

# **Globalization, Uncertainty and Youth in Society**

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## Preface

This volume emanates from the international and multidisciplinary research program '*GLOBALIFE*' – *Life Courses in the Globalization Process*, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (Hannover, Germany). GLOBALIFE studies the implications of the globalization process for the life courses of individuals in various OECD-type societies. The project examines how globalization impacts four aspects of the life course: 1) the transition to adulthood, 2) men's mid-career mobility, 3) women's mid-career mobility and the work/family link; and, 4) late careers and retirement. This volume represents the completion of the first phase of this project.

This volume examines how youth in 14 different industrialized societies make the transition into adulthood in an era of globalization and rising uncertainty. Globalization is an inherently complex concept, yet in recent years has become a central point of reference for media, politicians, academics and policy-makers to understand change. Globalization entails a series of significant macro-processes that are common to all modern societies: 1) internationalization of markets and subsequent decline in national borders, 2) intensification of competition and growth in discourse on deregulation, liberalization and privatization, 3) spread of global networks of people and firms linked by new technologies, and, 4) a rise in the importance of markets. Together these developments create an atmosphere of increasing uncertainty that is 'filtered' through country-specific institutions and perceptions. The institutions of welfare regimes, employment, education and family systems that operate during the transition to adulthood channel uncertainty to specific social groups of youth which in turn impacts their opportunity or ability to make decisions during the transition to adulthood. Yet youth are in a life course phase where they need to make vital and long-term binding decisions about entering the labor market and forming a partnership or family. This volume takes an empirical approach to the topic, brings the individual and nation-specific institutions back into the globalization discussion and examines the impact of globalization on social and gender inequalities.

The GLOBALIFE project, established and directed by Hans-Peter Blossfeld, began in September 1999 at the University of Bielefeld, Germany and will end in early 2005. Since September 2002, the project has been located at the Otto-Friedrich University in Bamberg, Germany. During the preparation of this volume, the project consisted of core project members located at the University of Bielefeld, including: Fabrizio Bernardi, Hans-Peter Blossfeld, Katrin Golsch,

Erik Klijzing, Karin Kurz, Melinda Mills, Tiziana Nazio, Carles Simó, Thorsten Sommer, and Nikolei Steinhage. Many of these researchers have now moved to take academic positions in various countries, perhaps a reflection of the ‘globalized’ nature of the project itself and our occupations. We thank all project members for their energy, persistence and contribution to the many lively ‘globalization’ debates during this period. We also thank Ingeborg McIntyre for competent administrative support. In particular, in the stage of preparing the typescript we received invaluable help from our student assistants Monique Antler, Katrin Busch, Cathrin Conradi, Kathrin Kolb, Jens Kratzmann, Wolfgang Kraus, Kerstin Künsebeck, Corinna Mergner, Robert Stephan, and Susanne Stedtfeld. We like to thank all of them.

Another important goal of the GLOBALIFE project was to create, expand, and utilize an international research network, in which specific substantive and methodological issues in the analysis of life courses in the globalization process could be developed and executed. The completion of this volume is therefore also attributed to the individual contributors to this volume who are experts in their respective countries who devoted time and energy into the project. We thank all of the contributors for their time and patience. Our condolences are extended to the family and friends of Mia Hultin, one of the contributors to this volume, who passed away in 2002. We would also like to thank to the many individuals who responded to our work when it was presented at various conferences. Our appreciation goes to Terry Clague and Routledge in London for supporting the publication of the volume. Finally, we would like to thank the Volkswagen Foundation in Hannover for their continued financial support that made this ambitious project possible.

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# Foreword

I have long been interested in the role of economic factors in influencing marriage behavior as economic change is a continuing feature of modern industrial, as well as industrializing, societies. As such it usually affects large numbers of people, although often differentially. Hence, economic factors could potentially be playing an important role in the substantial changes in marriage and fertility behavior that have characterized most industrial societies in recent years. To this end, I have been studying the impact of economic factors on American marriage and cohabitation behavior and am especially pleased to write a preface to this collection of studies because they partially build on and extend my own work to other societies.

Beginning some time in the early 1970s, the American age at marriage started its long-term rise. For many years, demographers thought this was due to women's increasing economic independence resulting from the large post-war rise in married women's employment. I did not think this was a particularly convincing explanation for a variety of theoretical and empirical reasons and recent research has borne out the weakness of this argument. More importantly, while demographers were so intent on the presumed consequences of *women's* rising employment, not much attention was being directed to the changes in *men's* economic status—and these were substantial. During the 1980's, labor economists started to document a sharp increase in economic inequality among American males. Most affected were less educated men, especially African Americans, but even *within* educational groups, there was a rise in inequality among those with less as compared to more labor market experience— i.e., the young. Labor economists were not particularly concerned with the likely impact of these changes on marriage and family behavior, and most social demographers did not seem to be noticing them, but warning bells definitely went off in my mind.

The increasing economic difficulties were not just characteristic of the least educated socioeconomic groups (high school dropouts) but also of the far more numerous group of moderately educated men (high school graduates) and of the young in particular. The question was how to get a handle on investigating the impact of economic inequality on marriage behavior. I conceptualized the problem from a career-development perspective as young men tend to be particularly vulnerable to changes in the economy—they have less work experience and hence less on-the-job training and low tenure at any particular job they may currently have. One well-known result of these vulnerabilities is that during recessions, the

unemployment rates of young men rise much more than those of older men. What the labor market analyses indicated, however, was that the inherent career-entry problems of young American workers had increased over time. This, in turn, has accentuated a number of impediments to marriage formation. On the one hand, their earnings are low and often unstable, which makes it very difficult to set up an independent household. Their low income and job insecurity also raises considerable uncertainty about their current ability and willingness to make a stable commitment to adult family roles. Uncertainty about their long-term socioeconomic characteristics and life style also impedes assortative mating because marriages are supposed to last. Hence people not only sort on their *current* characteristics but also on their expected *future* characteristics as well and these can be heavily influenced by the ultimate nature of their occupational careers. In short, low earnings and high levels of career uncertainties should lead to marriage delays while such difficulties are being experienced.

I was fortunate in investigating these issues to have available a large longitudinal data set, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, first interviewed in 1979 when they were aged 14-22 and which I followed annually thereafter until 1990 for my analysis of marriage formation and 1993 for the cohabitation and marriage study (Oppenheimer *et al.*, 1997; Oppenheimer, 2003). Very detailed data were collected each year on economic and marital behavior. Hence, it was possible to develop measures of career-entry status for males (earnings, time out of school, amount worked each year, school enrollment, job type) and likely long-term socioeconomic characteristics (educational attainment). Discrete time logit analysis was used to assess whether evidence of career “immaturity” discouraged marriage formation in any given year. And indeed I found that it did.

Because of the longitudinal nature of the NLSY data, it was also possible to assess inequalities in the *pace* of these young men’s career-entry process. This showed the persistence, over several years after they left school, of poverty-level earnings for a sizable proportion of moderately to less educated men, especially blacks. Furthermore, compared to those with a college degree, it also took several years for a sizable proportion to have worked full-time full-year for even one year and much longer to have worked full-time for two consecutive years. In short, there were considerable race and educational differences in the length of time it took these young NLSY cohorts to achieve a stable work career paying an above-poverty wage. This implied that the lowered risk of marrying due to economic difficulties in any given year would persist over some time for many of them. Using these data on educational and race differences in the pace of career development plus the logit analysis of the effect of the economic variables on marriage formation in any given year, it was possible to construct simulations of the pace of marriage formation for people with difficult vs. easier career transitions by education and race. The differences in marriage formation between difficult and easier transitions within race-education groups as well as between groups were dramatic. Hence, although a crude approximation, I thought this was telling evidence of the role of men’s career-development difficulties in marriage delays in the United States.

Recently, I have extended the analysis of marriage formation among NLSY males to include cohabitation behavior. I used a multinomial logit analysis of, first, the effect of career-related factors on the entry into either a cohabiting or marital union and then, if a cohabitation has occurred, the effect of these same factors on whether the couple split up or married. In general, the analysis indicated that entering a marriage rather than a cohabitation is far more likely for those with the best long-term prospects (i.e., the more educated). However, if such men did enter a cohabitation, they were also more likely to marry out of it compared to the less educated, suggesting that their cohabitations might represent engagements. The evidence also suggests that those with a recent unstable employment record may have been using cohabitation as an adaptive strategy while their careers were still in flux. They were far more likely than the stably employed to enter a cohabitation and, once in a cohabitation, they were also far less likely to marry out of it.

My studies of the role of career-entry difficulties and the likely uncertainties they create for young people, along with the ensuing effects on cohabitation and marriage, have been limited to American society. Nor have I attempted to investigate the role of these factors in delayed childbearing. Yet increases in both cohabitation and delayed marriage and childbearing have also been occurring among many other developed countries. Hence, this volume makes an important contribution to our understanding of these issues by investigating them for 14 diverse but mostly European, societies. Furthermore, it broadens the scope of the studies in two other important ways as well. First it places the difficulties young people are experiencing within the context of the globalization phenomenon, thereby providing a single hypothesized cause or cluster of causes for young people's economic difficulties. Second, there is a clear recognition that the possibly negative effects of globalization will be mediated by specified differences in the institutional structure of the various societies. Hence, uniformity in the nature of the impact of globalization on young people's economic position or in their response to economic difficulties is not preordained in societies impacted by globalization shifts. All in all, this collection of different country studies raises important questions in marriage and family behavior and sets the stage for even more work to come.

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