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Structuration of the Life Course: Some Neglected Aspects

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(with Stephan van Baarle)

Abstract

North American life course research has typically focused on micro/meso level contexts, and how these shape men's and women's lives. There has been less attention to societal laws and policies in analyses of gendered life courses. In contrast, Europeans have typically neglected gender and interdependence among lives, concentrating on analyses of how the state shapes trajectories. We argue that the consideration of demographic context and the role of laws and policies can help bridge the continental divide in life course approaches. In focusing on these two macro-level structural factors, it is unavoidable to acknowledge that families are critical mediators between society and individuals. We show that demographic shifts are creating new late life potential and new opportunities for intergenerational connections. Demographic change also increases differences between men's and women's networks and lives. We discuss so-called intergenerational policy regimes and show how they strengthen autonomy versus interdependence in families. Our review of legal changes reveals gender convergence in life structuring. Yet, we also observe strong contrasts between how men and women actually live their lives. Most likely, new understanding of this complex picture can be found in the intersection of macro-and micro perspectives. It is more important than ever that we

bridge a "continental divide" between research communities, across countries and methodological camps.

Keywords: gender, interdependence, laws, levels of analysis, demographic context

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1 Our Point of Departure

Since both authors have studied and worked in Europe as well as in North America, it is natural for us to take a comparative view, exploring contrasts and similarities between European and North American perspectives. We start from two basic premises: First, life course studies are a perfect arena in which to raise and seek solutions to some fundamental analytical puzzles that have faced social scientists since the start of our disciplines. Central among them are relationships among *levels* and units of analysis. Among major figures in classic social science, Durkheim, through his emphasis on *social facts*, took the clearest stance with regard to levels: "…collective life does not derive from individual life…, [and] the latter cannot explain the former (Durkheim, 1895/1982, p. 134). Second, we have a much better chance of building new insights, filling knowledge gaps, and solving analytical puzzles if we have *international dialogues* and collaboration across research communities.

After a brief historical overview of approaches to the life course on two continents (section 2), we highlight some classic work on men's and women's lives and raise the issue of whether life course scholars on two continents have met the empirical and analytical challenges of analyzing how *gendered life courses* are shaped by cultural expectations as well as contrasting positions in society (section 3). We ask: To what extent do macro-level forces create different patterns of interdependence, divergent and contrasting life trajectories for men and women in the early decades of a new century? As part of the focus on macro-level structures, we include a section (4) outlining key *demographic shifts*. Subsequently, we explore how demographic context, laws and policies create contrasting patterns of *interdependence* (section 5) and different *transition patterns* for men and women (section 6). In the final section (7) we attempt to restate and discuss key analytical and empirical challenges facing life course researchers who aim to understand the influences of demographic contexts, welfare regimes and methodological traditions.

It is important to note that in attempting a rather panoramic view of complex issues, our aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview of facts and findings, but rather to highlight dimensions and perspectives that we feel have not received the attention they deserve.

In several recent overviews of life course research, authors have argued that North American and European scholars have tended to focus on different levels of analysis, emphasizing contrasting dimensions of social context. For example, Leisering (2004) suggests that US researchers have tended to take a social-psychological perspective, emphasizing the micro-and meso levels of individuals and their families, contemplating culture and shared meaning as the main organizing force in shaping lives. Many of them build on what is referred to as "the Chicago school of sociology", with E. Hughes, G.H. Mead, W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki among the key figures. This tradition within life course research goes back

to the mid-20th century. In contrast, European scholars have focused on macro-level social structures and the institutionalized life course. This tradition builds on classic sociological accounts of social change, with M. Weber as a key figure.

2 A Comparative Lens: Perspectives on Lives in Different Contexts

2.1 Structuring the Life Course: Early North American Contributions

In the 1950s, scholars of human development conducted the pioneering Kansas City Study of Adult Life, collecting complex interview data. Questions covered perceptions of "the normal expectable life": culturally shared expectations of age-appropriate behaviors and the "right" timing of key transitions (e.g. Neugarten, 1969; Neugarten, Moore & Lowe, 1965). Implicitly, the project explored concepts that sociologist Robert Merton (1942/1979) called "the three Ps": prescription, proscription and permission, in this case linked to age status. Since then, similar studies have been carried out in the Chicago area (Settersten & Hagestad, 1996a, 1996b), in Japan (Plath & Ikeda, 1975) and in more than 20 European societies (Billari et al., 2011; Spéder, Murinkó & Settersten, 2013).

In the 1960s and 70s, key publications marked a new epoch for the study of how social structure and culture assign social meanings to maturation and aging, as well as to "metered" biographical time, i.e., chronological age. In 1964, Leonard Cain published a pioneering paper on life course and social structure. He based his presentation on classical anthropological studies of age differentiation, age grading and rites of passage. Focusing on age-status systems, Cain concentrated on a sequence of age-linked roles and emphasized the importance of historical generations and cohort flow. His discussion, however, had little or no consideration of sex/gender. Surprisingly, neither did Riley and collaborators, whose landmark volumes on age stratification were published in the late 1960s and early 70s (e.g., Riley, Johnson, & Foner, 1972). These authors elaborated how the social structuring of age is tied to the division of labour and a system of stratification. While both Cain and Riley

emphasized the importance of cohort flow and historical context, Elder's (1974) landmark volume on *Children of the Great Depression* made this principle come to life. Furthermore, his book presented evidence of how *families* are a critical mediating force, between macro-level historical events and changes, such as the Depression, and the micro-level of individual lives. Inspired by this view, researchers have later shown that the family realm may not only intensify, but can also soften or diffuse the force of societal conditions. For example, many African American parents, under conditions of racial segregation and discrimination, instilled confidence and courage in their children, enabling them to reach occupational goals despite massive structural and cultural barriers in the wider societal context (e.g., Fields-Smith, 2005; Loder-Jackson, McKnight, Brooks, McGrew, & Voltz, 2007). Scholars focusing on the mediating role of families clearly illustrate that knowledge of *intra-cohort variation* is necessary for understanding *inter-cohort contrasts*.

Work on family contexts also raises fundamental issues about gender. Elder (1974) suggested that boys were more negatively affected by changes in the family's economic circumstances than were girls, because the latter were better able to maintain a sense of continuity and stability as "mother's helpers" in the household. Here, we touch on a question that has often been raised in anthropological work: are women's lives more structured on a micro-level of social context, while men's life trajectories are more heavily shaped by macro-level institutional anchoring (Keith,1985; Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976, Young, 1965)? Building on Angrist's (Angrist & Almquist, 1975) discussion of women's contingency orientation, Moen (2001) states that "women's lives are typically contingent lives, shaped around the experience of others: their husbands, children, and parents (p. 189)". In other words, she argues that *interdependence among lives* is a more powerful force for women than for men. We return to this challenging issue in a later section.

Following up his volume on the Depression, Elder (1975, 1979) worked to systematize perspectives and concepts for studying lives in changing historical contexts. Central in his framework were four organizing concepts: transitions, trajectories, interdependence among lives, and agency. To describe transitions and trajectories, key concepts are timing, sequencing and duration. The strong emphasis on culturally shared expectations and proximal conditions in families, communities and social networks highlights how time and place shape lives. One might think that Elder's framework includes macro-level structuring through social policy, but as Leisering (2004) points out, the discussion of how lives were marked by the Depression did not include the possible impact of the New Deal. Subsequent consideration of interdependent lives shows that his perspective is mostly social psychological: "Lives are lived interdependently and social-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships…. Interdependent lives highlight the role of significant others in regulating and shaping the timing of life trajectories *through a network of informal control*" (Elder & Shanahan, 2006, p. 58, emphasis added).

Several authors have pointed to problematic aspects of agency as an organizing concept, given the realities of interdependent lives on micro-and meso-levels and structural constraints on the macro-level (Diewald, 1999; Kohli, 1986; Levy, 2013a; 2013b). Settersten (2003) speaks of "agency in structure", while Elder and Shanahan (2006:) argue that: "Individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance" (p. 52). Mayer (2003) takes a somewhat different view, stating that:

> "Sociologists tend to believe more in selection than in choice…..Within given institutional contexts, individuals are probably more frequently being selected than selecting themselves….If material resources, power, authority, information and symbolic goods are distributed very unequally within given societies, then it follows that more people have to accommodate than have the opportunity to control" (p. 466).

As he has done many times, Mayer points out that social groups, in which lives are interwoven, are highly structured by the temporal dynamics of social institutions and organizations.

2.2 Shaping the Life Course Through Laws and Policies: European Perspectives

In 1976, Cain pointed to the role of law in shaping lives, but he later stated (Cain, 2003): ”Most scholarly literature on age-related phenomena *has lacked curiosity* about the legal basis for the status of various age-categories” (p. 310, emphasis added). In the same year, anthropologist Fry (2003) discussed the baffling variety of age/time concepts in modern western societies, suggesting that we use the term *legislative time*. Quite a few years earlier, Hernes (1987), in a collection of essays on *Welfare states and woman power* (within a Nordic context) used the term *chronopolitics* and called for more scholarly attention to the politics of time, age and gender. By the late 1980s, European, mostly German, writing on the life course examined how *macro-level* structural conditions shape transitions and trajectories. Going back to Cain’s 2003 assessment of the US, one could argue that the central curiosity in Europe was, indeed, legal and policy-bases for age markers and the definition of life phases. Much of this literature emphasized that the state, through laws and policies, *deliberately* creates opportunities and constraints, (in German *Rahmenbedingungen*) an overarching framework for shaping lives. This point is emphasized by Leisering (2004), who explicitly states that “Life course policies are intended to change the structure of the life course” (p. 210). He goes on to say that researchers must search for tacit objectives, not only those that are openly stated. Furthermore, he makes a distinction between positive and negative life course policies. The latter occur when policy-makers leave it to markets or charity to form life course patterns.

In the 1980s, German scholars, with Kohli (1985, 1986), Mayer and Müller (1986), and Mayer and Schöpflin (1989) among the pioneers, argued that the modern nation-state, through its laws, institutions and modern bureaucracies gave rise to the institutionalized life

course. States structure the life course by delineating phases through legally stipulated chronological markers and by defining rights and duties linked to chronological age. States can also contribute to individual life course continuity through risk management and safety nets. Some of these policy efforts focus on supporting and minimizing risks for families. A focus on state-provided risk reduction and support is illustrated in two more recent comparative projects: Leisering and Leibfried's (1999) study of poverty in Germany and the US and an examination of the extent to which nine contemporary European welfare states provide support for men's and women's key adult transitions (Anxo, Bosch, & Rubery, 2010).

Early work on welfare state reduction of life risks focused on wage labor (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 1990), thereby neglecting the fact that participation in the labor market presupposes a support-system of unpaid family work. Feminist scholars pointed out that programs developed to protect workers from the vagaries of the market sometimes acted to reproduce and reinforce inequalities originating from the unequal distribution of care responsibilities at home (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993). These scholars have examined how welfare states create different "care regimes" for young and old, which in turn present starkly contrasting opportunities and constraints in men's and women's life course and structure parent-child ties in several generations. We return to the issue of care regimes in section 5.4. In considering the organization of men's and women's lives, both European and US researchers could benefit by returning to classic discussions of how age and sex in combination present the two sexes with different cultural expectations as well as contrasting locations in society's division of labor and social institutions.

3 Her and His Life: Revisiting Classics

In a presentation to the 1941 meetings of the American Sociological Society, Ralph Linton invited colleagues to enter new research terrain by studying what he called the "age-sex system". He emphasized that "the characteristics of age and sex may be treated *as a unit*,

since membership in a particular age-sex category.....will be found to be a prerequisite for the occupation of practically any status within a social system" (Linton, 1942, pp. 589-590, emphasis added).

The issue of the *American Sociological Review* in which Linton's presentation was published also has a paper by Talcott Parsons (1942). He highlighted age-sex roles in the nuclear family, especially the "asymmetrical relation of the sexes to the occupational structure" (p. 605) and its consequences for men and women in different phases of adulthood. Later, Parsons worked with social psychologist Robert Bales on the dichotomy between "emotional expressive" and "instrumental" roles (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Contemporary feminist critiques of work/family arrangements still return to this distinction, especially in discussions of parenthood as the "big divide" in differentiating her and his adulthood (Levy, 2013a; O'Connor, 1996).

In the wake of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s came growing research recognition that men and women have different adult lives. Based on their comprehensive studies of American life, Campbell, Converse and Rogers (1976) concluded: "To an important degree, men and women grow up in different cultures, develop different expectations, learn different roles, and live different lives (p. 395)". When Cain (1976) argued for studying the role of law in age structuring, he reminded the reader that in classic legal codes, such as the *Code Napoleon*, different age limits were set for men and women's transitions. For marrying, they specified age 15 for women, 18 for men. To a very limited extent have the calls for new knowledge, voiced in the 1970s, been systematically followed up. McMullin (1995) and Ginn and Arber (1995) expressed dismay that the issues identified by Linton have not been addressed in research, but both focus on old age.

Two decades after the American life studies, McMullin (1995) stated that "the lack of theoretical development concerning the relationship between gender and ageing seems

incomprehensible" (p. 30). She identified three "add on" paths that have been followed in past work: Adding gender and/or age to mainstream sociological theorizing, adding gender to sociological theories of ageing ("gendered ageing theory"), and adding age relations to feminist theory ("feminist aging theory"). She argued that "if age and gender are organizing dimensions of the social world, then separating these systems makes no sense. Older people are not just old, they are either men or women" (p. 37). In the same volume, two European researchers (Ginn & Arber, 1995) remind us that "Gender and ageing are inextricably intertwined in social life; each can only be fully understood with reference to the other" (p.1). Yet, they go on to say that ageing and gender have rarely been researched in terms of their joint influence. Like McMullin, Ginn and Arber (2005 suggest that "sociologists concerned with ageing and ageism have tended to "add on" gender, *treating it as a variable* rather than integrating it as a fundamental relationship of social organization" (p.2, emphasis added).

In the late 1980s "intersectionality" was introduced as an analytical tool to elucidate the creation and reproduction of inequalities associated with salient social categories like gender, sexuality, race, age, and class (Crenshaw, 1989). Rather than examining these social categories as producing distinctive cleavages, the principle of intersectionality leads to scrutiny of how they mutually interact with one another. Nevertheless, we argue that even limiting attention to two statuses, little progress has been made in understanding age and gender as intertwined systems. In a recent special issue of *Signs* on intersectionality studies (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013), age is not mentioned at all.

Alice Rossi, as president of the American Sociological Association three decades ago, selected age and gender as the theme of the annual meeting. The goal she expressed in the resulting volume (Rossi, 1985) is still programmatic, but unmet: "Hopefully, the next time an editor puts together a volume on these core constructs of age and gender, the state-of-the art will permit a sophisticated integration of new theory and research that is beyond our

contemporary ability to provide" (p. 17). Since the book was published, numerous overviews devoted to the life course have appeared, for the most part focusing on age but sidestepping gender. A notable exception is Levy and Widmer (2013), who challenge scholars to return to sociological work published in the mid 20th century to gain an analytical understanding of structural conditions that may differentially shape men's and women's life course.

In sections 5 and 6, we discuss the extent to which societies, through laws and policies, create distinct patterns of interdependence, transitions and life trajectories on the basis of age/sex/gender. Before we turn to such macro-level structuring, we focus on demographic conditions, another *Rahmenbedingung* that creates different patterns of interdependence and divergence in life phases for men and women. Demographic contexts have, to a great extent, been neglected in discussions of forces shaping the life course, on both sides of the Atlantic. Mayer (2004) reminds us that

> "It is not single individuals but populations that are allocated through and streamlined through the institutional fabric of society across the life time – for example, the size of one's cohort, as well as the preceding and succeeding cohorts, influences individuals' opportunities way beyond individual or situational conditions" (p. 165).

4 Demographic Context of Lives and Relationships

4.1 Altered Age Structures

The demographic transition (Davis, 1945) with its reduced mortality and fertility rates has created markedly longer lives and altered the balance between young and old in the population. Researchers face many challenges in mapping how new demographic circumstances have dramatically affected micro-level life course patterns and interdependence in *intergenerational matrices*. Such matrices need to be considered on a societal level, across cohorts and age groups, as well as in families, communities and social networks. The paucity

of appropriate data is part of the problem facing researchers interested in social change and relations across generational boundaries.

In popular media and policy discussions, the demographic transition is almost uniformly seen as a massive increase in the number of old people –a big "grey wave". The emphasis in scholarly work is also on the older segment of a changing population. In contrast, a few authors (e.g. Hagestad, 2008, Uhlenberg, 2009) have argued that demographic changes have altered the social worlds of *children*. Children now represent a much smaller proportion of the population than has been the case throughout human history, reflecting altered mortality and fertility. Victor (2010) comments that in 1901, 40% of all deaths in England and Wales occurred among children aged 0-14, while 44% were among individuals aged 65 and older. In 2008, the corresponding figures were 1% and 83%. Uhlenberg (1980) illustrated how experiences of family deaths have undergone dramatic changes over the last century. While losing at least one child was an expectable part of parenthood in the early 1900s, it is now so rare that parents experiencing such loss need national organizations to find peer support. Another change in the patterning of family deaths is that widowhood and the loss of parents have developed clearer timing patterns, a trend that may increase potential support from "transition peers".

Vaupel (2009) commented that in 1840, Swedish women had the world's highest life expectancy at birth−46. Today, Japanese women hold the world record−a bit over 87. While populations for most of human history have consisted of at least 50 % children and under 5% old people, we have witnessed increasing "top-heaviness"; the proportions of young and old are now about equal. According to the 2014 Population Reference Bureau (PRB) *World Population Data Sheet,* the more developed countries now, on a global basis, have 16% of the population under the age of 15; 17% 65 and older. These are also the average figures for Europe. North America is a bit younger−19% and 14%. The oldest population in the world is

the Japanese, where the figures are 13% and 26%−in other words−there are twice as many old people as children. Variations in the balance between young and old become more striking when we consider gender differences in survival to old age.

So far, population aging has entailed a "feminization", due to an increasing gap between life expectancies of men and women, which results in imbalanced sex ratios. In many old populations, there are more than twice as many women as men over the age of 80. The figures for 2013 (PRB, 2014) show that in more developed countries, the average difference in life expectancy at birth is 7 years. This is also the average figure for Europe. In the US, the number is now 5 years. Looking across Europe, the smallest gender difference is in Iceland, where women can expect to live 3 years longer than men. In sharp contrast, six countries in Eastern and Central Europe have a difference of 10 years or more. Belarus, Lithuania and Russia show a difference of 11 years.

Thus, demographic conditions for interdependence between old and young vary widely across societies. In 2005, there were 81 women aged 65 and older per 100 children under 15 in Italy. The corresponding figure for old men was 57 per 100 children. The figures for the Russian Federation were 62 women and 29 men per 100 children. It is reasonable to conclude that Russian children grow up having highly limited contact with old men. Because of changes in life expectancy, women's friendships and intergenerational ties are typically characterized by "co-longevity" and long durations. This fact has to a limited degree been recognized in the life course literature.

The magnitude and complexity of demographic change have not permeated scholarly or policy discussions of how men and women spend the last decades of life, studies of relationships across age groups in society, or research on intergenerational family ties. However, in his important discussions of the institutionalized life course, Kohli (1986; 2007) emphasized the significance of population change in the 20th century, suggesting that a new

demographic stability and altered age structures lead to a greater emphasis on measurable time, central in the development of modern bureaucracies and essential to modern society's division of labor. Kohli (1986) pointed out that during the first half of the 1900s, *chronological age* became increasingly significant as a basis for marking transitions and assigning rights and duties. He stressed that demographic stability is a major factor in the emergence of *the tripartite life course*: a first phase focused on preparation through schooling, a second centered on involvement in work and family building, and a third without work, a time of retirement. These phases were also outlined by Cain (1964). In addition to age, Kohli pointed to *duration* as a key dimension of social placement. Indeed, some legislation (reflected in the German concept of *Dienstalter*), assumed that duration of work (reflected in the seniority principle) nearly coincided with chronological age. Such assumptions, however, were based on a male life course (Moen, 2001; O'Rand, 1988; Sørensen, 1987). Gender is conspicuously missing in path-breaking German work on the institutionalized life course.

4.2 Life Maps out of Step with Demographic Reality?

In their discussion of age stratification, Riley and colleagues (1994) argued that in many aging societies, we observe structural lag: demographic shifts have been so rapid and complex that social structures are out of step with the new reality. The same argument could also be made using the more traditional concept of *cultural lag:* shared expectations linked to age status have not kept pace with demographic change. As life expectancies increased, also in old age, and actuarial patterns became increasingly predictable, scholars and policymakers suggested a shift in emphasis from *time lived* (chronological age) to *time left* in defining rights (e.g., Sanderson & Scherbov, 2007; Vaupel, 2009). Interestingly, this distinction was made by Neugarten in a 1968 pioneering paper on awareness of *middle age*. She argued that between the ages of 40 and 60, individuals become increasingly aware of finitude and start to think in

terms of time left, rather than time lived. Ryder (1975), trying to define a threshold for old age, also wrote about the time remaining until death as a marker.

Currently, the world average for the age at which individuals can expect to live 15 more years is 67 (Scherbov, Sanderson, KC, & Lutz, 2014). By the end of the century, the figure is estimated to be the age of 78. In Denmark, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain, there is now discussion of pension reform that links the statutory retirement age to remaining life expectancy (OECD, 2014). Recent analyses using cross-national European data show that a higher expected length of life increases the chances of working close to and past the official retirement age (Börsch-Supan, Brugiavini, & Croda, 2009).

In the US, several recent books take a cultural perspective on the new old age, calling for revised life maps (see Moen, current volume). They speak of becoming old as entering a *new country*, starting with Hendricks' (1980), *Country of the Old*. In 1995, Smith titled her book *Old Age is Another Country.* Pipher (1999) used the same metaphor. Recently, anthropologist Bateson (2010) has urged older adults to *compose a further life,* advocating new educational opportunities for seniors who try to negotiate unmarked life trails. In Europe, sociologist Rosenmayr, now age 90, takes a positive view of missing life scripts, emphasizing freedom (Rosenmayr, 1983). In his latest volume on the issue, published in 2007, he discusses the philosophy of old age, with a focus on creativity. Freedom and playfulness are also central themes in a rapidly growing international organization of old women, *The Red Hat Society* (Van Bohemen, Van Zoonen, & Aupers, 2014). Several authors argue that to create a meaningful old age, contact with children is essential. As Margaret Mead (1970) emphasized, children and old people need to exchange teaching and learning, especially in societies undergoing rapid change. Such considerations bring us to broader perspectives on how demographic shifts, in combination with other societal change, have affected relationships between age groups.

4.3 Altered Opportunities for Relationships among Age Groups: Increasing Segregation?

Before Kohli's account of the tripartite life course, US social scientists had voiced concerns that the new segmentation of life might lead to age segregation. Lofland (1968) described colleges as "youth ghettos". Coleman (1961) wrote about *The Adolescent Society*, expressing concerns over the exclusion of children and youth from places of work; adults are "away" much of the day in work spaces where there are no children and no old people. Later, Coleman (1982) argued that age segregation deprives the young of a proper view of mid-life and old age, and produces adults who have little understanding of the young. A recent US study based on successive waves of the General Social Survey shows that such concerns are warranted: young adults have become increasingly isolated from older age groups outside the family (Smith, McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 2014). More than two decades after Coleman's warnings, Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005; 2006) raised concerns about three types of age segregation: institutional, spatial and cultural. Institutional segregation is created by policies that block interdependence between young and old by allocating issues relating to the two age groups to separate ministries and administrative units. In the spheres of education and leisure, one of the age groups is typically excluded. Little is known about age segregation in residential patterns, with the exception of "old age ghettos", such as retirement communities and care institutions. Spatial segregation is now being addressed by social geographers and city planners (e.g., Vanderbeck, 2007) but has not been discussed by a wider social science community. Cultural gaps between age groups are often associated with the two first types of segregation and are observed in contrasting language, dress, food, and music preferences (Hagestad, 2008).

What are the consequences of age segregation? It makes contact and personal knowledge of one another difficult for members of different age groups, thus giving rise to

ageism; it blocks socialization across generational lines, and limits the spectrum of interpersonal resources in social networks.

Cross-age ties are an under-researched topic (Riley, 2000), perhaps because homogeneity is a tenet of friendship research. Homogeneity or "homophily" (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954) refers to the tendency to form relationships with others who are similar in some designated aspect such as age, sex, ethnic background, and social class (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). As Mollenhorst, Völker and Flap (2008) show, the age composition of the contexts in which people meet is an important determinant of the likelihood that cross-age ties develop. In their network study, the mean age difference between confidants who met each other at school, in leisure activities, or via friends was about nine years, but the mean age difference between those who became acquainted via family members was almost 16 years. Few authors have addressed the question of whether there are gender differences in the likelihood of having cross-age friendships. A common practice is to "control for" gender in analyses of age homogeneity in networks rather than to explicitly address gender differences (e.g., Mollenhorst et al., 2007). Most research shows that women have larger and more diversely composed networks than men (Antonucci, 2001), but patterns are not always clear cut: gender differences in personal networks vary by life stage, socioeconomic status and marital history (e.g., Ajrouch, Blandon, & Antonucci, 2005).

Scholars concerned about societal age segregation and lack of contact between young and old are often told that such contact is a key function of the family, where members of different age groups and cohorts meet, form durable ties and engage in reciprocal socialization.

4.4 Altered Opportunities for Interdependence Across Family Generations

To describe intergenerational family networks, one cannot rely on standard demographic measures such as fertility rates, life expectancy, dependency ratios and household

composition (Connidis, 2014; Herlofson & Hagestad, 2011). An overview of intergenerational ties requires careful attention to *anchoring* (Herlofson, 2013): whose family network are we describing? Uhlenberg (2004) offers an example: decreases in adult mortality have little relevance for the availability of grandchildren among mature adults. Any person who survives to an advanced age—regardless of time period—is likely to have an adult grandchild. However, decreases in adult mortality are particularly relevant from the perspective of grandchildren, because there is an increase in the supply of grandparents and expanded potential for young adults to develop adult relationships with grandparents.

Many modern societies have myths about the good old days, when children practically grew up on grandma's lap. Demographers have an alternative story about the *absence* of grandparents in the first part of the 20th century, especially for the younger children in large sibships. Reduced fertility has also led to clearer sequencing between active parenting and grandparenting, especially among women, resulting in less "competition" between the parent and grandparent roles. Uhlenberg (2009) points to one more factor affecting contact and closeness between grandparents and grandchildren: a reduction in the number of grandchild sets. What might be called a revolution in grandparenthood reflects the main drivers of the demographic transition. We have seen a dramatic increase in the proportion of children with all four biological grandparents alive. According to Uhlenberg's (1996) estimates, 5% of 10-year-olds in the US at the start of the 1900s had four grandparents; by 2005, the figure was 40%. This last figure is very similar to what emerged from the 2005 Norwegian grandparenthood study, a survey anchored in children aged 10-12: 41% had all four (Hagestad, 2006). Microsimulation models reveal an increase in the proportion of 0-20 year olds with four surviving grandparents in the Netherlands from 10% in 1950 to 20% in 1990 (Post, Van Imhoff, Dykstra & Van Poppel, 1997).

The availability of grandparents is not limited to childhood. Estimates for the US (Uhlenberg, 1996) show that the proportion of 30 year-olds with a grandparent alive more than tripled between 1900 and 2000, from 21% to 75%. The expectation for 2020 is a further increase to 80%. Uhlenberg presents a powerful example of historical change: 20-year-olds in 2000 were more likely to have a grandmother still living (91%) than 20-year-olds in 1900 were to have a mother living (83%).

Studies of intergenerational ties focus on "the matrifocal tilt" and "women as kin-keepers", but such descriptions of women's involvement in intergenerational relationships have mostly emphasized cultural constructions of family roles, not the demographic basis of gender patterns. An example is repeated reports that maternal grandmothers are the most involved grandparents. Such accounts often neglect the fact that these women typically become grandparents at the youngest age (reflecting timing of parenthood in two generations), are the healthiest, and can expect the longest duration of role occupancy. Work on the availability of vertical kin typically uses non-gendered terms, such as grandparents and great-grandparents (e.g., Grundy, Murphy & Shelton, 1999; Puur, Sakkeus, Põldma, & Herm, 2011), concealing the fact that women are heavily over-represented in the older generations. Relevant to life course research is the fact that the sequencing of parental death and entry into the grandparent role differs for men and women. Given gender differences in age at marriage and life expectancy, men are more likely to lose fathers before a new generation is added, whereas women typically become grandmothers while their mothers are still alive.

Cross-national differences in the generational structure of families are not easily determined, because the joint effect of demographic trends on family units is not always obvious. An example is the countervailing effects of increased longevity and postponed childbearing on the generational structure of families (Matthews & Sun, 2006). While declining adult mortality means that older family members are living longer than they did in

the past, which increases the likelihood that three, four or even five generations may be alive at the same time, delayed childbearing means that the age gap between generations is widening, which reduces the likelihood that multiple generations will be alive at the same time. A comparison between Hungary and the Netherlands of the number of descending family generations of people aged 70 and over illustrates decelerated generational turnover in connection with late childbearing (Knipscheer, Dykstra, Utasi, & Cxeh-Szombathy, 2000). Since the 1970s, the age at parenthood has been higher in the Netherlands than in Hungary. Not surprisingly, a lower proportion of Dutch (24%) than of Hungarian older adults (39%) reported four descending family generations, even though life expectancy is higher in the Netherlands.

4.5 Family Generations: Recognizing Multiple Links

An abundant literature underscores the importance of intergenerational family relationships in shaping the life chances of the young, the middle-aged, and the old. Nevertheless, this literature is made up of separate foci (Moen, Lam, & Jackson, 2014): "parenting" tends to be about young families, "intergenerational transmission" typically focuses on early and middle adulthood, whereas "informal care" is about adult children and ageing parents. Studies of "grandparenting" are exceptional in the sense that multiple generations of family members are often considered simultaneously: grandchildren, the middle generation, and grandparents.

A focus on both the young and the old in families points to forms of life course structuration that have been neglected in earlier work (Dykstra & Komter, 2012). For example, research on labor force exit has benefitted from looking at the retirement decision in a multigenerational perspective rather than solely focusing on the retiring generation. Van Bavel and De Winter (2013) examined whether grandchild care might encourage older workers to leave the labor force before the official retirement age. Their analyses revealed that grandparenthood speeds up retirement, particularly for women—an illustration that

interdependence plays a stronger role in women's lives than in men's. The finding is all the more compelling given policy efforts to increase labor force participation in the context of an ageing Europe. Whereas having grandparents taking care of grandchildren enables the middle generation to be gainfully employed, it suppresses the economic activity of the older generation, and may constitute an expensive form of childcare.

The "discovery" of grandparents (Segalen, 2010) by fertility researchers is another example of new insights gained from considering interdependence in the lives of young and old in families. A number of studies have shown that the decision to have children is taken more readily when support from grandparents is available (e.g., Hank and Kreyenfeld ,2003). Using Dutch longitudinal data, Kaptijn and colleagues (2010) demonstrated that men and women who received frequent childcare support from their parents were more likely to have a second or third child than offspring who received no such support. Based on longitudinal data from 11 European countries, Aassve, Meroni, & Pronzato (2011) concluded that the positive effect of grandparental help on childbearing was much greater in Mediterranean countries than in western and northern Europe.

Research on grandparental care and fertility shows how levels of analysis matter. At the micro-level of individual lives there is a positive association between grandparental help and childbearing. At the macro-level, however, the association is negative. Fertility rates tend to be highest in countries with the most generous public childcare facilities and parental leaves (Castles, 2003; Gornick & Hegewisch, 2015; McDonald, 2006), that is, in countries where governments support the combination of parenting duties and employment, thus reducing the necessity of grandparental care.

With people living longer and reaching old age in better health (Vaupel, 2010), grandparenthood is becoming a more important part of the life course. In Norway, grandparenthood is being called "life's dessert".

4.6 Limited Vertical Ties: Increased Life Course Vulnerability?

What happens to the lives of individuals who do not fit the picture presented above−those with no or limited vertical family ties? An issue that is of particular current interest is rising childlessness rates among men. Some authors, on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g. Dykstra & Keizer, 2009; Eggebeen & Uhlenberg, 1985), are concerned about men's social integration, support through interdependent relationships, and investment in their community, especially in the second half of adulthood. North American social psychological research based on Erikson's concept of generativity, i.e. investment in younger generations, indicates that the concern is warranted. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) found self-reported generativity to be associated with parenting for men but not for women. Compared to fathers, more childless men felt disconnected from their communities and were not involved in local organizations. A more recent study (McKeering & Pakenham, 2000) similarly found parental generativity (time invested in care activities and psychological involvement in parenting) more strongly related to societal generativity for men than for women. In rural parts of Europe, social services have difficulties organizing care for old childless men because they are severely isolated and often live in remote areas (e.g., Wenger, 2009).

Other authors (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 2002; Heckman,2006; Sørensen, 2005) have raised concerns about how children and young people with limited vertical ties (e.g. with single parents and no available grandparents) find life course supports. These authors argue that the availability or lack of intergenerational family relationships, especially with grandparents, is a major factor in the widening inequality among young people. In other words, cross-generational ties in the family are a source of economic, cultural and social capital. Such concerns have also been raised in discussions of societal age segregation (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005) because it is hard to find arenas in which young and old can meet outside the family realm.

5 Webs of Interdependent Lives: Micro and Macro Perspectives

5.1 Two Faces of Interdependence

When Elder introduced the concept of interdependence in lives, he focused on family groups: individual lives are influenced by what happens to other family members, whose circumstances are considered when making life course decisions. Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe (2004) give the following description: "Lives are lived interdependently and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships" (p. 13). Family historians (Hareven 1982; Modell, 1989) argue that with the emergence of the institutionalized life course, lives became less contingent on conditions in the family realm. In a home-based economy, the production and reproduction of the household took precedence over the interests of its members. The transition to a wage labor economy, as well as new educational opportunities, set individuals free from the bonds of the family of origin. Buchmann (1989) speaks of *Freisetzung*, a liberation, giving individuals (especially young people) more opportunity to build their own adult lives**.** The liberation also brings uncertainties, as Beck (1992) has argued; when individuals are the "architects of their own lives," they run the risk of being left with a sense of personal failure (see also Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). To what extent do modern youth actively plan their future? A recent analysis of data from 23 European nations (Hellevik & Settersten, 2013) shows that both micro and macro levels need to be considered. Individuals with greater personal security were more likely to plan than those who had fewer personal resources. Yet, young adults who lived in countries with less favorable societal conditions were more likely to plan than those in countries with more favorable conditions.

It is interesting to note that several of the authors cited above seem to take a somewhat negative view of interdependence. Clearly, it is a multi-faceted phenomenon, in that it represents rights, support, continuity and protection against risks, as well as obligations,

vulnerabilities related to events and resources of others, and transitions beyond a person's control. Anthropologist David Plath illustrated both faces of interdependence. In an analysis of a Japanese novel, he showed how a young woman had her life "on hold" until her older sister had made the transition into marriage (Plath, 1980). Plath also wrote of how we need a convoy (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980) of consociates (Schütz, 1967), who can serve as co-biographers (Ferrarotti, 1981).

5.2 Interdependence as a Policy Issue

Europeans often find it paradoxical that the US−quite possibly the most individualized country in the world− offers many examples of the power of family interdependence. Part of this power stems from the lack of state mechanisms for risk reduction. The first author, while teaching in US academic institutions, had students crying in her office on numerous occasions because a parent had become unemployed or seriously ill, leaving no money for tuition.

In all developed societies, the caring and financial responsibilities for young and old family members are shared between families and the state (Kohli, Albertini, & Künemund, 2010), but countries differ greatly in their understanding of "proper" intergenerational family relations (Viazzo, 2010). Laws define rights and duties of family members towards each other, while policies (or their absence) reward or discourage particular family practices (Grandits, 2010; Leira, 2002; Saraceno, 2010). In many European societies, laws create or assume interdependence among lives, including legal stipulations of age and duration requirements across family relations. Using Norway as an example, laws "cross lives" in a number of ways:

- A's duties are tied to B's age. Parents are financially responsible until the child reaches the age of 18.
- A's rights are tied to B's age. Parents are entitled to child support (public transfer) until the child turns 18.

- A's rights are tied to B's duration of role occupancy. To qualify for full paid parental leave, the father must have worked for a given number of months prior to the pregnancy, but he also must have a partner (the mother) who meets these duration requirements.
- A's duration has negative effects on B's duration. The law provides a given duration of paid care leave (for sick children or other family members), but when the illness period exceeds the stipulated amount of leave time, the care provider may lose the continuous duration at work needed for full pension rights.

In many countries, primogeniture still makes first-borns' life progress dependent on their parents dying or giving up the farm or firm. In some countries, daughters and sons have equal rights; in other societies, sons have first rights, even when they are not first-born.

Family responsibility laws define clear rights and duties across and within generations. Policies and institutional arrangements may also *block interdependence,* as for example when grandparents are not granted the right to raise grandchildren when parents cannot provide adequate care, or when parents have court orders prohibiting them from visiting their children after divorce.

How interdependence is shaped on a macro level has not been systematically examined, but in many modern societies, and in many ways, laws and policies create contingent lives. We agree with Esping-Andersen (1997), who states that lives and relationships must be seen within a matrix of life-course policies: services, transfers to the old, care for children, support of parenting. In other words, we treat interdependence as a *policy issue,* with social psychological consequences. This is an underdeveloped domain of life course work, for the most part neglected in European scholarship on the institutionalized life course. Can we find explicit policy efforts to shape interdependence by regulating and structuring marriage and parenthood, or intergenerational ties? To what extent do legal

frameworks assume, create, and reinforce interdependence among lives? Under what circumstances does legal regulation create continuity and security versus discontinuity and risk for individuals whose lives are interconnected? Is A's risk B's security?

As sociology students, we were taught that most social roles are reciprocal: Ego's rights are Alter's duty. From this premise, we would conclude that Ego's rights face Alter with prescriptions. However, we can find a number of examples, especially in relationships between minor children and parents, of how this is not always the case. Following divorce that defines one custodial parent, the non-custodial parent has legal visitation rights. However, these rights typically take the form of *permission*. As a consequence, children do not have a right to contact with a non-residential parent. Similar examples of "relational asymmetry" are found in states that grant grandparents visitation rights.

5.3 Examples of Laws and Policies Structuring Interdependence

Legal obligations to provide financial support or care to family members can be viewed as *mandated interdependence.* A power of attorney to act on behalf of an older person deemed legally unfit to make independent decisions, or having to accept the authority of parents and guardians, are other examples of mandated interdependence. European nations vary widely regarding the range of family members included in civil laws regulating maintenance responsibilities (Saraceno & Keck, 2008).[1] The Mediterranean countries have the most extensive regulations. In Italy, for example, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles are legally obliged to financially support children if their parents are not able to support them. Many Central European countries (e.g., Austria, Latvia) legally obligate grandparents to

[1] See the Multilinks Database on intergenerational Policy Indicators for details. http://multilinks-database.wzb.eu/

provide financial support. Western and Northern European countries (e.g., Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom) typically do not legally oblige family members to support children if their parents cannot provide for them. In a number of countries, adult offspring are under legal obligations to financially support parents. In Italy such rules also hold for grandchildren, as well as for sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, but only if they are legally married (Saraceno & Keck, 2008). The countries that have no legal obligations for adult children to financially support their parents tend be in in Northern and Western Europe, but there are exceptions (Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Germany). The countries that legally oblige children to provide for their parents tend to be in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, but again, there are exceptions to this pattern (Hungary, Estonia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic).

Bordone, Arpino and Aassve (2012) empirically illustrate how policy arrangements structure generational interdependence across three generations. Combining data from the Survey of Health and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) with data from the Multilinks Database on Intergenerational Policy Indicators,[2] they examined the likelihood that grandparents care for the children of an employed daughter on a daily basis. Findings show that grandparents are most likely to be daily caregivers in countries where public childcare services and parental leaves are least generous (Italy, Greece, Spain, and Poland). They are least likely to care for grandchildren on a daily basis in countries that score the best in terms of childcare services (e.g., Belgium), parental leave (e.g., the Czech Republic), or both types of arrangements (e.g., Denmark). Tobío (2007) argues that grandparental care in Southern European countries is part of an effort to improve the life chances of the middle generation. Paradoxically, she notes,,

[2] *Ibid*

Spanish grandmothers assume an old-fashioned role to enable their daughters to adopt modern gender roles. Grandparental care in Southern Europe is a clear example of what Leisering (2004) would call "negative" life course policy shaping interdependence between family generations.

An example of what Leisering would label "positive" life course policy, aiming to shape the life course by explicit intervention, can be found in parental leave policies, especially leaves for fathers. Here, the Nordic countries were pioneers. In line with Leisering's view, Swedish sociologist Therborn (1989) has argued that the Nordic welfare state is based on the assumption that policies can indeed lead to personal change, e.g. create caring fathers and egalitarian partners! Iceland, Norway, and Sweden and, most recently, Germany and Portugal (Moss, 2014) have introduced a "daddy quota": weeks of parental leave exclusively reserved for fathers. Arnlaug Leira (2000) highlighted the importance of non-transferable ("use or lose") leave entitlements for men, describing them as "fatherhood by gentle force". The expanding literature on the gendered consequences of leave designs shows increases in men's use of parental leave with the introduction of such non-transferable "daddy days" (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011).

Has the special quota for fathers made men more caring? Kotsadam and Finseraas (2011) would say the answer to this question is "yes". They treated the implementation of the daddy quota in Norway as a natural experiment, and compared parents with children born just after the reform to parents with children born just before the reform. Parents in the "treatment" group were less likely to have conflicts over the division of household tasks, and more likely to share them. In their study of leave policies in Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Finland and Italy, Boll and colleagues (2014) found increased levels of child involvement by the father after the introduction of daddy quota , particularly for highly educated men. Herlofson and Ugreninov (2014) report

that Norwegian men are more involved in childcare after the introduction of the "daddy quota", but *not* more involved in care for frail parents. Apparently, the policy reform does not make men generally more caring. Looking after children seems to result in such a depletion of men's care resources that little is left for the older generation.

5.4 Intergenerational care regimes

Rather than focus on individual laws and policies, some scholars have attempted to create models of "care regimes", including both care for the young and the old (e.g., Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996; Bettio & Plantenga, 2004; Daly & Lewis, 2000; Korpi, 2000; Leitner, 2003; Sainsbury, 1999). An attractive feature of these efforts to map intergenerational care regimes is that they overcome a "chopped up" view of families by considering multiple generations. A recent example is a model developed by Saraceno and Keck (2010), who examine how legal and policy frameworks affect the degree to which country-specific institutional frameworks impose reliance on family members and/or support individual autonomy/agency**.** The first pattern is *familialism by default*; situations where there are few or no publicly provided alternatives to family care and financial support. The second is *supported familialism*, where there are policies, usually in the form of financial transfers and leaves, which support families' financial and caring responsibilities. The third is *defamilialisation*, where needs are partly addressed through public provision (services, income replacement). By identifying and measuring actual public provisions rather than using ideal types of welfare regimes, Saraceno and Keck capture the nuance that differentiates countries.

An important issue is whether policies involve *payments* for care, *(paid) leaves*, or the provision of *care services* (Javornik, 2014). When public support is offered in money rather than in kind, families can use it to buy help or to augment the family budget while providing care directly. This tradeoff might be different for families in different socioeconomic circumstances (cf. Gornick & Meyers, 2008; Leitner, 2003). The strategy of staying at home

to provide care is more readily adopted by members of the working class (in practice: women). This reduces their ability to remain in the labor force and contributes to the likelihood of old-age poverty for themselves.

Cross-national comparisons reveal that the type of public provision offered has consequences for gender inequality. Using data from the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), Schmid, Brandt, & Haberkern (2012) confirm findings from many studies that show that women are more likely to provide intensive care to aging parents than men. However, the "imbalance" in the proportions of men and women providing such care is higher when aging parents receive public support—in addition to the care received from adult children—in the form of cash for care payments than when they receive public services (e.g., home help and home nursing). Apparently, the public provision of support services helps to keep both men and women involved in caring for frail parents, whereas care payments are a greater incentive for women than for men. Abendroth and colleagues (2014) demonstrate the differential effect of cash benefits, paid leaves, and child care services on women's employment. Using data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) they show that the motherhood occupational status "penalty" is lower in European countries with high expenditures on public childcare. Contrary to expectations, they did not find a higher "penalty" in countries with high spending on family cash benefits. The authors argue that paid leaves and public childcare prevent mothers from being sidelined at critical career junctures, whereas cash benefits seem to maneuver women into the "mommy track". These two studies clearly demonstrate how policies (or their absence) shape interdependence within and across family generations.

6 Structuring the Lives of Men and Women: Gender in Laws and Policies

Although there is a massive literature on cultural constructions of gender, differential socialization and role engagements, we have limited knowledge of how societal laws and policies create different social landscapes and structural maps for life trajectories of men and women.

In what follows we explore how gender, in combination with age, is a foundation for assigning rights and duties. We also examine gender differences in age boundaries for life phases or transitions. Our focus is on the EU-28 and OECD countries. Where it seems relevant, we expand our focus to other countries.

6.1 Roles Limited to One Gender

Are there adult roles which have legal rights/duties tied to only one gender? Do we find countries where citizenship rights, such as *suffrage*, differ between men and women? Saudi Arabia is the only United Nations member state in which women do not have the right to vote in national elections (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014). Nations differ widely in the introduction of women's suffrage. Early adopters of women's right to vote were New Zealand (1893), Finland (1907), and Norway (1913). Late adopters are Switzerland (1971), Portugal (1976), and Bhutan (2008).[3]

Military service has long been the domain of men only. Of 33 nations surveyed (EU-28, Norway, Switzerland, the US, Canada and Israel), nine have a system of general *conscription*: Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Israel, Norway and Switzerland (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). In six of these, only men are subject to

[3] Source: http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm

compulsory military service. Denmark, Israel and Norway have adopted conscription for women as well. In Denmark the type of duties might differ, whereas in Israel the conscript service obligation has a shorter duration for women.

Since it has been documented that women, across societies, are more likely to provide unpaid care than men, whereas men are more often gainfully employed, it is important to ask whether rights to *care leaves* are differentiated by gender. Among the OECD countries, Switzerland is the only one with a statutory maternity leave, but no leave for fathers (OECD Family Database, 2014). The US is the only OECD member that has no statutory entitlement to any kind of parental leave. Several countries (e.g., Austria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden) have introduced a "daddy quota" (a period of leave that is for the exclusive use by fathers on a use-it-or-lose-it basis), or a "father bonus" (a payment, tax break or additional time away from work) to encourage fathers to take parental leave (Moss, 2014). It is important to note that the design of leave polices differs considerably across countries in terms of length, level of wage replacement, the flexibility for taking leave, and rules governing fathers' access to leave and/or the distribution of leave between parents (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010). In Iceland, Norway and Sweden, uptake of paternal leave is mandatory if the full paid parental leave is to be granted.

An expanding number of developed countries offer leave entitlements to care for a wider range of family members (Moss, 2014). Conditions for taking leave vary from relatively common sickness to critical illness or severe disability. Length, payment and other dimensions of leave also vary considerably. However, even though descriptions of the policies are gender neutral, using terms such as "employees" and "family members", men are far less likely to make use of such leaves than are women, particularly if the leaves are unpaid (Moss, 2014).

6.2 Gender Differences in Age Borders

Do men and women have different markers between life phases? Do rights/duties tied to age differ for men and women? We start by examining gender differences in the *age of majority*, which is a key element in a wide range of legal regulations. Examples are the right to sign a contract and being subject to the juvenile or the adult criminal system. Utah state law provided a clear example: up until 1975 this state had a lower age of majority for women (Goldstein, 1988). Parents were mandated to financially support men up to the age of 21, women up to age 18. The assumption was that women would marry earlier and be supported by their husbands.

Our search revealed no gender differences in the age of majority in OECD countries, but the actual ages differ across countries. In almost all OECD countries, the age of majority is 18 years (OECD Family Database, 2013). Exceptions are Canada (19 in certain territories), Japan (20), Korea (19), New Zealand (20), and the United States (19 in certain states). Some countries in the Middle East stand out. Iran and Saudi Arabia have 8 as the age of majority for girls and 14 for boys (OECD/CAWTAR, 2014). In Ireland, Portugal and Slovenia a person can reach the age of majority below the legally defined age if he or she marries (OECD Family Database, 2013).

The *marriageable age* is not necessarily identical to the age of majority. Again we find virtually no gender differences (OECD Family Database, 2013) in OECD countries; the marriageable age is mostly set at 18, and is the same for both men and women. An exception is Luxembourg (18 for men and 16 for women). In most member states, persons can marry before the marriageable age, normally at 16, subject to parental consent or permission from the courts under special circumstances, such as pregnancy.

Legislators must strike a fair and reasonable balance between adolescents' right to be protected from unwanted sex and the freedom to engage in self-determined sexual

relationships through *age of consent*. Definitions of age below which all sexual contact was illegal were first introduced approximately 200 years ago (Graupner, 2002). At the time the limits were set around the ages of 10 to 12. By the 1950s, legislators started to raise the age of consent. In the earliest laws, the minimum age limits covered vaginal intercourse only. Recently, minimum age limits have been extended to lesbian and gay relationships. Traditionally, girls were seen as more vulnerable, so the age of consent was higher for girls than for boys. A 2002 overview showed that Estonia, Cyprus and Scotland still had different age limits for girls and boys (Graupner, 2002). Current legislation shows no gender difference in the age of consent in OECD countries (OECD Family Database, 2013). The minimum age typically varies between 14 and 16.

Public pensions are a set of policy arrangements that have assumed gendered and partnered life courses, with wives being primarily responsible for homemaking and family care, and husbands primarily responsible for generating income. The differential *pensionable age* fits this breadwinner model. In 2012, 22 EU and OECD countries had a lower statutory retirement age (age at which people gain the right to public old-age pension benefits) for women than men, but this number is decreasing (European Commission, 2014; OECD, 2012; 2014). European countries are currently in flux about whether the statutory retirement age also implies a mandated exit from the labor market (Marin, 2013). Increasingly, countries are enabling employees to work longer. The US is rather special with its 1976 Supreme Court ruling that mandatory retirement is unconstitutional (Abramson, 1977). Pension reforms are leading to an increasing equalization of retirement ages of men and women. After 2020, only Bulgaria, Chile, Israel, Romania and Turkey will continue to have different ages for men and women, given what is known about plans for reforms. Though the equalization of pensionable ages is reasonable, given women's longer life expectancy (Sundén, 2010), women with histories of interrupted employment will have difficulty meeting the requirements for full

pension benefits because often they are forced to retire (Marin, 2013). It appears that pension reforms are assuming a further *masculinization* of women's life courses.

A variety of reasons are provided for having an earlier retirement age for women (Brocas, Cailloux, & Oget, 1990). One is that it is a compensation for the "double shift" in many women's lives: combining housework, family care and a paid job. Another is that the couple can retire at the same time. This logic clearly assumes that women are part of a couple as they near retirement. They tend to marry older men, so having an earlier retirement age for her implies that husband and wife can leave the labor market at approximately the same time. Ginn and Arber (1995) view the earlier retirement age as a means to maintain male financial dominance, by avoiding the possibility that still-working wives have higher incomes than retired husbands. Another argument is that women experience greater difficulty finding a new job once they pass a certain age. Arber and Ginn (1995) note that the lower age of pension eligibility may have reinforced the widespread prejudice that women "age" earlier than men, or that physical signs of aging are more detrimental for women (the so-called "double standard of aging") who become unfit for work in their fifties. This might especially apply to work in service industries, or other occupations in which physical appearance is important. The lower pensionable age is particularly problematic for divorced women, because it limits their options to accrue a late-life income of their own.

Women's permission or prescription for earlier labor force exit and public pension benefits might be viewed as a "privilege", but as Marin (2010) points out, an earlier retirement age is only an advantage in a pension system that provides women who retire early a higher rate of return on contributions, so that their pension income matches that of men who retire at a later age. With the move from defined benefit pension systems to defined contribution systems that is taking place across all advanced economies, women are losing the financial advantages of their "privilege" to retire early. A shorter qualifying period is likely to

lead to lower pension income and increased poverty risks—particularly for women who cannot rely on a pension shared with a husband. Chloń-Domińczak (2013) points out that a lower retirement age for women might lead to discrimination by employers, who run less risk of losing personnel with a 50 year old man who is probably interested in working at least 15 more years than with a 50 year old woman who might leave after 10 years. Perhaps the "years left" principle, currently under consideration in the context of pension reform, will imply that women run less risk of discrimination by employers because they must work longer.

As yet, it is unclear what the income consequences will be of a pensionable age linked to developments in life expectancy. Will women be penalized because they live longer? A critical and gender-sensitive view is needed of the hidden and implicit assumptions underlying recent reforms. Do they build on a typical male life course with a long, uninterrupted work history? Do they build on breadwinner assumptions?

Taking the previously described laws and policies together, our conclusion is that there is a *convergence* between her and his age boundaries, rights and duties. Political pressure, leading to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), has undoubtedly fuelled this development. The CEDAW is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. Described as an international bill of rights for women, it came into force in 1981 and has been ratified by 188 of the 193 UN member states. In its 30 articles, the Convention explicitly defines discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.[4] Our overview has briefly touched upon differences between *de jure* and *de facto* practices (e.g., marriageable age, take-up of care leaves). Societies have not yet bridged

[4] For more information, visit http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx.

the gap between legislation aimed at achieving gender equality and established patterns of everyday lives of men and women. One issue requiring attention is gender-bias in the *implementation* of policies. For example, a recent Dutch study revealed that frail older women living with a partner were more likely to receive publicly funded home help than frail older men living with a partner—even though their circumstances were quite comparable (Schenk, Dykstra, Maas, & Van Gaalen, 2014). The authors suggest that the public servants processing the home help requests perceive older men as less able to provide care to their spouses. Another explanation is that the men more strongly feel they are entitled to public support because they perceive themselves as lacking the necessary caring skills. The gap between *de jure* and *de facto* practices represents a major challenge for social scientists with an interest in societal structuring of her and his adulthood.

6.3 Gender Differences in Credits for Role Engagement

Above, we focused on legislation structuring role entry and exit. Gendered life courses also serve as the basis for receiving publicly funded benefits through duration requirements. Are there differences in duration "credits" for men's and women's role engagement in terms of eligibility for unemployment benefits or pensions?

In many European countries, women may claim pension benefits as mothers and as family care providers. They receive credits in recognition of the unpaid work of child rearing and family care. *Care credits*, by acknowledging the time invested in childrearing and looking after dependent relatives, are not based on the norm of an uninterrupted work life until retirement. However care leaves are the only absences from work where *fixed flat rates* are sometimes applied (i.e. predetermined amount)—rather than the contributory social insurance principle (i.e. based on job history) that prevails in the more "male" social security arrangements of unemployment, health or accident insurance (Marin, 2010). Flat-rated benefits generally have advantages for less qualified and less paid women workers but are

detrimental to skilled and well-remunerated women. The more strides women make in the world of paid work, the greater the gaps between earnings-related and flat-rate pension credits will be. Countries that have residence-based minimum pensions (e.g., Iceland, the Netherlands and Norway) have no separate provisions for women who are out of paid work to provide family care. The guaranteed minimum pension is based on years of residence and requires no contributory payments or means-testing. Residence-based minimum pensions are favorable to women because they are not based on employment history (Marin, 2010).

Care credits are a source of debate between "care feminists", who call for greater recognition of women's distinct contributions as caregivers and "employment feminists", who feel that many women would benefit from stronger (not weaker) ties to paid work (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010). The latter point to *disincentives* to work and reinforcement of traditional assumptions about gender roles, particularly when care credits are only awarded to women or only to men if women waive their rights (Expert Group on Gender Equality, 2011).

Whereas men receive pensions largely as a result of their own employment history, women—as wives, divorcees, and widows—are more likely to be entitled to derived benefits, such as *survivor's benefits* and benefits from pension sharing (Lewis, 1997). Though benefits for the widowed tend to be couched in gender-neutral terms, the differences in life expectancy between men and women (and men marrying younger women) imply that women are the most likely recipients. In most European countries, divorcees are entitled to survivor's benefits if they have received maintenance payments from the ex-spouse and have not remarried (MISSOC, 2014). Systems of old-age assistance based on derived rights and marital status make gainful employment less rewarding for women, and lock them into domestic work or into work in the informal sector (Sundén, 2010).

Marin (2010) points out that survivor's benefits do not redistribute to women per se, but rather to ever-married couples. Never-married men and never-married women subsidize

single breadwinner families and homemakers in particular. The most conspicuous example of such subsidization is the granting of generous survivor's pension rights to as many women a man might have wished to marry over the course of his life—without any cost-sharing on his part. This policy of what Marin (2010,p. 216) calls "state subsidized serial monogamy" was apparently quite widespread in the civil service and occupational corporatist pension regimes in Central European countries. Cut backs were introduced only when young women professionals reported that more pensions were being paid to surviving ex-wives of older colleagues than to retired members who had contributed to the pension schemes.

7 Returning to the Point of Departure

In the opening of the chapter, we drew some contrasts between foundational North American and European perspectives on the life course, arguing that the former often emphasized the impact of micro- and meso-levels of social context, such as families, social networks and communities, on individual life trajectories. A number of early North American scholars had a strong connection to the "Chicago school of sociology". This tradition emphasized shared *meaning* and its creation, exemplified in Thomas' concept, "definition of the situation". In contrast, European classics focused on the macro-level, building especially on the works by Max Weber. They underscored how social institutions shape lives. Interestingly, while the early North American work recognized contrasts between her and his lives, Europeans initially had very little discussion of gender.

Today, it is very clear that if we want to understand contemporary structuring of men's and women's lives, we need to build on *both* macro- and micro perspectives. Silverstein and Giarusso (2011) sum it up nicely: "Micro-interactions in the family may be shaped by the political economies and cultures within which those interactions are embedded, specifically the way in which welfare production is allocated among state, market and family" (p. 39). In

our chapter, we have focused on some structural factors that have not been adequately considered in work on gendered life courses and interdependence among lives.

7.1 Neglected structural factors

The first area of neglect is *demographic change*: increasing longevity, combined with reduced fertility, is creating new late life potential and new opportunities for intergenerational connections. We argue that crucial insights into life course structuring in the family context would be gained if scholars adopt a multigenerational focus, moving beyond the current main foci: couples raising children, and adult offspring caring for frail older parents. Demographic shifts are also increasing differences between men's and women's lives. Since women live longer, they have greater opportunities for longstanding relationships across family generations and with age peers.

The second area of neglect is the role of *laws and policies* in structuring interdependence among lives and the shaping of gendered lives. Overall, we find gender convergence in life structuring by laws and policies. Yet, we also observe strong contrasts between how men and women actually live their lives.

Levy, using a concept developed by E. Hughes, argues that men and women have different *master statuses*, locating them differently in the worlds of family and work (Levy, 2013a; 2013b, Krüger & Levy, 2001). His perspective reflects Linton's (1942) and Parsons' (1942) discussions of roles based on age and sex. The master status implies that participation in other roles may be developed only insofar that it does not interfere with the primary responsibility. Thus, men's involvement in family tasks is secondary to breadwinner obligations, women's employment is subsidiary to the requirements of their caring roles. Recently, researchers have shown that such potential role conflict is not limited to mothers of young children, but increasingly also to women in the next generation: grandmothers who

struggle to maintain a work career as well as provide the care for grandchildren (Meyer, 2014).

7. 2 Analytical and Methodological Challenges in Bridging Levels

We have discussed Kotsadam and Finseraas's (2011) comparison of "before" and "after" daddy quota cohorts, which indeed shows that policy change results in altered lives. Yet, natural experiments like theirs amply illustrate the unanswered questions in research that attempts to connect macro- and micro levels. How can we identify underlying *mechanisms*? Do changing economic, political and legal contexts influence beliefs about what is possible, desirable, and normal? Do societal conditions take on personal meaning only when they get "translated" into family situations and family meaning systems? To what extent are individuals aware of societal forces that have shaped their choices and behaviors? If they are part of a clear cohort pattern, are they aware of it? Do we end up telling different stories if we aggregate from individual biographical accounts or examine macro-level societal patterns?

In order to begin to address the questions sketched above, we need dialogue and collaboration between research communities on two continents−one emphasizing culture and shared meanings on a meso-level; the other stressing macro-level structural conditions. We also need to overcome another "continental divide"−the chasm between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. As Levy (2013a) comments, the difference between a "subjectivist biographical" and a "factual life history" is often translated into a radical divide.

To arrive at a better understanding of macro−meso−micro links, we feel that a combination of methodological approaches is the route to follow. *Mixed-methods* are often espoused, but not often practiced in life course research, as is the case in much of the social sciences. Scholars practicing quantitative and qualitative approaches seem to live in separate worlds. It is unusual to find publications that demonstrate the complementarity of the two approaches. Rare examples are Melinda Mills' research on non-standard work schedules in

the Netherlands (Mills & Täht, 2010), Laura Bernardi's work (Bernardi, Von der Lippe, & Keim, 2007) on fertility in East and West Germany, and Helga Krüger's study (Krüger & Levy, 2001) on the employment careers of German women. Interestingly, the authors started from substantive puzzles on the supposed influences of macro-level conditions that their quantitative data were not able to solve. Mills, for example, aimed to unravel why Dutch non-standard work schedules did not have negative effects on Dutch families—which was completely contrary to previous research based on American families. She returned to her respondents whose biographical accounts revealed that Dutch couples voluntarily *choose* non-standard work schedules so they can spend more time with their families. We feel that life course researchers should emulate this kind of work. The ideal next step is to have a community of researchers who work on recorded *and* observed life histories, with comparisons across time and societies.

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