Does Upward Social Mobility Increase Life Satisfaction?
A Longitudinal Analysis Using British and Swiss Panel Data

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Abstract

A main assumption of social production function theory is that status is a major determinant of subjective well-being (SWB). From the perspective of the dissociative hypothesis, however, upward social mobility may be linked to identity problems, distress, and reduced levels of SWB because upwardly mobile people lose their ties to their class of origin. In this paper, we examine whether or not one of these arguments holds. We employ the United Kingdom and Switzerland as case studies because both are linked to distinct notions regarding social inequality and upward mobility.

Longitudinal multilevel analyses based on panel data (UK: BHPS, Switzerland: SHP) allow us to reconstruct individual trajectories of life satisfaction (as a cognitive component of SWB) along with events of intragenerational and intergenerational upward mobility—taking into account previous levels of life satisfaction, dynamic class membership, and well-studied determinants of SWB.

Our results show some evidence for effects of social class and social mobility on well-being in the UK sample, while there are no such effects in the Swiss sample. The UK findings support the idea of dissociative effects in terms of a negative effect of intergenerational upward mobility on SWB.

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1. Introduction

Subjective well-being (SWB) is a major goal of human actions as already outlined in ancient times by Aristotle (approx. 330 BC/2012; see also Tatarkiewicz, 1976). It is even the most important goal according to the social production function theory of Lindenberg and his colleagues (Lindenberg, 1996; Ormel, Lindenberg, Steverink, & Verbrugge, 1999). Consequently, the pursuit of SWB is a crucial factor of decisions and actions. An important motive of social (and spatial) mobility is to improve one's life situation and thereby SWB. Since SWB is both an outcome and contributing factor and, thus, a key prerequisite for educational attainment and a successful occupational career (Andres & Wyn, 2010; Kim-Prieto, Diener, Tamir, Scollon, & Diener, 2005), a feedback loop between mobility and SWB appears to be plausible (Diener, 2009; Keller, Samuel, Semmer, & Bergman, 2014; Samuel, 2014). People climbing up the "social ladder" should arrive at more positive evaluations of their lives as they are gaining access to further rewards in various forms, such as prestige and desirable lifestyles. But can we find evidence that upward social mobility increases their SWB?

Status is a major first-order-instrumental goal and its attainment increases SWB. This is a core assumption of the social production function theory by Lindenberg (1996) and his colleagues (Ormel et al., 1999). Yet, from the perspective of the dissociative hypothesis (Houle & Martin, 2011; Lipset & Bendix, 1959; Sorokin, 1959), upward social mobility may be linked to identity problems, distress, and reduced SWB since people who climb up the "social ladder" lose their ties to their class of origin. Dealing with the question of whether or not one of these arguments holds, we will look at both intergenerational and intragenerational upward social

mobility applying the same theoretical frameworks to the two types of upward social mobility and their links to life satisfaction. Not all events of intragenerational upward mobility are necessarily events of intergenerational upward mobility. An illustrative example may be the case of the son of medical doctors who first becomes a mechanic and later in life does further education to become a car seller setting up his own business.

In most of the currently available population surveys, researchers include life satisfaction as a measure related to SWB. This is the cognitive component of SWB based on an evaluation of past, present, and future conditions (Campbell, 1981; Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2005). Longitudinal analyses based on panel data will allow us to reconstruct life satisfaction trajectories after events of upward mobility taking into account previous levels of life satisfaction. Analysing the question of how social mobility affects life satisfaction, we consider two countries: the UK and Switzerland. Both settings are linked to distinct notions regarding social inequality and upward mobility. The UK is a representative of the liberal welfare state regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990), where discourses on class and upward social mobility are highly salient in the political and in the public sphere (Gerteis & Savage, 1998; Li & Devine, 2011). Switzerland is a special case characterised by elements of liberal and conservative welfare regime types, where class differences and mobility presumably matter less. This is maybe due to the rather high standard of living. The UK ranks 19th on the inequality-adjusted Human Development Index while Switzerland comes in 7th (United Nations Development Programme, 2013).

The innovative potential of our study lies in a) the consideration of both intergenerational and intragenerational mobility and its relation to SWB, b) the longitudinal perspective involving large panel datasets, and c) the comparison of the UK and Switzerland considering key elements on the macro level (society) such as class consciousness.

Following this introduction, we theorise the link between upward mobility and SWB. We consider two approaches and derive two contrasting hypotheses. This is followed by a brief description of how the UK and Switzerland differ in aspects that are important to the examined link between upward mobility and SWB. We postulate a third hypothesis on what we expect in regard to the mobility-SWB link comparing the UK and Switzerland. In a next step, we present the datasets and measures employed. Multilevel models with fixed effects serve to analyse the research questions. Finally, we discuss the findings and limitations of this study.

2. Upward Mobility and Subjective Well-Being

It is a widely held belief that status and wealth affect subjective well-being (SWB) positively. This is reflected in the efforts of many people to transcend their social background. By being upwardly mobile they hope to benefit from various rewards they believe to be associated with desirable societal positions. However, findings from a range of disciplines provide evidence that these benefits are not to be taken for granted. Contrary to popular opinion, it has been established that there is a diminishing marginal utility of rewards associated with social mobility such as income (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Frey & Stutzer, 2002). Easterlin (2005) finds even zero marginal utility when analysing consequences of income increases from a longitudinal perspective. Taking into account sociological and socio-psychological perspectives further questions whether upward mobility is associated with higher levels of SWB. But does leaving one's class of origin have only positive consequences? Houle (2011) derives different hypotheses regarding the impact of (intragenerational) social mobility on SWB. According to the dissociative thesis—based on the mobility research of Sorokin (1959)—a negative link between upward mobility and SWB can be expected, since even upwardly mobile individuals may "never become fully accustomed to life in a new and alien class position"

(Houle, 2011, p. 758). Thus, they may experience feelings of anxiety, strain, and distress instead of a boost in SWB. Following the two other hypotheses outlined by Houle (2011), no link between upward mobility and SWB is expected because only downward mobility may be assumed to go along with feelings of distress and failure (Newman, 1988). Furthermore, mental health may be shaped by their current social class position rather than by mobility patterns (Blau, 1956). In this sense, there is disagreement as to how upward social mobility affects SWB. Our study revolves around two competing hypotheses pertaining to the effects of intragenerational and intergenerational upward social mobility. We derive them drawing on the rational choice perspective of social production function theory and the dissociative hypothesis, which has evolved from the classical inequality and conflict perspective. A third rather exploratory hypothesis relates to a country comparison and is backed by a look at institutional characteristics of the UK and Switzerland.

2.1 The Rational Perspective of the Social Production Function Theory

The main objective of social production function theory (Lindenberg, 1996; Ormel et al., 1999) is to provide a rational perspective on human decisions and behaviour. At the centre of this theoretical framework lies the assumption that all individuals strive for subjective well-being (SWB) as a universal goal. This goal is reached via five instrumental first-order goals: first, stimulation/activation as the maintenance of an optimal arousal level; second, comfort in terms of absence of physiological needs; third, status understood as control over resources; fourth, behavioural confirmation defined as compliance to the expectations of reference groups and one's own identity; and fifth, affection in the sense of emotional relationships with others (Ormel et al., 1999, p. 67). To attain these instrumental goals and, eventually, SWB requires activities and endowments as well as resources. From a socio-structural perspective, status is a

central first-order instrumental goal in this framework. Status is linked to social well-being, i.e. feelings of approval, worth, and prestige in the eyes of others and in an individual's self-perception (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012). "Status refers to relative ranking to other people, based mainly on control over scarce resources" (Ormel et al., 1999, p. 68). Main activities and endowments to produce status are occupation, life style, and excellence in different realms of life (work, sports, education). Main resources to produce status are education, social class, and unique skills (Lindenberg 1996; Ormel et al., 1999). Whereas a change in activities and endowments has a short-term impact on SWB, resources and their use are linked to long-term effects on SWB. Upward social mobility is assumed to produce status and, thus, SWB. Upward social mobility may be accomplished by reaching a higher educational or occupational level than the parents (*inter*generational mobility) and by improving one's position within the social hierarchy by changing profession or reaching a higher position within a profession (*intra*generational mobility). According to this economic and rational framework, people who experienced intergenerational and/or intragenerational upward mobility should show increased SWB. We assume that this boost in SWB is genuinely determined by upward mobility and goes beyond effects due to an income increase.

Another mechanism behind the assumption of a positive correlation between upward mobility and well-being explored in mobility research relates to social comparison. Samuel, Bergman, and Hupka-Brunner (2013) suggest that "being more successful than significant others will boost well-being levels while being less successful than significant others will decrease well-being" (p. 78). This argument is based on a combination of psychological with structural theories that do not contradict the rational framework outlined above since both theoretical concepts argue that status in terms of a relative position produces well-being. According to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, individuals can gain a positive self-evaluation (as a major prerequisite of well-being) through social comparisons with reference

groups. Comparing with others, people always tend to search for better assessments, i.e. they want to see that they perform better than others. Consistent with this argument, sociological mobility theories (e.g. Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Treiman, 1970) implicitly or explicitly refer to the "status maintenance motive" as a major drive behind educational attainment and occupational mobility. Status decline is a major risk particularly for individuals from higher social origins that has to be avoided (Becker, 2003; Breen & Yaish, 2006; Holm & Jaeger, 2008; Stocké, 2007). These arguments suggest that success is to reach or even surpass one's parents or family's educational and occupational level.[1] Combining and summarising the different approaches with their rational choice assumptions lead us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a: Intragenerational and intergenerational upward mobility is associated with an increase in SWB.

2.2 The Dissociative Hypothesis

In contrast to the thesis of a positive effect of upward mobility on SWB, the dissociative hypothesis states that upward mobility (and also downward mobility) lead to distress and thus lower well-being. The dissociative hypothesis originates in Sorokin's (1959) classical work on the links between mobility and well-being. According to his concept, there is a direct link between social class mobility and well-being; "any changes in social class—up or down—are taxing because mobile individuals are uprooted from the position they are most familiar and have difficulty adjusting to their new class position, never fully become accustomed to the norms, values, and expected behaviors of their current social class" (Houle, 2011, pp. 758–759). This assumption is based on two premises. First, upward mobility is conceived as a life event

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[1] This tendency to reproduce and surpass the class position of origin is also emphasised by Bourdieu and Passeron (1970).

that involves change and may cause identity inconsistencies that are accompanied by various adverse effects (Lipset & Bendix, 1959). This argument relates to class identification in terms of a feeling of belonging (Centers, 1949; Jackman & Jackman, 1973). Thus, upward mobility is stressful and a cause of chronic strain that eventually leads to mental problems—as expressed in decreasing SWB. Second, social isolation after a change of social class position is another key factor behind the decrease in well-being (Ellis & Lane, 1967), since social isolation goes along with a lack of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).[2] Explicit assumptions of a negative impact of mobility on mental and physical health have also been developed in early stress theory and clinical studies (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; House, 1974; cf. Houle, 2011).

Empirical evidence corroborating these assumptions is rare. Most of the research looks at intergenerational mobility while analyses of intragenerational mobility or both are few and far between. Moreover, studies in this area tend not to take the strong relation between job and social class position into account (problem of linear dependence in mobility research, Hendrickx, De Graaf, Lammers, & Ultee, 1993; Sobel, 1981). Consequently, many studies are unable to identify whether changes in social class position *or* job changes drive the variance in SWB (Houle, 2011, p. 759). While preliminary results hint to links between job relocation and stress as well as disruptions of family life (Munton, 1990) and psychological distress (Martin, 1999), a recent analysis by Houle (2011) using the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study does not find support for the dissociative hypothesis. Considering the dependence between prior and current social class as well as control variables (e.g. cognitive ability, marital status, unemployment), social mobility is not associated with psychological distress. Instead, his results indicate that mobile individuals acculturate to the class of destination, i.e. their level of distress (and presumably, their level of SWB) adapts to the level of their new class. Houle's findings are,

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[2] This alternative reading can even be linked to social production function theory (Ormel et al., 1999): a lack of capital means a lack of resources and endowments to produce affection (emotional relations) and behavioural confirmation (compliance with reference groups and one's own identity).

however, based on data that are only representative of non-Hispanic white American high school graduates born in the late 1930s (Houle, 2011). The generalisability of his findings is therefore limited.

The effects of intergenerational and intragenerational upward mobility on life satisfaction are likely to be different. Based on the dissociative hypothesis, intergenerational upward mobility may be clearly linked to a decrease in life satisfaction since people are most familiar with their class of origin. Intragenerational upward mobility, however, does not necessarily have the same consequences since intragenerational upward mobility without intergenerational upward mobility is not associated with leaving a familiar class position, but entails passing a class position with no strong ties. This line of reasoning would, however, add an additional layer of complexity to our investigation that will not be possible to frame with current theoretical approaches. Thus, exploring the dissociative hypothesis further, we hypothesise for both types of upward social mobility:

Hypothesis 1b: Intragenerational and intergenerational upward mobility is associated with a decrease in SWB.

3. Macro Settings and the Link between Upward Mobility and Subjective Well-Being: Comparing the United Kingdom and Switzerland

The United Kingdom and Switzerland have been selected as country cases because they exhibit similarities and differences that are relevant to the link between upward mobility and SWB. There are two scenarios as outlined in regard to the individual level: according to social production function theory, we hypothesise upward mobility to increase SWB, while the dissociative hypothesis lets us expect the opposite. Bringing in the macro level of society into

this theoretical exploration, we focus on four characteristics that, we argue, will influence the degree of association between social mobility and SWB: prosperity level of a society, income inequality, welfare regime, and class consciousness.

A first factor that may affect the strength of the impact of upward mobility on individual quality of life is the *prosperity level of a society*. Festinger's (1954) classical social comparison theory holds that people always compare with other people and in particular with people who are worse off than themselves (downward comparison; Wills, 1981). In this line of argument, we assume that in less well-off societies upward mobility should have a stronger positive effect on SWB than in affluent societies, because in less well-off societies such a positively distinct position can be more easily gained via upward mobility. A similar assumption can be deduced from the big-fish-little-pond effect (Marsh, 1987): high prosperity of a society should go along with low importance of individual class position and, thus, social mobility. The UK and Switzerland clearly differ in their prosperity levels. According to World Bank data, Switzerland is characterised by a high GDP per capita that increased between 2000 (35,639 US dollars) and 2012 (78,928 US dollars). In comparison, the UK has been performing economically worse during this period with a lower GDP per capita and a lower increase (2000: 25,362 US dollars, 2012: 38,920 US dollars). Considering these figures, upward mobility should have a lower impact on SWB in Switzerland since prosperity and quality of life are higher than in the UK.

The type of *welfare regime* may also affect the link between upward mobility and SWB. This factor is an indication of governmental efforts to improve the living conditions of its citizens. Welfare regimes are key drivers in the structuring of social inequality (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The stronger a welfare state attempts to enhance living conditions the less important is class or upward mobility for SWB. This is because the welfare state compensates for disadvantages that may result from low education or low status (like in the social-democratic or Scandinavian welfare regime type) by, for example, a redistribution of wealth via tax laws

and social security institutions. Liberal welfare regimes are based on the idea of a free market with only a few interventions by the state (Esping-Andersen 1990). Although the state does not provide profound support, the economic strength of liberal countries ensures in many cases a minimum average welfare level. In regard to the welfare regime type, the UK and Switzerland are similar. According to the classification of Esping-Andersen (1990), they represent liberal welfare states that are characterised by a dominance of the market, a central role of the private sector, and a low level of state intervention with social policies aiming at the prevention of poverty rather than the reduction of inequality. However, some scholars stress that the Swiss welfare regime is a mix of liberalism and conservatism (Schröder, 2013; Trampusch, 2010). The welfare state is less developed, Calvinism is strong, workers' representations and social-democratic political representation are comparably weak (liberalism), and there are regional health service schemes, pension, and unemployment schemes (conservatism). Taking this into account, we assume that class and upward mobility have a stronger impact on SWB in the UK than in Switzerland.

Income inequality is another factor that affects how upward mobility matters in regard to SWB. The higher the distances between social class positions in a society (i.e. higher inequality, strong class identification), the stronger the effect of mobility in SWB since (upward) mobility is a more serious life event that will likely induce more pronounced identity problems and a stronger loss of class ties. Considering the GINI index of income inequality (World Bank data), Switzerland (2000: 33.7%) is only a bit more equal in regard to income distribution than the UK (1999: 36%).

While the arguments in regard to country differences outlined so far are implicitly linked to hypothesis 1a derived from social production function theory—a positive relation between upward mobility and SWB—a last factor shall be explored that can be linked to hypothesis 1b (dissociative hypothesis): *class consciousness*. This term relates to what Marx and Engels

(1848/1967) named "class for itself" (Klasse für sich) and refers to common interests and feelings of belonging. Weber (1978) also emphasised that classes or strata are characterised by distinctive lifestyles and world views. If class consciousness is strong and class is an important element of people's identity, moving upwards (or downwards) should have a stronger impact on SWB since getting more distant to the class of origin is presumably more problematic. In countries where class consciousness is low, upward mobility and becoming distant to one's class of origin should not matter as much as in countries where class is an important category. Class consciousness is stronger in the UK, as class voting and trade union density are higher in the UK (Lane & Ersson, 1999). Jansen, Evans and de Graaf (2013) even show that the UK is among the countries where class matters most, while Switzerland is among the countries with the lowest importance of class in regard to voting behaviour.

The different arguments in regard to these four macro characteristics lead to the same assumption:

Hypothesis 2: Intragenerational and intergenerational upward mobility have a stronger impact on SWB in the UK than in Switzerland.

4. Data and Methods

4.1. Samples, Dependent Variable, and Independent Variables

We analyse the effects of intergenerational and intragenerational upward mobility on SWB using the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and the Swiss Household Panel (SHP). Both projects offer longitudinal data of high quality covering SWB and key variables to calculate social mobility. To control for age selection effects, we restrict our analysis samples to those between 25 and 85 years old. People below 25 years are more likely to be still transitioning from late adolescence to adulthood and from school to work, and, thus, exhibiting erratic SWB

patterns (Buchholz et al., 2009; Keller et al., 2014). Respondents above 85 years may introduce selection bias because they differ systematically on several variables compared to younger respondents. To account for further selection (due to current migration experiences or socialisation in another country), we include only native people. We included in the British sample (BHPS) only people who mention British as their first citizenship, and the Swiss sample (SHP) Swiss citizens and those born in Switzerland.[3] Using 12 waves of the BHPS (1996–2008) and 13 waves of the SHP (2000–2012), we are left with 34,970 and 33,174 person-years, respectively.

To measure SWB we employ self-reported general life satisfaction. In the BHPS, we use answers generated by the item "How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with your life overall?" (answers range from 0 = "Not satisfied at all" to 7 = "Completely satisfied"). The SHP uses a similar question: "In general, how satisfied are you with your life if 0 means 'not at all satisfied' and 10 means 'completely satisfied'?" In the BHPS, 9.39 per cent report being completely satisfied, with 12.23 per cent of the respondents in the SHP giving this answer. The standardised means of general life satisfaction do not differ significantly. To allow for comparison of effect sizes, we standardise the outcome variable in both datasets.[4]

To gauge the effect of upward mobility on SWB, we use a set of dummies indicating intergenerational and intragenerational upward mobility, the social phenomenon we focus on, and downward mobility as a control (reference category: no mobility). We also control for class membership to separate the genuine effects of social mobility from class effects, as SWB is

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[3] In Switzerland, citizenship is not determined by place of birth.
[4] In regard to the question of whether or not the life satisfaction measure is referring to the same concept in Switzerland and the UK, we did some validity checks in regard to construct validity using European Social Survey (ESS) data (equalizing the Swiss and the UK sample in regard to people born in the respective country and birth cohorts/age groups). The association between a single-item measure of life satisfaction and a single-item measure of happiness (Kendall's tau-b) is .64 in the Swiss sample and .60 in the UK sample, while taking into account all ESS countries this association ranges from .43 (Ukraine) to .67 (Sweden). Comparing different birth cohorts regarding these associations reveals an intermediate stability over time. However, as the cohort differences follow the same patterns in the UK and Switzerland, this is another indicator that the single-item measure of life satisfaction can be applied to both samples and does measure the same.

expected to be generally higher among higher status groups with high income according to social production function theory (Ormel et al., 1999). Our operationalisation of class is based on a slightly condensed version of the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero class scheme (Erikson, Goldthorpe, & Portocarero, 1979). A main rationale for these minor amendments has been our attempt to emphasise the hierarchical nature of this scheme to use it for the measurement of upward and downward mobility (Table 1). In particular, we collapsed some categories in the middle of this scheme since it is hard to order some of these middle categories according to a hierarchy (e.g. self-employed without employees and manual supervisors). We borrow and adapt some terminology of the German Employment Class scheme of Mayer and Aisenbrey (2007) to name the middle categories. Another reasoning behind the reduction of categories is also to prevent biases caused by possible changes in the occupational structure over time, although the class concept based on the Weberian perspective (Breen, 2005) appears to be generally stable in regard to its temporal validity.

Intragenerational upward mobility refers to the state that the respondent changed his class position to a higher position in regard to the previous year (the preceding wave of data gathering), intragenerational downward mobility is a change in class position to a lower position. The reference category in our models is no intragenerational mobility, i.e. the respondent has the same class positions at both waves of data gathering.

We conceptualise intergenerational mobility in terms of the relation between the respondents' class position at the time of data gathering (wave) and the highest class position achieved by the parents (BHPS: parents' class position at the age of 14; SHP: parents' class position at the age of 15).[5] Again, upward mobility refers to the state that the respondent has acquired a position that is higher than the highest class position of his or her parents (mother or

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[5] We did some validity checks in regard to our operationalisation of social class. Comparisons between a sample reduced to people up to 65 years of age and the sample used here do not show significant differences regarding the links between class, mobility, and life satisfaction. Our conceptualisation seems to be robust for changes in the occupational structure.

father), downward mobility refers to the state that the respondent only acquired a lower class position than his or her parents. Reference is if the respondent reached the same class position as his or her parents (i.e. the highest class position of the mother or father).[6]

– insert Table 1 here: Summary description of the class scheme (following Erikson et al., 1979 and Mayer & Aisenbrey, 2007) –

Building on the vast literature of predictors of well-being (see Diener, 2009), we control for subjective health status, age, age squared, and living with a partner. However, we decided not to include satisfaction with financial situation as this will cause endogeneity. Satisfaction with life in general already entails satisfaction with financial situation. The descriptive statistics of all variables included in the models for the UK and Switzerland are presented in Table 2.

– insert Table 2 here: Descriptive statistics –

4.2. Estimation and Specification

We use a fixed effects approach to analyse the impact of upward social mobility on SWB. This allows us to control for time invariant characteristics using only within-person variance. We do not use between-person variance to estimate the regression coefficients because this variability could reflect omitted variable bias. Furthermore, for least square estimates to be consistent when using between-person variance the following must hold: $\text{Cov}(\alpha_i, X_{it}) = 0$. In other words, the unobserved heterogeneity α_i should not be correlated with one or more of our explanatory

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[6] Although there is an association between intergenerational and intragenerational mobility, since it is likely that a person who is upwardly mobile at the same time reaches a status that is higher than the parental status, the only weak empirical association is far below the threshold of multicollinearity (UK sample r = .13, CH sample r = .09).

variables X_{it}. This assumption is unlikely to be met in our case. Unobserved personality traits and general ability, for example, will affect one or more variables contained in $\boldsymbol{M}_{it}$ (see equation 1). Hence, we estimate the following model:

$$y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_m \boldsymbol{M}_{it} + \beta_c \boldsymbol{C}_{it} + \alpha_i + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

y_{it} is the SWB of person i at time t. $\boldsymbol{M}_{it}$ is a vector of mobility variables comprising dummies for inter- and intragenerational upward and downward mobility (reference category: no mobility) as well as dummies for class membership (reference category: higher service class and higher controllers). $\boldsymbol{C}_{it}$ is a vector of control variables. α_i represents unobserved heterogeneity, u_{it} is the idiosyncratic error.

Using this specification, we control for class membership but will not be able to estimate effects of specific transitions between classes on SWB. Models using a transition matrix could answer this type of question. However, they reduce the statistical power greatly as many transitions are rare even when using large datasets as we do. This is not a problem as our theoretical focus is on upward social mobility and not on specific transitions. We performed a Hausman test for both samples, rejecting the null hypothesis that differences in coefficients are not systematic when comparing random effects and fixed effects estimates. Thus, we estimate fixed effects models because they are consistent under the null hypothesis *and* the alternative hypothesis.[7]

To test whether the effects we found for the UK and Switzerland are different (hypothesis 2), we use the following test:

$$t = \frac{b_1 - b_2}{\sqrt{se_1{}^2 + se_2{}^2}}$$

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[7] We are aware of the reliability problems the Hausman test was found to exhibit (Clark & Linzer, 2012). Yet, there is still no widely accepted alternative.

t is the test statistic, b_1 and b_2 are the coefficients of a given variable of the UK and Swiss sample, respectively, and se_1 and se_2 the associated standard errors.

In our statistical analyses, we treat the data on life satisfaction (in terms of SWB) as cardinal. The data on life satisfaction has been gathered using a rating scale ranging from 0 to 10 in the SHP and from 1 to 7 in the BHPS surveys. On the one hand, we follow Ng (1997) and regard cardinal interpretations of SWB as possible. A major argument to assume that SWB is a metric is that the SWB measurements in both surveys (SHP and BHPS) have a theoretical centre point. Thus, it can be assumed that respondents implicitly oriented towards this mean and the extremes and the distance between points 2 and 3 is the same, like the difference between points 6 and 7. Furthermore, even if SWB is not regarded as cardinal but ordinal, analysing SWB with techniques of data analysis designed for cardinal (metric) variables (e.g. OLS regression), does not lead to significant biases (Diener & Tov, 2012; OECD, 2013; Oesch & Lipps, 2013).

5. Results

In the multilevel fixed effects models, we estimate the effects of intragenerational and intergenerational upward mobility (downward mobility as a control; reference: no mobility) along with the effects of class (reference: upper service class) and of certain time-variant control variables on life satisfaction (subjective well-being). Furthermore, the statistical procedure controls for individual time-invariant characteristics such as sex, average mobility, personality traits, individual ability, etc. The structure of our models with observation points nested within individuals finds support in an intraclass correlation that ranges around 0.60 for the UK sample and Swiss sample. About 60 per cent of the variance is on the level of persons (between variance), whereas approximately 40 per cent of the variance resides on the time level (within variance).

Results for the UK sample (Table 3) show that intragenerational upward mobility does not affect life satisfaction. Interestingly, intergenerational upward mobility has a negative effect on life satisfaction. People who reached a class position that is higher than the class position of their parents are less satisfied with their lives than people who reached the same or a lower position. There are also significant class effects: Members of the lower service class exhibit significantly lower life satisfaction compared to the upper service class. The same is true for the lower middle class (reference category: upper service class). Finally, the class of un- and semi-skilled workers experiences a rather strong negative effect on their life satisfaction (reference category: upper service class), having the lowest life satisfaction level compared to the other class positions. If class is thought to exhibit an intrinsic or extrinsic hierarchy, distance to the upper service class is associated with a greater SWB penalty. In regard to the control variables—well-studied factors of SWB—our longitudinal results indicate the expected effects: while with rising health problems life satisfaction decreases, sequences of living with a partner

17

are positively associated with life satisfaction. The negative effect of the linear age term and the positive effect of the squared age term match a u-shaped age effect on life satisfaction. As was found in numerous studies, SWB decreases with the establishment of adult life and work, followed by a stagnation of this decline or even an increase of SWB in old age.

– insert Table 3 here: Fixed effects regression of life satisfaction on intergenerational and intragenerational mobility and class –

For Switzerland, intergenerational and intragenerational mobility does not exert an effect on life satisfaction (as an important component of SWB) (Table 3). Furthermore, class does not seem to affect life satisfaction in Switzerland since there is no significant class effect. In line with our expectations and as is the case with the UK sample, subjective health status, age, age squared, and living with a partner are all associated with life satisfaction. Again, subjective health problems (health status) are associated with lower life satisfaction, people who live with a partner show higher life satisfaction. Life satisfaction decreases with age, but increases again towards older ages.

Comparing the UK and Switzerland, there are some indications that in the UK class and intergenerational upward mobility play a stronger role for life satisfaction. Although only the difference of the estimates in regard to intergenerational upward mobility is significant, it is obvious that for the UK more class effects are estimated as significant drivers of SWB.[8]

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[8] The test we use will only rarely yield a significant finding if one of the estimates is not significant. This is because its associated standard error will be large and thus decrease the size of the test statistic.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper attempted to shed light on the relation between upward intragenerational and intergenerational mobility and SWB. We analysed the impact of these mobility variables controlling for well-studied factors of SWB on life satisfaction. Considering both the UK and the Swiss results, upward social mobility plays only a limited role in regard to life satisfaction, and thus, presumably for SWB. While there is no finding that supports hypothesis 1a—that upward mobility would increase SWB—there is one finding corroborating hypothesis 1b: In the case of the UK, intergenerational upward mobility is negatively related to SWB. However, intragenerational mobility—a change towards a higher class position in regard to the preceding wave of data gathering—showed no effect on life satisfaction. In light of the dissociative thesis, this finding suggests that intragenerational upward mobility is of lower importance to life satisfaction than intergenerational upward mobility since leaving a newly acquired class when climbing the "social ladder" probably does not entail a dissociative effect as leaving one's class of origin does.

These findings do not provide evidence for our argument we derived from social production function theory (Lindenberg, 1996; Ormel et al., 1999). One result pertaining to the UK corroborates the dissociative hypothesis (Sorokin, 1959). Our interpretation is that reaching a higher class position than one's parents may go along with a dissociation from former class ties, alienation from the new class environment, and mental problems all of which are likely to decrease SWB. Thus, an increasing distance of the social position toward the class of origin would show the same negative effects as the increasing distance toward parental values (Hadjar et al., 2012). However, this interpretation is only supported by one finding. One possible explanation for the limited evidence is that the increase in SWB due to the gain in rewards associated with upward mobility and the decrease in SWB due to dissociation neutralise each

other. An alternative explanation might be that a sizeable share of intergenerational mobility happens in the lower ranks of the class structure. This kind of mobility could only yield limited benefits which might lead to frustration as ambitious mobility goals remain unfulfilled. We explored this idea using transition matrices where we allow for all conceivable mobility patterns. However, none of these transitions were significant in our models expect those that indicate no mobility at all (e.g., transition from class A_t to A_{t+1}). Further results based on our data do not provide any support for this alternative interpretation, but again hint to class effects on SWB.

Yet, the class effects in the UK—we controlled for to figure out the genuine mobility effects—provide some support for Lindenberg's social production function theory (Lindenberg, 1996; Ormel et al. 1999). The class position with the lowest status and income (un- and semi-skilled manual workers, farm labour) exhibit the lowest life satisfaction, while the upper service class reports on average higher life satisfaction. However, there are no significant class differences in life satisfaction in the Swiss sample.

We assumed stronger class and mobility effects on SWB in the UK in hypothesis 2. Our findings strongly support this assumption because there are no class and mobility effects in regard to the Swiss sample, while in the UK sample we find a negative effect of upward mobility on life satisfaction and some class effects. They indicate significantly lower life satisfaction of the lower service class, the lower middle class and the un- and semi-skilled workers (in comparison to the upper service class) in the UK. Class seems to matter more in the UK, while in Switzerland class position does not make any difference for SWB. One of the reasons for this is probably higher economic prosperity and quality of life in Switzerland as we outlined in the theoretical derivation of hypothesis 2. An alternative interpretation could also refer to stronger social consensus between different societal groups (e.g. classes) in Switzerland with its consociational tradition (Lijphart, 1999). In Switzerland, the different classes are more similar in regard to attitudes, values, norms and behaviour and, thus, upward mobility and

20

reaching a new class position and a new class environment does not lead to alienation like in the UK where class environments differ much more.

We provide further evidence that typical SWB determinants such as age, health, and romantic relationship are important determinants of life satisfaction in both countries. These variables are strongly linked to affect and comfort as other important first-order instrumental goals for the production of SWB according to Lindenberg's (1996) social production function theory. These "weak" factors may be even more essential for SWB than "hard" factors such as status.

On a methodological level, we disentangled the effects of mobility and current social class by including both variables into our models and control for social origin and differences in general ability as time-invariant variables by using a fixed effects estimation procedure. Thereby, we account for methodological challenges outlined by Houle (2011). Additionally, we also controlled for typical time-variant factors of SWB such as age, health, and living in a relationship. Our models should therefore deliver unbiased and consistent estimates of the effects of upward social mobility on SWB.

However, summarising our results and drawing conclusions, we have some limitations of our research in mind: first, our dependent variable does not measure SWB as a construct, but the cognitive dimension—life satisfaction. Yet, due to restricted space (e.g. length of questionnaires), longitudinal surveys mainly focus on life satisfaction as one important component of SWB. In other studies, the affective component of SWB (happiness) is highly correlated with the cognitive component (life satisfaction; e.g. cf. OECD, 2013). According to a study with the European Social Survey on migrants' SWB, the two items of life satisfaction and happiness exhibit high consistency (two items/Cronbach's alpha = 0.83; Hadjar & Backes, 2013). Second, the question arises whether the effect sizes can be compared within and between countries. By standardising our variables within and between countries, we think this should be

possible. On a substantial level, however, we cannot rule out subtle individual and country differences in the meaning of the concepts used, which may affect our interpretation. But as the reported validity checks have shown, both measures of life satisfaction perform similarly in regard to their association to a one-item happiness measure in a Swiss and a UK European Social Survey sample. However, we are aware that statistical procedures and sophisticated psychometric analysis will never be able to demonstrate total comparability of concepts measuring life satisfaction between and within countries. The meaning of the concept may differ across countries; response biases (for example social desirability or "yes"–tendency in regard to the question of whether people are satisfied with their lives) will vary in strength and have different impacts across countries.

Third, classification effects in regard to the class scheme may have caused some bias. However, the main argument is not affected since the classification used is rather rough (with only six categories) and it is focussed on differences between classes. Fourth, our operationalisation of intergenerational upward mobility may conceal more complex mechanisms that could emanate from the extent of parental social mobility as well as from the effects of high mobility levels on a macro level that might alter the meaning of individual mobility, for example, in terms of dissociation. We did robustness checks to evaluate the association between intergenerational and intragenerational mobility with regard to their effects on SWB and ran our models with either intragenerational or intergenerational mobility. The effects of intergenerational and intragenerational mobility do not change on a substantial level for both countries and in Switzerland the class effects stayed the same. However, in the UK sample, the effects of class on SWB became even stronger when leaving intragenerational mobility out of the model. Thus, in the UK, intragenerational mobility is associated with class and masks class effects. Fifth, we are aware of the dependency of prior social class, current social class, and social mobility (see Houle, 2011). Our analytical strategy should account for

22

this problem. Furthermore, we do not state hypotheses pertaining to acculturation, which are especially sensitive to the dependency problem.

All in all, our results show that upward social mobility does not increase life satisfaction. In the UK, where obviously class plays a more crucial role, upward mobility even reduces life satisfaction. Instead of status, well-established SWB determinants such as health status and being in a romantic relationship matter—being both linked to a healthy work-life balance.

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Table 1. Summary description of the class scheme (following Erikson et al., 1979 and Mayer & Aisenbrey, 2007).

Class	Denomination
Upper service class	higher-grade professionals, administrators, and officials; managers in large industrial establishments; large proprietors
Lower service class	lower-grade professionals, administrators, and officials, higher-grade technicians; managers in small industrial establishments; supervisors of non-manual employees
Middle middle class	higher grade routine non-manual employees (administration and commerce); lower grade routine non-manual employees (sales and services); self-employed with employees (small proprietors, artisans, etc. with employees); self-employed farmers
Lower middle class	self-employed without employees (small proprietors, artisans, etc. without employees); manual supervision
Skilled manual	skilled manual workers
Un- and semi-skilled manual	non-skilled workers, semi- and unskilled manual workers; farm labour

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

	United Kingdom			Switzerland		
	Mean or per cent	Min	Max	Mean or per cent	Min	Max
Life satisfaction	5.245	1	7	8.006	0	10
Within variation	.680 (SD)[a]			.818 (SD)[a]		
Intragenerational mobility						
None	73.9 %			82.5 %		
Downward	12.2 %			8.5 %		
Upward	13.9 %			9.0 %		
Intergenerational mobility						
None	21.8 %			22.4 %		
Downward	26.1 %			55.8 %		
Upward	52.1 %			21.8 %		
Class						
Upper service class	19.5 %			26.0 %		
Lower service class	22.4 %			29.0 %		
Middle middle class	23.5 %			23.1 %		
Lower middle class	13.7 %			7.8 %		
Skilled manual	6.2 %			5.3 %		
Un- and semi-skilled manual	14.7 %			8.8 %		
Health problems (subjective health status)	2.004	1	5	1.907	1	5
Age	43.267	25	85	47.539	25	85
Age, squared	1,978.792	625	7,225	2,353.493	625	7,225
Living with a partner	81.4 %			68.9 %		
Male	52.1 %			49.0 %		

Data source:

UK (BHPS): N = 34,970 (person-year observations), Switzerland (SHP): N = 33,169 (person-year observations).

[a] Note that this value refers to the within transformed data.

Table 3. Fixed effects regression of life satisfaction on intergenerational and intragenerational mobility and class.

	United Kingdom		Switzerland		Difference of estimates
Intragenerational mobility					
Downward	0.012		0.003		–
Upward	-0.002		-0.004		–
Intergenerational mobility					–
Downward	0.025		-0.020		–
Upward	-0.045	*	0.029		*
Class					
Reference category: upper service class					
Lower service class	-0.038	*	-0.007		–
Middle middle class	-0.035		-0.033		–
Lower middle class	-0.067	*	0.011		–
Skilled manual	-0.056		0.008		–
Un- and semi-skilled manual	-0.145	***	-0.030		–
Health problems (subjective health status)	-0.135	***	-0.132 ***		–
Age	-0.034	***	-0.037 ***		–
Age, squared	0.000	***	0.000 ***		–
Living with a partner	0.161	***	0.203 ***		–
Intercept	0.733	***	0.951 ***		–
Intraclass correlation (ICC)	0.589		0.605		–
R^2(within)	0.025		0.035		–
n person-years	34,970		33,174		–
N persons	8,061		5,774		–

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001
Data source:
UK (BHPS): *N* = 34,970 (person-year observations), Switzerland (SHP): *N* = 33,169 (person-year observations)