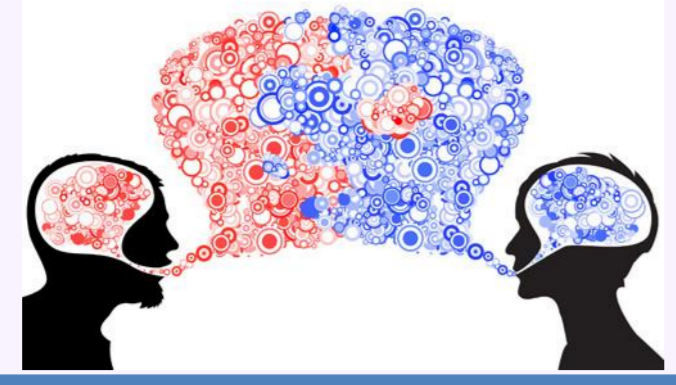


Negotiating the Life Course

Dyadic Decision Making and Limits of Agency in Postmodern Times



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I Social Change & Postmodernity

- Traditional: matters set, few changes
- Modern: predictable change
- Postmodern: pervasive, unpredictable change

„Change in almost all domains of society“
(Frankenberger 2008)

Transition period (Stacey 1990)

Core aspects

- **Reflexivity** (Giddens 1992)
- **Individualization** (Beck 1993)
- **Heterogeneity & Complexity** (van der Kaa 2001)
- **Ambivalence & Dilemma:**
 - Freedom vs. Responsibility (Beck 2010)
 - Demands vs Opportunities (Kohli 2007)
 - Intimacy vs. Autonomy (Huinink 2015)
- **Life Course Destandardization** (Kohli 2007)

→ Individuals themselves agents and locus of change (Dykstra 2009)

→ **Agency demands** (Bandura 2006)

II Intimate Relationships

„**Revolutionary changes**“ (Bronfenbrenner 1984)

- Gender (Wilkie 1998)
- Deinstitutionalisation of marriage (Tyrell 1998)
- Democratic intimacy (Giddens 1992)
- Economization (Illouz 1997)
- Family discontinuities (Bernardi 2013)

→ New heterogeneity: „*survival*“ (Schneider 2015)

→ „*Individualized relationships*“ (Burkart 1991)

Dyadic Life Course

- Life course indicator for structural change: macro-micro-interrelation (Huinink 2012; Elder 1987)
- Result of decision making: individual responsibility and idiosyncratic solutions (Lewis 2006)

→ Increasingly difficult to ‚synchronize‘, match and link two individual life courses

→ **New tasks, new decisions, new dilemmas along the dyadic life course of couple formation, enlargement and dissolution**

III Empirical Approach: Case Studies

Aim: understand dynamics of contemporary intimate relationships & capture social change

Micro Level: How are intimate relationships modulated by postmodernity? Concrete questions and contexts: case studies.

Macro Level: What can be learned about postmodernity by integrating these cases?

Dyadic Life Course Decision Making

- „*Linked Lives*“ (Elder 1987)
- Focus on **transitions, decisions and dilemma** which define and change intimate relationships along the dyadic life course.

Cases & Research Questions

I Couple Formation - Long Distance Relationships

How decide partners for one place of residence?

II Couple Enlargement - Fertility and Work Success

How do job rewards affect fertility intentions?

III Couple Dissolution - End-of-Life

How are aging, autonomy & death negotiated?

POSTMODERN TIMES

Dyadic Life-Course Decision Making ↓ Flexibility, Precarity and Agency Demands

Intimate Relationships

I Couple Formation Long Distance Relationships	II Couple Enlargement Entrepreneurs of the Self	III Couple Dissolution Successful Aging and Death
RQ: Live Together?	Children?	Health, Autonomy, Death?
Mixed-Methods: Qualitative Interviews + questionnaires	Longitudinal Panel Analysis + group-based interviews	Qualitative Interviews + questionnaires
Sample: 10 couples in LDR, age 25+	N = 300, both job, no children, age 30+	10 elderly couples, age 75+
Postmodern: Dyadic de- and relocalisation. Sacrifices for intimacy?	Architects of own life course: fertility as constraint for individual success?	Active role and new decisions in late life. Agency vs aging & death?
Dilemma: Agency to bridge distance, create joint life course!?	Agency to synchronize two 'business' life plans!?	Agency to master the end-of-life!?

Intimate Precarity:
Not Relating

Biographic Precarity:
Postponing

Agentic Precarity:
Repression or Despair

Postmodern Dilemma Situations:
Intimacy and Limits of Agency

Outlook and Discussion

- **Limits and Illusion of Agency** in constructing the own life course: Can agency bridge distance? Reconcile work and family? Stop aging and soften death?
- Insights into postmodern *conditio humana* & future of intimate relationships: How to stay committedly related, to live and give continuity (Tyrell 1988)?!
- **Macro-Micro-Macro** (Coleman 1990): Postmodern Demands → Dyadic Dilemma → Agency vs Self-Focus → Increased Individualization & „*Demographic Pressures*“ (Henninger 2008)
- Contextualized Case Studies? Couple dynamics as „*mediator of social change*“?

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