CHAPTER 9

# From Work Trajectories to Negotiated Careers

## *The Contingent Work Life Course*

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### OVERVIEW

In the social sciences work trajectories tend to be studied as careers which link individual participation histories in labor markets, occupations, and firms. Career models conceptualize the process of passing through socially defined pathways, but they neglect the mechanisms that connect these histories to biographical time and processes of social change (see Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, this volume). In this chapter, the work life course is regarded as a career, which is embedded in labor markets and organizations, and evolves through the interaction between social institutions and biographical actors. I argue that in post-industrial society there is an increasing emphasis upon personal decisions and responsibility in the shaping of the work life course, and a corresponding decline of normative age-markers for the timing and sequencing of labor market participation.

As a conceptual framework for the selection and presentation of the following themes, Gidden's (1984) structuration theory is used. This theory proposes that there is a reciprocal relationship between social structure and individual agency over the life course. It implies that institutions are contributing to the structuring of social relations across time and space.

The following chapter is organized according to this basic idea. The work life course unfolds in the structural context of labor markets, occupations, and firms. It is constructed by

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individuals via pathways and careers, which implies agency and socialization. Careers, in turn, are more or less regulated by social institutions, which mediate between labor markets, opportunities, types and sequences of work. Since the structuration of the work life course still differs by gender, the theme of coupled careers is introduced in order to illuminate that careers are not solo passages but are part of linked lives.

The chapter begins with a sketch of the major changes in work and their effects on the life course, with an emphasis on the economic turbulence during the last quarter of the 20th century. A discussion of the impact of labor market segmentation follows in order to clarify how occupations and organizations contribute to the distribution of life chances and the shaping of work histories. This discussion of social structures contextualizes research on the micro-social career processes that combine career experiences and socialization dynamics. Here, institutionalized pathways are contrasted with market-driven arrangements. These contexts condition the reciprocal effects of work conditions, job involvement, and personality over time. The process of self-socialization in flexible careers is described.

Then we look at the effects of institutionalized regulations and resources on employment sequences and discuss the consequences of the destandardization of pathways and contracts on careers. The way the gendered life course is implied in the structuration of coupled careers, on the levels of institutions and negotiations, is discussed next.

Finally, the contours of the contingent work life course, which emerges from negotiated careers, are outlined. Since the institutional approach to the analysis of work careers becomes most convincing with comparative data, examples derive from North America and Europe.

## THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF WORK

In the last decade of the 20th century, the end of work (Rifkin, 1995), or the erosion of the work-centered life course (Beck, 1999), became a prominent topic in both the social sciences and the public debate. Empirical evidence shows that economic globalization, the decline of manufacturing jobs, the progress of information and communication technology, and waves of company restructuring had complex, partly contradictory effects on work careers (Tilly & Tilly, 1998). On the one side, continuous careers and stable employment are less certain and unemployment is rising because of more volatile and deregulated labor markets; on the other side, there are more employment opportunities for women, and risky options for self-employment and business start-ups. In post-industrial society, paid employment has not ceased to be the cornerstone of the life course; most people still spend their adult lives either working, qualifying themselves, or looking for work.

In industrial society, the work life course followed definite age and gender norms, status transitions, and ensuing role changes; the "normal biography" reflected the relative stability of cultural norms and social structures in the era of mass production. Over the 20th century, economic and political changes transformed the world of work. This century was an "age of extremes" (Hobsbawm, 1994), especially its second half; it was characterized by an ongoing decline of farming, a shift from manufacturing to services, increasing enrollment in post-secondary education, and women's rising participation in the labor market. These social transformations have contributed to the growth of ever larger metropolitan regions; increasing travel time between home, work place, and shopping malls; and finally, to more flexible careers and a destandardized work life course.

The post-World War II years can be divided into a period of economic improvement with full (male) employment in North America and West Europe (around the 1960s)—a "Golden

Age" from the 1950s to the mid-1970s—and the "crisis decades" which marked the last quarter of the 20th century, when economic turbulence led to rising income gaps and growing structural unemployment (Hobsbawm, 1994). In order to understand the social transformations in the second half of the 20th century, which fundamentally restructured the linkage between work and the life course, the following five changes in labor force composition have to be kept in mind:

First, the massive exodus from the land continued and went together with the growth of a capital-intensive agri-business, which has set farmers and land laborers free to migrate into the urban centers (Conger & Elder, 1994). This process, which started with the Industrial Revolution, is still going on in Third World countries. Second, skilled and professional occupations, which required at least secondary, and increasingly, a post-secondary education, became more important. Third, the industrial working classes declined since the 1970s with de-industrialization and the ascendance of information technology and the lean factory. These trends led to rising structural unemployment and to a contraction of simple production jobs, which used to shape the work life course of less educated and less skilled men. Fourth, the growth and internal differentiation of the service sector, from McDonald's-type jobs to public, financial, and social service occupations, required higher-level qualifications. Career and employment opportunities for women were thereby expanded.

Tragic historical events also have had their impact on the work life course: by analyzing results of the German microcensus, Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) and the Life History Study, Mayer (1988) documents that the employment consequences of World War II differed by birth cohort. For instance, women born between 1929 and 1931, who had to make the transition from education to vocational training right after the war, were cut off from an educational career. Right after the war, women were engaged in maintaining their families and were employed in agriculture and unpaid domestic work; their representation in white-collar work at the time of marriage did not reach its former level until the early 1960s. The work life was also adversely affected for men who entered the labor market for the first time around the end of the war. Mayer (1988) suggests an institutional explanation: because of the strong links between labor market entry pathways and careers in Germany, initial disadvantages could not be compensated, despite the improvement of the economy .The story is different for job-entry cohorts after World War II in the United States (Elder, 1987), where veterans could use the GI-bill, which offered the opportunity to enter college.

The Golden Age, however, transformed the life course of the younger cohorts in North America and Western Europe who entered training and the labor market between the late 1950s and early 1970s. They found entry jobs and apprenticeships easily, embarked on stable careers, and could spend more income on consumer goods than any other cohort in the past: they fully participated in the rise of the "affluent society".

All this changed drastically for the cohorts who entered the labor market for the first time in the 1980s and 1990s, when jobs became scarce and income dropped. Social inequality increased again as the gap between high-and low-income groups got wider, a process which led to intra-cohort differences in life chances and life courses as well. However, in the decades of crisis more and more women entered the labor market, though in different rates in the United States, the Scandinavian countries, and West Germany. The number of employed women has tripled since the 1960s: By 1999, 62% of German women were participating in the labor market, 76% in Sweden, and 63% in the United States (OECD, 2001).

Looking back at the social changes in the second half of the 20th century, in the Golden Age two life course models were shaped: (1) The tripartite model of men's biography: education (youth)—work (adulthood)—retirement (old age); a model that centered on the world of

work (Kohli, 1986). (2) the three-phase model of women's biography, focused on family and employment in a normative sequence: education—employment—mother and homemaker—employment (Born, Krüger, & Lorenz-Meyer, 1996).

The period of crisis brought a restructuring of the gendered models into a variety of new flexible arrangements which are less guided by traditional age and gender norms but by changing opportunities and supply/demand in the labor market.

## LABOR MARKETS, OCCUPATIONS, AND FIRMS

Life chances are strongly dependent upon the structural context of employment opportunities that constitute social inequality across the life course. Beginning with the timing and status of job entry and ending with the timing of the transition to retirement, biographical options and life course outcomes hinge on material and social resources that can only be provided by participating in the labor market. In advanced industrial and post-industrial service societies, there is no unified labor market. The labor market is instead divided in occupations and firms, which are more or less separated in casual, company-specific, and occupational segments (Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Edwards, 1979). In theory, these segments are closed off from each other; it is difficult to cross their boundaries.

The casual segment consists of unskilled and semiskilled jobs with low income and little employment security. The company-specific or internal segment is characterized by employment careers within a firm that provides on-the-job training, continuing training, and promotion ladders. Large companies and public administration are work organizations that tend to establish internal markets because they must rely on a stable labor force. Occupational labor markets, in turn, depend on specific skill profiles that may be certified by vocational credentials on the intermediate job-level, or by academic titles on the professional and managerial levels.

While the North American labor markets emphasize the casual and internal segments, the German labor market is characterized by a strong occupational segment (Sengenberger, 1987). This segment is linked to an institutionalized transition pathway, the "dual system" of vocational education and training, which provides certified occupational skills. Standardized vocational training improves the match between job requirements and skills of applicants, and thus reduces the transaction costs in placement negotiations and the duration of job-adjustment. The occupational structure is the backbone of labor market dynamics in Germany, where the Vocational Training Act, industrial relations, and labor laws combine in regulating employment transactions and income differentiation. This feature is responsible for the slow, hesitant trend toward increased flexibility in career patterns and for relatively few occupational changes in past generations.

Recent comparative studies (Allmendinger & Hinz, 1998; Heinz, 1999; Shavit & Müller, 1998) relate social stratification and labor market issues to the life course and document that careers do not only depend on labor markets but also on education, training, and social policy. For instance, the United States has a non-stratified, comprehensive school system and no standardized pathways from school to work, while Germany is characterized by a stratified and standardized school and transition-to-employment system. The United Kingdom has a stratified education structure and a weakly regulated arrangement for vocational training. In comparing the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Germany, Allmendinger and Hinz (1998) show that the national structures of education and training provisions correspond to characteristic patterns of work careers, with variable stability and different levels of social integration

across the life course. The relative strength of market forces and welfare-state policies contributes to the respective options for combining or alternating between education, training, employment, retraining, and retirement. An active welfare state tends to establish links between the economy, the labor market, and social concerns in order to distribute life chances more equally. In periods of crisis, its social policy institutions launch job-creation and training programs, instead of limited employment schemes (Leisering & Leibfried, 1999).

Labor market participation varies between countries by age and gender. In the United Kingdom the 15- to 20-year-olds show the highest employment rate, mainly in the casual labor market segment, whereas in Germany most of the teenagers are either still in school or in apprenticeship training for the occupational segment. Labor market exits occur relatively early in Germany, where employment rates start to decline by age 55, and just 43% of men and 15% of women older than age 60 are still in the work force. This contrasts with the United Kingdom where more than half of men and 18% of women, and Norway, where almost three-fourths of men and 60% of women in this age group are still employed (EUROSTAT, 2000).

Countries with a highly flexible labor market, like the United Kingdom and the United States, seem to compensate low job or career stability with considerable opportunity for re-employment after episodes of short-term joblessness. In more regulated labor markets, a high level of occupational training and career continuity is maintained, though with the tendency to socially exclude people with inadequate skills. Life course consequences could not differ more dramatically: in the United States low income and non-standard jobs expanded and unemployment declined in the 1990s to 4% and 5%, while in Germany the jobless rate increased to around 10%. The work life courses of women and job-entry and exit cohorts have been more adversely affected in the new federal states (former GDR), which still cope with the consequences of the prior socialist economy and authoritarian state (Diewald, 2000; Weymann, 1999). The individual experiences of discontinuity due to job shifts and unemployment were widespread, due to the transformation into a capitalistic economy with a flexible labor market, which preserved the stratification of skill levels and the allocation mechanisms that characterize an occupation-centered labor market.

These examples show that transitions in the labor market range from pathways that are individually negotiated and mediated by social networks, to administratively regulated patterns of mobility in the framework of institutional guidelines for employment and retirement.

It is important to note in this context that different types of work organizations provide or restrict career opportunities (Hannan, 1988). In contrast to status attainment models, which focus on skills and occupations as sources of career diversity, the institutional view regards work organizations as social systems that mediate between the state of the economy and the shape of individual careers. Independent of workers' characteristics, employment in a young and small firm tends to be less stable than in an older and large firm. This in turn increases job-entrants' risk of job-hopping, which reduces their opportunities to be hired for positions with career prospects because they cannot accumulate enough skills and sufficient organization-based experiences. There is also a reciprocal effect of careers on organizational diversity, for example, good career prospects in large companies and public administration reduce the rate at which young and innovative firms are founded. As the example of Germany with a high proportion of orderly career patterns documents, there are much fewer exits from paid work into self-employment and a slower process of founding start-ups than in England and the United States.

Mobility in the labor market thus neither depends only on the individual's experiences and skills, nor on the economy, but also on the sectoral expansion or decline of job offers or vacancies in companies. According to Sørensen (1983), worker mobility is related to opportunity structures that reflect the rate at which new vacancies occur and their distribution

between large and small firms and industrial sectors. For instance, when companies in declining industries are keeping promotion rules based on seniority, this will lead to less recruitment of new employees and to an increasingly experienced work force.

From a life course perspective, these trends indicate possible intercohort or generation effects of job entry and job exit transitions: for instance, does early retirement lead to corresponding job openings that would improve the employment chances of the job-start cohorts? Can employment and welfare policy actively promote or invest in such a transfer of life chances by contributing to a reduction of youth unemployment and maintaining a decent quality of life for early retirees at the same time? As Sackmann (1998) shows, the qualitative properties of transition structures, and the kind of institutionalized linkages between education, employment, and retirement, are making a big difference in the unemployment rates of young and old workers in different countries. In societies like Germany, where companies are at the core of the standardized vocational training system, youth unemployment continues to stay lower than general joblessness, but unemployment among older workers is higher. A well-structured training and job-entry arrangement in which firms tend to invest in order to guarantee a supply of reliable and able employees delays the risk of unemployment at least until the end of vocational education and training. In this chapter, we have seen that the segmented labor market structures the interaction between employers and employees and affects the way in which occupations are linked to career opportunities. Now we will discuss from an agency perspective how individuals contribute to the shape of their work life course.

## PATHWAYS, CAREERS, AND SOCIALIZATION

The variability of transition markers is a crucial characteristic of the education-to-work passage in post-industrial societies. In flexible labor markets, occupational expectations at the time of school-leaving tend to be influenced by a mix of school experiences, parental hopes, personal interests, teenage work experiences, and the assessment of regional employment opportunities. Thus, labor market entry is a complicated matching process of personal claims, skills, and job opportunities. As we have argued, economic and cultural change in the second half of the 20th century have contributed to social conditions that promote more individualized passages from education to occupation (see Kerckhoff, this volume) and from employment to retirement. There is greater diversity in transition paths after college (Buchmann, 1989), more career discontinuity after leaving high school (Rindfuss, Swicegood, & Rosenfeld, 1987), and a longer duration of time before full integration into the labor market (Morris, Bernhardt, Handcock, & Scott,1998). The young person's risk-taking behavior should not be considered responsible for these frequent career breaks; instead, such instability is due to sectoral shifts from manufacturing to low-income service jobs and the short-term contract policy of firms; in short, the collapse of the youth labor market. Such a collapse is observed in the UK for low achievers (Bynner, 1999) and for the sub-BA labor market in the USA (Grubb, 1999).

The matching between persons and jobs in the labor market can take place in different ways, either via organized pathways (*the institutional model*) or via informal linkages (*the market model*). The weaker the institutionalization of school-to-work pathways, the more are young women and men required to actively shape their passage to employment. The capacity to shape one's transition presupposes socialization contexts that promote planning (Clausen, 1993) and negotiation skills (Heinz, 2002a, 2002b), as well as access to social capital or social networks (Granovetter, 1995). These transition resources are difficult to accumulate for socially disadvantaged school leavers who need passage-helpers in order to enter the first steps of a

career. Moreover, the diversity in contexts of opportunity leads to a variety of transition sequences (the timing and duration of employment episodes), which, in turn, are creating very different socialization experiences (Shanahan, 2000). For example, compared to continental Europe, in the United States there is a much higher involvement in paid jobs among high school students, jobs that tend to be of low quality and pay. These early jobs, however, may improve the gateway to employment for many non-college bound youth because they provide work experience and contacts with firms (Mortimer & Johnson, 1998).

In the market model, a combination of job experience and passage-helpers or mentors is expected to support young people, but not all potential passage-helpers are effective. Analyzing data from the U.S.-study "High School and Beyond", Rosenbaum and associates (1999) found that relatives and school contacts promoted students' placement in jobs that lead to higher income, though with a time lag, 9 years after leaving school. Friends and job-placement agencies were less successful. Blacks and women were more likely than white males to enter the labor market with the help of contacts between teachers and employers; the latter trusted the recommended students because of positive experiences in the past. The young workers who got such support tended to be allocated to entry jobs that offered better career pathways and income in the long run. Thus, links between schools and firms can act as a mediating device for youth who cannot count on other passage-help; these links seem to establish trusting ties, which substitute for formal relationships that are found in transition arrangements with institutionalized pathways.

The occupational attainment process in market arrangements makes it likely that school-leavers lack a clear orientation about work-entry and career pathways and thus will have to modify their career goals in response to the employment opportunities. Indeed, there is substantial instability of occupational expectations among U.S. young adults; as late as age 25, fewer than half actually achieved their aspirations (Rindfuss et al., 1999). The transition history of the high school class of 1972 (National Longitudinal Study) shows furthermore that occupation and gender make a big difference. Craftsmen, who received initial training, were on their chosen career pathway well before age 30, as were those with specific college degrees. Gender also has a powerful effect on career dynamics: when no match was possible between original expectations and occupation, men moved up the status ladder, whereas women moved down or withdrew from the labor force. It is interesting to note that social background characteristics, at least in this longitudinal study, showed little influence on the relationship between early aspirations and actual occupation at age 30. This study illustrates an individualized, unstandardized career entry process that may become characteristic of post-industrial societies.

The lessons from these longitudinal studies are twofold: first, employers' preferences, applicants' work histories, and a limited portfolio of resources create constraints for shaping the career according to aspirations; and second, market-led transition systems require that individuals invest more time in career scouting and negotiation, in order to "sort themselves into jobs for which they have both an interest and an aptitude" (Rindfuss et al., 1999, 255).

The example of Germany, which has an institutionalized transition arrangement for young people who are not college-bound, also shows that there has been growing job-discontinuity in the 1990s despite formal training provisions and occupation-specific certification. A longitudinal study of job-entry (in 1989) and career processes of skilled workers in crafts, manufacturing, and service occupations documented that 60% still were employed in their training occupation (up to 8 years after completing training), whereas 17% returned to school or went to college, and 11% were unemployed or not looking for work. However, only 10% did not work in the occupation they were trained for. This indicates a better match between expectations,

occupational training, and career outcome than in the USA. Nevertheless, about 40% were confronted with, or had themselves initiated, a career break. The kind of interruption was influenced by occupation, gender, and the persons' biographical action orientations, like wage worker's-habitus, company-identification, or optimizing-chances (Heinz et al., 1998). Such orientations result from transition experiences and occupational contexts; they promote understanding of how career expectations and decisions are developed in view of changing employment opportunities. Instability, however, does not necessarily lead to a precarious life course because young people with better educational credentials opted for a voluntary turning point when leaving their jobs for post-secondary educational alternatives in order to improve their career prospects.

Such a comparative perspective illustrates that entry into work and career prospects hinge on the linkage between educational and employment institutions. Formal and connected pathways create less variability in the transition and less uncertainty in the work life course, compared to more market-driven and flexible arrangements in the United States or the United Kingdom. Economic turbulence in the wake of globalization and company restructuring in the last decade of the 20th century, however, have also affected the start of the work life in societies with institutionalized transition arrangements by creating more destandardization of the nexus between school, training, and employment.

In view of recent transformations of the work life, it is likely that persons have to cope with more discontinuity in their careers than prior assumptions about the influence of early formative years on personality across the life course would predict.

Longitudinal studies from the 1970s and 1980s (Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Mortimer, 1988; Mortimer & Borman, 1988) showed that there is an association between work experience and personality that can be explained by job selection processes and socialization at work. Work contexts and personality are reciprocally related over time: job conditions affect identity and persons select their own work experiences. The results are consistent in documenting that alienating employment circumstances restrict job involvement and productivity over the work life course, while occupational self-direction (Kohn & Schooler, 1983) or work autonomy (Mortimer, 1988) enhance psychological well-being and job-involvement across the life course. Biographically meaningful job tasks, in combination with social recognition, are intrinsically motivating and increase self-esteem.

Three competing hypotheses describe the relation between socialization and work orientations across the life course. First is the expectation of increasing stability with age, which assumes a strong impact of socialization in pre-adulthood and early employment on work identity and involvement. The second posits flexibility across age, which is an active adjustment or self-socialization in response to changing work conditions. The third emphasizes the duration of employment episodes, that is, the formation of work habits and job-involvement depends on the duration of stable work conditions. When social and economic circumstances provide continuous employment and meaningful job tasks, job-involvement, occupational satisfaction, and work-based identity are likely to stabilize with age. In periods of social transformation, however, self-socialization in the sense of developing self-reflexive strategies for coming to terms with changing job conditions and career breaks becomes a dominant pattern, especially in job-entry cohorts, but also for the older workers who are affected by down-sizing. For those who are confronted with declining durations of employment contracts, job-related motives and work identity will reflect a series of short-term adjustments with limited opportunity for forming biographical meaning (Sennett, 1998). Thus, with the 21st century it becomes more likely that "shifting economic conditions could also influence the relative propensities of workers of different ages to change jobs and thereby alter their work conditions" (Mortimer, 1988, 277).

We still know very little about the reasons and effects of voluntary and involuntary job shifts on the duration of unemployment, and thus need to conduct more longitudinal research to understand cohort and age effects on the relationship between stable and unstable work conditions and socialization. For example, does it still hold that work conditions become more stable with evolving career sequences? How do internal labor markets, occupation, and social policy on the one hand, and education, skill profiles, and gender, on the other, modify this pattern?

It is still unclear which mechanisms account for the reciprocal relationship between occupational contexts, agency, and work socialization for persons who are in different stages of their work lives. If we take into account that there is a loose coupling between social structure and the life course (see Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, this volume), then the accentuation principle or the person's work history/biography gains in importance, as does linked lives, for explaining adult career socialization. For job-entry and job-exit transitions, historical conditions (e.g., Great Depression, Golden Age, era of globalization) restructure the links between education and work, family and employment, and work and retirement.

In order to better understand the relationship between career conditions and the pacing of the work life course in increasingly flexible labor markets, self-reflexive learning processes seem to become more important. The conventional socialization approach tends to assume that coping with career demands is based on stable, internalized occupational role expectations and values. In contrast, the concept of "self-socialization" (Heinz, 2002a, 2002b; see also Dannefer, 1999) emphasizes that in post-industrial society the work life course requires a series of involuntary, and sometimes voluntary job moves, which initiate self-reflexive readjustments. The experience of job shifts, unemployment, and career breaks is interpreted in the context of the person's work biography. According to Giddens (1984), the structuration of the work life course implies individual agency and institutional resources, which come into play when decisions are taken between pathways and employment conditions. Thus, the analysis of work careers from the perspective of self-socialization may illuminate the variable ways in which work experiences and the life course are reflexively constructed in the contexts of institutions, social networks, and linked lives. Our longitudinal study of a German job-entry cohort has shown that processes of self-socialization are reflected in different modes of biographical agency in the shaping of early employment careers (Heinz et al., 1998; Heinz, 2002a, 2002b).

The early post-education life course is still an important "sensitive phase", but only one of many phases for the shaping of biographical orientations that direct a person's work involvement and career transitions. The restructuring of work settings and the prevalence of short-term employment will make labor market participation and careers increasingly dependent on the person's capacity to adapt to changing demands on short notice. This will require commitment to a kind of just-in-time flexibility, for instance, by acquiring new skills and knowledge or by changing employer and/or occupation, a commitment that may affect the stability of a person's work biography.

Empirical evidence for the growing frequency of contract negotiations required in fluid labor markets comes from research on part-time jobs in the United States and in Europe (Blossfeld & Hakim, 1997). There is wide variation in the occurrence and distribution of those jobs among countries and between men and women. All kinds of non-standard work, taken together, show the strongest increase in the 1990s in the age groups 15–24 and 55–64, which indicates less predictability of the work life course at the entry and exit transitions than in the middle years of employment (OECD, 2001).

The norm of an uninterrupted work life until retirement age is fundamental for most public pension and social insurance systems. This standard is rapidly becoming flexible in EU

welfare states, where the departure from work is occurring earlier and earlier. For example, in Germany, the employment rate in the age group between 55 and 64 dropped from 75% to 43% for men during the decades of crisis (1972–2000). As a result, the duration of the retirement years has become extended and the burden on the public pension fund is increasing. A similar consequence results from the downsizing strategy of companies, which use early retirement packages to set older workers free (Marshall, 1999). These changes in the pathways at job entry and exit transitions of the work life course have introduced career dislocations that require readjustments through self-socialization.

## SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CAREERS

As Kohli (1986) has argued, the institutionalization of the life course emerged in the industrial society; it coincided with state politics that introduced obligatory schooling and social retirement insurance. This led to a work-based distinction between childhood/youth, adulthood and old age, thus to a tripartite life course, which consists of the preparation for work, working, and retiring from paid work.

The movement of cohorts, that is people born in the same year or in a certain historical period (the Great Depression or the Golden Age), through life can be conceptualized as an institutionalized allocation process to social roles that define the start of adulthood or the entry into old age. Intriguing cohort comparisons can be made with respect to the timing of transitions into and out of work (Carroll & Mayer, 1986; Sackmann, 1998). There is cross-national evidence that economic and social change has modified both cultural standards and persons' biographical timing, which in turn have led to a more flexible sequencing of male and female work life courses (Marshall, 2001). This research suggests that instead of relying on age as the major indicator of the individual life course, the timing, kind and duration of a person's involvement with labor market institutions is more useful as a focus of career analysis. A career then can be analyzed as a sequence of life events and movements in education, work, and family life, a sequence which is co-constructed by institutional gate-keeping and personal decisions (Heinz, 1996).

Both the contours and contexts of life course transitions and sequences are becoming less defined by age-markers and more by variable timing and duration of participation in the institutional fields of education and employment. Economic and social changes in the last quarter of the 20th century have been affecting these institutions, modifying the rules and resources of the labor market and the social policies of the state in the direction of a more flexible framework and individualized ways of integrating work and the life course (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Heinz, 2001). Job entries, durations, and exits across the life course became more diversified. The employment-family arrangements of couples, and the relationship between (competing) generations in the labor market for employment opportunities were transformed.

These transformations were mediated by the social institutions of the labor market, education, family, and the welfare system, which contribute to the way individuals shape their working life course (Heinz, 1992; Leisering & Leibfried, 1999; Leisering, Müller, & Schumann, 2001; Mayer & Schöpflin, 1989). They provide guidelines and resources for individuals who are constructing their careers through decisions and self-reflexive actions in the context of interrelated biographies (Born & Krüger, 2001; Elder & O'Rand, 1995; Heinz & Krüger, 2001; Moen, 2001). As the structuration approach (Giddens, 1984) suggests, a systematic analysis of

the nexus between work and the life course should take into account the reciprocal effects of work transitions and durations and the timing of participation in the other main institutions of education and the family (see Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, this volume). For instance, the presence of children constitutes a restriction of career resources and behavioral constraint for women, which increase the likelihood of interrupting labor market participation; whereas for men, career breaks usually are not linked to fatherhood, but rather to lay-offs or to the decision to return to education.

Macro-social, economic, and political changes in the wake of globalization (see Weymann, this volume) have been affecting the shape of the life course not directly, but via institutional processes, for instance, company restructuring and labor market deregulation. Shifts in the structure of the work life course are, in turn, influenced by the sum of individual decisions concerning the timing of biographical transitions and the selection between social pathways (Hagestad & Dannefer, 2001). For example, the influx of women and mothers into the service industries precipitated a change in employers' hiring practices, as they turned to hiring women to fill full-time and, especially, part-time jobs. This strategy had to be promoted by affirmative action legislation in the USA and equal rights legislation in the European Union. Another example is the rise and prolongation of post-secondary studies, which delay labor market entry, lead to new role configurations of student and worker or student and parent, and create the life stage of young adulthood (Modell, 1989; Shanahan, 2000). A final example is the greater flexibility of the retirement age, which corresponds to company downsizing, pension reform (from public to private insurance), and to a new life style and self-esteem among the elderly (see Moen, this volume).

In flexible labor markets, the individual must assume greater importance as the agent of the timing of transitions, as investor of time in education and paid work, and as the producer of self-constructed pathways through the employment system. However, the extent to which there is individual autonomy in the rational organization of time allocation depends on the institutional fabric of labor market transactions and the welfare politics of the state. The balance of the deregulation of the labor market and welfare state provisions differs between neo-liberal, conservative, and social democratic social policies (see Leisering, this volume), which create a range of new opportunities as well as substantial risks and uncertainty for the work life course (Anisef et al., 2000; Beck, 1992; Sennett, 1998).

Essential for an adequate understanding of the work life course is to investigate the relative impacts of institutional guidance and control, and individual autonomy and capacity, on the selection of pathways into, in and from employment across the life course. In other words, it is important to discern the degree of choice in the timing and sequencing of transitions between jobs, occupations, and firms and the extent to which institutions facilitate or restrict multiple participation in different institutional fields, for example, university and company, family and paid work, retirement and part-time employment. Macro-, meso-, and micro-social analysis is needed to understand the impacts of social change on the coupling of work (re)structuring, labor market participation, and employment careers over the life course (Elder & O'Rand, 1995; Hagestad & Dannefer, 2001).

As the examples of temporary and part-time employment show, non-standard work deviates from the adult (male) norm of full employment, but it is acceptable for youth, mothers, and older workers. In post-industrial society, the gap between the institutionalized models or scripts for gender and age-appropriate timing and sequencing of career moves, and the actual distributions of career moves and employment opportunities, is growing. Cultural modernization and social transformation have made scripts for the "normal" male and female work life course less binding; such scripts are coming out of tune as yardsticks for the proper pacing of

participation in the field of work. When we analyze the life course as a sequence of multiple participations in the major institutional sectors of work, education, and family, the loose coupling of cultural norms, sectoral circumstances, and individual participation patterns must be taken into account. This is obvious in the increasing variation in actual male and female work careers, which results from the combined effects of labor market deregulation and individuals' biographical decisions in the context of linked lives. The latter issue will be inspected in more detail below.

According to Levy (1996, p. 92), it is possible that "inconsistencies and frictions between institutional regulations, but also structural influences may interfere with traditional biographical patterns and provoke life course consciousness and innovation." This means that institutions may be shifting responsibility to individuals who are expected to synchronize their life courses in view of declining job tenure, family support, and social benefits. These trends will eventually open more space for a number of coexisting life course patterns that may even cut across the lines of gender segmentation. There is ample evidence, however, of an incomplete or even fragmented institutionalization of women's work participation (Gerson, 1985; Hochschild, 1989; Moen, 1992), and some evidence that men's careers are becoming less institutionally integrated. Because training, employment, and retirement opportunities are still quite differently distributed by gender, skill-level, industry, and location, and given variable access to kindergarten, parental leave, day care, and family-friendly companies, women's careers are structurally more unstable than men's (Hochschild, 1997; Krüger, 2001).

Therefore, the institutional view with its focus on norms, control, and gate-keeping, has to be supplemented first, by the recognition of unequally distributed resources for a proper sequencing of employment careers; and second, by taking into account biographical actors, who attempt to actively shape their living and working circumstances. In post-industrial service societies, continuity and change of work biographies are resulting from time-dependent joint ventures of biographical actors, social networks, and work organizations. Though career lines are more or less embedded in institutional regulations (Carroll & Mayer, 1986; Spilerman, 1977), actual careers are neither assigned nor guaranteed but rather negotiated (Gershuny, 1998; Heinz, 1996; Strauss, 1991). Negotiating a career confronts the biographical actor, as a participant in the labor market, with the problem that work organizations are mainly interested in processing, using, and regulating its members and tend to neglect the variability of employees' role configurations across their work life course. Due to the absence of linkages between social institutions, individuals must structure their biographies by negotiating transitions and participations. Cultural modernization defines individuals as responsible for their biographies and requires them to become less dependent on the family or charitable associations, and to rely increasingly on the labor market and collective systems of security (Leisering & Leibfried, 1999).

At the beginning of the 21st century, it has become obvious that the tripartite model of the institutionalized, work-centered life course has two weak points. First, it does not incorporate the increasing variability of transitions and sequences; in short, it favors the standardized over the flexible (individualized) life course. Second, it reflects the dominance of the labor market institutions and neglects the person's involvement in the institutions of family life.

## GENDER AND COUPLED CAREERS

Life course research and women's studies have documented that gender is a cultural and structural feature that shapes transitions and the biographical pacing of work sequences

(Born, Krüger, & Lorenz-Meyer, 1996; Gerson, 1985; Moen, 2001). "Women's lives are typically contingent lives, shaped around the experiences of others: their husbands, children and parents" (Moen 2001, 189). Women's life courses are also shaped more and more by the labor market, as indicated above. At the intersection of work and family, gendered configurations and time allocations put more demands on employed women than on employed men across the life course. Therefore, the conditions and meanings of careers also differ between women and men, for instance, there are gender differences in age markers or deadlines of transitions in the fields of work, family life, and retirement (Settersten, 1997; see also Settersten, this volume). Although there is some convergence in the range of age-related transitions, women are disadvantaged in the accumulation of work-related returns because they tend to allocate more time for care and domestic responsibilities than men.

Research about male and female work histories shows repeatedly that there is a structural imbalance in the social pathways and biographical options at the employment-family intersection; greater responsibility is placed on the shoulders of women as daughters, wives, and mothers (Born, Krüger, & Lorenz-Meyer, 1996; Hochschild, 1989). There is indeed a persistent "structural lag" (Riley & Riley, 1994) or discrepancy between the promise of equal opportunities for women and the social and political provisions for enabling full participation, as comparative studies of part-time work demonstrate (Blossfeld & Hakim, 1997). How does this lag impact women's biographical involvement in work?

Occupational qualifications and labor market histories provide experiences that lead to variations in work identities; they are based on employment, income, career, and autonomy. Work identity develops from a person's employment history and influences personal career dynamics. Because of their strong family commitment, women's multiple responsibilities may very well constrain formation of a career identity. A study by Rosenfeld and Spenner (1988, p. 303) shows with retrospective (1966–1979) employment history data that "women's work identities reflect the constraints of social structure and labor demand." Whereas men employed full-time tend to see their jobs in career terms, women form "employed-income" or "employed-career" identities, work identities that differ according to mobility chains, type of firm, job-tasks, and inter- as well as intra-occupational variations in employment experiences. Lower-level educational resources, non-professional jobs, and family responsibility restrict socialization into a career-identity, and make the formation of an income-related identity more likely. Women with an employment-career identity are more likely to have experienced a continuous work biography, in the context of stability of both employer and occupational segment. In addition to the type of work-identity, there are also career consequences that evolve from the interrelationship of life courses.

As Moen (2001; Moen & Han, 2001) argues, men and women construct the work identity in the context of "linked lives" (Elder, 1998) or "interrelated life courses" (Born & Krüger, 2001; Krüger, 2003). Therefore, the concept of occupational career must be modified to reflect both men's and women's life transitions, "as they negotiate status passages of work and family in tandem" (Moen, 2001, 184; see also Moen, this volume). The example of retirement transitions documents that the person's work history is more influential than experiences in education and family life. Past opportunities and restrictions contribute to an uneven accumulation of experiences, and both material and social resources, which affect individual and in-tandem retirement decisions (O'Rand & Henretta, 1999).

We referred above to occupations and organizations as institutions that contribute to the shaping of the work life course. A retrospective study of women in transition to retirement (Born, Krüger, & Lorenz-Meyer, 1996) sheds light on the importance of the occupation as a social institution that structures the female life course in Germany. Both the level of education

and the family event-history were less important for explaining women's careers than their occupation. For instance, when talking about their work histories, the women reported up to 12 interruptions. Sequence analysis demonstrated that these interruptions did not so much depend on domestic demands than on the respective occupation's labor market opportunities.

Women's career histories thus can be driven by their certified skill profiles, as this example shows, which presuppose a more or less occupation-centered life course. In addition to occupational qualification, companies' human resource management can make a difference, as documented in a case study by Hochschild (1997) of dual-earner couples in a family-friendly firm. In her interpretation of the couples' work and career experiences, she suggests that the workplace may be winning over the home, mainly because the former provides more recognition. In a life course perspective, however, this interpretation needs to be verified with cohort and work-history data, because the rewards persons expect from the workplace may very well differ across the life course.

The reorganization of employment conditions in lean companies and the increase of non-standard jobs should have an impact on working couples' role-configurations. While in continental European welfare states women's part-time employment is promoted without radically transforming the traditional male career model of the breadwinner, in the United States there is no institutional support for women's employment, but rather private sector arrangements with various opportunities to combine paid work and family tasks.

Han and Moen (2001) investigated pathways through work and marriage in the USA, based on the fact that in the United States at least half of the workers are dual-earner couples at the end of the 20th century. Assuming that there is a transformation of the traditional man-breadwinner and woman-homemaker division of labor, they analyzed the role configurations and career pathways of two-career couples with U.S. retirees' life history data. The multiple pathways traversed by men and women across their employment trajectory are considered together with their marital trajectory. By applying sequence analysis, they found five types of occupational pathways which were systematically related to the number of career transitions and to the shape of marital trajectories. "High-geared" and "intermittent" types showed much more mobility between companies, though the former changed jobs in order to move upward, while the latter indicated unstable employment sequences. Not unexpectedly, gender differentiated between the career types; men were located in the "orderly" or "high-geared" pathway types. These pathways also had a substantial representation of women. Most women, however, were associated with "delayed-entry" and "intermittent" pathways, and the majority in the "steady part-time" pathway was female. The main finding concerns the persistence of unequal comparative advantages and life chances between men and women at the interface of work and home: working women suffered more marital instability than did men; and wives' employment sequences were highly contingent on their husbands' careers. This research confirms that work sequences contribute to the specific shape of linked lives which are still structured by gender inequality and asymmetry.

It is likely that in societies with a high level of women's culturally supported labor market participation, the spouses' careers will be more independent of each other. Research in socialist countries like the former German Democratic Republic (Kreckel & Schenk, 2001) or China document that there the conventional, gender typed work transitions and sequences do (did) not exist. The job-shifts of wives and husbands between 1949 and 1994 in China, a state-socialist country undergoing waves of politically enforced economic and social changes, indicate career patterns in a life course regime which strongly contrast with gender-specific careers in the North American and EU-countries' market economies (Zhou & Moen, 2001). The hierarchy of the respective work organizations (with the government administration on

top) and the wife's and husband's specific work histories determine job-shift patterns across a period of more than 40 years. Again, this study shows how institutional arrangements can facilitate or restrict the multiple participations/role configurations at the interface of family and employment and access to pathways through the working life.

In capitalist market economies, the life course is shaped by linked or interrelated lives embedded in gendered role configurations and institutional arrangements that are documented in individual contracts and unequal career patterns. These macro-social and institutional contexts are reflected in individuals' multiple and interdependent transitions, which influence the timing and duration of employment careers. Therefore, even the individualized career in a flexible labor market is not a solo passage. Instead, social contexts, which create mutual social obligations, options, and obstacles that constitute conditions of career diversity and deviations from the most likely path, influence work histories.

## WORK TRAJECTORIES AS NEGOTIATED CAREERS: THE CONTINGENT WORK LIFE COURSE

The concept of "trajectory" stems from rocket technology; here it designates a ballistic curve with a highly predictable slope between firing and hitting the target. As a metaphor for the life course, trajectory applies to continuous careers, which are characteristic of orderly pathways in the internal labor markets of large companies and state bureaucracies of industrial societies. It does not reflect less ordered pathways, especially those of women, and of job-entry and job-exit cohorts in the 1990s, who were confronted with much less employment stability than earlier cohorts. There are also intercohort differences that make for less career continuity for middle aged and older managers who became victims of company downsizing. Therefore, "transitions and sequences" seem to be better suited for describing the "contingent work life course" (Heinz, 2001), because these concepts do not carry the latent meaning of continuity, but make it an empirical issue.

The remodeling of the tripartite life course is an unfinished process; it has created socially legitimate periods of non-work, namely education, family (for women), and retirement which in reality did not become completely separated from the sphere of work. There are students and retirees who are employed in low-income, non-standard jobs and socially disadvantaged youth and worn-out workers who are regarded as not productive and thus get excluded from the labor market and become welfare recipients (Leisering & Leibfried, 1999). Each move into work or out of work, as well as career moves, upward, downward or horizontal/lateral, are transitions that are shaped by work organizations and persons' employment decisions as well (George, 1993; Sackmann & Wingens, 2001). From the institutions' point of view, such transitions occur in an organized framework that links past status with the target status, for instance, by screening of applicants, job interviews, and periodic reviews; while from the person's perspective, transitions mean learning new membership roles and organizational rules.

The prolongation of the job-entry process, the increase of job-shifts, and the rise of early retirement are indicators of a transformation of both the human resource strategies of companies as well as the labor market and social policy of the state. In employment systems that rest on long-term contracts, combined with a strong, usually union-supported element of seniority, companies can reduce layoffs by taking advantage of state programs for early retirement and partly subsidized temporary jobs for young people and mothers.

We have argued that in post-industrial society, social transformations and work biographies are linked through self-socialization and individual career management as well as repair, in the structural context of labor markets and firms, mediated by institutional rules and resources. Employment opportunities and career options are embedded in contested exchange arrangements between employers and employees that contribute to the shape of the work life course. These arrangements involve contracts with different employment durations, career prospects, and varying autonomy and learning chances at the workplace. Contracts are negotiated in a social framework of institutional guidelines and industrial relations, which permit occupation- and company-based, short-term bargaining (*the market model*) or require industry-wide, long-term agreements (*the institutional or corporatist model*). In both circumstances, there is interactive bargaining, which occurs via more or less institutionalized procedures. As Chris and Charles Tilly (1998, 264) emphasize: "The character of work under capitalism has always depended on hard bargaining within stringent institutional limits established by the previous histories of shared understandings and social relations." This notion of interactive bargaining is useful for analyzing the options and restrictions that people are faced with in the process of career negotiations. It points to the variability of contextual forces that supplement the temporal aspects of employment sequences and promote understanding of career stability and instability.

The negotiating power of job applicants and workers depends on their position in vacancy chains, which, in turn, relates to their education, gender, and work history. These employee characteristics are important for school-to-work transitions, status-attainment, and career patterns in post-industrial societies because they are criteria for matching workers and jobs (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Shavit & Müller, 1998). In the market model, this matching may occur in informal negotiations, which are embedded in social networks (Granovetter, 1995; Tilly & Tilly, 1998) and account for variations in the frequency of transitions and job-durations. In flexible, deregulated labor markets (United States, Canada, United Kingdom), careers negotiated through social networks influence the timing, sequencing, and duration of employment, joblessness, and retirement more strongly than in the European continental welfare states, where career negotiations are embedded in occupational labor markets and industrial relations that are operating in the context of the principle of social partnership or corporatism.

A fundamental transformation of employment standards into a decentralized patchwork of flexible and precarious career patterns is still counterbalanced in the European Union by bargaining agreements concerning contracts, work time arrangements, time accounts, and social policy provisions like unemployment benefits and allowances for retraining. Nonetheless, the temporal destandardization of work sequences and the individualization of employment pathways have increased, especially among recent job entry cohorts.

The various forms of non-standard work constitute new challenges and obstacles for building a work career with some continuity and require that persons develop competence in negotiating contracts on short notice and come to terms with having to alternate between episodes of full- and part-time jobs, under-employment (Livingstone, 1998), unemployment, and retraining.

These challenges will require more frequent negotiations at career turning points, greater involvement in self-socialization across the life course, and, perhaps, lead to more flexible work identities. These processes have been accelerated in the less regulated North American and UK labor markets, where firms have been moving faster away from internal labor market strategies with stable employment to non-standard contracts. In continental European welfare states, there are indications that occupational credentials gain in value in the labor market when combined with work experience, self-presentation, and social contacts.

The preceding sections have intended to show the extent to which the structure and meaning of work and career have changed in the 20th century with respect to labor market entry, employment continuity, retirement, and the reconciling of work and family life. Individual flexibility in the timing, sequencing, and duration of work-related transitions has become characteristic of post-industrial service societies. There is, however, substantial difference among nations with respect to the new lifetime budgets, which results from the degree of labor market regulation and the institutionalization of linkages/pathways among education, training, work, family, and retirement. Economic turbulence and social transformations have brought about change in female and male career sequences, changes that have been more dramatic in market economies than in welfare states. This observation suggests the need to analyze the work life course from both an institutional and biographical perspective. Pathways have become destandardized and employment careers discontinuous, and the ensuing "contingent work life course" (Heinz, 2001) transforms the relationship between social institutions and the life domains of education, work, and family. Such transformations loosen the coupling between social structure and work biographies because they shift the challenge and responsibility for managing one's career, for coordinating transitions and durations, to the individual. Moreover, individual work careers evolve in the context of linked lives; they are tied to multiple, interlocking pathways. Because in post-industrial service society, the social structure of work and the shape of the life course are loosely coupled, careers do not simply result from the sum total of work transitions and employment durations; they rather emerge from negotiations based on qualifications, work experiences, and biographical decisions on the one side, and institutional gate-keeping on the other side.

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