



Pathways to Social Class: A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility

Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson

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Calling for a broader, new approach to social mobility research, *Pathways to Social Class: A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility* moves beyond pure statistics to use qualitative techniques--such as life stories and family case studies--to examine more closely the dynamics of mobility and address more fundamental sociological questions. Up to now, the extensive sociological literature on mobility has been based around the survey method. As a result, we have access to abundant statistical data, but there is little information available to explain how and why people follow particular life paths. To overcome these limitations, Bertaux and Thompson have developed an alternative, complementary approach using life stories, case histories of whole families over several generations, or case studies of local communities. Employing the case-study approach does not prevent the identification of structural trends; on the contrary, it allows us to analyze those collective processes through their local effects, restoring the links with classics of sociological thought.

Bertaux and Thompson tackle such problems as: What exactly is transmitted between generations; is it wealth or land, occupational models or skills, social networks, or values and orientations? What kinds of assets can immigrants draw on? How can a social elite survive the upheaval of a popular revolution? What is the impact of marriage on the mobility of men and women? How far can belonging to one locality rather than another, or choosing a particular house, shape mobility paths and aspirations? Do dreams of mobility matter? This volume promises to inspire other sociologists towards the richly revealing and highly significant findings that a broader-based-approach to social mobility will enable.

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