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# Swiss Journal of Sociology

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## Cumulative and Compensatory Effects over the Life Course

Edited by Claudine Burton-Jeangros, Eric D. Widmer and Dale Dannefer

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193 Stability, Homogeneity, Agency: Cumulative Dis/Advantage and Problems of Theory [E] | Dale Dannefer

As the concept of cumulative dis/advantage (CDA) has expanded in conceptual development and research application, its relation to a number of more general theoretical issues remains to be articulated. This paper considers the relation of CDA to three enduring tensions in social theory, between 1) stability and change, 2) homogeneity and variability, and 3) structure and agency. The fundamental pattern of change related to CDA, which entails a process of systematic divergence and increasing dissimilarity and hence inequality among age peers as they grow older, is a regular feature of cohort aging that seems to be reproduced in each succeeding cohort. At the same time, social policy changes that disrupt the processes that generate systematic divergence have produced a long-term trend of change, reducing poverty and perhaps inequality among older people. Similar social processes have resulted in the institutionalization of the life course, which entails increases in age-based homogeneity and predictability. These large-scale social processes have been credited with heralding in an increase in individual agency even while they have generated greater conformity in transition behavior, a reminder that the expression of agency is itself organized by larger social forces. Agency is also fundamental to the processes underlying the production of cumulative advantage and disadvantage, since such processes are ultimately grounded in human intentionality and action.

Keywords: cumulative disadvantage, inequality, life course, heterogeneity, agency

211 Cumulative Knowledge about Cumulative Advantage [E] | Aaron M. Pallas and Jennifer L. Jennings

The cumulative advantage/disadvantage perspective has become an increasingly prominent part of the literature on social stratification across the life course. In this paper, we join cumulative advantage with another influential perspective, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social stratification. We begin by reviewing the concept of cumulative advantage, and the diverse

ways in which the term has been used in the literature on stratification and the life course. We then introduce the key concepts in Bourdieu's theoretical framework: capital, field and habitus. We conclude by considering some of the implications of Bourdieu's framework for understanding social stratification for research on cumulative advantage. These include a new definition of what constitutes evidence of cumulative advantage; a call for greater clarity on what counts as capital that can be accumulated; clarifying the boundaries and attributes of the fields in which cumulative advantage might occur; and taking the habitus seriously as a contingency in cumulative advantage.

Keywords: life course, cumulative advantage, Pierre Bourdieu, social stratification, capital

**231** **When Does Disadvantage Not Accumulate? Toward a Sociological Conceptualization of Resilience [E]** | Markus H. Schafer, Tetyana Pylypiv Shippee and Kenneth F. Ferraro

Although structural disadvantage and inequality have the propensity to stifle life chances, some people are able to surmount considerable obstacles in social life and avoid the consequences of cumulative disadvantage. This phenomenon, often termed resilience, holds promise for the study of life trajectories but has received little systematic consideration in sociological research. This essay, therefore, offers a typology of what resilience is and how it is related to different forms of adversity and to the activation of social and material resources. Constructing such a schema will enable scholars to develop testable hypotheses about the interplay between structure and agency that underlie resilience and compensatory efforts. We draw from cumulative inequality theory to bring the agency of people back into the study of the structural processes by which advantage and disadvantage persist, amplify, or shrink over the life course.

Keywords: cumulative inequality theory, compensation, life trajectory, resource activation, perceptions of trajectories

**253** **The Differentiation of Occupational Trajectories across the Transition to Parenthood in Switzerland [F]** | Francesco Giudici and Jacques-Antoine Gauthier

Life course studies focusing on the cumulated advantages and disadvantages (CAD) hypothesis indicate that initial differences in a specific characteristic (sex, social status, or health) have an impact on intracohort differentiation. Most of these studies consider an entire life course and do not focus on specific transitions as a key moment for differentiation. In this article, the researchers focus on the transition to parenthood, showing that variations in occupational participation of both partners before the birth of a first child explain how professional trajectories differentiate after child birth.

Keywords: occupational trajectories, transition to parenthood, linked lives, sequence analysis, cumulated advantages and disadvantages

**279** **Being or Becoming a Woman: Paths of Female Precariousness in the Context of Deindustrialization in France and Italy [F]** | Elisabetta Pernigotti

By comparing the processes of precarisation among poorly qualified or unqualified women, this essay discusses the "feminine" precarisation. All women live in rural areas in France and Italy. Two paths are being compared: where the interruption of occupation and family work have a direct effect on female employment; and where, the transformations of the local structures of production can also lead to precariousness of the low-skilled women labour force. By comparing the different influences of the family, the market and the Welfare State

on these paths to precarisation, we discuss the relationship between the concept of gender and the local de-industrialization.

Keywords : deindustrialization, rurality, low-skilled women, France, Italy, precarisation.

297 **Differential and Cumulative Effects of Life Course Events in an Intergenerational Perspective: Social Trajectories of Three-Generation Family Lineages** [E] | Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos

Drawing from a life course perspective and on the basis of in-depth life narratives of male and female three-generation lineages, with the same relative unqualified and poor point of departure, from urban Lisbon and a rural, semi-industrialized village in northern Portugal, we identify three main processes of social mobility: low accumulation, loss of accumulation and continuous accumulation. Rather than just reproducing class positions inter-generationally, these processes are also the result of the relation between advantageous and disadvantageous life course events, whose effects are differential and cumulative across the generations, as they produce specific logics of resource appropriation and transmission.

Keywords: family lineages; social mobility; life course; cumulative (dis)advantage

321 **From Social Complexity to Atypical Life Courses: the Contribution of an "Eventful Sociology"** [F] | Armelle Testenoire

This article analyses the professional and family life course of a group of women from a working class background. To what extent do gender, class and ethnic inequalities interact with one another? Are these inequalities reinforced or weakened throughout the course of an individual's life? The use of the biographical method enabled the researcher to analyse the subjects' life course as a pattern of causal events, within the limits of statistical probability. The subjects' past contributes to a certain set of constraints and resources for future action, but does not determine their outcome, opening the possibility for atypical life courses which differ from normative social models.

Keywords: lifecourse, event, turning point, gender, class.

337 **Being a Student in Prison: Continuing or Catching Up with the School Career?** [F] | Fanny Salane

This paper focuses on an atypical population: students doing postsecondary studies in prison. As they are exceptional on the level of education they are enrolled in, are they also exceptional regarding their life trajectories before getting into custody? The article elaborates on the hypothesis that being a student in prison is the result of aggregated and accumulated advantages along these life trajectories. The results highlight that despite the majority of "student-inmates" being privileged in multiple ways in- and outside the prison, some of them have suffered disadvantaged life courses but have been able to compensate educational inequalities along their trajectories in profession, military, family and jail.

Keywords: prison, students, academic trajectories, inequalities, compensation.

357 **Psychological Health: an Analysis of the Intersection of Cumulative Disadvantage and Partnership Events** [E] | Monica Budowski, Maurizia Masia, and Robin Tillmann

By means of research on social inequalities in health and the life course we address the intersection between cumulative disadvantage and partnership events on psychological well-being. We describe how health changes around partnership events, and analyze the effects

of cumulative disadvantage and partnership events by means of two general linear models. Data from the Swiss Household Panel data (1999–2006) are pooled around partnership events. The results suggest that although partnership events and social environment are important when explaining health change, social positioning during youth and actual social and material environment prove to be more relevant when explaining health status.

Keywords: psychological well-being, psychological health, cumulative dis/advantage, life course, Switzerland

### 377 Cumulative Advantage, Educational Attainment, and Late Life Health Status

[E] | Michele J. Siegel, Ayse Akincigil, Shahla Amin, Stephen Crystal

There is a strong association between economic advantage and late life health, but few studies have examined the distinct relationship between various aspects of socioeconomic status (income, education) and health (self-rated health, functional impairment, chronic conditions). We examined these relationships using 1992–2005 Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey data representative of the U.S. Medicare population aged 65 and older. Adjusting for current income, insurance coverage and healthcare access does little to explain the education/health association. Other pathways may be more important in explaining this relationship. Nonetheless, despite the passage of many intervening years, schooling completed early in the lifecourse is powerfully predictive of late-life health.

Keywords: cumulative advantage, education, chronic conditions, functional limitations, self-rated health

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