

Globalization, Uncertainty and Women's Careers

Globalization, Uncertainty and Women's Careers

An International Comparison

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Preface

This volume is one of four published books containing the research stemming from the international and multidisciplinary research program ‘GLOBALIFE – Life Courses in the Globalization Process,’ funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (Hanover, Germany) and established and directed by Hans-Peter Blossfeld. The project began in September 1999 at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, and moved to Bamberg University, Germany, in September 2002; it concluded in early 2005. In total, the project employed 23 scientists directly and contracted an additional 44 external collaborators from 17 different countries. It produced about 80 working papers in addition to these edited volumes and an extensive list of other publications. Our profound thanks go to the Volkswagen Foundation in Hanover for their financial support that made this ambitious project possible.

GLOBALIFE studied the implications of the globalization process for the life courses of individuals in various OECD-type societies. The project examined 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 employment transitions; and (4) late careers and retirement. This volume represents the work generated in the third phase of this project.

We examine how women in 13 industrialized societies navigate work and family careers in an era of globalization and rising economic uncertainty. Globalization has powerfully shaped both national economies and individual life courses during the last decades. The emergence of a single worldwide market has therefore enhanced the number of competitors and increased the demand for flexible labor forces. Mid-career women may be affected by globalized working environments due to their outsider position in many labor markets and the various competing demands for their time across paid employment and unpaid caregiving.

There are many people to thank in a project of this magnitude. During the preparation of this volume, the project consisted of core project members located at Bamberg University, including: Sandra Buchholz, Daniela Grunow, Dana Hamplová, Steffen Hillmert, Dirk Hofäcker, Karin Kurz, Detlev Lück, Štěpánka Pollnerová and Kadri Täht. We thank all for their counsel and support. We especially recognize project members on site who contributed chapters to this volume, including Sandra Buchholz, Daniela Grunow, Dana Hamplová, Dirk Hofäcker and Detlev Lück. Our gratitude goes to Melinda Mills for advice and support throughout the research and manuscript preparation, and to Fabrizio Bernardi for valuable editorial

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An important goal of the GLOBALIFE project was to create and utilize an international research network that would collectively pursue specific substantive and methodological issues in the analysis of life courses in the globalization process. This volume would not be possible without the external contributors to this volume, experts in their respective countries, who devoted time and energy to the project by traveling for workshops, corresponding regularly over the course of several years, and above all producing top-quality research to illuminate the life courses of mid-career women. Our gratitude goes to Matthijs Kalmijn, Ruud Luijkx, Thomas Korpi, Charlotta Stern, Søren Leth-Sørensen, Erzsébet Bukodi, Péter Róbert, Jelena Helemäe, Ellu Saar, Ania Plomien, Katrin Golsch, Emilio A. Parrado, Maurizio Pisati, Antonio Schizzerotto and Carles Simó Noguera for their enthusiastic, professional, and cooperative teamwork throughout.

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Foreword

Phyllis Moen

Across the European and American labor markets, the ‘story’ of the latter half of the twentieth century consists of trends in women entering, remaining in, or reentering employment at different ages and life-course stages. Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Heather Hofmeister make a convincing case that the ‘story’ in the first decade of the twenty-first century will be globalization and its varied impacts, especially as they intersect with women’s lives in different policy contexts.

Globalization, Uncertainty and Women’s Careers: An International Comparison is the third in a quite remarkable series of edited volumes chronicling an impressive array of comparative, cross-national longitudinal research findings from the GLOBALIFE project. Most extant studies of globalization focus largely on the developing world. By contrast, this series charts the ecology of globalization in economically developed regions: North America and Europe, including countries in Eastern Europe. Taken together, these researches examine micro-level, life-course impacts of globalization processes, within as well as across nations, within as well as across age and gender divides.

In this edited volume, Blossfeld, Hofmeister and colleagues demonstrate the ways that the globalization of markets together with existing institutional disadvantages exacerbate women’s position as outsiders. But this outcome is nuanced, in that women’s increasing vulnerability is contingent on both their prior biographies and the policy regimes under which they live.

Mayer (1986, p. 167) describes institutional careers as the orderly flow of persons through segmented institutions. A number of life-course scholars (for example, Blossfeld and Drobnič 2001; Blossfeld, Drobnič and Rohwer 1995; Kohli 1986; Mayer 1986; Moen 2003, Riley and Riley 1989; 1994) have pointed to the development of occupational careers as providing the organizational blueprint for the life course, beginning with a period of education, followed by years of continuous, full-time productive work, and then retirement. By the middle of the twentieth century across the West, this became a *career mystique* institutionalizing a ‘primary’ labor market, with continuous (throughout adulthood) full-time employment the expected and rewarded norm (Moen and Roehling 2005). The career mystique promised success and fulfillment in return for a lifetime of hard work and commitment.

Indeed, in the United States uninterrupted full-time (or more) employment in the primary labor market became the *only* path to security, status, and success, including the provision of health care insurance, pensions, and even paid (typically two-week) vacations. Those outside this primary labor market were, literally, outsiders.

The career mystique belief, and the social organization of paid work it fostered, was predicated on the *feminine mystique* (Friedan 1963), the myth that women could (and should) find fulfillment as homemakers, supporting their husbands who, in turn, were freed to devote their time, effort, and commitment to their paid jobs. Thus the career mystique of the good worker was conveniently isomorphic with men's roles as family breadwinners. With the identification of the feminine mystique as a false myth in the 1960s, the re-energized women's movement in Europe and America argued for equality in access to educational and occupational opportunities, as well as in pay. Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s saw paid work as the path to gender equality, and this meant replacing one false myth (the feminine mystique) with another (the career mystique), using men's employment experiences as the yardstick for equality.

In the 1970s and 1980s, women in Europe and North America pushed for equality at school and at work, moving into universities and employment in unprecedented numbers. But they did so while still encumbered with a second shift (Hochschild 1989) of housework, family care and the details of daily living. Most employed women in most developed countries were part of the secondary labor market. This meant working part-time, temporarily, or in low-level jobs that came without the career mystique expectation of continuous, total commitment but also without the internal mobility ladders, skill development, security or rewards associated with it (Blossfeld and Hakim 1997). This two-tier arrangement offered a bifurcation of opportunities. 'Good jobs' in the primary labor market were disproportionately occupied by middle-class men, along with men in unionized blue-collar occupations. Women, immigrants, minorities, and the poorly educated, by contrast, worked in the secondary labor market with few job protections or possibilities. The lack of job protections or possibilities have been especially but not exclusively the case in the United States, where health insurance, pensions, unemployment insurance, disability insurance, and Social Security all rest on the edifice of the lock-step career mystique. Whether or not employees may have actually believed in the career mystique script, it nevertheless became the yardstick against which job success and status are gauged and resources are allocated.

Feminists in the 1980s turned to the concept of comparative worth. If women and men were not to occupy the 'same' jobs, at least those doing comparable jobs (in terms of educational and skill requirements) should earn comparable pay (Reskin 1998). The next phase of feminism in the 1990s addressed the second shift of unpaid care work, presuming that women's double day accounted for the enduring disparities in men's and women's

occupations, status, mobility and pay. The call was for men to accept their fair share of domestic work. But men's 'good jobs' remain 'greedy' (Coser 1984) and men remain the principal breadwinners in most households. Even dual-earner couples prioritize husbands' jobs (Pixley and Moen 2003) and follow a neotraditional division of paid work and domestic work (Moen and Sweet 2003).

While women are now doing less housework and men are doing somewhat more of the unpaid family care work in some modern societies, this has not appreciably lessened women's work–family conflicts and strains. And even though opinion surveys show that women (and men) give primacy to family and personal life over paid work in their hierarchy of commitments, their actual adaptive strategies suggest otherwise (Moen and Orrange 2002; Orrange 2003). Across Europe and North America, the evidence is that women are seeking to lessen the family demand side of the work–family equation: having no or fewer children, bearing them later in life, marrying later or not at all, or not remaining married.

Feminist scholars in the United States are beginning to frame gender disparities as originating in and sustained by the social organization of paid work (Bailyn 1993; Moen 2003; Moen and Roehling 2005). Many Americans are calling for more flexibilities in the clockworks of paid work – the social arrangement of workdays, workweeks, work years, career and retirement paths. But, as Blossfeld and Hofmeister show, this call for greater temporal flexibility at work (especially in the United States) comes at a time when global forces are creating a different kind of flexibility, in the form of job uncertainties and insecurities. *Globalization, Uncertainty and Women's Careers* shows that continuities and changes in women's roles and adaptations are occurring side by side with dramatic shifts in technologies and in labor markets that are rewriting seniority and security conventions. The traditional contract between employers and employees is dissolving in many countries, and even workers with established seniority and skills find they are disposable in times of mergers, bankruptcies, and restructuring. Risk and uncertainty may be blurring age-graded rules and scripts based on the career mystique, but women are still especially vulnerable to the forces of global change.

Blossfeld and Hofmeister, along with their other chapter authors, use women's life courses as a *strategic research site* (Merton 1968) to empirically investigate the micro (changing biographical) consequences of these macro forces of globalization. In doing so they are reframing the work–gender–life course discourse, chronicling what I call *converging divergences* (Moen and Spencer 2005) in life paths and life chances. Global forces are dismantling the lock-step life course, producing *divergences* in biographical paths. These divergences are occurring across social locations, meaning that the experiences of subgroups are *converging* in the range of their variation. Combining both concepts captures the growing heterogeneity by age and by gender in the strategic selections and opportunity structures of men and

women. Thus within-gender distinctions may be as diverse and as consequential as across-gender (or age or cohort) differences.

This edited volume charts the converging divergences in women's lives brought about by globalization in distinctive national contexts. It encompasses a complex but rich theoretical and research agenda: locating gendered life courses within global forces of change, even as these forces are themselves embedded within the very national borders globalization is seeking to blur. Each country chapter models how national constellations of roles, risks and relationships serve to moderate (or exacerbate) the impacts of the forces of globalization on women's life chances and life quality.

Globalization, Uncertainty, and Women's Careers shows how women's position as outsiders in the labor force in many countries is being exacerbated by the globalizing of markets, including the labor market. Equally important, the unique contribution of this edited volume is that it captures the dynamics and cross-national contextual distinctions in women's relative vulnerability, given the culture and structure of women's 'expected life course' embedded in within-nation (as well as within welfare regime) institutions and ways of thinking.

This book, and especially as part of the set of four books on life courses under globalization, highlights the often outdated shared understandings and taken-for-granted rules, roles and risks within and across policy regimes in the face of the uncertainties and ambiguities of twenty-first century life on a global playing field. This volume highlights different *within gender* differences, depending on the institutional ecologies of women's lives. The books taken together show that the social organization of the life course remains *gender graded*, typically producing diverging paths for men and women even though they may begin life with similar backgrounds and abilities. By viewing macro-level forces of global change from the micro-level of women's lives, this edited volume offers a unique angle on globalization. Pathbreaking too is its contextual, comparative and dynamic framing of gendered policy regimes, careers and life courses. Women's lives are being reconfigured in light of dramatic shifts in the larger social fabric of society, but in different ways in different settings.

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