Transforming Gender Relations at German Universities? - A Case Study about Dual Career Families in Academia -

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Gender as a category of difference

Tomke König (2012) analyzed gender relations within the reproductive sphere as an engine or key catalyst for basic social changes and economic transformations when women and men both participate in domestic and care work.

These gender relations are set within contexts of time, place and society.
Dual career partnerships mostly being described as couples …

- with higher education qualifications
- with a strong occupational orientation
- with a lifelong career-orientation
- with professional “commitment“
- with independent career tracks.

Women are more likely than men to choose a partner “at eye level” concerning qualification:

Dual career as an important condition for the realization of professional careers of women (compare Rusconi and Solga 2010).
In between tradition and transformation

- women’s increasing participation in professional education
- the „new fathers“ family orientation in Germany
- egalitarian arrangements in partnerships

Heike Kahlert (2013):
Transnational change of family leitmotif in the EU policy – as a shift from „the model of the single male breadwinner or its renewed variant of the modernized breadwinner model“ towards the concept of the ‘double income family’ or the ‘dual career family’.
In between tradition and transformation

Before birth

profession & career

Dual carreer couple

housework & partnership

After birth

profession & career

Dual carreer couple

housework partnership & childcare
Oberndorfer und Rost (2002):

“On a normative level there is „verbal openness“ towards equal partnership agreements in the family context, whereas on a real level there exists more or less rigidity.”
Empirical data

Semi-structured and problem-centered interviews (Witzel)

- with dual career couples in academia
- with their children (aged 5-12 years old)

Case by Case Analysis & Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring)

Mixed sample:
- couples of professors
- professors with partner in research management or at research institutes
- professors with partner in the economy or in own business
Empirical data: Recruitment of sample

Landscape

of dual career services

in Germany (2010)
Results from the interviews

- Biographical context
- World of work context
- Life world context
Biographical context

- socialization in the family of origin
- social leitmotifs of family as invisible mechanisms

Interview statement:

“For my mother it was unthinkable to have children and both go to work. That was a concept difficult to imagine.”
Interview statement:

“One of my colleagues holds a professorship and his wife works part-time. He once told me regarding our work-life-balance to take a step back at work and decide for a part-time position. I told him that he can talk! But would he as well take a part-time position? He had never even thought about it. For him, it was a matter of course that women can reduce their working hours. It was no option for himself. … But at least, my question caused confusion.”
Results from the interviews

Life world context

Interview statements:

"Something we always tried to realize was a concept of not acting gender-specific in responsibilities."

"We came to the agreement that I put back first in favor of his job. And in case I will be offered a permanent position in academia, he would put back and follow me."
World of work context

- academic work culture
- German laws on higher education institutions
- commuting situations ("traditionalization trap")

Interview statement:

„It is written down in my contract. I'm committed to move to town X. And my wife, also a professor, same contract, different university, is bound to live in town Y. [...] That is paradox! That doesn't work!“
World of work context

Main logic of jobs in science as an “increasing imperative”!

Interview statement:

"Always higher, further, faster. It doesn't end with the professorship. [...] Output and effort! The main logic of this job is to constantly move on. An increasing imperative!"
World of work context

Interview statement:

"Work-life-balance has less to do with science itself than with the organization of university. With the organization and the persons acting in it. Most of the people in executive positions at universities do not have a deeper understanding of what family is really like."
World of work context

Recognition, power constellations und gatekeeping-effects in contexts of academia:

Gatekeepers and their lifestyle-related leitmotifs as decisive key factors along the academic career track (Kahlert 2013).
Results from the interviews
Results from the interviews

World of work context

Awareness of position within gatekeeping processes in academia:

“Mission consciousness” of (female) interview partners!

Interview statement: “I always try to motivate my PhDs to follow the academic career track. I tell them that they are talented and that they should reflect where they want to go to. It is hard and you have to fight but you should not exclude the “academic option” from the start. Even if you wish to have children. Research and family is somehow compatible but you have to be aware of the fact that you will start working once again when the kids are in bed.”
Conclusions

Requirements of entrepreneurial universities?

Universities in between defense and changing views:

‘Dual Career’ as an element of recruiting strategies and profile building at highly competitive universities – but **not** understood as an „instrument of family support in organizations“ with the aim of „overcoming previous barriers in careers“ (Woelki/Väth 2010).
Conclusions

Political, economic and academic environment

Interview statement:

“Our dual career model should be a possible one in society although it demands highest requirements towards social and political settings. In case we can once realize our way of life more relaxed, that would be a sign for an ideal framework and a consistent political strategy (at universities). So far, we suffer from an imbalance.”
Thank you for the audience!