

Social Dynamics of the Life Course: Transitions, Institutions, and Interrelations (Life Course and Aging)

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In the last two decades, research on the life course has successfully combined and integrated different and rather isolated fields of social concerns such as: the labor market, family solidarity, education, employment, retirement, and social policy. It has also developed a special focus on crucial problems of sociological research, which includes the understanding of micromacro phenomena, the dynamics of social change, and international comparisons. Contributors to this volume take an international, comparative approach in applying the life course theoretical framework to issues of work and career. Life course research focuses on the relationship between institutions and individuals across the life span and illuminates the impact of modernization on the shaping of biographies. Industrial service societies are characterized by historically new contingencies of living arrangements and biographies. These contingencies differ according to the extent to which life course patterns are regulated by social institutions. In the continental European context, institutional frameworks continue to define the timing and sequencing of transitions across the life course. In less regulated market societies, like the United States and Great Britain, biographies and living arrangements are shaped more by the interaction of markets, social networks, and individual decisions. In active welfare states, institutional resources and rules continue to mediate the effects of social change on the life course. What the editors and contributors to this fine compendium anticipate is a change on the cultural level toward more equality. This trend supports young people, and women in particular, in their expectations concerning an egalitarian relationship. This expectation is not taken for granted from the point of view of the male partner, but has to be negotiated in decisionmaking processes as an issue that concerns the couple as a unit. Thus, the way in which people interact is profoundly impacted by the values and goals of equity demands. Walter R. Heinz is professor of sociology and social psychology, and director, Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Bremen. Victor W. Marshall is professor of sociology, and director of the Institute on Aging, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Carolina.



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