

Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (pairfam): why we need it and what it is about

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Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (PAIRFAM)

Why we need it and what it is about.

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1 **Introductory Remarks**

Theoretical and methodological, family research has made considerable progress by overcoming cross sectional concepts and implementing longitudinal approaches of empirical analysis. On the macro level, social change in the structural and institutional embedding of the family in the society is investigated and cohort analysis allows distinguishing period, age and cohort effects. On the level of family units and couples, the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships of different kinds are studied over a period of time. On the individual level we analyze couple and family dynamics as part of individual life courses. By studying how parents' and children's lives are connected in a particular way over a period of time, we achieved deep insight into intergenerational relationships. Research has profited from better theory and from new strategies of data collection, especially panel and retrospective survey designs (Mayer 2000, Blossfeld/Huinink 2001, Seltzer et al. 2005). Refined methods of panel and event history analysis have been developed, which allow connecting different levels of analysis and different interdependent dimensions of the life course (Blossfeld/Rohwer 1995; Wu 2004).

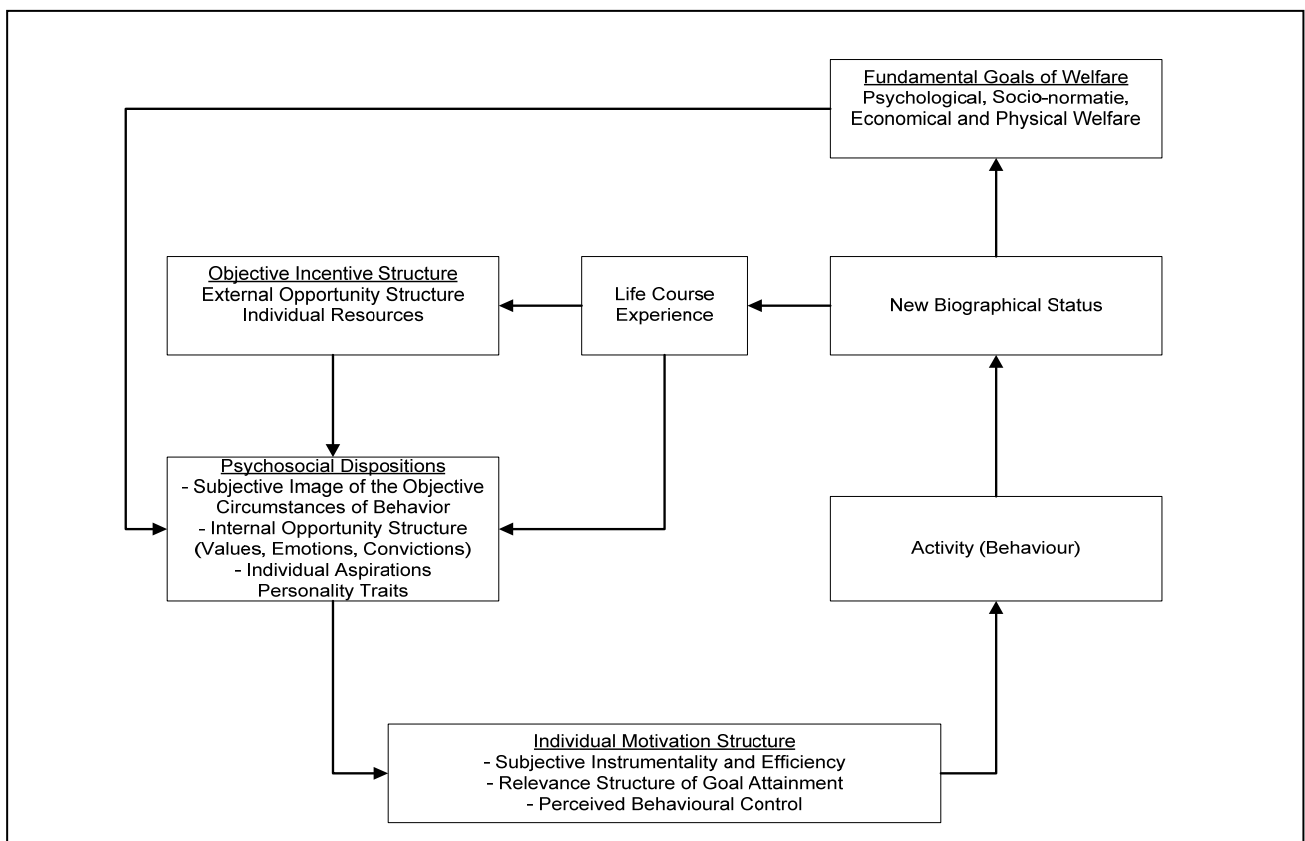
We are quite capable of identifying economic and socio-structural determinants of couple and family dynamics, but still have difficulty in dealing with determinants of family behaviour and their change over a period of time, which go beyond these structural factors. Psychosocial determinants of family behaviour or aspects of the social embeddedness are not investigated in a satisfactory way. Consequently, there are many blind spots in the understanding of complex individual decision processes over the life course. Research which includes both partners and studies family dynamics as co-development of 'linked lives' (Elder 1994), has also not been well established. These weaknesses are primarily a matter of data, not of theory. Large representative studies in family research, which collected a broader range of data on individual life courses over a period of time, are rare, because available longitudinal data primarily focused on structural data. Qualitative research has been shown to be a helpful tool in generating more knowledge about the logic of family dynamics, but it has to be confirmed in large scale studies for representative statements. However, if we want to overcome current limits of current family research we need to run large-scale panel studies (Lesthaeghe 2002). This agenda is the basis of a research program in Germany which plans to run a long term "Panel Study of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics" (PAIRFAM). This study will allow for the following up of couple and family dynamics as well as intergenerational relationships from the micro perspective of individual action and decision-making over the life course.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we present a conceptual schema, which serves as a theoretical frame of the research program. It is based on a multi-level theory of purposeful individual behaviour. Secondly, we address methodological requirements of family research from the life course perspective, which originated out of our conceptual approach and have not been addressed sufficiently in previous research. Thirdly, we sketch an agenda for future research on couple and family dynamics in modern welfare states from the life course perspective. We address some major research questions, which are concerned with the future challenges of the demographic change and their implications in modern welfare states. After a short conclusion we finally give some information on the structure of the PAIRFAM research program.

2 A Conceptual Framework for Family Research from the Life Course Perspective

The conceptual framework for family research from the life course perspective is not a theory in detail. It can be conceived as an overarching theoretical frame or a common shell, which has to be filled with substantive middle range theories concerning the different substantive issues that family research deals with (Schema 1).

Schema 1: The Conceptual Framework



2.1 Basic Theoretical Assumptions

In analyzing individual behaviour in general and the kind of behaviour we are interested in particular, we assume that people act to achieve individual welfare as efficiently as possible on the basis of cognitively, emotionally and culturally bounded rationality (Simon 1957). This means by pursuing welfare goals actors do not consciously act against their own interests and they obey the imperative of limited resources. In this sense they always have good reasons to act the way they do (Boudon 2003).

Individual welfare goals and basic needs or tasks of individual development during the life course can be distinguished by four dimensions: psychological, socio-normative (“social approval”), economic, and physical welfare. Individual welfare is not without a price, however. It is ‘produced’ by investing time, money, and goods. We differentiate between direct costs (investment costs) and the indirect costs (opportunity costs) in pursuing welfare goals. Opportunity costs are conceived as foregone benefits of welfare production because investing in one welfare goal usually means that one cannot benefit from alternative welfare goals. This is obviously the case because available resources are not infinite.¹ Usually this means pursuing intermediate goals (Vroom 1964; Lindenberg/Frey 1993; Esser 1999; Nauck 2001), which are instrumental for ultimate welfare goals the individual strives for. Following this approach living in a satisfying relationship, in cohabitation or marriage, bringing up children and fostering them, engaging in intergenerational relationships are examples of instrumental goals in a welfare production function. They serve psychological satisfaction, can be a reason for gaining social status or improving material resources.

2.2 Individual Life Course

We conceive the individual life course as a process of individual welfare production (including individual development) over a period of time. Intimate relationships and family dynamics are integral dimensions of the individual life course. From the life course perspective, transitions to certain biographical statuses and changing everyday life practices as well as maintaining on statuses can be understood as instrumental goals of welfare production. In this sense welfare production over the life course is (cf. Huinink 2005, Mayer 2004):

¹ One additionally has to address so called ‘by-product’-effects achieving a certain welfare goal. This means that this might induce benefits in regard to other welfare goals as well. For example, one does not only gain economic welfare (income) from achieving a gainful employment, but also social approval. However, also negative effects in regard to other welfare goals have to be considered. Living in a union does not only support psychological welfare by staying together in love with somebody. It can also mean that one partner is affected by negative externalities caused by the other partner’s action.

- embedded in a *multi-level structure* of social dynamics and individual development. On the one hand, individual welfare production is influenced by a multi-level-frame of external and internal conditions. On the *societal level* cultural and institutional social structures as well as political and economic conditions determine the constraints and opportunities of social action. On the *level of the social context and social networks*, associations, neighbourhoods, the family, and partnership (dyadic level) influence the scope of context and situation-related actions of interdependent actors to a different degree. One can here especially emphasize Elder's aspect of 'linked lives' (Elder 1994). On the *individual level* we regard the individual *resources* and we consider the *psychosocial dispositions* of the actor, which work as internal conditions of action. On the other hand, individual action works back on the process of reproducing and changing the social structure on every level. It affects the individual resources, and causes modifications of the psychosocial dispositions.
- related to different but highly interrelated life domains, intimate relationships and family dynamics are two examples of the *multi-dimensionality* of the life course. We distinguish personal and cognitive development, education and work experiences, leisure activities, and other areas of activities. Activities in different fields can be compatible or compete with each other (incompatible). They can be supportive (maybe even complementary) or substitutive. Multi-dimensionality reflects the social differentiation in modern welfare states which goes along with a "multi-temporalization of life" (Weymann 2004). Several specific types of timetables must be recognized. There are *general timetables* which are widely shared timetable for major transitions that most individuals experience. In contrast, *specialized timetables* exist for specific subpopulations or specific transitions. Finally, we assume *personal timetables* that are not shared and not normative but have to be coordinated with other persons. Therefore, individuals are engaged in many different institutional and personal spheres, which are more or less compatible with or supportive of each other.
- influenced by the experiences and decisions of the past life course (*path dependency*). The individual life course can be conceived as an endogenous, highly non-linear process.

These different aspects contribute to the fact that the life course is a complex social process. Several dimensions of interdependency and endogeneity are apparent, meaning that studying life courses is a complicated enterprise.

2.3 Pursuing Individual Welfare

In general, the pursuit of welfare is based on external and internal conditions, which can effect its benefits and costs. First, we can differentiate between an external opportunity structure, that gives the opportunities and restrictions on the societal level (politics and law, social structure, economics, culture), in social networks (friends, kinship network), in couple, and parent-child relationships, and individual resources of actors, i.e. economic, cultural, social, psychological and physical capital. Given these opportunities and constraints the objective incentive structure tells us what the actor should do for pursuing individual welfare. But this does not directly determine individual decisions and behaviour. It works only via the internal, 'subjective' conditions of welfare production, which we call the psychosocial dispositions. There is only a subjective image of the actor's circumstances of action respectively welfare production. Lindenberg and Frey as well as Esser call it the 'definition of the situation' (Lindenberg/ Frey 1993; Esser 1993). The actor's welfare production is also influenced by an 'internal opportunity structure' by which we mean a body of norms, values, convictions, mental models or frames, and emotions affecting their decision process analogously to the external opportunity structure. Furthermore, pursuing their welfare goals, actors follow individual aspirations, which define what they require for the results of welfare production to be satisfactory for them. And finally, personality traits must be taken into account.

These internal factors modify the objective incentive structure and we get what we call an age-specific *individual motivation structure*. It 'tells' the actor what to do next by suggesting a hierarchy of instrumental goals. This is based on the subjective assumptions about the instrumentality and efficiency of particular actions when pursuing particular goals, reasoning, the relevance structure of goals, and perceived behavioural control. The latter may result in an estimate of the probability of success when pursuing a certain goal with certain means.

The pursuit of welfare leads to changes in the biographical status of the person. It adds to the life course experiences. These changes affect the external opportunity structure, the available resources and, of course, the psychosocial dispositions of the actors. With the changing biographical status, the generating 'outputs' will be more or less conscious 'evaluated and compared' by the individual and becomes the new starting point for welfare achievement.

3 Conceptual Problems of Family Research from a Life Course Perspective

Family research from the life course perspective - as is the case for multilevel longitudinal research in general - needs adequate methodological tools for empirical study and causal analysis. As mentioned, we have observed considerable progress in complex longitudinal data analysis. However, there are various aspects which, from our point of view, illustrate conceptual shortcomings of family research in this respect. Following our theoretical framework, they are of major relevance and need to be tackled in a proper way. We will argue that these problems can only be solved given panel data of high quality.

3.1 Third Variable Phenomenon

The question of spurious correlation is quite common in empirical research. But in longitudinal research it is of specific relevance, particularly in highly self-referential or path-dependent processes like the life course of individuals. Let us explain the problem by presenting an example of life course modelling in the field of family research. We know that the level of education and labour force participation of women have negative effects on incident rates and delaying effects on timing of family formation in many countries. We also know much about the reverse direction. Family formation often has negative effects on women's further labour force participation. It is still not well understood how couples deal with the requirement of combining work and family and how this might affect family and work plans simultaneously. It could be that the negative relationship between motherhood and work found is spurious. How women deal particularly with family and work could be a matter of life plans determined by completely different 'third' factors (Bagozzi/ van Loo 1988). Candidates for those third factors are attitudes which emerged in earlier phases of the life course, late adolescence for example. An interrelationship between family formation and labour force participation would be the result of psychosocial pre-dispositions, which results in 'lifestyle preferences' meaning that women are more in favour of one than the other and structure their lives accordingly (Hakim 2000). This is an example for the case of spurious correlation between two dynamic variables caused by a third variable involving path dependency. Individual norms or convictions, so called scripts of the future life course, are candidates for this kind of selective pattern determination. This situation can be considered not only in regard to fertility and work, but in other aspects of couples' dynamics or intergenerational relationships as well.

Of course in a comparative setting, the third variable can originate from a level different from the individual one. The strength of the negative correlation between motherhood and work, for example, depends heavily on the generosity of family related support systems in different

countries. Interestingly enough, we find a positive ecological correlation between labour force participation rates of women and fertility (Brewster/ Rindfuss 2000), seemingly contradicting the micro-level findings, but caused by national differences in support of combining family and work. That is a structural aspect which is very important. Often neglected is also the relevance of cultural images of motherhood and preferences in regard to the family structure and how they relate to work.

Obviously, learning more about possible ‘third variables’ is of crucial importance in family and life course research. Think of political intervention in the case of family formation. If political measures are based on spurious correlations they might fail because the causal factor is not tackled. Individual actors might even counteract the intentions of the political action.

3.2 Selection and Adaptation

Another important question of family research is the matter of selection and adaptation over the life course (Lesthaeghe/ Moors 2002). It again is due to the fact that life courses are self referential processes. Particularly if we deal with intentions, values, aspirations, or frames of action, we have to assume selective effects on behaviour as well as adaptation operating in regard to these factors. The choice of relevant persons in the social network could be influenced by the process of selection and adaptation.

As we already mentioned, values may influence the probability of family related transitions like marriage or childbearing (selection). However, marriage and childbearing probably reshape the family related values (adaptation) of actors. Achieved biographical statuses and life course decisions affect individuals' values, attitudes, and aspirations. Lesthaeghe and Moors convincingly argue for the relevance of values in family research. They show that values matter even after controlling for structural factors. And they refer to a few panel studies enabling dynamic analyses of the interrelation between values and changing biographical statuses. Only with panel data it is possible to analyze selection and adaptation in life course behaviour (Lesthaeghe/ Moors 2002). Previous research by Moors (2002), using data from an early German three wave panel study, showed for example that items on family values, individual autonomy, and personal freedom predict subsequent behaviour in family formation between panel waves. Family formation leads to the adaptation of the respective values. Those who experience no changes stick to their values, married to traditional ones unmarried to non-traditional ones. Moors calls this value affirmation.

As another example one can refer to the surprisingly positive correlation between cohabiting before marriage and divorce risk. Couples who cohabit probably have individual

characteristics, which are associated with a greater divorce risk (experiencing a divorce of the parents, less traditional view on marriage, low religious commitment). The assumption is that a selection effect explains the higher risk of divorce, because couples who do not cohabit before marrying are committed to marriage in a stronger way (Brüderl/Diekmann/ Engelhardt 1997). However, the experience of cohabitation could have a feedback effect, supporting increasing aspirations in regard to gender equity, signalling benefits of lower personal commitment to the partners, and amplifying acceptance of separation. After marriage and the birth of a child, non-traditional expectations are no longer fulfilled in a satisfactory manner and the likelihood of divorce increases (Uhlenberg/ Mueller 2004). On the one hand we find an effect of self-selection and on the other divorce might be a consequence of the affirmation of values generated during cohabitation.

To turn to the case of social networks, friends or relatives who act as a reference group have an impact on the actors' attitudes and behaviour. However, depending on their biographical status actors choose the kind of people they like to associate and communicate with. We have to assume a feedback loop between individual dispositions, social network structure and individual action. One simple mechanism lying behind this is learning and evaluation.

Two lessons can be learned from this. First, we cannot rely on cross-sectional or retrospective information in regard to value orientations or embedding in social networks. Secondly, selection and adaptation must be analyzed in longitudinal family research in order to decipher causal relationships. Therefore, from a life course perspective, selection is not a methodological nuisance. As Georg (2004) argued, it rather is at the heart of life course research, which intends to delineate the long-term pathways associated with outcomes of interest.

3.3 Substitution and Complementarity

The life course is a multidimensional process, but we know little about relations of substitution and support between different dimensions of welfare production in different life domains. Take the example of family formation and labour force participation again. Being successful in one or the other life domain displays different kinds of welfare benefits. The question is to what extent and under what conditions engagement in work can be perceived as a substitute for family relations in regard to welfare benefits. In family research it seems to be common sense that intimate relationships and parenthood cannot be substituted by other social arrangements as far as their particular contribution to individual welfare is concerned. It is assumed that these kinds of social relationships serve a particular experience of a very

special and authentic kind of affection and personal identity, which you cannot get in other social contexts (Huinink 1995). However, there might be alternatives: personal solidarity and a sense of belonging, security and warmth can also be achieved in other kinds of informal relations. A gainful career or social interaction at the work place could serve as an equivalent for the psychological welfare one would get from focusing on family life and satisfying interaction with children. It is an open question, therefore, whether there are reasons to believe that substitutes for family life and intergenerational relationships exist, friends networks for example, and whether the actors have any notions of those opportunities. How does this affect the actors' decision processes?

One can also ask under which conditions labour force participation and parenthood are not competitive but even supportive or complementary to others. Gainful employment contributes to the financial budget of a family household and could provide a better basis for satisfactory parenting and encourage people have more children (Easterlin 1987).

Questions of substitution and complementarity cannot be discussed theoretically in a straight forward manner without problems. The reason is that costs and benefits from different aspects of the welfare production often are not commensurable. Work serves for money. Cohabitation, marriage, or parenthood is a matter of emotional affection and of strong personal commitment. It can be seen as a counterpart to the highly formal and impersonal relations in the public sphere and economic markets. It is important to know how actors manage such a situation of non-commensurability of outcomes if an engagement in both spheres is competitive. In regard to family issues, for example those kinds of 'hard choices' are not a rare constellation (Gerson 1986).

3.4 Anticipation

Actors learn from the past and they are restricted in their degrees of freedom for current action by past decisions and past behaviour. Knowing this they anticipate future consequences as well as expected changes in the conditions of their action. The length of the time span covered by mutual consequences of status changes then should be correlated with the length of the life span one tries to be certain about in regard to one's expectations and plans. Future life course transitions or the 'shadow of the future' therefore gain relevance for decisions on current behaviour in two ways.

First, the expectation or plan to change family status – say by marriage or childbirth – in the near future may motivate individuals to perform a shift in another life domain - say leaving home - earlier than otherwise. We can assume effects from (planned) future events on current

behaviour. This is the case of anticipation. Lesthaeghe and Moors argue that this also holds for adaptation or readjustment of values and aspirations, we referred to above (Lesthaeghe/ Moors 2002). The affirmative adaptation of marriage related values probably happens already before marriage. Effects of anticipation confront us with the serious question of the correct point in time to measure causes and effects of transitions in life course. It has to be addressed in a more precise way as has been the case so far. Is it only manifest transitions in different life domains or is it a non-cacheable time point of the shift in an individual planning process or an unobserved decision, which is crucial for explaining family changes? Often the manifest event (birth of a child, finishing education) is the reflex of previous decisions for which we usually do not know when and under which conditions they were made. Special kinds of data are needed to be able to model decision processes over the life course and to solve the problem of causal effects between different sub-processes of the life course from a substantial point of view.

Second, knowing about path dependencies actors try to estimate the effects of current behaviour on future opportunities of the life course. This is particularly true when transitions lead to irreversible and/or highly committing consequences for the actors in the future life course. This is the case with childbirth. Actors try to estimate the shadow of the future over a long period of time and want to be sufficiently sure that the consequences of current action are compatible with what they expect in the future or plan for the future. The relevance of this kind of effects has been underestimated in the past; at least it should gain importance in the future.

3.5 Couple's Perspective

Individual level family research in Sociology is still strongly focused on single actors and often fails to link the partners' perspectives. However, one has to be aware of the importance of social interaction in the family unit and between partners for family development (Schneewind 1996). Elder's concept of 'linked lives' (Elder 1994) points to the fact that individual life plans are interdependent. External factors effect partners behaviour on each other. The life courses of partners have to be 'co-organized' (Blossfeld/ Drobnič 2002). So coupled life courses have to be analyzed in appropriate models (Lyons/ Sayer 2005). One can extend this aspect to relationships between parents and their children (Beth/ Giarrusso/ Bengtson 2004), siblings to even other persons the actors have close relationships with. Contextualism, dynamics systems or linked lives are the catchwords indicating that meanwhile sociology has realized that at least bidirectional and reciprocal relations exist

between partners attributes. However, in most cases this insight is still ignored in research designs (Seltzer et al 2005). The focus on the individual perspective disregards the multi-level approach and the impact of multi-temporalization of connected life courses. So there is a gap between theoretical models of individual development in interdependent life courses and empirical approaches studying the ongoing dynamics (O'Brien 2005).

3.6 Summary

As we have already mentioned, the methodological issues discussed in this chapter are strongly related to the conceptual framework presented in chapter 2. The third variable phenomenon is addressed by including the experiences of the past life course into the analysis. The issue of selection and adaptation is also considered assuming the feedback loop between external and internal conditions of action on the one hand and the biographical results of activities on the other. The issue of substitution and complementarity is covered by the notion of multidimensionality of the life course. Anticipation and the shadow of the future is a matter of the dynamic structure of the framework and its path dependency. The couple's perspective is part of the multi-level structure of the concept.

The aim of social research is to explain causal relationships and to reduce causal fallacies. Therefore, it is not enough to measure characteristics of actors or family units at one point in time and predict "outcomes" for actors or family units at a later time point without examining of the whole processes evolving over a period of time. Identifying the link between earlier events and subsequent processes is a necessary step in understanding couple and family dynamics. This requires not only prediction but also dynamic modelling. Fulfilling these methodological requirements needs long term time dependent data of high quality. However, this kind of panel study is very rare so far (Lesthaeghe 2002).

4 An Agenda of Family Research from the Life Course Perspective

Based on the background of this conceptual framework we will now address some substantive issues of a future agenda for couples and family research in modern welfare states, which add considerably to the current research in the field. From cross sectional as well as longitudinal studies we know, for example, a lot about the relationship between education or labour force participation and family formation, educational homogamy and divorce risks, the kind of living arrangements and the division of domestic work in a couple's household, social status of parents and educational achievement of the descendants. In general, however, previous

family research in social science was mainly based on socio-structural and economic variables. The connection between structure and behaviour was modelled somewhat deficiently because the dimension of individual decision-making was disregarded by a great number of researchers. As a consequence, the complex interplay between couple and family dynamics, other life domains, and the objective circumstances of welfare production during the life course is still not understood in many respects. It is a major challenge of interdisciplinary family research (Seltzer et al. 2005: 911). Different areas of research which we will address in the following are (1) couples' dynamics and the stability, (2) family dynamics and fertility, (3) parenting and transmission effects, (4) intergenerational relationships, and (5) family dynamics and the institutions of welfare states.

4.1 Couple Dynamics and Stability

Due to changes in patterns of embeddedness in consensual unions and marriage in the life course and increasing divorce or separation rates, psychological and sociological research has to decipher the relevant factors and processes influencing the need for and satisfaction with intimate relationships as well as their stability (Klein/Kopp 1999; Karney/Bradbury 1995). One assumption is that in modern welfare societies the cost of living in an intimate relationship or marriage is quite large and increasing. Combining commitment in an intimate relationship successfully with individual flexibility, autonomy, mobility in other domains of the life course, for instance work life, is difficult. As a consequence we see that the requirements to be met before individuals feel ready for this commitment as well as the aspirations and expectations in regard to an intimate relationship become stronger. Marriage might still be attractive as a union, in which the reciprocal solidarity between the spouses can be enforced by a legal contract and which serves for a certain level of their social security. However, exactly this law based commitment at the same time makes individuals reluctant to marry, since there are less binding legitimate alternatives. Despite the fact that intimate relationships might even gain relevance for individual welfare, actors tend to minimize the binding force of those relationships. This leads to an increasing proportion of new patterns of family life organisation over the life course and the stability of unions and marriages is decreasing. Hybrid forms of living arrangements with partners living in more than one household and showing complex structures in regard to the spatial and time related structure are gaining in relevance.

The changing opportunity structure of welfare production has a decisive impact on the dynamics of living arrangements over the life course. However, it leaves increasing room for

other, mainly psychological and dispositional factors.² Which level of commitment and institutional regulation actors choose, whether they marry or cohabit in different phases of their life course, cannot be explained purely by structural variables. Experiences during childhood with the relationship between the parents and value transmission affect the attachment of both partners in the contemporary relationship and their attitudes towards divorce (Amato/DeBoer 2001). Communication habits and competences, coping strategies, conflict solving behaviour, and other personal characteristics must also be considered (Hill 2004).

Moreover, patterns of the relationship between the partners change with time, emotionally, in regard to the internal power relationship between the partners, or in regard to household organisation. In contrast to the emphasis on gender equality in modern welfare societies, for example, we observe remarkably stable gender specific structures in the division of domestic work in couples' every day life. To understand this individual attitudes and personal identities developing from the biographic experiences have to be taken into account (Schulz/ Blossfeld 2006).

It becomes apparent that cross sectional analysis fails to give good empirical evidence about the dynamics of intimate relationships and their embedding in individual life courses. We need an integration of psychological, sociological und economical approaches, and a longitudinal perspective to be able to construct a generic model of the life course of couples, their success, and their failure (Seltzer et al. 2005: 916).

4.2 Family Dynamics and Fertility

The traditional pattern of family dynamics within a regime of typically structured, gender specific life course patterns has become obsolete in modern welfare states and we experience declining birth rates in many of these countries. Therefore, the question which has been receiving high public attention is, which factors determine whether, when, and how individuals or couples decide to establish a family unit as part of their adult life course today. How can the different dimensions of activity and engagement during the life course be organized and combined with each other in modern societies? What factors determine a decision in favour of or against raising children as a possible dimension of individual welfare production?

² What we do not refer to here, the genetic and biological aspects or constraints of family dynamics, have also received more attention and major progress has been made in measuring the biomarkers of behaviour (Seltzer et al. 2005: 910).

To answer these questions, both structural factors, such as education and labour force participation of men and women, and subjective aspects have to be taken into account (Lesthaeghe/ Moors 2002). Particularly, we do not know enough about developmental determinants, early and later life experiences, and individual competences, which not only affect the timing and realizing of child birth, but all other activities in different life domains as well. The analysis of family formation has to uncover how the parallel ongoing production of welfare in different life domains is combined with each other and how their relevance changes over time. A particular issue is the question of the 'shadow of the future'. It means that in the case of a decision about fertility plans, anticipating future expectations connected with parenting gain relevance. The binding force of parenthood has to be considered. A union can be separated, a marriage divorced, but a parent - child relation is a very stable one and connected with strong obligations. We must know more about the impact of biographical experiences in their childhood. Nauck (2001) convincingly argues that previous experiences could the scope of choice for future decisions towards the planning of childbearing. These long term expectations are hard to model and need longitudinal data of high validity including the subjective information. This means that one cannot deal with retrospective data anymore. And a combined effort between psychological, sociological and economical research activities is of vital importance.

There is another reason to emphasize considering cultural aspects as well as motivational and other psychological factors in the study of fertility (Lesthaeghe/ Moors 2002). One can ask, whether we experience a fundamental change in regard to the values of family and parenthood for actors in modern welfare societies. Will the relevance of family and partnership as part of the individual life course decrease? After decades of stable appreciation of children and parenthood, will a 'culture of childlessness' emerge - as is suspected in the German public discourse? This question can only be answered if it is possible to distinguish between rational reactions to more or less family friendly structural conditions in a society on the one hand and the mutual emergence of new images or norms of embedded living arrangements in the life course on the other hand. For example, in Germany family size appears to be declining while intentional childlessness is gaining in relevance. This could mean that we are experiencing a substantial rejection of the project family, which will have major consequences for the future of this welfare state.

Considering scenarios like this leads to the question of whether and to what extent alternative institutional and social arrangements can potentially substitute more functions of the family and intergenerational relationships in regard to particular welfare effects.

4.3 Parenting and Transmission Effects

The arrangement and the quality of the relationship between parents and their immature children as well as its interrelation with family structure and parents' life course is also an important research topic. How capable are families of fostering children's development? What are the conditions for successful parenting in modern welfare states? Among other things, the "output" of families is in the best case autonomous persons, capable of action and achieving successfully over the trajectory of their later life course. Modern welfare states are extremely interested in successful parenting and therefore it is a highly controversial issue in the public debate. For the future development we must know more about the conditions of bringing up and socializing our children under conditions of advanced market economies. Little attention has been paid to grandparent-parent-child-relationships in longitudinal research in this respect up to now (Bengtson 2001).

In general, too little attention is paid toward the intergenerational transmission of patterns of behaviour, value orientations, or scripts for future life. The effects of social background on family formation processes (Nauck 2001), of experiencing more or less parental affect and attachment on the capability to live in stable unions are well researched (Uhlenberg/ Mueller 2004). However, we are still waiting for an investigation in large scale longitudinal studies, in which one can trace the ideational links between generations and analyse personal development as it interacts with the dynamics of the parental family.

Other features of parents' life course should also be addressed. For example, timing of parenthood has important consequences for children's life courses. Studies on the consequences of early parenthood show that children of very young parents achieve less education or occupational and socioeconomic attainment and experience greater risk of early marriage and divorce as well (MacMillan/ Copher 2005). Because of increasing divorce rates and the appearance of patchwork families, for example, the investigation of the impact of divorce on child development has to be intensified. There is still controversy about whether divorce or growing up in patchwork or single parents families is problematic or not for children's future development. (Walper 2001; Wallerstein/Lewis/Blakeslee 2001).

4.4 Intergenerational relationships

Detailed research on intergenerational relationships will play an important role for understanding the influence of population aging in modern welfare states in future social developments. Even quite simple questions have not been answered in a satisfactory way so far. What will the intergenerational demographic structure look like in the future, when we

observe declining number of births on the one hand and increasing life expectancy on the other? How will aging societies cope with a fading basis of solidarity between the generations because of the birth decline? Bearing the risks of conflict, how will they deal with widening gap between the differing needs of the younger and older generations? What are societal conditions of enduring solidarity between the generations in later life?

The arrangement and the quality of the relationship between parents and their mature children can be investigated in respect to organization, investment and interaction. Research on intergenerational relationships has been greatly intensified in the last two decades (Kohli/Szydlik 2000; Rossi/Rossi 1990; Bengtson 2001). Most studies come to the conclusion, that there is an extensive exchange between the parents and their children, where the material transfers (financial support) most likely go from parents to (adult) children and immaterial services in the other direction. But it is interesting to look whether functional equivalents for intergenerational relationships come about to compensate mutual losses in the potential of intergenerational support (Wachter 1997). Again longitudinal study designs are required to follow the linked life courses of the relevant actors over a period of time and we need an intergenerational design to capture the effects of strengths and weaknesses that parents pass on to their children.

4.5 Family dynamics and Institutions of Advanced Welfare States

The multi-level perspective of the life course emphasizes that individual behaviour is embedded in a broader range of institutions. They are part of the opportunity structure and shape the individuals' scripts of life as well. This approach, therefore, includes structural *and* cultural determinants of the everyday organization of family life and the social interaction of the family members (Mayer/Schoepflin 1989, Lesthaeghe 2002). Policies affect the lives of citizens in direct or indirect ways. Following our theoretical approach, the welfare state, like other institutions, changes the opportunity structure and the incentive structure for individuals, especially through cash benefits, services, or by defining the conditions of getting special support.

Faced with a decline in fertility rates, European welfare states are undergoing major demographic change. Nordic countries and France have quite successfully tackled this trend by supporting families with a moderate defamilialization strategy, while Germany and Southern Europe continue to depend on welfare production by families (Esping-Anderson 1999). Defamilialization means to provide families with services like day care facilities, advisory services, or support in caring for the elderly. Families are disburdened, which allows

parents to stay engaged in work and other non-family activities. Whereas the Nordic and French models allow for lower rates of childlessness and larger families, welfare production by families in other countries is now leading to smaller families and high rates of childlessness. Would the Nordic model be successful in Germany or the familialistic countries of Southern Europe as well? The ‘paradox’ effects of familism and de-familialisation on birth rates and the capabilities of families being successful in ‘producing’ individual well-being and positive externalities for the society need to be looked at in more detail - again from the structural and the cultural perspective. This will contribute to a better knowledge about an inter-societal transferability of measures in family politics.

Additionally, life course analysis has to take regional differences into account. For example, in the case of East and West Germany a huge difference in the rates of family formation out of wedlock can be observed (Konietzka/Kreyenfeld 2005). In East Germany the proportion of women who give birth to a child out of wedlock is two and a half times as high as in West Germany. In statistical models estimates of significant effects of various structural factors on the probability of an illegitimate birth can be identified. However, these models cannot explain the gap between the rate of illegitimacy in East and West Germany statistically. The question is what additional conditions contribute to this gap. A plausible suggestion is that besides considerably different structural conditions, relevant aspects of the cultural background also differ between East and West Germany. A similar case can be made in regard to regional differences in marriage behaviour in Germany. In West Germany after controlling for structural factors on the individual level and on the regional level in a multi-level analysis the residual variance between regions differs significantly different from zero (Hank 2003). We do not know for sure what the explanation for this residual regional variance is. However, we can assume again that cultural or social factors, which have not been observed, might play a role. With the given data there is no opportunity to solve this problem of explaining these regional differences empirically.

5 Conclusion

In this paper we have addressed several open questions about family research. We argued that these deficits are not really a matter of missing theory, conceptual ideas, and methodology. Instead we are lacking adequate data in a variety of fields which does not allow us to model family dynamics as an interdependent part of the life course of individuals and their underlying decision processes. We proposed a research agenda to overcome the stagnation in family research. The embedding of mating, partnership formation, marriage, child birth,

parenting, separation and divorce, 'rearranging' families, and the social exchange between generations in multi-dimensional individual life courses, linked lives, and the institutions of modern societies has to be 'deciphered'. Panel surveys provide the kind of data that we need for the very ambitious goals of family research from the life course perspective. For these questions, prospective instruments have to be developed and implemented in a long term panel study.

6 Panel Analysis of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics in Germany (PAIRFAM)

In Germany a panel project has been started to solve the problems of limited data quality and to meet the new demographical challenges of the future welfare state. The major ambition of the German research program "Panel Study of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics" (PAIRFAM) is a theory-guided collection of prospective data on a yearly basis. The research program has been initiated by Josef Brüderl and Hartmut Esser (both at University of Mannheim), Johannes Huinink (University of Bremen), Bernhard Nauck (Technical University of Chemnitz), and Sabine Walper (Leopold Maximilian University of Munich). The approach of this study is multidisciplinary and spans the disciplines Sociology, Psychology, Demography, and Economics. This multidisciplinary access guarantees that different levels of analysis and systems of influence are included in a reasonable way – from the macro level of social structure and labour market factors to the micro level of social relationships in social networks and living arrangements down to the inner-personal level of individual dispositions.

In 2004, the German Research Foundation granted a "Priority Program" to prepare PAIRFAM. This research program gives the opportunity to German scholars of family research to run projects on different important issues of the PAIRFAM study in order to support it with content related modules of a questionnaire. Co-operating with each other these projects develop new instruments and test established ones whether they work in a prospective approach. Here is a list projects participating in the Priority Program:

Abraham, Martin: Effects of regional mobility on partnerships and families

Diewald, Martin & Lang, Frieder R.: Interdependence of professional and kinship networks and family development across the life course

Esser, Hartmut: Social embedding and close relationships

Hill, Paul B.: Stability of intimate relationships and marriages (STAB)

Huinink, Johannes & Schröder, Torsten: The timing of parenthood

Klein, Thomas: The marriage market

Nauck, Bernhard & Steinbach, Anja: Development of panel-suited instruments to research the values of children as well as intergenerational relationships in Germany

Ott, Notburga & Althammer, Jörg: Bargaining theory and the family

Pinquart, Martin & Silbereisen, Rainer K.: Developmental timetables in adolescence, young adulthood and family development

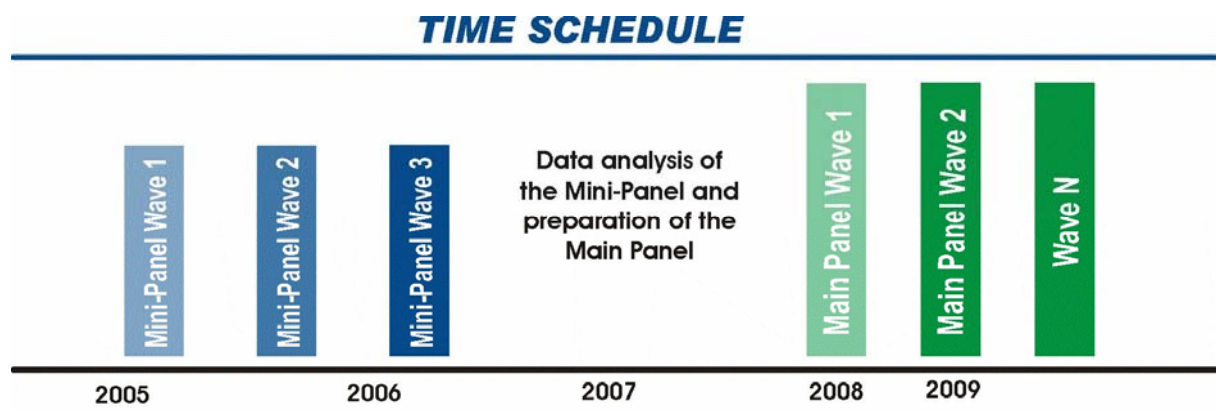
Reichle, Barbara: Competences of coping in adult partnerships and their transmission on children

Sackmann, Reinhold: Family-enlargement as a dynamic process

Wagner, Michael: Conflict, communication and the stability of close relationships

Walper, Sabine: Love in adolescence and young adulthood

In addition to these projects in 2005 and 2006 a “Mini Panel”-survey with three waves (September 2005; March 2006; September 2006) was conducted. Among others in this survey instruments developed in the various projects were tested and validated. 600 persons of age 15-17, 25-27, and 35-37 were interviewed (in Bremen, Chemnitz, Mannheim, Munich), 200 in every age cohort. Beside the target person, also their partner – if existent – as well as their parents and their children have been interviewed (multi-actor-design). In 2007, after the Mini Panel survey is finished, the data will be used to validate the instruments and to construct the questionnaire for the Main Panel (see the time schedule below).



Particular emphasis was placed on psychological and sociological instruments to get prospective information on determinants of *establishing intimate relationships and their stability over time; the timing, spacing, and stopping of fertility; intergenerational relationships and parenting; and social networks*. Detailed information can be found on the internet site: <http://www.pairfam.uni-bremen.de>.

It is planned to start with the Main Panel in 2008. A total of 12.000 members of the selected age cohorts (target persons) will be interviewed as well as their partners, in case of the youngest cohort their parents, and in case of the older cohorts their children. The overall sample size will be about 27.000 respondents in the first wave. The age-cohort approach was chosen because it fits best to the life course perspective. The target group will be of German nationality when we start. Immigrants in Germany will be included in subsequent waves. Because of the large sample size, we will be able to study infrequent events, which is a common aim of any family research.

After the Priority Program is finished and the first two waves of PAIRFAM have been conducted, it is planned to continue with the research in a long-term project "Life Courses and Family Dynamics in Modern Welfare Societies" in 2010 to assure the longevity of the panel, after all that is what a panel is all about.

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