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# The end of active life as a status passage challenging life evaluation

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## Overview

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2 Results: Evaluation of occupational life

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4 Conclusion

# 1 Design of study

1.1 Review of concepts

1.2 Hypotheses

1.3 Data

Sample

Dependent variables

Independent variables: occupational life

Independent variables: private life

# 1.1 Review of concepts

# Concepts to analyze the end of active life

## *Status passage (Glaser & Strauss's dimensions)*

- not reversible, repeatable, voluntary = **ultimate**; not entry, transition = **exit**
- Private life remains only arena of everyday life
- motivate to look back

## *Critical life event (Filip's definition)*

- Several processes together in a short time span
- requires new fit between person and environment
- emotional non-indifference requires some response

## *Rite de passage (van Gennep):*

- Retirement marked by festivities within former group
- Family meetings, birthday celebrations

Consequence from all three concepts: end of active life = **challenge to evaluate one's life so far**

But problems in everyday life and in interview

No competence, no or even averse motivation

Events forgotten, if painful excluded from memory.

Self-protective tendencies

Pushing the balance to the positive

In interview with stranger probably even stronger than  
in everyday life.

# Sociologists of biography on Transitions

## Theoretically

- “identity work along the time line”, “embedded in the total life history”, need to be researched from the “inner perspective of the person”, “biographical contexts of construction”. **But**
- No specification which transitions require which “identity work” and of what it consists
- No account of cognitive and motivational obstacles against it, and of who performs it and why.

## Empirically

- evaluation of active life at its end never been surveyed in standardized interviews of larger samples, or in informal interviews of small groups.

## In this situation, we ourselves

- formulated survey questions about evaluation of active life at its end and
- developed hypotheses on their determinants

## 1.2 Hypotheses



# *Success and failure in occupational and private life*

Active life driven by wish to succeed - its evaluation determined by successes achieved.

Successes = attainment of institutionalized goals, defined for a class of people by a legitimate authority and beyond the control of an individual

In occupational life

- Educational advances: according to rules of school administration
- Occupational remuneration and promotions: according to rules of the firm.

In private life

- single persons strive for civil status of marriage or partnership and parenthood.

In prospect, in planning one's life, people strive for their attainment.

In retrospect, evaluating one's life, people sum up what they have attained as their "value".

In the eye of the person and as well as its social relations, successes to be "evaluated".

# Success hypothesis – failure Hypothesis

*Success hypothesis:*

- The more successes, the better one will evaluate one's life.

Insofar as failure is the non-attainment of success

*Failure hypothesis:*

- The more failures, the worse one will evaluate one's life.

But success and failure = more than flip sides of same coin.

People want successes & seek to prevent failures

Motivational dominance of success over failures.

Therefore, differences between success and failure in:

- 1 strength of impact on life evaluation, contradictory hypotheses
- 2 forms of accumulation over time, different measurements

# *1 Contradictory hypothesis on impacts on life evaluation: Success as guideline for, failures as scars in careers*

Success motive: aims at accumulating successes over a career.

Success as fact: achievement at a given time.

Failures: disrupt a career, require re-orientation of life planning and life evaluation, attained successes mirrored in life evaluation *before* failure darkens the picture.

- *Success as guideline for careers hypothesis*: positive effects of successes stronger than negative effects of failures

Failures, to be coped with, even reverted, dominating thinking and action.

- *Failures as scars in careers hypothesis*: negative effects of failures stronger than positive effects of successes

## 2 Different forms of accumulation and of measurement: *Success ultimate, failures summed up*

Occupational life, productive activity = working.

- Success: ultimate state of employment, prestige, and income.
- Failures: disruptions of the occupational career, repeatable with varying time spans. Time spans summed up.
  - The longer the time of disruptions, the greater the failure.

Private life, productive activity = handling intimate relationships (apart from household).

- Success: ultimate state of partnership and parenthood.
- Failures: dissolution of partnership, no children. Cases of disruptions of intimate relations over the life course are *summed up*.
  - The more separations and divorces, the greater the failure

In both,

- Success: ultimate attainment,
- Failure: cases summed up – cases, which may be additionally weighted by time spans

# Sample and Panel waves

Cologne High School Panel (CHISP): cohort of former *Gymnasiasten* first interviewed at age 16 and re-interviewed at age 30, 43, 56, and 66.

# Dependent variables

“Looking over your occupational life in total, what would you say: The balance is (1) negative, (2) rather negative, (3) balanced (4) rather positive, or (5) positive”

“And looking over your private life in total ...”(as before).

More than 55 % of the respondents draw a “positive” balance (5) of their occupational and of their private life, and 33,8 % do so simultaneously in both domains; both correlate  $r=.310$ .

(1) to (4) against (5): dichotomy in logistic regressions.

# Independent variables: Success and Failure in occupational life

**Success:** HINCOME66, MPS66

**Failure:** Individual recall of life by months from all surveys in up to 45 episodes

Response options

- UNEMPLOYED-66 “registered as unemployed”
- FAMILY-66
  - “discontinuing education or employment because of marriage or home keeping obligation”
  - ...because of motherhood”
- WAITING-66
  - “waiting for study or trainee place”
  - “searching for a trainee or job position”
  - “waiting for military or civilian service”
  - “waiting for a dissertation”
- DISABILITY-66
  - “discontinuing education or employment because of other reasons”
  - “illness”
  - “invalidity pensioner”

Months summed between 16 and 66

# Independent variables: Success and Failure in Private life

## Success:

PARTNER66 and MARRIAGE66, single (divorced etc.) basis

CHILDN66:1, CHILDN:2 and CHILDN66:3+, no children as basis

## Failure:

SEPARATION-66:1 and SEPARATION-66:2+, none base

DIVORCE-66:1+, none base



## Predictors of the evaluation of occupational and private life: hypotheses and variables

		Occupational	Private
<b>Success at age 66</b>	+	HINCOME66	PARTOBL66
	+	MPS66	CHILDN66
<b>Failure from 16 to 66</b>	-	UNEMPLOYED-66, months	DIVORCE-66, #
	-	FAMILY-66, months	SEPARATION-66, #
	-	DISABILITY-66, months	
	-	WAITING-66, months	
<b>Control</b>	?	MALE	MALE

# Analysis strategy

Three Models:

Success, Failure, Success & Failure

Gender controlled for in each model

Compared according to

- logistic regression coefficients
  - NOT absolute sizes, hypotheses refer only to predictor groups
  - but according to direction and rank order
- BIC-value of logistic regressions, impact of all predictors =  $R^2$ -value corrected for df

## 2 Results: Evaluation of occupational life

## Logistic regression of occupational life evaluation on success and failure and on gender

	H	Model		
		Success	Failure	Success & Failure
<b>Intercept</b>		-.900	-.441	-.412
<b>Success at age 66</b>				
<b>HINCOME66</b>	+	.012*		.008
<b>MPS66</b>	+	.007***		.007**
<b>Failure 16-66</b>				
<b>UNEMPLOYED-66</b>	-		-.013***	-.012***
<b>FAMILY-66</b>	-		-.003***	-.002**
<b>WAITING-66</b>	-		-.027	-.021
<b>DISABILITY-66</b>	-		-.005***	-.005**
<b>Control: MALE</b>	?	.318*	.159	.113
<b>Valid n</b>		949	1008	949
<b>-Log likelihood</b>		631.023	391.266	618.464
<b>BIC</b>		1294.035	824.027	1291.771

## Logistic regression of private life evaluation on success and failure and on gender

		Model		
	H	Success	Failure	Success & Failure
<b>Intercept</b>		-1.054	.475	-.983
<b>Success at age 66</b>				
<b>Private Obligation: PARTNER</b>	+	.464		.499
<b>: MARRIAGE</b>	+	1.307***		1.191***
<b>CHILDN66: 1</b>	+	.356		.540*
<b>: 2</b>	+	.408*		.560**
<b>: 3+</b>	+	.461*		.663***
<b>Failure from 16 to 66</b>				
<b>DIVORCE-66:1+</b>	-		-.872***	-.722***
<b>SEPARATION-66:1</b>	-		.005	.228
<b>:2+</b>	-		-.508***	.273
<b>Control: MALE</b>	?	-.010	.143	-.044
<b>Valid n</b>		1006	1010	1006
<b>-Log likelihood</b>		53.956	31.878	161.926
<b>BIC</b>		156.309	98.345	392.989

## 4 Conclusion:

Comparing the impact of success and failure  
between occupational and private life