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Imagining the Future:  
Preliminary analysis of  
NCDS essays written  
by children at age 11

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## Abstract

This paper describes the preliminary results from an analysis of a unique sample of essays written by members of the National Child Development Study (NCDS), the 1958 British Birth Cohort study, when they were eleven years old in 1969, on the topic of "Imagine you are twenty-five...". Children's creative writing about 'the imagined future' potentially provides insights into their understandings of adult work roles and family relationships, their views of gender roles, and the ways in which social inequalities are reproduced over time. This paper also provides a brief introduction to some of the methods that can be used to analyse this type of material. The paper provides a descriptive account of the content of the essays including a preliminary exploration of how gender and family circumstances appear to affect how children described their imagined futures. The focus is on a sub-sample of approximately 500 essays which were selected from the complete sample of over 13,000 essays that have been archived on microfiche at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

### Introduction: theoretical approach

This project draws upon two differing theoretical paradigms for the study of children and childhood. The first is developmental psychology, traditionally the dominant way of understanding children, that attempts to identify experiences in childhood and to link these with outcomes in adulthood. The second is the 'new' sociology or social studies of childhood, which has arisen from a dissatisfaction with the way children have been studied (Prout and James 1997). Prout and James (1997) proposed a framework that attempts to move beyond psychologically-based models of childhood as a period of socialisation, and sees childhood as socially constructed, in that children's roles and activities differ according to historical period and cultural context. Children are seen as active social agents, who shape the structures and processes around them, at least at the micro-levels, and their 'social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspectives and concerns of adults' (p8). This paradigm involves moving away from the focus of socialisation and child development and the study of what children will *become* – to a sociology that attempts to take children seriously as they experience their lives *in the here-and-now* as children. This is obviously a counterpoint to the aims of the National Child Development Study, which have tended to be to link circumstances, events and experiences in childhood with developmental outcomes in later childhood and into adulthood. The emphasis on the developmental paradigm can be seen in this brief example from in the introductory notes for interviewers issued in 1969. The NCDS researchers wrote: *'With so much information already available about the children [as a result of the peri-natal mortality study in 1958] a unique opportunity was presented for relating the ante-natal and birth history of the children to their subsequent development. There is as yet much to learn about the influence of conditions both before and at birth on normal educational, physical and emotional growth'*.

In this paper essays written by members of the National Child Development Study at age eleven in 1969 are used as a cross-sectional resource and the emphasis is on the children as research subjects in their own right rather than as adults in the making. However, the research design of the NCDS means that there is also potential for linking material in the essays to later data collected on the same sample of individuals, this will form the focus of some future papers.

### **Children's writing as a research resource**

Few studies have used children's writing in the form of essays as a source of sociological data about children's hopes and aspirations for the future. However, there is a tradition of analysing children's writing in developmental psychological and educational research. Carolyn Steedman, in her classic study 'The Tidy House', analysed in detail a freely-written narrative produced by three 8 year old 'working class' girls, over the course of a summer term, about two couples, their romance, their children and the burdensome business of childcare. As Steedman argues, "The story written by Melissa, Lindie and Carla is the artefact of children who were active participants in the process of their upbringing. The text served them as a kind of theoretical construct of social life and social relations, of information about reproduction, their observations of mothering and the feelings of individuals in the face of perceived social necessity" (Steedman 1982: 61). She therefore used the material produced by these three girls to explore the ways in which girls are socialized in to adult feminine identity. Steedman did not collect data from boys, or middle or upper class girls.

Within sociology, children's writing has been used in various ways. Morrow has used children's writing amongst other forms of data collection, in three research projects: on children's work, broadly defined (Morrow 1994, 1996), children's understanding of the concept of family (1998, 1999), and children's 'social capital' in relation to health and well-being (2001a and b). She discusses the advantages and disadvantages of differing methods used in research with children in a forthcoming paper (Morrow 2007). The Swedish educational sociologist, Gunilla Halldén, has over the years conducted a series of research projects that analyse Swedish children's imagined future families (1994, add more); O'Connor (2006) has recently analysed texts written by Irish young people aged 14-17, 'describing themselves and the Ireland they inhabit' (O'Connor 2006). The research described in this paper builds upon these examples.

A further innovative feature of the project described here is the unique opportunity to combine qualitative and quantitative methods. The fact that such a large and representative sample of qualitative material on children's aspirations exists provides an exciting opportunity for research that draws on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

### **Background: NCDS**

The 1958 British birth cohort study, known as the National Child Development Study (NCDS), started out as a single wave Perinatal Mortality Survey. There were over 17,000 children in this birth cohort in Great Britain, all of whom were eligible for comprehensive follow-up. This occurred as funding permitted, at ages 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42 and 46 years. In childhood, information came from interviews with parents and teachers, from medical examinations on the whole cohort, while the children themselves underwent educational tests. From age 16, the cohort members themselves were interviewed, and their examination results and other qualifications over the years were added to the record. Adult sweeps have collected data over a number of domains, including physical and mental health, demographic circumstances, employment, and housing. Over the years there has inevitably been some attrition from lost contact; refusals; emigration and death, but response rates

remain high. The adult surveys each include information on approximately 11,000 individuals who are still participating in the survey (Plewis *et al.* 2004).

When the children of the NCDS were eleven years old they were given a short questionnaire to complete at school about their interests outside school, the school subjects they enjoyed most, and what they thought they were most likely to do when they left secondary school. In addition, they were asked to write an essay about what they thought their life would be like at age 25. The instructions given were as follows:

‘Imagine you are now 25 years old. Write about the life you are leading, your interests, your home life and your work at the age of 25. (You have 30 minutes to do this).’

Of the 14,757 children who participated in the age 11 sweep of the NCDS (representing 90.8% of the target sample of 16,253 (Plewis *et al.* 2004), a total of 13,669 (92.6%) completed an essay about their imagined life at age 25.

#### *The context and timing of essay completion*

Approximately 90% of the essays were written in April, May or June 1969 i.e. very soon after the cohort members’ eleventh birthdays. A very few essays were written in January February and March of 1969, and a handful of essays were written as late as November 1970. By the end of the school year, in July 1969, over 96% of the essays had been completed with fewer than 1% of essays written in 1970. This means that at the time they wrote the essays almost all of the cohort members were in their final year of primary school.

Of those children who wrote essays, 47.5% were at a state junior school. A further 45.6% were attending a combined junior and infant school. Only 0.8% of the children were at secondary school, and just 3.9% were attending an independent school. The remaining children were either at a school for all age groups (1.1%) or at a special school (1%).

The survey of NCDS cohort members at age 11 also collected a great deal of information about the school the child was attending and this provides additional contextual information about the environment in which the essay was written. In the sample as a whole (14,106 children) 82% were attending a school that had a male head teacher with just 18% of schools having a female head teacher. In addition it was reported that 55% of children had a male class teacher and 45% had a female class teacher. It is also interesting to note that the mean class size was 34.3 and the median class size was 36. In other words 50% of these eleven-year-old children were in classes with 36 or more pupils.

To date, these essays have not been fully coded or analysed for use with the other data collected in the study. Copies of the original essays (i.e. in the child’s handwriting) have been stored on microfiche and archived at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies. Some preliminary coding of the occupational aspirations of cohort members was carried out and archived together with the other quantitative data collected at age 11, but this is the only aspect of the rich material contained in the essays that has been available to researchers.

These essays were written in 1969, towards the end of a boom time for the British economy, as well as a period when divorce rates were increasing rapidly but still relatively low, fertility was dropping but the average age of mothers was still only 26.2 compared with 29.4 in 2005 (Health Statistics Quarterly, 27). In addition, it was still over five years before equal pay legislation came into force in Britain, and until the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission. The parents of the children in the cohort study would almost all have grown up during the Second World War, rationing ended in the mid-1950s, and for many the 1960s were a time of relative prosperity.

It is important to remember that the essays produced by the children will have been shaped both by the context in which they were produced (i.e. at school, with a time limit of 30 minutes) and by the fact that the children knew they were part of a longitudinal study. They should be understood as externally required narratives rather than as the product of a spontaneous or inner felt need to provide an autobiographical account of the self (Stanley 2000: 41). The nature of the influence of the school setting on the content of the essays cannot be ascertained. Children presumably expected that their essay was primarily for the researchers on the NCDS, but it is difficult to know to what extent they may have anticipated that their essay may also have been read, or even marked, by their teacher.

#### *Previous research using the essays*

Discussion with the researchers who were responsible for the NCDS in 1969 (Professors Ron Davie and Peter Wedge) suggests that there were no specific or immediate plans to analyse the essays written by the cohort members at age 11. At the time, the priority was to analyse the rich quantitative data collected in this sweep of the study. In the late 1960s it was hoped that the NCDS would continue to follow the cohort members and study their development through into adulthood. With this in mind, the qualitative information about future aspirations, collected in the essays written at age 11, was seen as having potential interest in the future for comparison with the actual trajectories of individual cohort members.

During the 1970s some analysis of a sub-sample of the essays was carried out which focussed on the 'syntactic maturity' of the children in the study. A random sample of 521 of the total of 13669 essays were coded for composition length and for 'Mean terminal-unit length' (MTUL). This is not equivalent to sentence length but rather refers to a main clause with attached subordinate clauses and is therefore the shortest unit which it is grammatically allowable to punctuate as a sentence. This measure had been found to correlate strongly with age in previous research and was used as a simple indicator of development in syntactic control (O'Donnell *et al.* 1967; Richardson *et al.* 1976, Richardson 1979). These analyses revealed that although the girls wrote significantly longer essays than the boys (with a mean of 228.8 words compared with 180.7 words) the slight difference in MTUL was not statistically significant. Richardson *et al.* suggested that this finding 'reflects the well-known 'conformism' of young girls relative to boys' in other words that social factors are a more likely explanation than differences in 'neurobiological maturation processes' (Richardson *et al.* 1976: 347). In a review of research on sex differences in specific abilities, Gipps and Murphy (1996) conclude that during the school years from 4-11



the two sexes perform very similarly on verbal tasks but from adolescence onwards there is evidence of female superiority in a variety of verbal abilities. The longer essays written by girls at age 11 could therefore be interpreted as evidence of girls' greater facility with language at this age. The research by Richardson et al also found that social class was significantly associated with composition length such that children from social class 1 produced essays that were on average about 25% longer than those from children from social class V, but once again there were no significant differences in MTUL suggesting no apparent differences in syntactic maturity between the social class groups.

## **Methods**

### *The stratified sample*

Rather than attempting to provide coding and analysis of the whole sample of over 13,000 essays written by cohort members in 1969, a subsample of essays has been initially extracted for closer analysis. One approach would have been to sample these essays randomly, but in order to ensure sufficient numbers in subgroups to facilitate some simple comparisons to be made, a stratified sub-sample was extracted based on three key variables:

- 1) The gender of the cohort member
- 2) The social class and family background of the cohort member and
- 3) The ability of the cohort member (measured using a general ability test, similar to an IQ test, at age 11)

The social class of the cohort member was classified according to the occupation of the father at age 11. This is recorded as variable N1171 'Social Class of father or male head', in the set of data corresponding to the 1969 survey. Given the relatively small sample size this was recoded to form a variable with three categories: children with fathers in non-manual occupations; children with fathers in manual occupations, and children living with lone mothers where there was no male head in the household.

At age 11 children in the NCDS completed a general ability test. Children's test results are recorded as variable n920 'Total score on general ability test' in the data set corresponding to the 1969 survey. These test scores are approximately normally distributed with a range of 0-80, a mean of 42.9, a median of 44 and an inter-quartile range of 31-56. For the purposes of constructing a stratified sub sample from the cohort the ability score was recoded to form three categories: children scoring in the lowest 25% (i.e. 31 or under); children scoring in the middle 50% (i.e. 32 -56) and children scoring in the top 25% (i.e. 57 or above).

The profile of this stratified sub-sample is provided in Table 1. The approach used to create this subsample, means that, although in the sample as a whole there is a statistically significant difference in the ability test scores of boys and girls (a mean of 41.8 for boys vs. 44.1 for girls) and in the ability test scores of those with fathers in non-manual, manual occupations and those in families with no male head (50.0 vs. 40.19 vs.39.46) in the stratified subsample of essays no such differences exist. In other words the sub-sample of essays has been drawn to reflect accurately the range

of ability within the sample as a whole but to remove any relationship between ability and social class. This means, for example, that as can be seen from Table 1a the sampling fraction for children with *non-manual* fathers and low scores on the ability test is much higher (0.123) than the sampling fraction for children with *manual* fathers and low scores on the ability test (0.028). This reflects the fact that in the sample as a whole children from non-manual backgrounds tend to achieve higher scores on the ability test than those from manual backgrounds.

Table 1: Stratified sub-sample

		Gender of child						Total
		Male			Female			
		Social class of father			Social class of father			
		Non-manual	manual	No male head	Non-manual	manual	No male head	
General ability age 11	Low	30	30	10	30	30	10	140
	Medium	60	60	20	60	60	20	280
	High	30	30	10	30	30	10	140
	Total	120	120	40	120	120	40	560

Table 1a: Sampling fractions for the stratified sample

		Gender of child					
		Male			Female		
		Social class of father			Social class of father		
		Non-manual	manual	No male head	Non-manual	manual	No male head
General ability age 11	Low	0.123	0.028	0.102	0.190	0.034	0.122
	Medium	0.062	0.033	0.142	0.062	0.033	0.128
	High	0.040	0.045	0.227	0.036	0.043	0.141
	Total	0.061	0.034	0.141	0.061	0.035	0.129

The next section of the paper describes the process of developing a coding frame based on the content of the essays.

### Coding the essays

An initial sample of 10 essays was examined in detail in early February 2006. Following this, a draft coding frame was constructed and tested on a further sub-sample of 50 essays. Some elements of the coding frame were shaped by the

instructions given to the children to write about their 'interests, home life and work', while others emerged from recurrent topics introduced by the children themselves. For example, it was striking how many boys talked about football within their essays, and that a substantial minority of children described the type of house they would like to live in. It was also noticeable that pets and animals were mentioned relatively frequently. The aim was to create a manageable coding frame with not too many 'variables' but which successfully captured most of the topics and themes that emerged repeatedly in the children's essays. The draft coding frame was subsequently modified slightly to reflect additional themes identified within the sub-sample of 50 essays, and further refined after discussions with our initial research assistants, (Jenny Neuberger and Tash Anderson). The sample of essays were then copy typed, each into a separate word document, as accurately as possible and retaining the children's original spellings, and coding of the main themes within the essays completed. Appendix A provides a summary list of variables and Appendix B provides the coding frame that was used. In the first stages of transcribing and coding the essays, research assistants checked each other's transcriptions and coding for accuracy, and to ensure that the coding frame was being interpreted consistently.

The coding frame was then used to record data on 28 variables for each essay. The aim was to use the coding frame to build up a database that would offer a detailed descriptive profile of the content of each essay, to identify (for example) how many of the essays included references to the cohort children's mother, father or siblings; how many discussed wanting to have children; and how many gave details about the skills they would use in their preferred occupation. Notes were also made of any exceptional essays. In effect, this process generated quantitative data that can be used both to provide an overall summary of the content of the essays, and also to explore any links between the characteristics of the children and the topics they chose to include in their essays. It is hoped that in addition to being used in the current project this coding of the content of essays will also help future researchers to identify sub-samples of essays that they would be interested in examining in more detail.

## **Results**

The results of this preliminary analysis of a sub-sample of 495 essays are presented in two main sections. In the first section a quantitative description is provided of the achieved sample followed by an analysis of how ability, gender and social class were associated with the length of the essays written by the children at age 11. In the second section simple descriptive statistics and contingency tables are presented together with extracts from the essays themselves to try and provide as complete a picture as possible of the content of the essays. Where extracts from the essays are included in the text, the serial number of the cohort member, together with gender and social class is also noted. This can be used to identify the essay from which the extract has been taken and also provides a link to the relevant case within the quantitative database of information about cohort members. The Chi-squared statistic has been used to assess the statistical significance of the patterns found within the data and results are considered significant where the probability associated with Chi square is less than 0.05.

## The achieved sample

A profile of the achieved sample of transcribed essays is provided in Table 2 below. Of the target sample of 560 essays, a total of 495 were transcribed. Of the 65 essays that it was not possible to transcribe, 11 were found to be completely illegible due to the quality of the microfiche copy; and 54 were missing from the microfiche archive held at CLS. (During the time of the project a major initiative took place to scan the whole of the paper and microfiche archive held by CLS for the NCDS and BCS70 studies. This meant that only one set of microfiche were available for transcription and analysis as the second set were offsite being scanned).

As can be seen from Table 2, the transcribed essays were distributed relatively evenly across the stratified groups and therefore the stratified sample does not appear to have been distorted by the relatively small number of essays that were not available to be transcribed. For example, the samples of 280 boys and 280 girls were reduced to 243 and 252 respectively, while the samples of children from families with non-manual fathers, manual fathers and lone mothers were reduced from 240, 240 and 80 to 208, 214, and 73 respectively.

Table 2: Profile of sample

		Gender of child						
		Male			Female			
		Social class of father			Social class of father			
		Non-manual	manual	No male head	Non-manual	manual	No male head	Total
General ability age 11	Low	28	24	9	23	27	10	121
	Medium	54	54	15	53	56	20	252
	High	24	26	9	26	27	10	122
	Total	106	104	33	102	110	40	495

## Ability and length of essays

While the mean length of this sub-sample of 495 essays was 187.4 words the median was 171 with a mid-spread of 116 to 234 words. There were just 10% of essays that were under 76 words in length and 10% that were over 320 words in length. On average the girls' essays were significantly longer than the boys with a mean of 206.7 words compared with 167.4 for the boys. (The differences between these summary measures of essay length and those reported earlier based on a sample of 521 essays are likely to reflect the different sampling strategies used to select essays for analysis).

Table 3: Number of words in essay by gender

Sex of child		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Number of words in essay	Male	243	167.39	86.339	5.539
	Female	252	206.67	105.231	6.629

Although there was a statistically significant association between the length of the essay and the ability of the child as measured in the general ability test it should be noted that this relationship was relatively weak, so that even children with relatively low scores on the ability test were capable of writing long essays. Conversely, some children with high scores on the ability test produced short essays. To illustrate this, four short essays are reproduced in their entirety as Appendix C. Two are essays by children with ability scores of over 70 (out of a maximum of 80) and two are essays by children with ability scores of under 20.

Table 4: correlation between number of words in essay and ability measured at age 11

	Boys	Girls
Pearson correlation coefficient	0.238	0.236
Sig. (2-tailed)	P<0.001	P<0.001
N	243	252

### Social class, gender and length of essays

An analysis of variance was carried out to ascertain how essay length varied by social class and gender. It can be seen from Table 4 that for all three categories of family background girls wrote longer essays than did boys.

Table 5: number of words in essay by gender and social class background

Dependent Variable: Number of words in essay

Family background	Sex of child	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Biological mother & father non-manual	Male	169.623	9.307	151.337	187.908
	Female	229.505	9.441	210.955	248.055
Biological mother & father manual	Male	168.067	9.351	149.694	186.439
	Female	187.768	9.054	169.979	205.557
Biological mother & no father figure	Male	158.667	16.680	125.895	191.439
	Female	192.425	15.150	162.658	222.192

There was also found to be a significant difference in the length of the essays according to family background, and as can be seen from the means in Table 4 the most striking difference is between girls with fathers in non-manual occupations and girls with fathers in manual occupations. However, the interaction between family background and gender did not reach statistical significance in the model. As has been highlighted above, any social class difference cannot be attributed to differences in measured ability as the sub-sample of 495 essays has been stratified to remove the association between social class and measured ability within the cohort.

## The content of the essays

As noted, children were given very brief instructions about which aspects of their imagined lives at 25 they should focus on - 'the life you are leading, your interests, your home life and your work'. There was a great deal of heterogeneity in the way that children approached the task and the type of material that they included, and many examples reveal a wealth of imaginative and creative detail that transcends the relatively mundane nature of the task they were asked to do. The following sections of the paper provide a preliminary description of the main topics that were included in the essays. Many of these topics are relatively broad, and there is clearly a great deal of further, more qualitative analysis than can be carried out in order to illuminate the different ways in which children wrote about the different aspects of their imagined adult lives.

## Family members, friends and pets

In total, 39% of children (192/495) referred to a member of their family in their essay. As can be seen from Table 6, children were slightly more likely to mention their mother than their father (29% vs. 23%). In total, 32% of children mentioned either their father or their mother with 9% mentioning only their mother and 4% mentioning only their father. As will be seen from the short extracts below, in many cases children just referred to their 'parents' rather than explicitly talking about their mother or their father. Table 6 also shows that siblings were mentioned less often than parents and only 9% of children mentioned other family members. The types of family members mentioned included uncles and aunts, cousins, nephews and in-laws. Grandparents were not mentioned very often. In a few cases children just made a general reference to 'relations' or relatives for example:

*Then it happened John [name] asked me to marry him! And geuss what my answer was YES! we were very happye all of our relations came to the wedding reseption and we all lived happily ever after. (282035Z: Female, manual father, medium ability)*

*We live quite near our relatives (684089R: Male, non-manual father, medium ability)*

Table 6: frequency of mention of family members and pets

	%	N
Mother mentioned?	28.5	141
Father mentioned	23	114
Siblings mentioned?	13.7	68
Animals or pets mentioned	31.3	155
Other family members mentioned	8.7	43
Friends mentioned?	23.8	118

The following extracts give some illustrative examples of how children included parents:

*Last year I was twenty five and I still live with my parents I donot want to get marrade I have to look after the house and my parents (092222Q: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*I am not married and I live with my mother and father. I often Play football o cricket.*

*(096008K: male, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*My son's name is Johnathon and he is the modle of his father. Sometimes my mother and father come to see us and usally bring Johnathon some sweets. When my mother and father do come they look after Johnathon while I go into town to do some shopping. After when I come back with the shopping my mother and father stay for tea. Then the next day my husbands mother and father come to stay for tea. (110337C: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*I go to my mum and dad's house once a week and I do their grass with my hover mower. My dad has one I must say but theirs is 14 years old and it start and stops in 5 seconds every time. (187012F: male, non-manual father, medium ability)*

It is noteworthy that pets or animals were included in children's essays more often than any family member. However, a simple analysis suggests that pets were not a substitute for including a mention of members of the family in that there was no association between mentioning pets and mentioning (or not mentioning) other family members.

Children who mentioned their mother or their father were also more likely to write something about their siblings. For example, of those children who mentioned their mother 34% mentioned siblings compared with only 6% of those who didn't mention their mother. The figures showed a similar pattern for children mentioning or not mentioning their father.

### **Gender and discussion of family and friends**

Whereas 47% of the 252 girls in the sample mentioned at least one member of their family, only 31% of the 243 boys included mention of a family member. As can be seen in Table 7, girls were also more likely than boys to mention friends, but boys and girls were equally likely to write about pets.

Table 7: Gender and mention of family and friends

	Male		Female	
	Count	%	Count	%
Is cohort member's mother mentioned?	47	19.3	94	37.3
Is cohort member's father mentioned?	50	20.6	64	25.4
Are cohort member's siblings mentioned?	18	7.4	50	19.8
Are animals or pets mentioned?	72	29.6	83	32.9
Are other family members mentioned?	12	4.9	31	12.3
Are friends mentioned?	45	18.5	73	29.0
Total				

## Social Class and discussion of family, friends and pets

Analysis suggests that the social class background of the children had little impact on whether they mentioned their families of origin. Whereas 39% of children with non-manual fathers made mention of at least one family member, 40% of children with a non-manual father and 36% of children with no male head living in the family made mention of at least one family member. However, it can be seen in Table 8 that there is a social class difference in whether the cohort member's father is mentioned, such that non-manual fathers were more likely to be mentioned than manual fathers (32% vs. 20%). In addition, children from non-manual backgrounds were more likely to mention animals and pets than those from manual backgrounds (37% vs. 27%).

Table 8: Social class and family, friends and pets

	Non manual father		Manual father		No father figure	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Is cohort member's mother mentioned?	63	30.3	58	27.1	20	27.4
Is cohort member's father mentioned?	66	31.7	42	19.6	6	8.2
Are cohort member's siblings mentioned?	25	12.0	34	15.9	9	12.3
Are animals or pets mentioned?	78	37.5	57	26.6	20	27.4
Are other family members mentioned?	16	7.7	20	9.3	7	9.6
Are friends mentioned?	47	22.6	54	25.2	17	23.3

## Getting married and having children

As can be seen from Table 9, approximately two thirds of the children made some reference to whom they would be living with at age 25, and girls were slightly more likely to mention this than boys. However the gender differences here are not particularly striking, with boys and girls being roughly equally likely to say that they would still be living with their parents, would be living alone or would be married.

Table 9: Child's description of living situation by gender

% within	Gender of child	Gender of child		Total
		Male	Female	
Childs description of living situation	Not mentioned	38.7	29.4	33.9
	Alone	5.3	4.0	4.6
	Still living with parents	8.2	10.3	9.3
	Married	42.4	45.6	44.0
	Cohabiting		0.4	0.2
	Friends	1.2	3.2	2.2
	With other family members	0.4	0.8	0.6
	Changes during essay	0.8	4.0	2.4
	Other	2.9	2.4	2.6
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0



Only one girl's essay was coded as 'cohabiting', and although she did not explicitly state that she would be living with her boyfriend, there is some suggestion of this in the essay:

*I have a job as an air hostess for B,O,A,C and I am on day work. I have 1 boy friend who is 25 years old we go to night Clubs sometimes or we stay at home on Saturday days we go to a club in Londons westend.(730060T:female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

In a few cases (two boys and ten girls) the children related more of a narrative about a change in their circumstances, for example:

*I am a fireman and I woRK on nights We have to get up very quick and come down a pole get into a fire engine and drive off very fast. My hobby is making models in my spare time. I have four models one is an aircraft carier and the viciory ship and the other two are aeroplanes I am going to get the concord from the post office. I have got a girl friend in manchester who likes george best. She goes to watch the match every saturday even if its away we are engaJed we are getting marrid in one year. She has got blond hair and blue eyes. I live in a flat in wednesfield I have £40 pound in the bank.( 939027K: male, manual father, medium ability)*

*My name is Gillian [Surname]. I live with two other girls in a big flat. ... Just now I am planing to get married ... When I planed to get married I planed to get married on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June and not it was the 17<sup>th</sup> of June so I had only 3 days left I had saved £100/-/- by now. I was not going to have a quiet wedding. On the 18<sup>th</sup> I went into the center of London to have a two piece suit. I had gone round nearly every shop. I had two shops left to go into I went into one and I fancied a blue one I had it. And on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June I got married. (815044S: female, non-manual father, high ability)*

Among those children who made some mention of marriage, the majority (83%) expected that they would get married, with only 14 stating explicitly that they did not want to get married. There was very little gender difference here, and girls were only very slightly more likely than boys to say that they would be married at age 25 or that they planned to get married, as Table 10 shows. Analysis also showed very little social class difference although those from non-manual backgrounds were slightly more likely to say that they would not be married (7% vs. 4%).

Table 10: statements about marriage, gender

% within 0-3D Gender of child		Gender of child		Total
		Male	Female	
Childs statements about marriage	Not mentioned	36.6	32.5	34.5
	Will get/be married	51.4	57.1	54.3
	Doesn't want to be married	2.9	2.8	2.8
	Not married	6.2	5.6	5.9
	other about marriage	2.9	2.0	2.4
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

Those children who explicitly said they did not want to be married made statements such as:

*Last year I was twenty five and I still live with my parents I do not want to get marrade I have to look after the house and my parents. My interests are baking and doing things round the house. (092222Q: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*The life I am having is quite a good time I am not married and I do not want to be unless I get a good girl. (120002A: male, manual father, low ability)*

*Whan I am 25 I want to be a footballer when I don't play football I will be a reporter my interests will I be play games I will not move away from home becaues I don't want to git married. (500320J: male, no father figure, medium ability)*

Those children who wrote that they would not be married made statements such as:

*I am 25 years old I am a nurse and I am not married. (093007R:female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*I am not married and I live at home with my mother and work in a offic. (093081D: female, no father figure, low ability)*

*I work in an office I am employed by Holdsworth of Morley my name is miss S. [lastname] I am not married. I live in a flat with a friend who works in the same office as I do. (213018K:female, no father figure, medium ability)*

*My interests are I like Trains I have a big garden I work at the Railway staston I drive trains. I am not married. (330082Y: male, manual father, low ability)*

## **Children**

Just under half of the children made some mention of having children in their essays. Only a very small minority said they would not have children and of those who did want children the majority said they wanted, or expected to have, two children. Those who said they would not have any children made statements such as:

*When I am 25 I Will not Be marryed and I will Not have any children My Job will Be as a modle. I will Be living in a Big House And I Will have a Red Spots Car. (200054R: female, non-manual father, low ability)*

*I am 25 years of age and I go to college, I would like to be a aircraft pilot and I am training very hard for the job and I hope I get it. My home live is fairly pieceful I like gardining, and at the moment I am paiting the house. I live in a small village Just out side Nottingham and it is very nice. my intrests are football, garding, and cricket. I am married and I dont have any children. (400113V: male, non-manual father, medium ability)*

As can be seen from the example below, in some cases it was not clear whether the child expected to have children at some point in the future but not by age 25. Indeed some who stated that they would not have children at age 25 clearly thought they would have children at some point:

*I don't really know what I will be doing when I am 25. but I think I will be working in a bank. perhaps Westminster bank. I will still be living in \*\*\*\*. I will be very happy in life. and I will have just got married. and in my spare time I will go horse riding. my mother & father will come for tea every Wednesday. my husband would just have won 200 pounds so we decided to go to the moon for our holiday while we had not got any children. Then perhaps we would have the house painted. My husband would be a teacher of 11 year olds. It was very hard to said what in will be like but this is what I think it will be that. (381048M: female, manual father, medium ability)*

Table 11: having children, by gender

% within Gender of child		Gender of child		Total
		Male	Female	
Child's statements about having children	Not mentioned	56.4	47.6	51.9
	None	3.7	4.0	3.8
	One	8.2	8.7	8.5
	Two	15.6	22.2	19.0
	Three or more	4.9	6.0	5.5
	Vague	9.5	9.9	9.7
	Other	1.6	1.6	1.6
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

Those children who did write about having children frequently said that they wanted or expected to have two children and in many cases gave the genders, names and ages of the children they hoped to have by age 25. For example:

*I am married now and have 2 children one 5 gerald and a 2 Elizabeth I am a nursery nurse and my son gerald is at School and my daughter is at the nursery I work at. I finish early so I can collect gerald from School. (X80190V:female, no father figure, high ability)*

*My name is [first name, surname], I am 25 I works in Mactakerts. I think my live has been a happy one, I am interested in cars the engine is what I look at first.*

*I am married and have two children one four and one three, at least once a month we go to the cinema. When the circus comes to town we always go to see it the children always enjoy themselves.*

*I have a very pretty wife named Mary she looks after the children when I am away. (X80035H: male, manual father, medium ability)*

*When I am twenty five I would like to be married and have children of my own and have a girl and a boy and call the girl Janey and the boy GARRY. (X80128Q: female, manual father, low ability)*

Unusually, a small number of children imagined fostering or adopting children, sometimes in addition to having their own children.

## Housing

When devising a coding scheme, one of the striking features was how often children described, in considerable detail, the type of house they would be living in, or the area in which they would be living, even though this was not part of the explicit instructions for the essay task. As can be seen from the table below just under half of the children made some comments about the type of house they would be living in. Statements about housing in the essay were coded into the following categories: living in a flat; description of living in the country or a rural setting; some other description of house; other comments about housing.

Table 12: imagined future housing, gender

% within Gender of child		Gender of child		Total
		Male	Female	
Nature of housing discussed?	Not mentioned	55.1	55.2	55.2
	Flat	5.3	8.7	7.1
	Other house	25.1	20.6	22.8
	Rural countryside cottage farm	13.6	13.5	13.5
	Other	0.8	2.0	1.4
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

Once again there was very little difference between the boys and the girls in terms of what they wrote about the type of accommodation they would be living in. The types of comments that children made about living in the countryside were as follows:

*We have a little house in the contrey with a small lake running Just out side. We have a four bedroom house. One for me and Micheal and one for Cory, one for Richard James and a Spare room. We hardley even qaulle and it is really a very happy home.( 510192J: female, manual father, medium ability)*

*I have a little cotttage of my own. I live in the country. I have quite a big garden because, also in my spare time I do some gardening. I like gardening very much. my neighbours like some nice quiet work they sometimes come and help me. One of my neighbours has a little girl who is very sweet. Sometimes she comes in my cotttage and I play my guitar to her. This little girl is 4yrs her name is Kim. Sometimes in my spare time on a Sunday (after I had been to church) I would take her into the nearby-by park. I have a big pond in the bottom of my garden with 12 fish in. I like fish very much. I did have 13 fish but one died of fungus. I am not very superstious but 13 is an unlucky number. My cotttage is'nt very big but it is nice. It is a 3 bedroom cotttage although the third bedroom is'nt very big. (516033U:female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*I would like to be a farmer out in the country it would be nice and quiet. I would not have to put up with all the noise that there is in towns. (X80220B: male, manual father, medium ability)*

While many children simply wrote that they would live in 'a nice house', others gave details of the number of rooms and a few were very detailed:

*We will get a two-bedroomed house in Peterlee. It will have a living-room, a dining room, a kitchen, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. (110020W: female, manual father, high ability)*

*I am 25 years of age, I live in a big house it has five bedrooms, dining room, lounge, and kitchenette... The doors of the house are orange and round the windows of the door white, the window frames are painted cream. We have oil fired central heating and an electric cooker, and strip lighting in the kitchenet. (110335Y: male, non-manual father, medium ability)*

Analysis of comments about housing by the social class background of the children suggests that those with non-manual fathers are slightly more likely to make statements about housing and in particular are twice as likely to write about living in the countryside. However these differences were not statistically significant and further analysis with a larger sample would be needed to explore them in more detail.

Table 13: family and social class background, nature of housing

% within Family background		Family background		Total	
		Nat Mum & Dad non-manual	Nat Mum & Dad manual	Nat Mum & no father figure	
Nature of housing discussed?	Not mentioned	50.5	59.3	56.2	55.2
	Flat	5.8	7.9	8.2	7.1
	Other house	24.0	22.4	20.5	22.8
	Rural countryside cottage farm	18.3	9.3	12.3	13.5
	Other	1.4	0.9	2.7	1.4
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Approximately thirty percent of children made some reference to where they would be living at age 25 with 20% stating a specific location in Britain, which in many cases could be assumed to be close to where they were currently living. A further 4% said they would be living in London; 2.5% said they hoped to be living abroad (with America and Australia being the most common examples) and 3% mentioned more than one location. Once again there appeared to be no impact of social class or gender on where children imagined living at age 25.

### Car ownership

Essays were also coded for whether children wrote about owning a car as this was a common theme that emerged from the initial reading of a sub-sample of the essays. Nearly three in ten children mentioned cars in their essay (28.9%), this was strongly gendered with 17.5 % of girls and 40.7% of boys including a reference to car ownership or driving a car. The essays were further coded according to whether the child wrote about the car as a form of transport or mentioned a specific make and or model of car. Among the boys, 22% mentioned a specific make of car (e.g. Sunbeam Rapier, red mini, big jaguar car, white Hillman Hunter, Ford, Morris Traveller) and a further 19% wrote about having a car as a means of transport, while among the girls only 5% named a specific make of car (cherry red mini, brand new Cortina, white Vauxhall, Cortina estate, Capri, Estate car )and a further 13% wrote about using a car as transportation. There was a modest social class difference so that middle

class children were more likely than working class children to write about car ownership and in particular they were more likely to write about using a car as a means of transport, for example:

*I am now 25 years old I work as a teather at all hallows school I take English [illegible] I get up at half-past seven in the morning and do my work than have someing to eat and get ready for school I go in my car it is bule (055065R:female, non-manual father, low ability)*

*My work is a shopkeeper and I get £4 a week I hope to get a moter cycle and then I could do the shopping quicker. Then when I am older I hope to get a car then I could take my parents to see their friends who live in Kendel and other parts of the contry (092222Q: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*When I was 17 years old I got a driving licence that lasted for quite a long time and took lessons and passed a test. Now I have a motor car and go out at times. (110217S: female, non-manual father, low ability)*

### Domestic labour

Preliminary analysis of a small sub-sample of the essays showed that, perhaps surprisingly, a large proportion of children made some mention of domestic labour. One interpretation of this is that the children are using domestic labour as a device to indicate their understanding of what it means to be an adult and therefore providing what they see as an appropriate response to the researcher's question about how they imagine their life at age 25. Alternatively, or perhaps in addition, many of the children were likely already to be responsible for domestic tasks at home and therefore their inclusion in the essay may be indicative of the way that children use their current experiences to inform what they wrote about. The coding frame was expanded to capture some of the main types of domestic tasks that children wrote about and as can be seen from Table 14 there were marked gender differences in the prevalence of discussion of domestic labour within the essays and also differences in the types of tasks mentioned by boys and girls. For example although boys and girls were equally likely to write about childcare in isolation from other tasks (3% of boys and 2.0% of girls), girls were much more likely than boys to write about childcare together with cooking and cleaning or to write about multiple tasks that might include childcare.

Table 14: Discussion of domestic labour by gender of child

% within			Gender of child		Total
Gender of child			1 Male	2 Female	
domlab	Discussion of domestic labour	0 not mentioned	78.2	45.1	61.3
		1 childcare	2.5	2.0	2.2
		2 cooking cleaning etc	2.9	10.3	6.7
		3 childcare & cooking cleaning	1.2	7.9	4.6
		4 DIY or gardening	9.1	1.2	5.0
		5 multiple tasks	4.5	21.7	13.3

	6 sewing, knitting, needlework		8.3	4.2
	7 other	1.6	3.6	2.6
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

Some examples of the types of things children wrote under these headings are given below:

#### Childcare:

*My son is only two years old. My job is a footballer and a part-time lawyer. At home I spend a lot of time with my kids. At work I'm in an office or on a football pitch. Two hours a day sometimes more I'm training. At home on days [illegible] I play with my son at football. (083064X: male, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*I will want my house to be near a park for my children. I will take them there every fine Saturday afternoon. Every Sunday morning I will take my children to church. I will want my husband to be a keen gardener. (110153S: female, manual father, medium ability)*

#### Cooking, cleaning:

*I wood Be working in a pub I would stack the shelves and fill the glasses up for the people. I would be married and cook the dinner I wood go on holidays to Butlins (092024L: male, manual father, low ability)*

*I will enjoy my work which is my own hair-dressers me and a friend are going to have one of our very own. I enjoy washing their hair and seting it up, we asked them if they would like a cup of tea or coffee and it is free. I enjoy cooking and washing up and I Like doing the house works when I am on my own. I like going to town and doing my shopping. Somtimes I would go to my friends and have a cup of tea or she would come to my house.( 097001Z: female, manual father, low ability)*

*I am centre – Forward for Newcastle United football club. I have a Rover T.C. 2,000. I have I son aged 4 and he comes to watch me play on a Saturday My wife has a Mini Cooper 'S So I do not have to take her home from the supermarket. I am leading a happy life and I have to help cook the meals when I am in.( 182029X: male, non-manual father, high ability)*

Further analysis by both gender and social class suggests that there were no major social class differences in whether children wrote about domestic labour. However, girls with non-manual fathers were slightly more likely than those with manual fathers to write about domestic tasks (60.8% vs 52.3%) and in particular to write about sewing, knitting and needlework (9.8% vs 5.4%). Analysis of girl's writing about domestic tasks disaggregated by aspirations for different types of occupation at age 25 revealed very few differences, so that for example girls who wanted to become

teachers or other professionals were as likely to write about domestic work as were girls who aspired to be clerical workers or shop assistants. However, as might be predicted those girls who explicitly said they wanted to be housewives overwhelmingly talked about domestic work, so that of the 22 girls in the sub-sample who wanted to be housewives, 20 wrote about domestic tasks.

### **Work and occupations**

One of the topics that children were specifically asked to write about was the work they would be doing at age 25. Table 15 shows a summary of the occupational aspirations for the whole sample of 13699 children as these were coded in the early 1970s. As can be seen, these are highly gendered, so that for boys the most popular occupations are 'Skilled manual work' and being a sportsman, while for girls the most popular occupations are 'teacher'; 'typists and clerical work'; 'nurse' and 'Personal Service'. Closer examination of the sub-sample of 495 essays transcribed as part of this project showed that, in addition to writing about their own occupational aspirations, 16.4% of the children also wrote about the occupation they thought their husband or wife might be doing at age 25. This was strongly associated with gender so that while 23% of girls wrote about their imagined husband's occupation, only 10% of boys wrote about the occupation their wife might be doing. For example:

*I've got a hairdressing shop by the sea and I earn about £100 a week. I enjoy my job because I meet such nice people and they are so pleasant to talk to. My husband acts at the theatre he has been acting for 2 years now. (010014U: female, manual father, high ability)*

*I am twenty five year's old and I work for T.W.A.... I may get married to somebody and I have to cook his meals before he comes or he will start to moan. He is a pilot so I need'ent bother about him because I no he is on the plane all night. (female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

Some children gave very few details of the type of work they imagined doing at age 25 and simply included short statements in their essay such as :

*I have a job as a model. (092058D: female, non-manual father, low ability)*

Or

*I have a part time job as a secretery at a school (010042Z: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

However, 38.8% of children gave more elaborated accounts of the types of activities, skills and expertise associated with their chosen occupation. For example almost the whole of the essay reproduced below focuses on what this girl imagines it will be like to be a teacher:

*I am a teacher and I am very busy. every day that comes in school hours and out of school. I have great intrest in becoming a teacher and I am one. sometimes little children are fighting and I go and stop stern and tell them that it is wrong to fight and I tell them to shake hands and go off and be friends again and so they do when school is over I go home and I have a pile of books to be marked and when I have to go to bed I put my head on my pillow and i go to sleep straight away. In the morning I get up early. have my breakfast and I go back to school. I then start marking books again. I enjoy being a teacher very much and I wouldn't do any other job but teaching I take a very good class and I have games and acting with other classes besides my*



*own. Some-times they make me very cross and if it is a day when we have art together we only have half an hour instead of a full hour. For the next half hour we do poetry and the next day they behave themselves or they do not have what ever is coming to the [illegible] that day. I do not hit them I only cosd them or make them do 100 lines for me or more. or they miss their games or art or acting. One day I hope to become a head-mistress and then I will be more busy than I was when I was a teacher. Words: 272 (010021R: female, manual father, medium ability)*

Boys were significantly more likely than girls (46 % vs. 32%) to write about occupational skills in some detail, however there was no association with social class.

In addition, some children gave details of the hours that they would be likely to work, or said specifically that they would be working part time. Once again, this was gendered, so that girls were slightly more likely than boys to make a reference to working hours (35% vs. 27%).

Table 15: children's imagined occupations at 11

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Professional etc	Count	842.0	375.0	1217.0
	%	12.1	5.6	8.9
Teachers etc	Count	177.0	1007.0	1184.0
	%	2.5	15.0	8.7
Nurse	Count	1.0	779.0	780.0
	%	0.0	11.6	5.7
Other non-man,SCII	Count	589.0	364.0	953.0
	%	8.5	5.4	7.0
Typists,clerical	Count	197.0	959.0	1156.0
	%	2.8	14.3	8.5
Shop assistants	Count	119.0	631.0	750.0
	%	1.7	9.4	5.5
Junior non-man	Count	320.0	68.0	388.0
	%	4.6	1.0	2.8
Personal service	Count	70.0	766.0	836.0
	%	1.0	11.4	6.1
Foreman,manual	Count	41.0	5.0	46.0
	%	0.6	0.1	0.3
Skilled manual	Count	1755.0	130.0	1885.0
	%	25.2	1.9	13.8
Semi-skilled man	Count	271.0	58.0	329.0
	%	3.9	0.9	2.4
Unskilled manual	Count	52.0	48.0	100.0
	%	0.7	0.7	0.7
Self employed	Count	140.0	125.0	265.0
	%	2.0	1.9	1.9
Farm workers	Count	171.0	189.0	360.0
	%	2.5	2.8	2.6
Housewife	Count	1.0	543.0	544.0
	%	0.0	8.1	4.0
Forces	Count	648.0	16.0	664.0
	%	9.3	0.2	4.9
Sportsmen,women	Count	850.0	29.0	879.0
	%	12.2	0.4	6.4
Students	Count	64.0	50.0	114.0
	%	0.9	0.7	0.8
Other work-n.e.c	Count	442.0	389.0	831.0
	%	6.3	5.8	6.1
No mention work	Count	106.0	135.0	241.0
	%	1.5	2.0	1.8
Unclassifiable	Count	109.0	38.0	147.0
	%	1.6	0.6	1.1
Total	Count	6965.0	6704.0	13669.0
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0

## Money

Approximately a third of children made some mention of money. This was frequently in relation to earnings, for example:

*I am now 25 years and I live in Spain. I have got two children we have a big house my brother is staying at the house for a few months. Ive got a hairdressing shop by the sea and I earn about £100 a week.( 010014U female, manual father, high ability)*

*My work is a shopkeeper and I get £4 a week (092222Q: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

Some children did not mention exact earnings but made a more general comment that they would earn a good wage. For example:

*My life that I am leading is good for I have a job that suits me fine. I work as a carpenter in a large building. The carpentry I do is quite good for so people say. I work Mondays for six hours, Wednesday for four hours and Friday for seven hours. The wage I get is quite resonable.( male, manual father, medium ability)*

Other children did not write about money in relation to earnings but rather wrote about the savings they might have, or the cost of housing, for example:

*In the bank I've only got £600 so I won't by a house until I'm married.( 083042M: male, non-manual father, high ability)*

*At home we are doing very well we are quite wealthy.(086029M: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

There was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in relation to whether money mentioned, so that whereas 42% of boys included something about money only 25% of girls wrote about money. However, the social class background of the children was not found to be related to whether money was mentioned, either for boys or girls.

## Leisure

Just over two thirds of the children (69%) wrote about leisure pursuits. These included some elements of leisure that could be understood as linked to the children's current leisure interests. For example, reading, watching television, going swimming, playing sports, stamp collecting, and making models.

*I AM 25 years old. I am married have two children. My friends are all round about the same age as I am. My hobbies are reading, printing and model making. At home I mend things that broken cultery chairs ect. I am a teacher.( 085016W: male, no father figure, high ability)*

*When I am twenty five I hope I will be at an army college studying. I hope I will be a soldier and go to foriegn lands. I shall still keep my child hood hobbie of a train spotter and see all sorts of continental type trains (110037Q male, non-manual father, medium ability)*

Other children also included leisure activities that were clearly linked to their imagined adult status at age 25, in particular taking children out for day trips and going out to clubs and dances. In the example below, a boy focuses almost entirely on his leisure activities and clearly combines current interests with a more adult role of taking his children to the park and taking his family to the cinema:

*I'll be going out with my wife nearly every night. In my work I'd try to be in a football team like manchester united. I'll try to have 3 children 2 boys 1 girl. I am leading a good life. I go swimming nearly every day. Playing football or cricket in the park with my pals. I'd play in park with my children take them to baths when I go. When I go to pictures I take my wife or children. When Im fairly old Ill retriy from work try to become a manger.( 280080U: male, no father figure, medium ability)*

Girls were slightly more likely than boys to write about leisure interests (73% vs. 64%) and this was statistically significant. In particular, girls with non-manual fathers were significantly more likely to write about leisure interests than boys with non-manual fathers (79% vs. 64%).

## **Holidays**

Linked to the theme of leisure, approximately a fifth of children (21.8%) wrote about what type of holidays they might expect to go on at age 25. A very few wrote about the possibility of going on holiday to the moon, which may well have been linked to the coverage of the moon landings in July 1969. However, the majority of children mentioned destinations that they might have visited with their families in the 1960s. For example:

*As I am now 25 I am a fully wofafied nurse. I am working at Solihull hospital .... But during my six week holiday I went the france and saw all the sights there but at night all the shops were all lit up and looked very nice (950088V:female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

*I am working to be a Child Welfare officer, as you see, I enjoy working with children. ... During the holidays I go water-skiing with my husband, or skiing in switzerland. We have a small cottage at Glen [illegible] in Wigtownshire for the Easter holidays. My husband is a mechanic and often comes home filthy. Also in the holidays we go hostelling with our child, Anne, strapped firmly in a bag, on our backs. As you can see, we are an energetic family because John and I both like sport. (female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

There was found to be no association between writing about holidays, and social class or gender. Preliminary analysis also suggested that contrary to expectations the type of destinations written about by children did not vary by social class. Holiday destinations mentioned by children included: France, Spain and Africa, Cornwall, Switzerland and Austria as well as Butlins, caravanning and camping, while other children did not mention a specific country but said that they would like to go on holiday abroad or to a 'foreign country'.

## Travel

In addition to writing about holidays, some children (17%) wrote about travel, in many cases linked to their imagined occupations at age 25. For example:

*My name is [name] I am a mechanic at Manchester airport. I am a bachelor and live quite near to the airport...Once I went to America for a fortnight. I would have rather of stayed in England. I had to go there because a plane needed repairing. The people their gave me a bad time. They always said I was doing my job wrong. One day I said to an American when I need your help I will ask for it. When I came back to England I was pleased.(010208J: male, no father figure, high ability)*

*... my job at 25 years of age would either be piloting an aeroplane or being part of the crew of a ship bound for Africa or India or somewhere like that.(042017F: male, non-manual father, high ability)*

There was a slight gender difference here so that boys were more likely than girls to write about travel (21% vs. 13%). However, there was no difference by social class and no apparent interaction between social class and gender in relation to whether children wrote about travel.

## Narratives

Although children were not asked to write in the form of a story, approximately one in eight of the children (12%) produced extended narratives. A narrative is defined here as an essay with clear sequential order or a 'complicating action', to use a term coined by Labov and Waletzky (1967). In other words, the child is using the essay or part of the essay to tell some kind of story where one event follows another. In this first example, a girl uses her essay to write a narrative about her imagined wedding day:

*I set of on a Monday morning in a car to go to a Registrey office to get married, it was 9 oclock in the morning and I got there at half past nine I had butterflys when I walked into the office. My boyfriend was waiting for me by the table next to a man. When he put the Ring on I felt so happy I wanted to cry. When it was over I went with my husband and most of my relations and my mother, father and brother to a very big hall in the town. We had to eat sandwiches, fruit and wedding cake and some other nice food. We had Champagne, bear, tomato Juice and some soft drinks for the people who didn't like bear. It was about four o'clock when the party had finished and when I wented off in my Husbands car to live in a flat my mother was in tears.  
(435043X: female, non-manual father, medium ability)*

Whereas in the essay below, a boy conjures up his imagined life at 25 by telling the story of a typical day, complete with dialogue with his mother and a work mate:

*[Boy's name] get up your late for work come on.  
all right I'm coming where,s my slippers.  
under the bed come on your breakfast is getting cold.  
all right all right I,m coming mum.  
Ah! that was super thanks mum.  
well come on then its 8 o clock now you have got to get to  
work at half past and you. will never make it*

*good by mum see you at six!  
Hello Jock what up mate  
to me kid carole shes going into hospital  
dont worry she, ll be all right there take good care of her  
gee and geas you right  
well come on then lets get to work.  
phew! I, m hot I relly dont know 10 hours work and  
only half hour tea break  
well Time that the way it go's  
hello mum I'm home, mum where are you  
here I am your dinners on the table  
thanks mum thanks  
I, m going out now mum I, ll be back a bout ten o clock tra la.  
( 550108T: male, manual father, medium ability)*

Girls were twice as likely as boys to write in the form of a narrative (16% vs. 7%) and although there was no social class difference, the more able children were more likely to provide full narratives (17%) than those in the middle 50% of the ability range (12%) or those in the lowest 25% of the ability range (7%).

There has been considerable interest in narrative evidence across many of the social sciences over the past two decades, and in particular the links made between narrative and identity (Elliott, 2005). The subset of essays that are written in narrative form may therefore be a useful resource for researchers, and particularly when used in tandem with the rich information about cohort members lives that is stored in the quantitative datasets.

## **Summary**

Preliminary descriptive analysis of the content of essays written by children at age 11 has revealed some unexpected patterns. The clearest patterns emerged with respect to gender rather than social class or ability differences. Firstly, it was noted that girls tended to write more than boys, and this is consistent with the findings of other research using children's writing as a method (see Morrow 1999). Relationships with 'significant others' were frequently mentioned, and children were slightly more likely to mention their mother than their father; pet animals were mentioned frequently by both boys and girls though girls were more likely to mention close relationships with family members. Halldén (1994: 66) in her research with Swedish 8-9 year olds also found that the relationship theme 'is more clearly in evidence in the girls' writings than in the writings of the boys'. Social class made a small difference in whether children mentioned their father, in that non-manual fathers were more likely to be mentioned than manual. Gender differences in expectations of getting married and having children were not particularly marked, and social class differences were only small, in that children from non-manual backgrounds were slightly more likely to say they would not be married.

Perhaps surprisingly, detailed descriptions of housing were provided by some children, and while there was very little difference according to gender, children with non-manual fathers were more likely to write about an imagined rural idyll and to describe living in the countryside. Other aspects of imagined futures described by children differed quite markedly according to gender. Car ownership, domestic labour and childcare, work and occupations (whether their own work or their imagined future partner's job), were gendered. Boys were more likely to write about the skills they

associated with the work they imagined. Another unexpected feature of a third of the essays was the mention of money, and boys were more likely to mention money than girls. Leisure pursuits were also slightly influenced by gender, and girls with non-manual fathers were more likely to write about leisure than boys with non-manual fathers. A fifth of children wrote about anticipated holidays but, again perhaps surprisingly, differences in social class were not marked. As noted, the style of writing was also analysed, and girls were slightly more likely to write in a narrative, story-telling style. Ability appeared to make very little difference to any of the aspects of the essays, apart from the (unsurprising) finding that more able children provided fuller narratives.

## Conclusions

This paper has presented some preliminary descriptive findings from analysis of a sub-sample of essays written by children aged 11 in 1969. A key objective of this paper is to highlight this part of the NCDS archive as a resource for researchers to utilise, and we hope we have given some indication of the richness of the data provided by the children, and scope for further analysis. Further papers are planned that focus in greater depth on aspects of content of the essays –specifically, the links between social class background and children’s aspirations for and understandings of paid employment; the ways in which children mentioned or described how they imagined combining paid and domestic work; the narrative qualities of some of the essays and the strategies children used to respond to this research task, as well as some of the ethical questions raised by using archived qualitative data of this kind.

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## Appendix A: List of variables describing the content of the essays

serial	Serial number to link the essay to the quantitative record
Words	Number of words in the essay
Mother	Whether the cohort member's mother is mentioned
Father	Whether the cohort member's father is mentioned
Siblings	Whether the cohort member's siblings are mentioned
Othfam	Whether other family members are mentioned
Animals	Whether animals or pets are mentioned
Friends	Whether friends are mentioned
Livsit	Description of household at 25 (see coding scheme below for further details)
Married	Intentions for marriage by age 25 (see coding scheme below for further details)
Kids	Intentions for children by age 25 (see coding scheme below for further details)
Occn	Number of occupations mentioned
housewife	Whether cohort member explicitly mentions being a housewife
partocc	Partner's occupation mentioned
Occsk	Skills and activities described in relation to paid work (see coding scheme below for further details)
hourswk	Hours of work discussed (see coding scheme below for further details)
Occsoc	Social aspects of work mentioned (see coding scheme below for further details)
Money	Money, savings or earnings mentioned in the essay
Leisure	Leisure activities mentioned in the essay
Holidays	Holidays mentioned in the essay
Housing	Housing mentioned in the essay (see coding scheme below for further details)
Location	Does the child mention where they will be living at age 25? (see coding scheme below for further details)
domlab	Does the child mention domestic labour in the essay & if so what type (see coding scheme below for further details)
Car	Is a car mentioned in the essay (see coding scheme below for further details)
Travel	Is travel (apart from holidays) mentioned in the essay?
Football	Is football mentioned in the essay
Workch	Does the essay mention how paid work/career will need to accommodate responsibilities for children?
Narrate	Does the essay include narrative elements?
Extra	Is there some aspect of the essay that makes it particularly unusual or interesting?

## Appendix B: Instructions for coders and coding frame for descriptive analysis of the essays

### *Instructions for coders*

- 1) Type the essay as exactly as possible including spelling mistakes and aiming to mimic the original punctuation. If part of the essay is illegible write [illegible] to cover that section. There is no need to preserve the way the essay is set out in terms of words per line. Make sure that the serial number is typed at the top of the essay so that it can be matched with other data. It is essential that the serial number is correct and that no numbers are transposed so please double check this.  
Using the word count facility on word count the number of words in the essay and type this at the end of the essay.
- 2) Code the essay for the main themes it includes using the coding frame provided and then enter the codes onto the excel spreadsheet provided. If you are unsure about a code then leave the cell blank.

### **Coding frame (detailed) revised 17<sup>th</sup> May [Final version]**

The majority of codes in the coding frame are dichotomous i.e. either the child has mentioned something in the essay or not. In all these cases 0 is used to indicate no mention and 1 to indicate that the topic has been mentioned.

**Serial:** This is the NCDS serial number, great accuracy is required

**Words:** number of words in essay (use word count in Word to obtain this)

**Mother:** whether cohort member's mother is mentioned (0= no mention, 1= mother mentioned),

Note that if parents are mentioned this should be included as a reference to mother

**Father:** whether cohort member's father is mentioned (0,1),

Note that if parents are mentioned this should be included as a reference to father

**Siblings:** whether siblings mentioned (0,1)

**Othfam:** whether other family mentioned (0,1),  
(e.g. 'I live with my Uncle')

**Animals:** whether pets or animals mentioned (0,1),

**Friends,** whether friends mentioned (0,1),  
e.g. could be going out with friends, going on holiday with friends, living with friends

**Livsit:** this is a summary of the child's anticipated living situation at age 25 the following codes should be used:

not mentioned, 0  
alone, 1  
still living with parents, 2  
married, 3  
cohabiting, 4  
friends, 5  
other family, 6  
changes during essay (e.g. gets married), 7  
other, 8

Note that if the child describes a change during the essay for example being single and then getting married this should be included as code 7

**married,**

not mentioned, 0  
will get/be married, 1  
doesn't want to be married, 2  
Not married 3  
other about marriage, 4

Note that the main aim of this is to identify the children who expect to be married, those who categorically say no they don't ever want to marry and those who simply state they are not married.

**kids**, how many wanted e.g. -1=not mentioned, 0, 1,2, 3 etc 8=vague; 9=other (e.g. foster child),

Note that if children are not mentioned, this would be coded as -1. Children who say something fairly vague like 'I'll have some kids' should be coded as 8 to indicate that exact numbers of children are not specified.

**Occn**: Number of occupations specified 0,1,2 etc 8 = vague (i.e. I will have a job , but occ not specified) 9=several mentioned as possibilities

Note that several children seem to mention doing more than one job e.g. 'I'm going to be a footballer and an electrician'. This would be coded as 2. However if the child lists lots of different occupations that they might consider doing then code this as 9.

**workch**: work accommodating to care of children (0,1),

In some cases, girls in particular talk about working and then giving up to have children or having children and then working once the children are older, both of these should be captured by the workch code.

**Housewife** Whether child expects to care for home and family (instead of ,or as well as having an occupation) (0,1)

**partocc**, Is partner's occupation mentioned(include housewife as an occupation), e.g.

0 = not mentioned

1=housewife

2=other occupation

If the child mentions what they expect their husband or wife's occupation to be then code this as 2, except if the occupation mentioned is housewife, which would be coded as 1. e.g. 'I am a vet and so is my husband'

**Occsk**, skills discussed in relation to occupation (0,1),

Use this to indicate that the child has given some level of detail about what skills or activities are involved in the work they intend to do.

**hourswk**, Hours worked discussed (0,1)

if there is any mention of the timing of work then use this code e.g. 'I will work part-time' or 'I will work from 7am to 1pm on the farm'

**Occsoc**, Social elements of work mentioned (0,1),

If the child mentions social relations at work e.g. working with friends, getting told off by the boss, enjoying talking to other teachers etc the n code this as 1.

**Money**, money, savings, earnings specifically mentioned (0,1),

Use this if wages or other finance is specifically mentioned e.g. 'I will have saved £600' or 'I earn good wages'

**Leisure**, leisure activities discussed, (0,1)

This covers a very wide range of leisure activities e.g. going to the pub, watching TV, reading, swimming, going for day trips, visiting relatives.

**holidays**, holidays specifically mentioned, (0,1)

This should only be used for explicit holidays and not for days out or traveling for work.

**housing**, nature of housing discussed e.g. flat/house/quiet/in the country,

not mentioned: 0

flat: 1

other house: 2

rural/countryside/cottage in the country/farm: 3

other : 4

If the child mentions that they live in a house or a bungalow, for example, this would be coded 2

**location**, location mentioned

not mentioned: 0

London: 1

Other U.K: 2

overseas: 3

more than one location mentioned 4

e.g. If the child mentions that they live in Denton, this would be coded 2; If they say Spain, this would be 3.

**domlab**, domestic labour discussed whether done by self or other,

, not mentioned, 0

, child care/babysitting, 1

, cooking cleaning etc, 2

, child care and cooking/cleaning, 3

DIY and gardening, 4

Multiple tasks, 5

Sewing, knitting, needlework 6

Other 7

Note use this if any domestic labour is discussed e.g. my wife will look after the children, or we will have a maid to clear up for us.

**Car**: car specifically mentioned,

not mentioned, 0

car as means of transport, 1

specific type of car (as possession), 2

**travel**: travel (apart from holidays) e.g. for work (0,1),

**football**: is football discussed (0,1)

many of the boys either want to be footballers or talk about being footballers in their leisure time

**Narrate**: does essay include narrative elements,

no narrative, 0

some narrative clauses (this happened then this happened), 1

complex or extended narrative, 2

Note that many essays are pure descriptions with no sense of the passing of time or one thing happening after another – these should be coded as 0.

Other essays have some narrative elements e.g. relating what will happen in a typical day, one activity after another these use the code 1  
In a few cases children have used the essay to tell an extended story about what will happen in their life these should use the full narrative code 2.

**Extra:** A very few essays (perhaps one in 20 stand out as being very different from the rest e.g. they have interpreted the task in an interesting and unusual way. Please use this code to identify essays that we may well want to look at again because they are so unusual.

## Appendix C: Examples of some selected complete essays

*Boy, ability score over 70 and 78 word essay.*

Serial number: 085016W

I AM 25 years old. I am married have two children. My friends are all round about the same age as I am. My hobbies are reading, printing and model making. At home I mend things that broken cultery chairs ect. I am a teacher. We live at B\*\*\* and go to the fair at holidays time and sometimes go to m\*\*\* and h\*\*\*. The year after I would like to work in London for a few years.

Words: 78

*Boy, ability score under 20 and 68 word essay*

X25062Y

I will try to be afootballplayer I done no if I will be marred I will be buying my self a fishing road and passing my time fishing and I will join a club I will not smoke or drink I might drink a shandy but not spirits I might buy a car if I had a car it wood be an mini or a seffer Austin cambright

Words: 68

*Girl, ability score over 70 and 90 word essay*

Serial number: 435040R

If I was 25 I would start studying to be a Wren. When I had studied for as long as I should, I would start as a secretary and perhaps the captain of a ship would invite me onto his ship to go for a voyage to another country or a small island. I would learn a few languages perhaps and make friends with people from other countries. During the holidays I would go and visit my family. Perhaps meat a jolly sailor and have a family of my own.

Words: 90

*Girl, ability score under 20 and 87 word essay*

097014K

My a Nuses now and the chin line me and I like mean to. The Nuses like me that I work with and I like mean to we all like she more. My called is [name] I my 25 years old my write a troy about by life well I like my work and the Nuses said I wook be a good Nuses. Put I went in work a Nuses and I had to be it. I had the life with baege and I liked the work.

Words: 87

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