

Aisenbrey, Silke; Fasang, Anette Eva

Article — Accepted Manuscript (Postprint)

Introduction to special issue on work and family from a life course perspective: In Honor of Karl Ulrich Mayer's 70th Birthday

Advances in Life Course Research

Provided in Cooperation with:

WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Suggested Citation: Aisenbrey, Silke; Fasang, Anette Eva (2016) : Introduction to special issue on work and family from a life course perspective: In Honor of Karl Ulrich Mayer's 70th Birthday, Advances in Life Course Research, ISSN 1879-6974, Elsevier, Amsterdam, Vol. 29, pp. 1-4, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2016.03.002>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/207956>

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Introduction

Work and Family from a Life Course Perspective

The contributions gathered in this special issue represent research by sixteen social scientists from seven countries. What unites these scholars is their commitment to a life course perspective, with research focusing on work and family. Another commonality among the authors represented in this issue on *Work and Family from a Life Course Perspective* is that they were all shaped, in one way or another, by the strong guidance of the quantitatively-oriented life course approach of Karl Ulrich Mayer. They all work on longitudinal research questions, underlining the importance of understanding life not only by a snapshot but as a course of life unfolding over time, as a part and product of self-referential and multilevel processes (Mayer, 2015). All of the articles are also guided by what Karl Ulrich Mayer refers to as the life course being “multi-dimensional”, developing “in mutually related and mutually influencing life domains, such as the family, work, education, and the civic sphere” (2015, p.139). Or as Glen Elder puts it, these “[l]ife course dynamics arise in part from the *interplay* of trajectories and transitions, an interdependence played out over time and in relation to others” (1985, pp.32). Next to multi-dimensionality, the life course principle of “linked lives” takes a central position in the study of work and family from a life course perspective, meaning that “lives are lived interdependently and sociohistorical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships” (Elder et al. 2003, p. 13). Important links between lives in this area of research include relationships between spouses and partners, generations, peers, or among colleagues at the workplace.

The common multi-dimensionality or structural glue between the research questions in this issue is guided by the urgency of one of the biggest challenges for families and societies (or civic spheres) over the last 30 years: The intersection and negotiation of gender equality within a society in terms of equal career opportunities and equal pay, but also within a family-unit in terms of who gets to work how much at home and in the labor market. When Mayer in 2009 summarizes the still unfulfilled promises of life course research, one of his major conclusions is that the “the unraveling of the impacts of institutional contexts and social policies across countries and political economies on life courses has hardly begun” (p.426). The starting point for the diverse research represented in this special issue can be seen in this statement. Each of the

articles is part of the beginning to unravel the structural effects that form individual work and family life courses as they unfold over time.

The collection of research articles in this issue is additionally shaped by Karl Ulrich Mayer's commitment to international comparisons or comparisons across civic spheres. From a life course perspective, Mayer (2005) argues against the comparison of welfare state categories and for case studies, like the ones at hand. Mayer puts forward that in the classification (subsumption) of multiple welfare states into one category, relevant country specificities get lost. History, social change, policies, institutions and life courses within one country interact with each other (Mayer 2015). From a life course perspective, it is therefore most promising to analyze life courses within and across specific countries and their institutions as 'packages' (Fasang et al. 2012). It might very well be the country specific interactions that trigger life course transitions to differ between countries. "If cross-national life course research wants to succeed in establishing credible links between institutional antecedents, the timing of life course transitions, and the distributions of life chances, then there is no alternative than to resort to the level of particular countries and particular institutions." (Mayer 2005, p.36). The research published in this special issue follows this framework: All of the research questions addressed are concerned with the institutions of work and family, but focus on specific mechanism and or specific country comparisons.

Before discussing the richness and importance of the contributions to this special issue, we would like to take the reader on a quick detour. In this detour we will take the proposition seriously that civic-spheres, place, time, institutions, policies and life interact with one another. We want to highlight the structural forces that these interactions had and have in our world, the world of researchers that were part of the Center for Research on Inequalities and the Life Course (CIQLE), at Yale, during Karl Ulrich Mayer's tenure as the founding director. Young researchers came to CIQLE already with an interest in life course research, but they walked away with a skill set and a network that enabled them to pursue international academic careers to push the life course research agenda forward. The authors of this issue all work on and further develop innovative methods to analyze longitudinal data further (Sequence Analysis, Growth Curve Models, Panel Regression Analysis, Multilevel Models, Event History Analysis). Many authors are pioneers in utilizing data that has just been made available to researchers or collect their own life course data. Most authors take results from cross-sectional research a step further and

validate or question those findings with longitudinal data. Besides these similarities in their orientation towards data, there are also striking similarities in their theoretical research agendas. All contributions are tied together by a guiding interest in negotiating the triangle of gender, work and family. The research compiled in this special issue is the evidence for the imprint that has been made by Karl Ulrich Mayer, and by the interactions of civic-spheres, place, time, institutions, policies and life courses that cumulated at CIQLE between the years of 2003-10, on this generation of life course researchers.

An overview of the articles in this issue

Unlike other special issues, we followed a relatively open concept of collecting articles by former graduate students and post-doctoral fellows at CIQLE that showcase their current work in life course research and illustrate how they have been inspired by Karl Ulrich Mayer and the intellectual environment at CIQLE. The resulting articles all speak to the question of how differences and changes in family formation influence “the way in which men and women in families and other unions allocate their life time for economic and family roles” (Mayer 2015). They approach this common theme through the lens of three different research foci.

1) The first set of articles centers on the *multidimensionality of lives* and how events in the family realm affect trajectories in the life course dimension of paid work. They zoom into the dynamics of parenthood and employment with a focus on changes in actual and preferred working hours after women enter motherhood under different macro-structural conditions.

In their innovative study, *Daniela Grunow* and *Silke Aisenbrey* show that economic downturns have different consequences for mother’s labor force participation in two selected countries, the United States and West Germany. In West Germany, a traditional conservative welfare state, women return to the labor market after childbirth at a slower pace during, or right after an economic downturn. In contrast, in the United States women return to their jobs faster after giving birth during times of economic downturns than during times of economic growth. In addition, the authors show that women in higher status occupations are more attached to the labor market irrespective of the economic situation and the country context. The authors thereby add important evidence to a growing literature that investigates how country contexts support or hinder mothers’ careers and how women of higher social classes are less vulnerable to country specific regulations for maintaining their careers when they have children. Considering the

medium and long-term effects of the 2008 recession, these findings emphasize that we can expect widely different effects on mothers' labor force participation in different countries depending on the welfare state context.

Matthias Pollmann-Schult pursues a broader comparative analysis of 15 Western European countries to address a related question: how much do mothers actually want to work? In a second step, his analysis on preferred working hours is put into perspective with the impact of motherhood on actual working hours. In line with Grunow and Aisenbrey's findings, the results further highlight the strong contingency of mothers' preferred working hours on country-specific institutional and cultural factors with considerable variation between countries. Mothers in Denmark and Portugal, for instance, want to work the exact same amount of hours as their childless peers. In contrast mothers in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy would prefer to work at least 5 hours less per week than childless women. Gaps in preferred working hours of mothers and childless women are, to a large extent, accounted for by national difference in gender culture, social policies and working time regime. Specifically, motherhood has little effect on women's preferred working hours in countries with non-traditional gender cultures, little financial support for families, generous public childcare and family friendly employment hours. Similar to Grunow and Aisenbrey's study on mothers' actual working hours, Pollmann-Schult's findings substantiate the crucial importance of women's socio-economic status: highly educated mothers generally want to work more hours than lower educated mothers. However, the impact of motherhood on women's preferred working hours pales in contrast to its impact on actual working hours. Mothers work substantially less than they wish in almost all countries under study, which suggests that many of them are involuntarily relegated to part-time work or stuck in non-employment. The results thereby highlight the large untapped labor force potential of mothers across Western European countries.

2) A second set of articles centers on *gendered life courses* at the work-family nexus in different macro-structural contexts. A common theme of these contributions is the spotlight on differences in men's and women's work-family experiences.

Continuing the thematic focus on how parenthood affects subsequent employment trajectories of the two studies discussed above, *Marie Evertsson* presents a sophisticated analysis of women's and men's wages up to eight years after parental leave in Sweden. Even though Sweden is considered a comparatively gender-egalitarian country, previous research shows

persistent gender differences in caretaking and parental leave that go along with a continued gender wage and income gap. Findings from this study support significant but relatively small wage effects of parental leave for men and women in Sweden, mainly because women's loss in earned income is to a large extent compensated by social transfers. However, the mechanisms that drive the wage effect of parental leave greatly differ for men and women: for mothers, human capital depreciation is the driving force behind lower wages after parental leave as wage penalties substantially increase with longer durations of leave. In contrast, for fathers parental leave depresses wages as a negative signal of lower work commitment to employers, which is visible in negative wage effects already for very short paternal leaves. In line with the pivotal importance of socioeconomic status for work-family life courses highlighted in Grunow and Aisenbrey and in Pollmann-Schult, Evertsson's findings support considerably larger wage penalties of parental leave for both higher educated men and women than for the lower educated. This lends support to the theory of the unencumbered worker. Taken together, we can conclude that higher educated women's actual and preferred working hours are less affected by national contexts – they are persistently higher compared to lower educated women (Grunow and Aisenbrey; Pollman-Schult in this issue). Nonetheless, higher educated men and women suffer greater relative wage penalties for parental leave than lower educated parents, at least in Sweden.

Juho Härkönen, Anna Manzoni and Erik Bihagen extend the focus on gender inequalities in wages in Sweden presented in Evertsson with a comparison of occupational trajectories in Sweden and West Germany over time by following the birth cohorts from 1920 to 1970. In both countries, a pronounced gender gap in occupational prestige for the oldest cohorts closes across cohorts. For Germany, there is even a slight female advantage in occupational prestige in the youngest cohort. The authors report evidence of a motherhood penalty, which is clearer and longer-lasting in the conservative welfare state in West Germany particularly in the older cohorts than in the social-democratic welfare context of Sweden. Based on Evertsson (this volume) as well as other studies, we know that gender wage gaps persist in these two countries, despite the closing gender gaps in occupational prestige. This study highlights the dynamic nature of gender inequalities in employment life courses by pinpointing both permanence and change in individual occupational trajectories over time and social change across cohorts. The authors conclude that historical change in gender inequalities will be mainly driven by cohort replacement of older, less equal cohorts by new, more equal cohorts.

Based on an original retrospective life history survey, the Turkish Academic Career Survey (TAC) that was modeled after the German Life History Study (GLHS) (Mayer, 2008), *Hande Inanc* and *Berkay Özcan* focus on gender differences in family outcomes within one specific occupational group: academics in Turkey. Turkey provides a particularly interesting country case, in which women account for a much higher proportion of university professors compared to many European and North-American countries. In this study, the authors ask whether the relative equality achieved in terms of female-to-male ratios among university professors comes at the cost of delayed and foregone family formation for female academics, more so than for male academics. Findings show a clear gender gap in family outcomes: Male academics are more likely to be married, have a child and have a higher number of children. The massive expansion of higher education during their observation window in Turkey enables the authors to examine gendered family outcomes among academics under different structural conditions. The analysis starts during a time when the overall number of universities and academics was low and selective (pre-1991) until recent years after a massive expansion and decrease of selectivity for academic positions (post-1999). Results from this over-time comparison once again highlight the crucial role of socioeconomic status in shaping men and women's work and family life courses: older cohorts of female academics were disproportionately selected from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds that enabled them to maintain an academic career and establish a family. Selectivity from advantaged backgrounds diminishes with the massive expansion of higher education. As a consequence, work-family conflict among female, but not male, academics has just recently increased as more women from less advantaged backgrounds enter the profession. The findings thereby highlight the complex interplay - and sometimes trade-offs - between inequalities by gender and social background in shaping work-family life courses.

In their article on family life courses, *Emanuela Struffolino*, *Matthias Studer* and *Anette Fasang* use new sequence analysis techniques to study the mechanisms that structure gender differences in family formation until midlife at different educational levels. Similar to Inanc and Özcan, the authors also address the interplay between gender and education as one indicator of socio-economic status in shaping work-family life courses. Their study compares two distinct macro-structural contexts by contrasting East and West Germany during the German division until 1990. The innovative use of sequence analysis allows the authors to uncover how gender

and education interact to shape family formation in the two sub-societies. Gender is a stronger structural force in shaping family life courses in the conservative male breadwinner welfare state in West Germany than in the communist dual earner model in East Germany. Similar to Grunow and Aisenbrey and Pollmann-Schult in this issue, Struffolino et al. add more evidence that women with high status or, in this case, with higher education are more immune to national institutional contexts: gender differences in family formation are smaller for the highly educated in both German sub-societies. In the article at hand this is especially true in East Germany, where findings suggest no gender differences in family formation for the highly educated at all. In contrast, gender differences are significant and sizeable among the medium and lower educated in East Germany. The authors conclude that in addition to institutional differences, different patterns of educational assortative mating in East and West Germany are crucial drivers of gender differences in family life courses in the two sub-societies. The findings thereby point to interdependencies between (potential) partners' life courses summarized in the principles of *linked lives* in family and friendship networks.

3) Dynamics of *linked lives* in family and friendship networks present the common focus of the remaining two articles.

In their study on the division of housework, *Natalie Nitsche* and *Daniela Grunow* take a micro-level life course perspective and examine the effects that family events, gender ideology and socio-economic resources have on the division of labor within couples. To account for the dynamic nature of the process under study, they apply innovative multi-level random effects growth curve models and include measures of gender ideology and socio-economic resources prior to the assessment of subsequent housework trajectories. Findings on the interplay of family events and the gender division of labor substantiate previous research that documents a re-traditionalization of the household division of labor after the first child is born. Beyond previous research, the results strongly support that neither absolute nor relative resources determine the division of labor in couples. Instead, a more egalitarian gender ideology of either partner is highly predictive of a more egalitarian division of labor. Thereby the authors add strong and important empirical evidence to support the argument that gender ideology, and not relative bargaining power, is driving gendered household divisions of labor in couples.

In the last contribution of this special issue, *Daniela Klaus* and *Sebastian Schnettler* compare how the social networks of childless older adults and elderly parents in Germany

develop across the life course. Their analysis pertains in part exactly to the post war birth cohorts, for whom childlessness, particularly in West Germany, was high due to structural barriers to combining work and family as highlighted in Struffolino et al. as well as Grunow and Aisenbrey in this issue. The high proportion of childlessness potentially puts these cohorts at risk of loneliness and limited access to social support in old age. However, Klaus and Schnettler's findings contradict common perceptions that pity the childless elderly for lacking the "links" to children in old age. While older parents have somewhat larger social networks that are composed of a higher proportion of kin, childless older adults report a higher number of friends and collateral kin. Importantly, childless older adults have equally efficient actual support networks in old age as parents. Socioeconomic status once again takes a central position in understanding these findings: Childless older adults tend to be of higher socioeconomic status, as many highly educated women in these cohorts remained childless in favor of establishing careers on the labor market. Older adults of higher socioeconomic status tend to have more close unrelated friends in their network and are particularly efficient in mobilizing social support.

All articles combined in this special issue add important and empirically grounded evidence supporting that work-family life courses are highly context-specific. Within countries socioeconomic status is associated with vastly different work-family life courses as well as later life consequences. Work-family life courses for the highly educated appear more similar across countries compared to their lower educated peers in the same country context. Concerning theory, several articles point to the inadequacy of the dominant rational choice approaches in this literature. Instead, the importance of ideational and normative factors is apparent in several analyses presented here, including findings on the importance of country-specific dynamics of educational assortative mating for gender differences in family life courses. Finally, the emphasis on conceptualizing country contexts or different civic spheres as interactions of their constituent components, as highlighted in Karl Ulrich Mayer's call for a "differential life course sociology" creates a common thread throughout this special issue.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to thank Karl Ulrich Mayer for bringing together all of these talented young researchers at CIQLE, at Yale University, mentoring and exposing them to a very supportive and productive research environment, and sending them off in the academic world with an expanded network, more skills, and publications to successfully jumpstart their careers as a new generation of life course researchers all over the world. Karl Ulrich Mayer shaped our careers in multiple ways and he has been and still is a prominent figure in our own life courses.

Francesco Billari has been a strong proponent and supporter of this special issue and opened the doors of the ideal *Advances in Life Course Research* journal for our project, to compile these strong contributions from so many former CIQLE scholars. The research presented in this special issue would not have risen to its excellence, if we had not been able to count on the feedback of our reviewers. We were able to recruit reviewers with connections to different stages in Karl Ulrich Mayer's academic life course. The network of outstanding academics were all excited to support the publication of a piece of research in honor of Karl Ulrich Mayer; for this we would like to thank: Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Irene Boeckmann, Hannah Brückner, Lynn Prince Cooke, Hans Dietrich, Jani Erola, Stefan Fuchs, David B. Grusky, Michael Hannan, Thomas Hinz, Jan Hoem, Corinna Kleinert, Dirk Konietzka, Britta Matthes, Walter Müller, Gerda Neyer, Paula Protsch, Marcel Raab, Christian Schmitt, Haya Stier, Heike Trappe, Wout C. Ultee, Mareike Wagner and Christine Wimbauer.

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