the *Paths* data set with each colour representing a specific type of life course activity. Reading from left to right, the first individual experienced 14 months of full-time work only (abbreviated EFT) which was preceded by two months of part-time only employment (EPT) for two months, again preceded by four months of full-time post-secondary attendance (FTPS). The second individual worked full-time only (EFT) for two months, preceded by six months of part-time only (EPT) employment, two months of an “other” activity

Figure 2. Life Course Activity States



(OTH), four months of part-time only (EPT) employment, three months of studying and working simultaneously (PS&E), preceded by three months of full-time post-secondary study (FTPS) only. The third individual was employed part-time only (EPT) for five months, preceded by two months of an “other” activity (OTH), seven months of full-time only (EFT) employment, preceded by six months of full-time post-secondary (FTPS) study only. Other states not represented in this schema include part-time post-secondary study (PTPS) and unemployment (UN).

Figure 3. Three Examples of Life Course Activities in Retrospect over 20 (of 259) Months



<sup>4</sup> There are four combinations of post-secondary attendance and work: part-time post-secondary education + part-time work, part-time post-secondary education + full-time work; full-time post-secondary education + part-time work; and full-time post-secondary education + full-time work. Including this level of detail in the graphs renders them uninterpretable. Analysis focusing on combining post-secondary education and work will be presented elsewhere.

## Sequences of Life Course Activities in Retrospect, 2010 to 1988

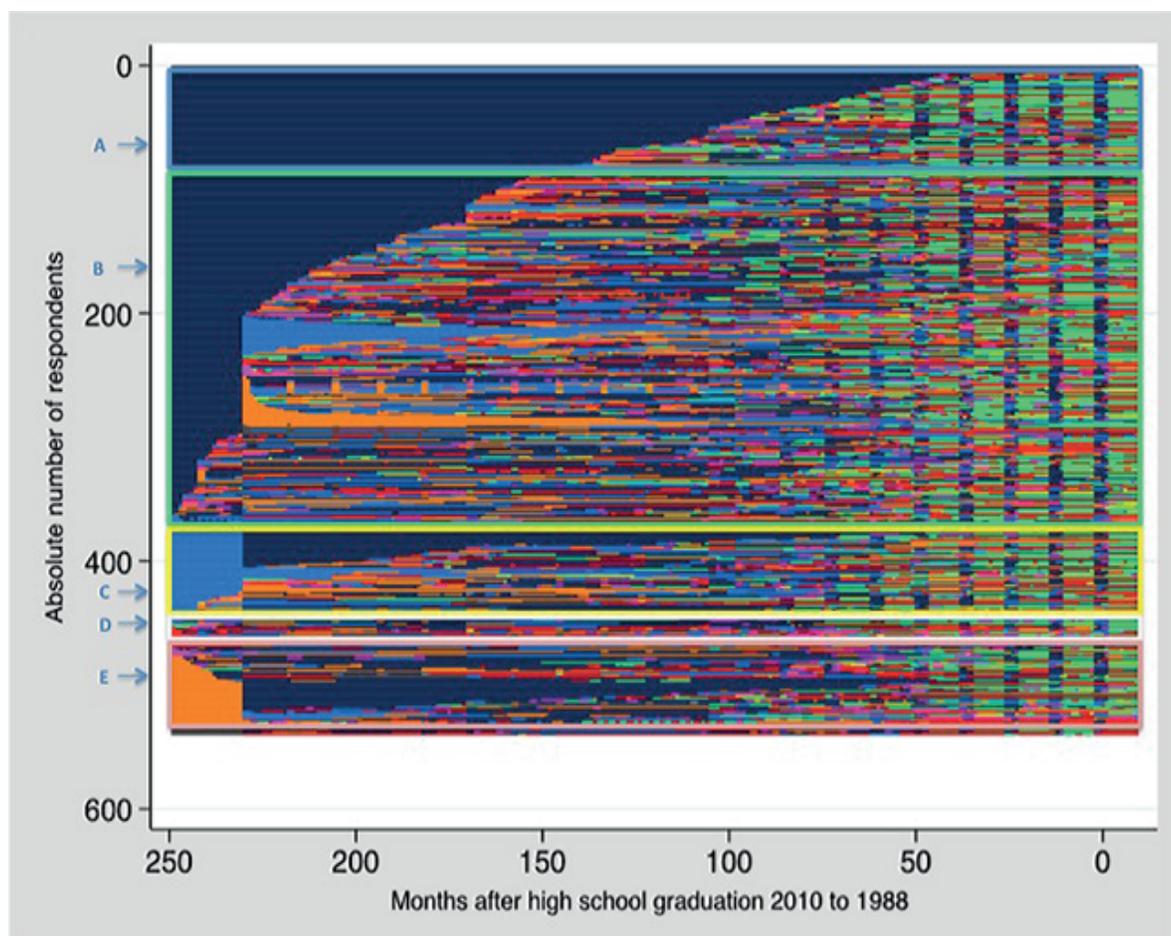
In Figure 4, the retrospective sequence of life course activities from 2010 to 1988 is portrayed. In total, the 540 respondents in this study engaged in 540 different sequences over 22 years – in other words, none of the sequences are exactly the same.

Although each individual's trajectory was unique, most respondents experienced a large number of the eight possible states: 31% participated in six different states,

25% participated in seven different states, and 4% participated in eight different states, but less than 2% participated in only two different states (as defined by Figure 2).

Five discernable patterns emerge from the figures included in this report. To reduce complexity, sections in each figure are identified as "A," "B," "C," "D," and "E" which correspond with one of the five patterns. However, the proportions reported are for the entire sample.

Figure 4. Life Course Activities in Retrospect, 2010-1988



In Figure 4, the solid dark blue represents participation in full-time employment only (FTE) with the left side of the figure beginning at 2010 and the right side at 1988. By 2010, approximately 70% of the sample were employed full-time. However, within 9 years of graduating from high school, only 15% commenced and remained in full-time employment only (the pattern labelled A on the figure). Even for this group, entry into full-time work was gradual. For most individuals in pattern A of the figure, the period between 1988 to 1993 was characterized by full-time post-secondary attendance interspersed with summers spent in full- or part-time work, and to a lesser extent study and work simultaneously.

In addition to pattern A, a second pattern, labelled B on the figure, included those who reported being employed full-time in 2010. Similar to those in pattern A, the early years from 1988 to 1993 demonstrated solid periods of either full-time study (green) or study and work simultaneously (red) followed by work during the summers. Some continued on with this pattern for up to three additional years, as evidenced by bands of primarily green or red with narrower bands of primarily dark blue or light blue in between. After 1995, a colourful array of states indicates that individuals participated in a variety of activities, with steady full-time work not evident for a sizeable proportion. However, beginning in September 2008 and coinciding with the global financial crisis, 18% (of the entire sample but located in pattern B) had shifted –from either part-time work or an “other” activity, or to a much lesser extent unemployment or simultaneous post-secondary study and work – to full time work, where they remained through to 2010.

Two patterns, labelled C and E exhibited a marked shift in state – into either part-time employment or an “other” activity, which commenced in September 2008 coinciding precisely with the global financial crisis. Similar to patterns A and B, the early years were characterized by extended periods of full-time study

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***Beginning in September 2008, 18% of the entire sample (but located in pattern B) had shifted – from either part-time work or an “other” activity, or to a much lesser extent unemployment or simultaneous post-secondary study and work – to full time work, where they remained through to 2010.***

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or study and employment. Before September 2008, most of those represented by pattern C were either employed full- or part-time and most of Group E were employed full-time. Full-time employment only gradually increased over the years, then abruptly changed.

A very small proportion, captured in the pattern labelled “D,” were engaged in simultaneous post-secondary study and employment or full-time post-secondary study in 2010. It appears that by 2010, the vast majority of Paths participants were no longer participated in post-secondary studies at formal post-secondary institutions.

## **Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Gender**

In Figure 5, life course activities by gender patterns are portrayed. As reported in Andres & Offerhaus (2013), over the 259 months or 22 years covered in this report, men were employed full-time only for an average of just under 15 years. Women worked fewer average years full-time only (10.8) but triple the number of average years part-time (3.2) when compared to men (1 year). The average number of months spent unemployed was approximately equal for women and men.

## Males

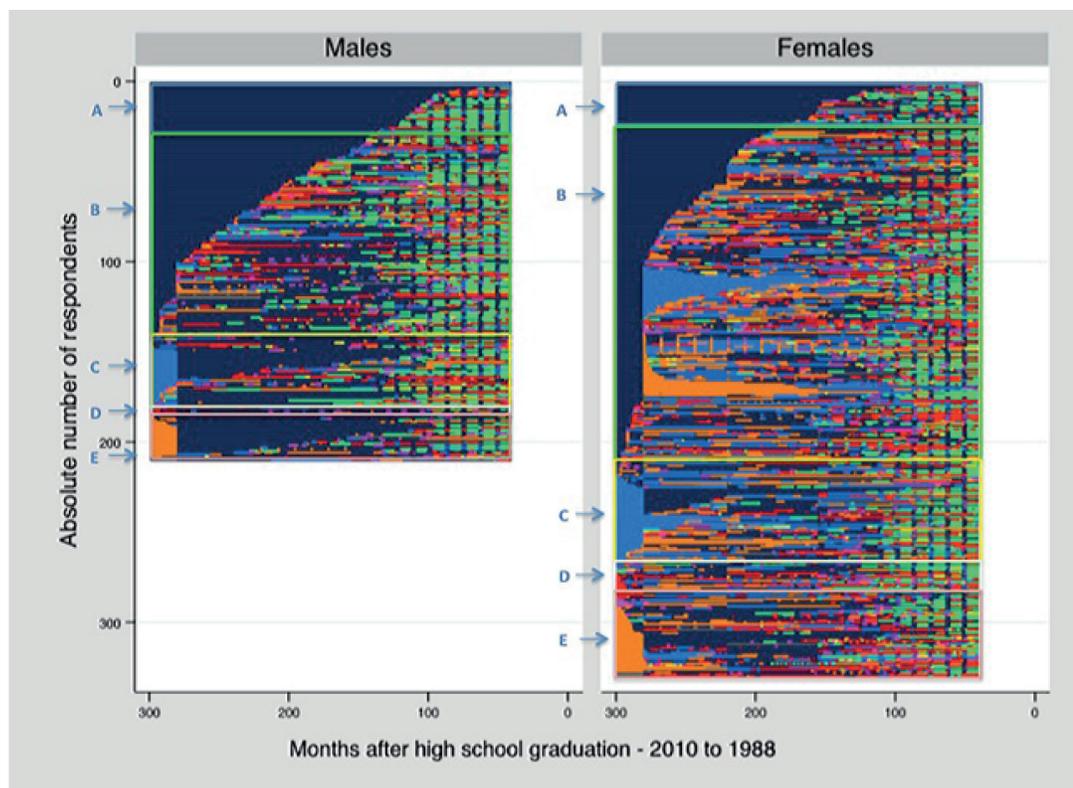
In contrast to the 2013 report prepared for BCCAT by Andres and Offerhaus, the current report entails a reflective look back from the current states of *Paths* respondents, as of March 2010 back through to September 1988. For 17% of men (pattern labelled A on the graph) almost exclusive full-time post-secondary attendance in the early years with periods of summer employment led directly into full-time employment only. However, it took just over eight years following high school graduation for those in pattern A to reach the state of continuous full-time employment. A tiny proportion (top of the graph) experienced full-time employment for almost the entire period since high school graduation. In the pattern labelled B, all (together with those in A) were in full-time work by March 2010.

Approximately 6% of men shifted from other states into full-time work and stayed in full-time employment only beginning in September 2008. This period was preceded by primarily participation in full-time work (dark blue) but was interspersed with other activities including primarily post-secondary study, simultaneous full-time study and work. A very small proportion had previously been employed part-time. Patterns C, D, and E portray an abrupt change state in September 2008, coinciding with the global financial crisis. Previously, most men in these groups were employed primarily full-time. In September 2008, 21% were employed part-time, 10% were in “other” activities, and just over 1% were studying while working.

## Females

The women in this study were much slower to commence, and remain, in continuous full-time work. In the same time period reported above for men (just over eight years following high school graduation),

Figure 5. Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Gender, 2010-1988



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**The women in this sample were much slower to commence, and remain, in continuous full-time work. . . . Just over eight years following high school graduation, only 3% of women, compared with 17% of men, commenced full-time employment and remained in that state through to March 2010.**

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only 3% of women commenced full-time employment only and remained in that state through to March 2010 (A). Within 10.5 years of high school graduation, only 8% of women were and remained employed full-time (A). The part of the figure labelled B represents those (in addition to those in pattern A) who were in full-time employment only as of March 2010. Similar to men but more than double the proportion at 28%, women entered and remained in full-time employment only in September 2008, suggesting that they moved from other states – primarily part-time work or an “other” activity – into full-time work, either as a response to, or consequence of, the global financial crisis.

The 22 year time span following high school graduation was a highly colourful period – that is, involving many different states, for the women in this study. Full-time work only, as represented by dark blue, was much less evident, whereas part-time work was. Periods of an “other” activity, often extended, was also more prevalent, as was simultaneous post-secondary study and work, and unemployment. Full-time study is not as prevalent as it was in the male sample. Patterns C, D, and E portray the same abrupt change state in September 2008 seen above for men, but in different proportions. In September 2008, 13% were employed part-time (excluding those already in part-time work), 13% were in “other” activities, and 5% were studying while working. Although some women in pattern C had previously been employed continuously full-time,

others had participated in various states during this time. Women in pattern E exhibited a stronger history of full-time employment only before shifting to the “other” state.

## Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Post-secondary Completion Status by 2010

It is well known that more women than men attend post-secondary institutions and complete their post-secondary studies. Regarding university education, since 1981/82 more women than men have earned baccalaureate and professional degrees and since 1988 women surpassed men in terms of attendance (Andres & Adamuti-Trache, 2008; Statistics Canada, 1979-2000).

These patterns are reflected in the Paths data. According to Table 1, more men (50%) than women (42.4%) had not earned any post-secondary credential by 1993 and by 2010 the proportions were 21% and 15%, respectively. These figures also demonstrate how post-secondary attainment occurred across the life course of these individuals. Regarding university attainment, slightly more women (33.1%) than men (32.0%) earned baccalaureate credentials or higher within five years of high school graduation, and except for 1998, this pattern continued. By 2010, slightly more women (59.4%) than men (58.9%) had earned at least baccalaureate degrees as their highest credentials.

Given post-secondary educational equality – or even advantage – of women, it could be anticipated that women would enter full-time work in a similar patterns to men. Clearly, children are a factor in terms of employment. By 1998, 13% of men had children. This figure is double for women, but still low at only 26%. By 2003, the proportions were more equal at 49% and 55%, respectively, and by 2010, both 73% of men and women had children.

**Table 1. Highest Post-secondary Credential Earned by Gender, 1993 – 2010**

	No p.s. credential		Non-baccalaureate		Baccalaureate or >		
	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	%
<b>1993</b>	50.0	42.4	18.0	24.5	32.0	33.1	100.0
<b>1998</b>	30.8	24.6	17.0	24.3	52.2	51.1	100.0
<b>2003</b>	25.0	18.3	18.8	24.9	56.3	56.9	100.0
<b>2010</b>	21.0	15.4	20.1	25.1	58.9	58.4	100.0

In Table 2, the mean number of months, for a total of 259, spent in each state is documented. Across the board, men spent more average months than women in full-time work. Women with earned baccalaureate credentials or greater spent the least average time in full-time work; men with non-baccalaureate credentials spent the most time working full-time. Women spent up to four times more time on average in part-time employment than men. Women educated at the baccalaureate level or greater spent the least time in this state; however, they spent almost three times longer on average than men with the same level of credentials. Despite not having earned post-secondary credentials, men in this group spent around a year on average in full-time post-secondary study and just under a year studying while working. The comparable figures for women in without post-secondary credentials are 1.3 years and 8.7 months. Average length of time in unemployment was lowest for baccalaureate educated men and women and highest for men and women with non-baccalaureate credentials. Women across all categories spent two to three times more time than men in “other” activities.

Table 2 documents aggregate mean times in each state included in this analysis; in other words, the “what” in terms of participation. Figures 6a and 6b portray the “how”: that is, the sequences of life course activities by three levels of post-secondary completion status by 2010 – no credential earned; non-baccalaureate credential (e.g., certificate or diploma); and a baccalaureate degree or greater as the highest credential earned.

**Table 2. Average Months/Years in Life Course Activities by Post-secondary Completion Status**

	No credential		Non-baccalaureate Credential		Baccalaureate Credential	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
FT employment	16.5 years	11.9 years	16.6 years	11.8 years	13.4 years	10.1 years
PT employment	1.1 years	3.8 years	11.1 months	3.7 years	1.1 years	2.9 years
FT study	1.0 years	1.3 years	1.2 years	1.0 years	3.4 years	2.7 years
PT study	1.3 months	1.0 months	1.7 months	1.7 months	2.5 months	1.8 months
Study and work	11.6 months	8.7 months	11.2 months	1.7 years	2.0 years	2.8 years
Unemployment	6.0 months	5.5 months	8.0 months	5.6 months	3.6 months	4.8 months
Other	11.1 months	2.8 years	10.5 months	2.4 years	10.3 months	2.2 years

## Males

In general, each of the male post-secondary status groups is dominated by dark blue, in other words, full-time work (Figure 6a). For a minority of males, including those who had not earned any post-secondary credential by 2010, interrupted full-time work followed a period of post-secondary activity (pattern A). As noted in earlier analyses (see Andres, 2013; Andres & Offerhaus, 2013), men who had not earned post-secondary credentials participated in a considerable amount of either full-time study or simultaneous post-secondary study and work. Within around nine years following high school graduation, 51% of the entire sample of “no post-secondary credential” men (labelled as pattern A) were employed full-time and would remain so through to 2010. For men with baccalaureate level credentials or higher, those in pattern A studied primarily full-time for up to five years and then entered the work force. Only 17% of the full sample with these credentials were solidly employed in full-time work within nine years out of high school. Those in pattern A who had earned non-university credentials participated very little in post-secondary studies.

It appears that they had completed certificate or diploma programs of very short duration which led to sustained, full-time employment. Of this post-secondary status group, 18% remained in full-time employment only within around nine years of high school graduation.

For each post-secondary completion status category, the men labelled as pattern B participated considerably in post-secondary education in the early years, followed by participation in states other than continuous full-time work. The “no credential” and to a greater extent the “non-baccalaureate credential” group, although employed primarily full-time did demonstrate, for example, periods of simultaneous post-secondary study and work or participation in “other” activities. Also, for a small proportion, conversion to full-time work from other states in September 2008 is evident. Men who had earned baccalaureate credentials or higher displayed the most colourful trajectories in the middle years of this study. Full-time work was often interspersed with full-time study (green) or simultaneous post-secondary study and work (red), suggesting prolonged study likely at the graduate level.

By 2010, 51% of men without post-secondary credentials, 64% with non-baccalaureate credentials, and 74% with baccalaureate or greater credentials were employed full-time.

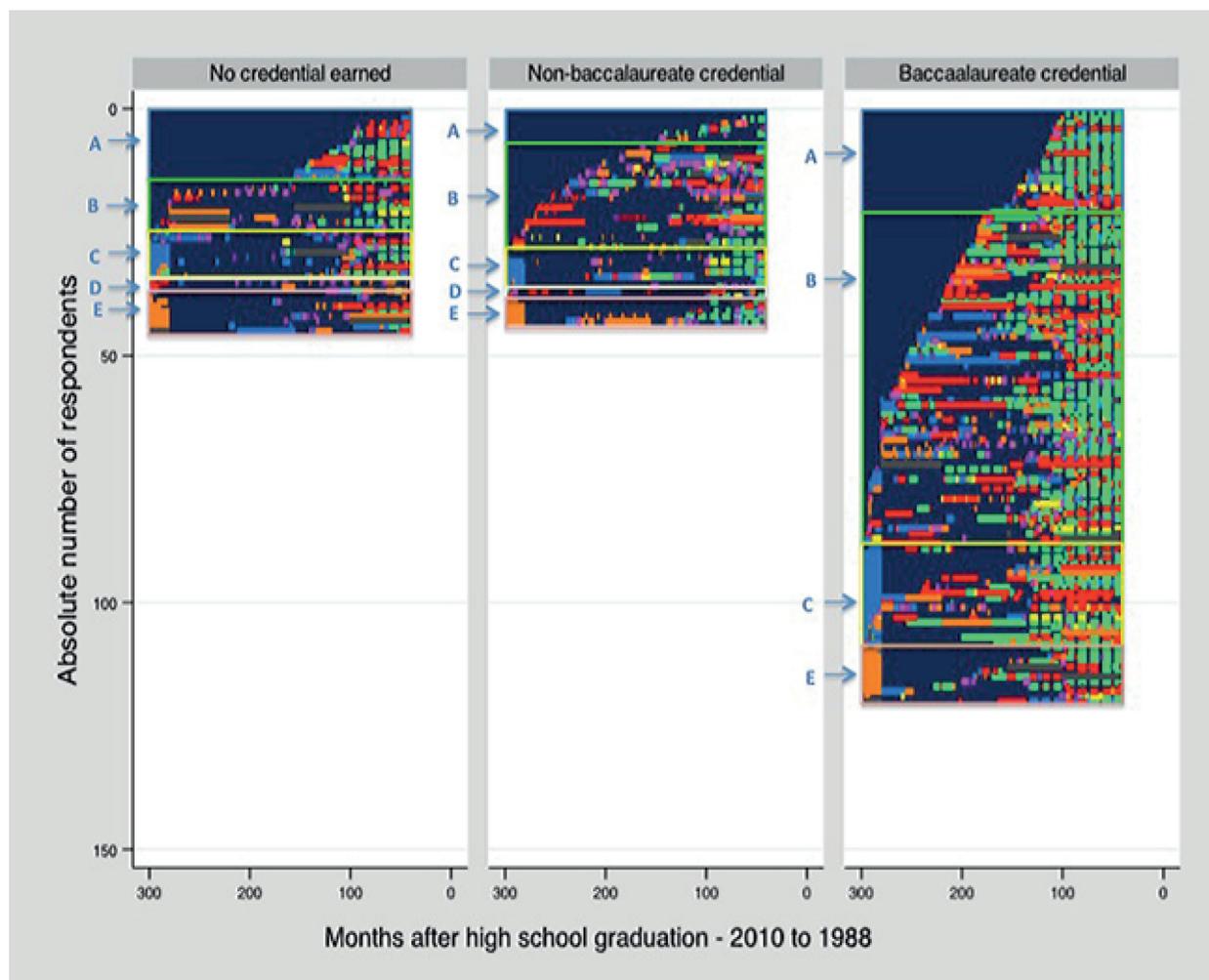
Those identified as belonging to patterns C and F demonstrate having made a marked shift out of full-time work in September 2008 either to part-time work or “other” activities. For those without post-secondary credentials and to a lesser extent those from the other two groups, this shift was preceded by a long period of full-time work.

Returning to post-secondary study, either as a sole activity or along with work (labelled D) during the global financial crisis, was undertaken by a small handful of those in the “no credential” and a slightly larger handful of “non-baccalaureate credential” groups.

## Females

In contrast to males, according to Figure 6b, very few women in each post-secondary completion group exhibited continuous full-time employment for most of their adult lives (pattern A). For women without earned post-secondary credentials, almost 11 years had

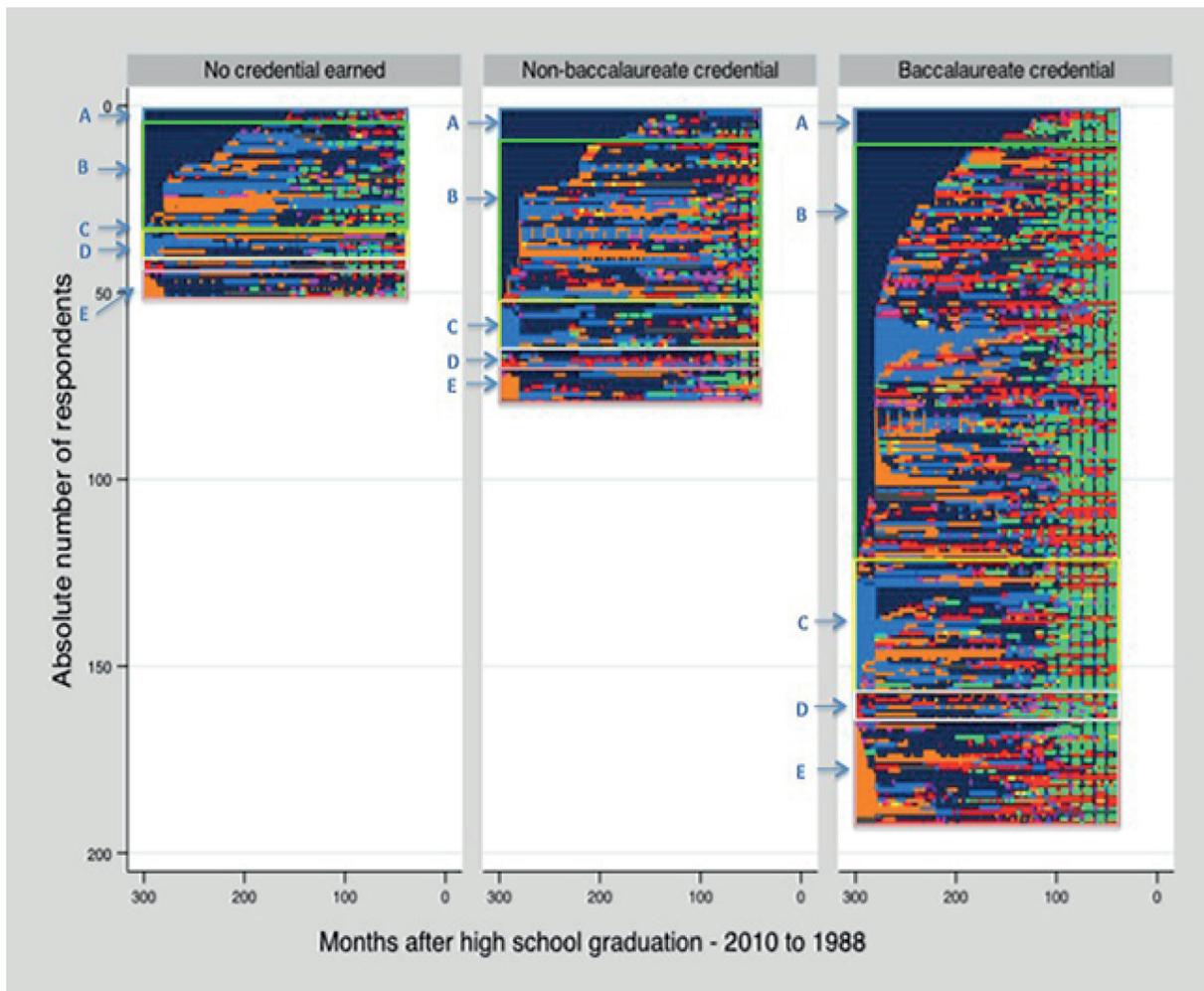
Figure 6a. Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Highest Credential Earned by 2010, Males, 2010-1988



passed before 8% of the sample remained in full-time work through to March 2010. Similarly, for women with non-baccalaureate credentials, it took 11 years before 9% were in and remained in full-time work. Full-time work for these two groups was not preceded by a solid period of post-secondary study. For women with earned baccalaureate credentials or greater, those in pattern A did exhibit four years or more of primarily full-time study. However, those with sustained full-time employment represent only 5% of the sample and such employment occurred only 9.5 years following high school graduation.

Again, in contrast to males in Figure 6a, females in pattern B in Figure 6b exhibited both overall far less participation and less sustained periods in full-time work. More prevalent were solid blocks of part-time employment (light blue), study and work (red) and “other” activities (orange). However, it is notable that larger proportions of women in all post-secondary completion categories – and particularly those with baccalaureate credentials or greater – switched from other states to full-time employment only in September 2008 and remained so through to March 2010.

Figure 6b. Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Highest Credential Earned by 2010, Females, 2010-1988



This was the case for a full 26% of baccalaureate educated women (compared to 11% of men with the same level of credentials).

Similar to the previous figures, the status of women in patterns labelled C and E changed to either part-time employment or “other” in September 2008 which, in many cases, disrupted long periods of sustained full-time employment. Returning to post-secondary study while working (labelled D) between September 2008 and March 2010 was an option taken up by a very small proportion of women.

## Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Parental Educational Background

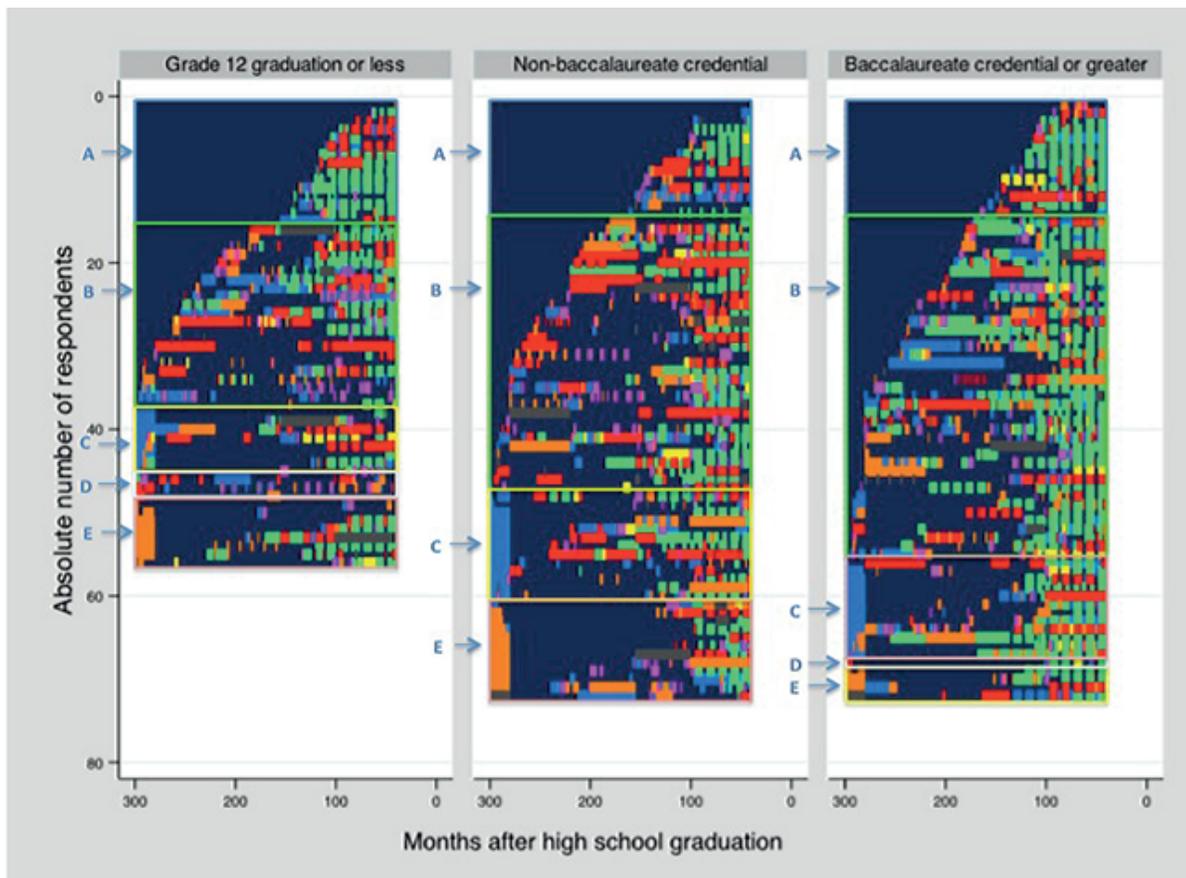
Parental educational background, as a proxy of social class, is one way of assessing inequality of educational outcomes. As the well-known theory of Pierre Bourdieu posits, those children in educationally more affluent families have higher levels of cultural capital (e.g., dispositions, habits, good taste) that help them succeed in the school system and hence convert their cultural advantage to academic attainment and eventually into higher occupational status). Also, because social capital (e.g., connections, information channels) serves as a “helping hand” or “pulling strings” (Bourdieu, 1986) to ensure advantage, it would seem reasonable that Paths men and women from more advantaged households would be more privileged in terms of securing full-time work.

## Males

In Figure 7a, life course activities in retrospect are portrayed for men. This figure is a good news story in that a considerable proportion of men from homes where neither parent had earned post-secondary credentials did attend post-secondary education full-time, and to a lesser studying while working, for four or more years and then were employed full-time only through to March 2010 (labelled A). A larger proportion (28%) of the entire sample of men in this educational background category had secured and stayed in full-time work within 9.5 years of high school graduation. Approximately 23% of both men with at least one parent educated at the non-baccalaureate and at the baccalaureate level followed the same post-secondary education to career trajectory, but slightly later at 10.2 years.

Those labelled as pattern B exhibited the now familiar pattern of graduated entry into full-time continuous work. Again, the dominant state for this group is full-time work; however, other states, primarily full-time study or simultaneous study and work were interspersed across the life course. A small proportion shifted from full-time work to either part-time work or “other” activities in September 2008. The proportion doing so was largest for those with baccalaureate educated parents. By March 2010, 65% of men whose parents did not possess post-secondary credentials and 65% with one or more parents educated at the non-baccalaureate level reported being employed full-time. The figure for men with at least one parent having earned baccalaureate level credentials is 76%. The patterns labelled C, D, and E are similar to those reported in figures above.

Figure 7a. Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Parental Educational Background in 1989, Males

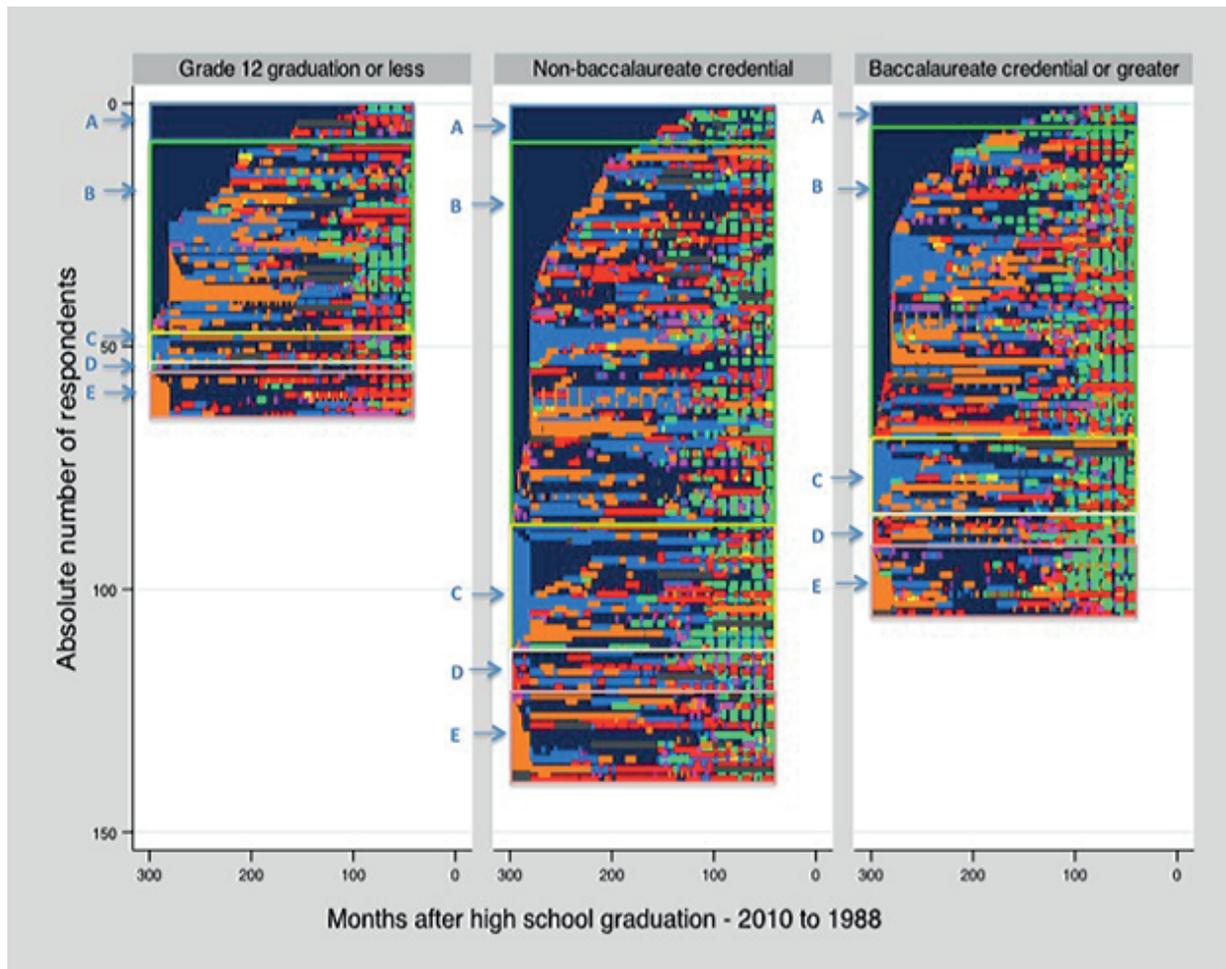


## Females

In Figure 7b, the patterns for women in relation to parental education are portrayed. In the pattern labelled A, only 8% of women from the entire sample where neither parent possessed any post-secondary credentials had secured continuous full-time employment within 9.5 years following high school graduation. The comparable figure for those with one or more parent having earned non-baccalaureate credentials is 6%, and with one or more parents with baccalaureate credentials or greater is 5%. Unlike men where neither parent possessed any post-secondary credentials, in the early years most of the women in this category studied while working.

The bulk of women in all categories fall into the pattern labelled B. Unlike the sea of solid dark blue in the comparable figure for men, light blue representing part-time work and orange representing “other” activities are prominent. Again, a large proportion of women shifted from other states into full-time work in September 2008. The patterns labelled C, D, and E are similar to those reported in the other figures.

Figure 7b. Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Parental Educational Background in 1989, Females

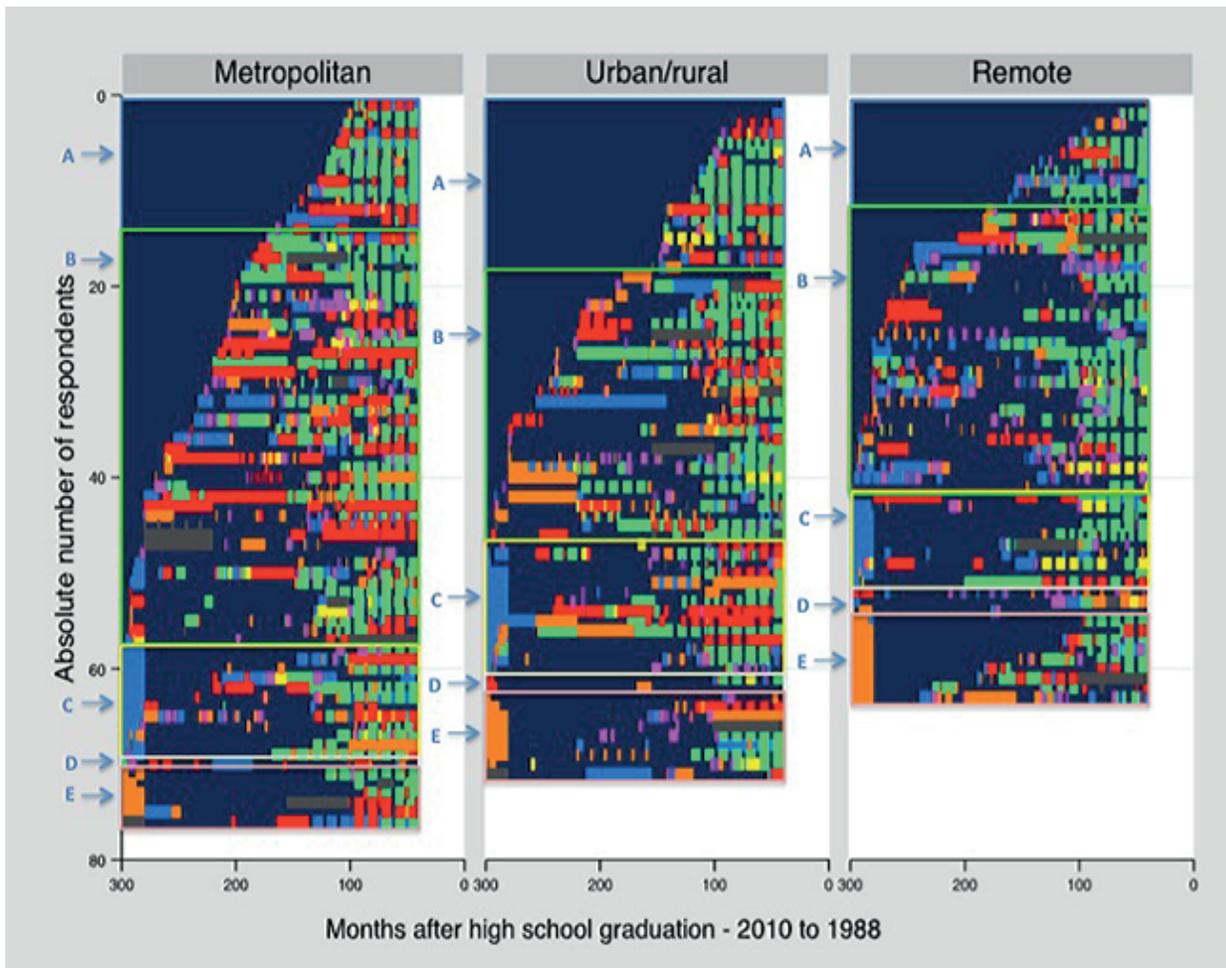


## Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Geographic Location of Origin

Finally, in Figures 8a and 8b, the life course activities in retrospect are described and plotted by geographic region of origin of respondents. Each region shows distinct participation patterns. For men (Figure 8a) the patterns are similar to those reported for parental education background. Pattern A demonstrates that following primarily full-time study, between 9.4 and 10

years following high school graduation, 18% of men from metropolitan areas, 26% from urban/rural areas, and 17% from remote areas were in continuous full-time work.

Figure 8a. Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Geographic Location of Origin and Sex, 2010-1988<sup>5</sup>, Males



The pattern labelled B shows similar patterns described earlier. However, men in metropolitan areas were more likely to participate in either full-time study or study while working. Men in remote areas worked full-time with some periods spent in other states. Men from urban/rural areas fell somewhere in between. Patterns C, D, and E are consistent with other figures in this report.

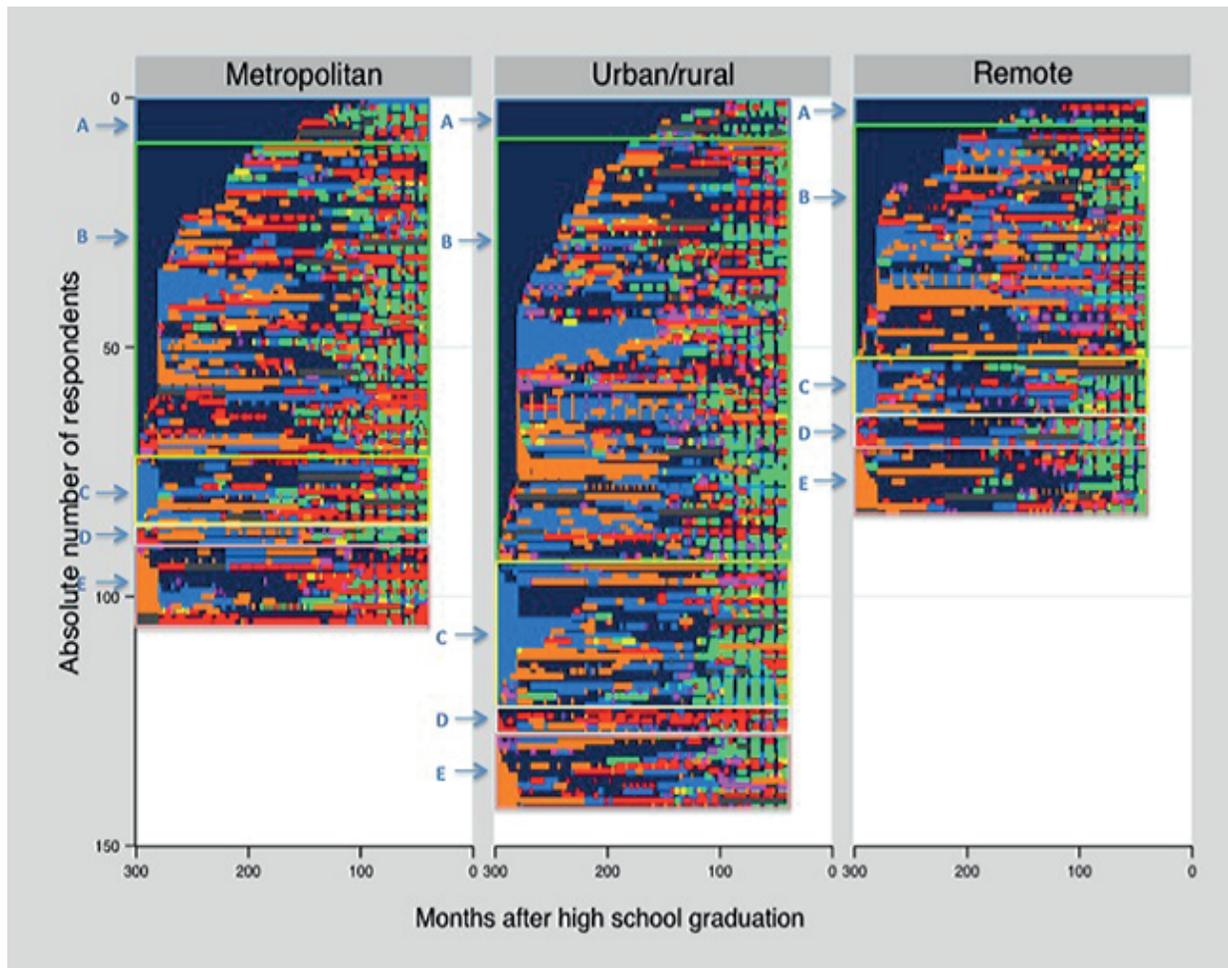
<sup>5</sup> Geographic regions in this study were defined according to categories used in many other studies on post-secondary students in British Columbia in the mid-1980s. Definitions are as follows (see Andres (1992) for a full description):

**Metropolitan Region:** Includes school districts which are large metropolitan cities or centres.

**Urban/Rural Region:** Includes school districts which are either located in the interior of the province or on Vancouver Island. They generally include communities which are moderate in size and typically have a mixture of urban and rural settlements.

**Remote Region:** Includes school districts which have relatively small populations, typically scattered in small communities. All are located quite remote from the Lower Mainland area of the province. (See Andres (1992) for a full description.)

Figure 8b. Life Course Activities in Retrospect by Geographic Location of Origin and Sex, 2010-1988, Females



## Females

All of the patterns portrayed in Figure 8b for women mimic those for parental educational background. The predominance of light blue indicates that a considerable proportion of women, particularly in urban/rural areas, worked part-time. Also, the prevalence of pink, representing unemployment, is more prominent as a state for women in urban/rural and remote regions.

Also, for a small proportion of women from urban/rural areas, study while working (red) as evidenced in pattern D stands out as being different from the other figures in this report.

## Conclusion

In this report, I have documented the life trajectories of 540 individuals from the BC high school graduating *Class of 1988* who are also participants in the *Paths on Life's Way* project. The data presented in this report are revealing in many ways.

First, only a small minority of men and even smaller minority of women participated in post-secondary studies and then entered the full-time labour force and remain employed continuously through to 2010 (when they were around age 40). Men eased into continuous full-time work at a rather steady pace from about five years following high school graduation. For women, entry into the continuous full-time work force was both slower and more gradual.

For the majority of men and women, the life course entailed many transitions throughout the seven states documented in this analysis. However, even though full-time employment may not be continuous, the life course trajectories of men showed fewer states other than full-time work than did women. This finding holds even after considering post-secondary completion status, parental educational background, and geographic location of origin. Whereas the life course trajectories of men tended to be more monochromatic – mainly dark blue representing full-time work only – the trajectories of women were more polychromatic. This finding suggests that over the space of 22 years, women in this study, willingly or unwillingly were more adaptable, flexible, and fluid, as evidenced by vastly more time spent in part-time employment and/or in an “other” state.

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***The employment discrepancies between men and women are stark and startling. A higher proportion of women than men had post-secondary credentials and almost 60% of both women and men have earned baccalaureate level credentials or higher. Yet, this was not translated into sustained full-time employment for women.***

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The employment discrepancies between men and women are stark and startling. A higher proportion of women than men had post-secondary credentials and almost 60% of both women and men had earned baccalaureate level credentials or higher. Yet, this was not translated into sustained full-time employment for women.

Another interesting labour market finding emerges from this report. The “great recession of 2008” is almost always associated with economic hardship in terms of unemployment or underemployment. This was indeed the case for both men and women in this study. September 2008 marked a shift for 31% of men and 26% of women in from other states into either part-time work or an “other” state. However, whereas at the same point in time 6% of men shifted from other states into full-time work, 28% of women did so! What did the 2008 financial crisis mean for women? Were they required to seek out full-time work because of precarious employment situations for their male partners? What compelled, enabled, or required these *thirtysomething* women to secure full-time employment? More research employing the qualitative *Paths* data may be able to reveal answers to these questions.

In light of policy discussions surrounding the lack of skilled Canadians and initiatives such as the Temporary Foreign Workers program and the Government of British Columbia's (2014) *B.C.'s Skills for Jobs Blueprint*, the loss of human capital to the workforce by educated underemployed women or women who were out of the workforce, as documented in this report, is remarkable. It could be that women "choose" not to work full-time, but "choice" entails multiple considerations such as available and affordable daycare and shared domestic labour, to name two. As Esping-Andersen (2009) comments, "women may now be working but that does not necessarily entail that *society* has been altered in any fundamental way. The really pertinent evidence lies therefore elsewhere, namely whether the way citizens go about their lives has lost any resemblance with the past . . . . [in other words] that women's *and men's* decisions about marriage, parenthood, or work are distinct from that of our forbearers" (p. 19).

In the 1992 *Client Survey Report* conducted by the BC Ministry of Advanced, Education, Training, and Technology, 84% of women and 83% of men first year post-secondary students expected that post-secondary education would help them "prepare for a job/improve themselves financially" compared to 81% of women and 82% of men who expected that post-secondary participation would "develop potential/[lead to] more life choices" (p. 35). In 2010, 52% of females, compared to 31% of male *Paths* respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, "it is still more difficult for women to succeed in the work force." However, 40% of females and 37% of males reported that it was very important that they "succeed at work or a career." These contradictory findings require further investigation.

The findings in this report suggest that refocused attention by all levels of government beyond the current *skills to work* rhetoric is in order. The adult lives lived by British Columbians are complex. Acknowledging, celebrating, and problematizing this complexity may serve to improve both the lives of BC individuals and families. Complexity is not necessarily negative as periods of full-time study or study while working, as evidenced in the analyses, suggest that individuals are engaged in lifelong learning, reskilling, and earning graduate degrees. However, that women are far less likely than men to be employed full-time, regardless of control variable employed, is troubling and requires ongoing rigorous examination.

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