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 (Baczyk 1990)

Core aspects
- Reflexivity (Giddens 1990)
- Individualization (Beck 1992)
- 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? (Dykyra 2009)
→ Agency demands (Bandura 2006)

II Intimate Relationships

Revolutionary changes (Bourdieu 1984)
- Gender (Fiske 1989)
- Deinstitutionalisation of marriage (Tyrrell 1998)
- Democratic intimacy (Giddens 1992)
- Economization (Roud 1997)
- Family discontinuities (Bernard 2013)

→ New heterogeneity: „survival“ (Schneider 2015)
→ „Individualized relationships“ (Bourdieu 1987)

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 (Lives 2000)

→ 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

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

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 are aging, autonomy & death negotiated?

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?

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 condition humaine & future of intimate relationships: How to stay committedly related, to live and give continuity (Tyrrell 1988)?
- Contextualized Case Studies: Couple dynamics as „mediator of social change“?