



'Doing Transitions'

The Formation of Transitions across the Life Course

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Research Programme

Coordination

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1. General Information

1.1. Responsible Senior Researchers

Table 1: Researchers

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<i>Prof. Dr. Frank Oswald</i>	Goethe-University Frankfurt, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Institute for Social Pedagogy and Adult Education ¹	Theodor-W.-Adorno-Platz 6 60323 Frankfurt am Main Tel.: 069-798-36398 Mail: oswald@em.uni-frankfurt.de	Professor for Interdisciplinary Gerontology, with a focus on Development, Education and Counselling
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1.2. Summary

The research training group focuses on how transitions are formed and constructed across the life course. To date, transition research has dealt with structural factors of transitions and their effects on individual agency and life course trajectories. By contrast, the research training group starts from the assumption that transitions are both constructed and formed through social practice. It seeks to complement current transition research by analysing how transitions emerge, focusing on the interrelation between discourses on transitions, institutional regulations and pedagogical action as well as individual processes of learning, education and coping. Research questions address all life ages, from childhood up to old age, along three thematic strands:

- How are transitions constructed and framed by the discursive articulation of demands, distinctions of success and failure and risk identification?
- How are transitions regulated and processed at the institutional level? What aspects of pedagogical action are included in the formal and informal processing of transitions?
- How are transitions shaped through individual processes of coping, learning and education? How is this reflected in individual development and life course trajectories?

Further research interests include the interrelationships between the levels on which transitions are constructed and formed. The research training group seeks to attract excellent doctoral candidates interested in these questions, especially from educational sciences, sociology and psychology. Moreover, it seeks to

- Contribute to a broader transdisciplinary understanding of transition as a social practice in addressing uncertainty and how this is related to the social reproduction of inequality,
- Increase reflexivity with regard to the discursive, institutional and pedagogical as well as individual processing of established and newly-emerging transitions across the life course,
- Place young researchers in disciplines, research areas and professional fields that are concerned with transitions as well as at the interfaces in which transitions evolve.

The excellence of the research training group is secured by the consortium's profile and expertise, their available international networks, a differentiated recruitment process, alongside a high-quality training programme that is sensitive to participation and equal opportunities.

2. Research Training Group Profile

Transitions are commonly understood as changes in an individual's social status across the life course, resulting from the entanglement of individual development and expectations about social roles. This research training group starts from the observation that as the structural role of life phases decreases across the life course, increasing numbers of social situations and life

conditions are considered and treated as transitions. This applies to all ages and fields of living and socialisation: for instance, childhood transitions in daycares or primary school; transitions of adolescence in school, education at a child's home or in informal youth cultural scenes; in young adulthood, in the transitions of work and parenting; transitions in adulthood into new employment opportunities or relationships; and in old age, transitions into new types of housing and care setting. Across life ages, transitions also result from, for example, processes of migration or poor health, to name just a few.

Research on transitions and the life course has thus far emphasised life course trajectories and the effects of transitions, such as social positioning as a consequence of transitions or their reflection in the course of biographic (re)construction. Hence, transitions appear as 'social facts' (Durkheim) that individuals have to cope with. However, little is known about how these transitions come about and the processes on which they are based. Obtaining theoretical, methodological and socially relevant evidence about these processes is particularly important as transitions can reflect social norms and expectations of normality. They are also linked to individual and collective uncertainty, social structures of inequality and the reproduction of inclusion and exclusion.

The current focus of transition research on the trajectories and effects of transitions in the life course translates into limited conceptualisations of 'transition' in terms of social structure or individual agency. Additionally, it also fosters an increasingly assumed interaction between structure and agency. By contrast, the Research Training Group seeks to expand this perspective. The concept, 'Doing Transitions', follows the 'Doing Difference' approach and applies a practice theoretical perspective, which allows an analysis of practices through which social situations are addressed as transition. The concept, 'doing transitions', complements previous research on how transitions structure life course trajectories and vice versa.

The questions of how transitions are constructed and formed are analysed on three levels: discourses, institutions, and individuals. At each level, transitions are constructed and situated in specific modes, and have been hitherto primarily examined as contextual factors of processes rather than in terms of a performative social reality. As such, on the level of discourse, this approach focuses on analysing the order of knowledge as well as the thematisation of transitions as specific modes of formation. At the institutional level, modes are evident that regulate, standardise, and coordinate transitions as, for instance, standard patterns or as a means to prepare individuals for new life requirements. At the individual level, it is important to examine how transitions are interpreted biographically with specific reference to how they are practically acquired, modified and subsequently integrated into the actual life course trajectory.

The three levels, which previous research on life course and transitions have primarily analysed as separate phenomena, are considered together in this research, particularly in terms of how they interact. Of particular interest are therefore the requirements of transition discourses for individuals, that is, aspects of knowledge and skills and the dominant conceptualisations of success and failure. At the institutional level, it is particularly interesting to consider formal and informal practices of preparation, reviewing the suitability and support for transitions into new life roles and, in some cases, the practices associated with compensation when individuals fail to meet existing requirement. These aspects of the institutional regulation of transitions particularly appear within the new thematisation and modification of transitions in educational institutions. Finally, practices associated with the individual formation of transitions are evident in the form of reconstructed processes of biographical appropriation, which are reflected in various ways in models of coping with everyday life as well as individual learning and educational processes.

This research training group thereby departs from recent research—and its focus on transition trajectories and effects—by providing a much deeper examination of the modes of construction and formation. It focuses on how transitions emerge and are established within the interaction between their formation through discursive orders, institutional regulations, individual coping strategies and learning and educational processes.

The research programme is divided across the following research questions and areas of focus:

- How are transitions constructed and framed through the discursive articulation of requirements, the differentiation of success and failure as well as the identification of risk?
- How are transitions processed and regulated on an institutional level? What pedagogical aspects are involved in formal and informal processes?
- How are transitions formed in the course of individual coping strategies, learning and education processes and how is this reflected in biographical developments and life courses?

At the heart of these questions will be the modes of formation and construction that can be observed at work at these levels. This facilitates the research training groups' analysis of how each of these modes relate to the other and how this explains the emergence of new transitions and result in a thematisation and formation of established transitions. Furthermore, this research will explore the role of uncertainties and insecurities in transition formation and how this also leads to the reproduction of social inequality. Accordingly, the changing relationship between the construction and processes of transitions will be investigated.

The dissertations will define the research objectives and the doctoral candidates will choose the empirical point of entry for one level of formation/construction, while keeping the other levels of investigation in view. The selection process ensures that within the research training group all three research focuses and possibly each age group will be represented. The substantive and methodological structure of the qualification programme ensures that the dissertations are oriented towards the overarching research aim and that the findings contribute to a common understanding of the effects and emergence of transitions.

The goal of the research training group is, first, to contribute to a broader understanding of transition in terms of the practices by which individual life courses are structured, coordinated and normalised in social contexts. Second, against the background of an increased focus on and regulation of transitions, this research also seeks to substantiate the need for increased reflexivity in how educational institutions deal with insecurity and uncertainty. Third, since the analysis of transitions requires collaboration between traditionally-separate disciplines and interfaces between fields of knowledge and professional backgrounds, the doctoral candidates will be exposed to promising and sustainable academic and professional career opportunities.

Given the comprehensive and mutually complementary prior work of the researchers involved in the field of research on transitions and current expertise in research on different age groups, Frankfurt am Main and Tübingen offer optimal, highly complementary, internationally-oriented and stable cooperative relationships for the research training group. This is also reflected in the structural variety of existing research options for early career researchers. The universities have excellent doctoral and post-doctoral services and therefore make important contributions to the understandings of transitions as well as their construction and formation.

3. Research Programme

3.1. State of the Art: Transitions across the Life Course

In a social science understanding, transitions are described as a change in social status across the life course. This includes transformations during the life course and biographies that lead to a change in role and/or status, changes in subjective self-concepts and social positions that are triggered by external expectations such as institutional life course expectations. However, they could also be triggered by changes in a subjective life orientation. The roots of transition research can be found in anthropological studies on initiations and rituals, which position the resulting transitions as a universal element of individual development resulting from the tension between the maintenance of the social order and social change inherent to generational change. Accordingly, van Gennep (1981) differentiates 'rites des passage' on the basis of

different transition phases (separation, conversion, affiliation). Eisenstadt (1956) identifies the arrangement of learning processes used to prepare individuals for the requirement of a new role as the focus of initiation rituals, which contribute to social differentiation over the course of particular age groups' education, such as during the youth phase. Turner (1969) analyses the creative and innovative moments that emerge from such transition communities, for example, youth culture. Additionally, Glaser and Strauss (1971) refer to transition markers and sequences in the social reproduction of institutionalised functional regularity.

Since the mid-1980s, new research on transitions has emerged, increasingly inspired by the sociology of education and the sociology of life courses rather than anthropology. Bourdieu (1990), for instance, criticises that the anthropological approach masked structures of inclusion and exclusion. The American research group led by Elder (1985), the Bremen Collaborative Research Centre, SFB 186, 'Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course' (Heinz 1992, 2000; Behrens/Voges 1996; Weymann/Heinz 1996; Heinz/Marshall 2003) and the Max Plank Institute's life history research on education (et al. Blossfeld 1986; Mayer 1990, 1991; with a focus on the differences between East and West Germany; Hillmert/Mayer 2004) brought the question about the influence of socio-economic and institutional factors on processes of social reproduction over the life course to the fore. These studies primarily focused on the sequence of social statuses within life course trajectories. At the same time, research was also concerned with the diagnosis of social individualisation and pluralisation, the flexibilisation of work, the limitations of welfare state security and the question of stability and change in standardised life course regimes (Kohli 1985; Beck 1986). The life course was understood as an institutionalised differentiation that links life stages, and, therefore, as part of the social division of labour: 'age-bound progression of typical, socially-defined states' with 'specific expectations (roles)' (Scherger 2009, p. 532).

From this research, different fields emerged under the banner of current-day 'transition research'. These fields developed with the support of international organisations, which to a large extent sought to determine general context-specific aspects of social change (OECD 1998; European Union 2009). Given the decreasing reliability of national structures, the international comparison was also connected to a political desire to identify 'best practices' in managing transitions, as a large number of research indicators corresponded to institutional criteria for success.

As an extension of this research perspective, life history research brings the reciprocal relationship between transitions and institutional markers (Alheit/Hanses 2004, p. 23) into focus by complementing research on transitions that questions the construction of subjective identity and life histories as well as the appropriation of and coping with transitions (cf. Alheit/Dausien 2000; Dausien 2013). The life history approach was significant for the development of a 'subject-oriented transition research' (Stauber et al. 2007). Transitions, inter alia in international comparative research, are investigated as an expression of the negotiation between institutionalised life courses and subjective biographical social action (cf. Evans/Heinz 1994; Evans 2002; Kieselbach 2001; Weil et al. 2005; Walther et al. 2006). A broad life history perspective of transition brings the plurality of partial transitions into consideration, particularly in terms of those faced by young adults: educational transitions, transitions into parenthood, transitions from foster care, transitions into university, transitions into citizenship and participation in civil society, etc.

Changes over the life course have also been increasingly given interdisciplinary treatment. Educational research on transitions is connected to developmental psychology's conceptualisation of transitions insofar as it examines transitions in early childhood but also in adulthood (Welzer 1993; Griebel/Niesel 2004; Hof/Maier-Gutheil 2014), while developmental psychology increasingly discusses the person-environment relationship across an individual's lifespan (cf. Baltes 2005). Although national and international research on transitions has expanded in terms of life ages and aspects of life, it continues to be framed in terms of institutional structures of life phases and the associated norms and social constructions (cf. Allmendinger 2005; Burkart 2008).

In this sense, current research has highlighted several points from which this research group can start in order to extend the research perspective:

Research on transitions in *childhood* is a relatively new field emerging from rising attention to early educational processes, particularly since the expansion of childcare facilities (e.g., daycares) and in the wake of the Programme for International Student Assessment's research (Griebel/Niesel 2004; Roßbach 2005; Kamerman 2008; Hasselhorn 2010; Honig 2012). In panel studies or studies that focus on the links between individual competence development, particularly the family context and daycare and classroom settings, transitions are increasingly coming into focus (cf. Baumert et al. 2009a, 2010; Cadima et al. 2010; BMFSFJ 2013; Maaz et al. 2014). In the context of the institutionalised life course, early transitions, such as those in nursery or primary school, fulfil preparation as well as selection functions (cf. Denner/Schumacher 2004; Becker 2009; Betz 2013). Studies on these transitions, however, refer to the decreased influence of social characteristics as well as the use of childcare according to children's increasing age (cf. Fuchs-Rechlin/Bergmann 2014). Despite the fact that parents are involved in the study of children's transitions, research on the topic tends to remain at the level of exploring simultaneous transitions separately or consider parents merely as contextual factors in their children's transitions (cf. Büchel/Spieß 2002; Andrén 2003; Wiese/Heidemeier 2012; Salmela-Aro et al. 2010; Settersten/Cancel-Tirado 2010; Erola et al. 2012; de Maes et al. 2012; Yu et al. 2010). This research group particularly draws on intergenerational studies that explore the mutual importance of transitions for both the parent and the child (cf. McDonald/Evans 2003; Vélez et al. 2011; Andresen/Richter 2012; Maes et al. 2012; Kalmijn/de Graaf 2012; Graßhoff et al. 2013). This is also connected to early work on processes of adapting to normative transitions and the associated shortening of childhood (Diehm/Panagiotopoulou 2011; Kelle et al. 2012; de Valk/Milewski 2011; Beelmann 2013; Kelle/Mierendorff 2013; Andresen et al. 2014), as well as the institutionalisation and pedagogisation of the reproduction of social inequality during transitions (cf. Helsper/Kramer 2007; Bischoff/Betz 2011; Klinkhammer 2014).

Transitions from youth to adulthood have long been the primary object of transition research as the transition to adult status is ascribed the meaning of full social membership and thus plays a key role in social integration and reproduction (cf. Eisenstadt 1956). Historical youth research has reconstructed the differentiation of youth as the institutionalisation of a developmental moratorium (Musgrove 1968; Zinnecker 1991; Andresen 2005). Newer research on transitions, which focuses on entry into the workforce and youth unemployment, has primarily concentrated on the identification of risk factors for youth unemployment and educational disadvantages, including: social background, gender, migration and ethnic background, regional disparity, education levels and psycho-social development as well as international comparisons of educational attainment, welfare states, and the labour markets (Lex 1993; Roeder/Schnabel 1995; MPI Bildungs-forschung 1996; Gangl/Müller 2003; Hammer 2003; Solga 2005; Wagner 2005; Billett et al. 2012; Low et al. 2012; Faas et al. 2013). Additionally, research on subjective processes and strategies of coping with precarious transitions as well as the effectiveness of educational and political measures has grown (cf. Heinz/Krüger 1985; Schoon/Silbereisen 2009; Thielen 2011; BIBB 2012; Seiffge-Krenke et al. 2012; Cucona-to/Walther 2015; Parreira do Amaral/Stauber 2015). With the extension of measures of the so-called 'transition system in Germany (authors from *Bildungsberichterstattung* 2008; Oehme 2013) and Europe (Pohl/Walther 2007), the anticipation of career-oriented measures and preparation in school (Bolay/Walther 2014) are increasingly entangled with transition research and educational research (cf. Baumert et al. 2009). In the expansion of life history research, mechanisms that lead to the reproduction of inequality in educational trajectories have been brought into focus, for instance, those of high school students (see, for example, the Graduate Centre for Education and Social Research 2006; Maschke et al. 2012), but—even more so—other transitions in the youth phase: between school and leisure time (Zinnecker 2001), the transitions of so-called Care Leavers from foster care into independent life (Köngeter et al. 2012; Schröer/Thomas 2014; Sievers et al. 2015), transitions in the context of youth culture (Stauber 2004; Sting 2013), transitions between legality and criminality (Sackmann et al. 2000), housing transitions (Iacovou 2010; McHa-

le/Crouter 2011; Meuth 2014), transitions marked by risky practices of consumption (Litau et al. 2015) and young people's expectations in relation to upcoming transitions (Woodman 2011; Pettit et al. 2011). The DJI Survey AID: A studies childhood, youth and family in terms of broad development processes over the life course (Rauschenbach/Bien 2012). Despite criticism of the dominance of institutional success criteria and problem definition, the reproduction of constructions such as 'disadvantaged young people' or 'trainability' (in the German context), which have often accompanied research on youth transitions (cf. Walther 2002; Großkopf 2014; Karl 2014), has hardly led to questions about how transitions are constructed during the youth phase. One exception is Pfahl's (2011) study, which explores the entanglement of discursive and individual adaptation in subjective processes in the context of disabilities and the transition into vocational training. The research training programme will follow research in particular that applies a biographical approach and/or explicitly reflects normative assumptions and problem definition.

This is particularly true for research on young adults' lives as an expression of destandardised transitions into adulthood or 'life in transition' (Stauber/Walther 2013; cf. Cavalli/Galland 1995; Junge 1995; Walther 1996; Hurrelmann 2003; Arnett 2004; Settersten/Ray 2011; Kelly et al. 2012). The prolonged, precarious, and uncertain transitions of young adult into the workforce are examined in relation to changing relationships between institutional perspectives and subjective experiences, for example, orientations that focus on the general destandardisation of the life course. This coincides with a reflexive and critical differentiation of dominant normative orders (cf. Rietzke/Galuske 2008; Stauber/Walther 2013). Starting a family as a transition into parenthood is considered a central moment in integration and reproduction alongside finding employment, both in terms of the timing of starting a family (Stauber 2011; Kühhirt 2012; Schober 2013) and the effect of the retraditionalisation of gender relations (Fthenakis et al. 2002, Berger et al. 2011; Dechant/Schulz 2013; Jurczyk et al. 2014). International studies have also investigated transitions in and outside of school such as the influence of family and socio-economic backgrounds or those from non-traditional higher education students (cf. Bowl 2001; Alheit et al. 2008; Bradley/Renzulli 2011; Busseri et al. 2011; King 2011; Roksa/Velez 2012). Transitions in childhood are not only considered in the context of early parenting against the background of social and demographic changes, but also gain attention in studies on the importance of caring for family members as young professionals (Hamilton/Adamson 2013). The research group, 'Young Adult Lives in Transitions' (University of Mainz), focuses on the relationship between social change and new biographical requirements (cf. von Felden et al. 2014). Research on this transitional stage can be recognised particularly where it does not follow the pattern of a 'successful' transition but instead raises questions about the relationship between professional and family-related transitions as well as their connection to social structures and transition construction, which is at the heart of this research training group.

Transitions that primarily occur in middle and late adulthood have long been neglected despite the fact that life course research—such as research completed in the context of the MPI for educational research—have underscored the importance of social and professional positioning in adulthood, in, for example, family and educational trajectories (cf. Mayer 1991, 1997; Lauterbach 1994; Jacob 2004; Hillmert/Mayer 2004; Mayer/Schulze 2009; on migration see Hao/Woo 2012). The collaborative research centre, 'Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course' (Bremen), has paid particular attention to the relationship between structured inequality (primarily gender, educational background and social status), institutional processes such as Gate Keeping and individual biographical action. Against the background of a path-dependent life course regimes and labour-market-related tendency toward flexibility, mobility through education and training, the re-entry of women into paid work as well as transitions in and out of social assistance come into view (cf. Geissler/Krüger 1992; Leibfried et al. 1995; Witzel et al. 1996; Born 2001). International studies often refer to the effects of transitions in childhood and adolescence as well as career transitions in adulthood (cf. Geissler/Krüger 1992; Leibfried et al. 1995; Witzel et al. 1996; Born 2001). The expansion of transitional research allows a critical analysis of the demands adults increasingly face in the context of the activating welfare state with its shift towards self-responsibility and expectations in terms of

lifelong learning (cf. Alheit 2009; Field et al. 2009; Ecclestone et al. 2010). In such perspectives, critical forms of 'transformative learning' (Mezirow 2000; Taylor 1998) emerge (Hof 2013) in addition to career changes, transitions in and out of unemployment, changes in health or the establishment of new family constellations (Blossfeld et al. 2006a, 2006b; Rupp/Blossfeld 2008; Schröer/Stiehler 2008; Böhnisch 2008; for transitions in the wake of natural catastrophes see Cohan/Cole 2002). These new and newly structured transitions accurately reflect the research perspective this research group will follow.

Regarding transitions and the life course in old age, the focus on retirement reflects the dominant employment-orientation of transition research (cf. Kohli et al. 1992). Research on family transitions in old age also relates to risks and risk factors of care, neglect, loneliness or illness (cf. Bookwala 2011; Mezuk et al. 2011; Harris 2011; Yong/Saito 2012; Hurd Clarke/Bennett 2013; Fokkema/Naderi 2013). Additionally, it describes the resource-poor 'fourth age' (Gilleard/Higgs 2010) in long-term care (Robeiro et al. 2007; Backes et al. 2008), during chronic illness (Bury 1982) or frailty (Hurd Clarke et al. 2008) as well as transitions into homecare or assisted living systems (Burkart 2009; Ryan et al. 2012). Such research is not only helpful for the transitional perspective but also proves to be useful in terms of resource-based preventative health research, particularly with regard to the future necessity of integrated communal strategies for the provision of 'sustainable networks' of demand-oriented support from so-called 'prevention chains' or 'caring communities' (Klie 2012). Additionally, this line of inquiry discusses the potential for active decision-making in retirement, for example, in continuing employment, civil society engagement or supporting the family (Grenier 2012; Börsch-Supan et al. 2013; Schneider et al. 2015). At the same time, the transitional perspective takes processes of adoption and adaptation to the home environment into account, such as the implementation of new technologies as well as moving (Wahl/Lang 2004; Oswald et al. 2014; Oswald/Wahl 2013; Oswald 2012). Moreover, transitions are also examined in terms of changes in male and female roles (Fookan 2004), including such processes of social development like grandparenthood (Klosinski 2008), changes driven by dramatic losses such as widowhood (Bennett 2007; Mann 2007), changes in how time is experienced and individual processes of death and confrontation with the end of life (Clark 2002; Auffarth 2012; Hurd Clarke/Korotchenko/Bundon 2012; Paul et al. 2015; Bildtgård/Öberg 2015). New forms of regulations for transitions associated with aging processes have been given very little attention. Slowly, however, discursive re-evaluations and requirements in the context of 'active aging', demographic development as well as the mobilisation of a welfare state are being brought into view (Lessenich/Otto 2005; Maier/Buchen 2008; Ehmer 2009; Denninger et al. 2010; Kruse/Wahl 2010; van Dyk/Lessenich 2010; Igel/Szydlík 2011; Dill/Keupp 2015), and also raise particularly important question about the formation of transitions.

The overview of the state of art of national and international research on transitions can be summarised to the effect that such research has had a rather narrow focus on the institutionalised life stages to date and has thereby both documented and reproduced the modern 'normal life course'. This manifests itself primarily in a dominant focus on trajectories of transition and the relationship between socio-economic, institutions and individual factors on one hand and life course trajectories and social positioning on the other. Research primarily focuses on the reasons why certain individuals deviate from the linear life course and fail to achieve some institutional standard. Thus, current research contributes to the reproduction of both the underlying constructed and institutionalised notions of normality and the related standards of success and failure. Schröer (2015) criticises this as a 'methodological institutionalism' of transition research, which accepts transitions as given social fact. Accordingly, transition research not only risks generalising a specific historical constellation of 'normal' but also depriving the field of an analysis of the genesis and the mechanisms of the reproduction of social inequality.

Accordingly, this research group will focus more on the *how* of the construction and formation of transitions. This will not only make the creative and dynamic aspects of transitions visible but also allows for an analysis of the (re)production of historical and societal constellations of normality and its consequences. For this purpose, the research group will build on recent

developments in research on transitions in the educational sciences, which has emerged against a background of growing attention to insecure and uncertain transitions that are increasingly being addressed as problems and countered with pedagogical interventions. This research thereby questions the role of educational actors in the formation of transitions as well as the goal orientation of pedagogical action in light of the destandardisation of the life course (cf. Lenzen 1997; Stauber et al. 2007; von Felden/Schiener 2010; Hanses/Homfeldt 2008; Böhnisch 2009; Schildmann 2010; Thielen 2011; Ahmed et al. 2013). Such developments have been documented in questions such as those about the role of pedagogy in the formation of transitions in early childhood (Griebel/Niesel 2004; Oehlmann et al. 2011) or about the basics of educational guidance during transitions (Walther/Weinhardt 2013). The profile of the recently published 'Handbook of Transitions' (Schröer et al. 2013) is strongly influenced by pedagogical perspectives while Hof et al. (2014) outline a 'pedagogy of transitions'. Educational and pedagogical research are therefore good starting points, as it is here that the changing relationships between discursively constructed educational goals, institutionally framed educational activities and individual processes of education, coping and learning are revealed. It is the basic assumption of the research group that transitions are generally constructed and shaped as a construct of such changing conditions.

3.2. Modes of Construction and the Formation of Transitions – Theoretical Framework

Transitions do not exist on their own; they are not natural occurrences but are instead socially constructed and are socially malleable insofar as they are repeatedly reshaped, reformed or bypassed through processes of construction. By focusing on the processes of transition construction and formation, guided by the concept of 'Doing Transitions', this research group engages with a theoretical approach currently used by different social science disciplines. The goal is to avoid the narrowness, oversight and theoretical subsidence of the dualism of structure and action (cf. Biesta/Tedder 2007; Raithelhuber 2013), which has been criticised often for running the risk—with its focus on the structural conditions of transitions—of structural-deterministic misunderstanding. The narrative of individual accomplishment and agency tends to deal with problematic elements such as a 'strong subject' with numerous factors. For both structural and agency-oriented perspectives, transitions are primarily analysed without consideration of their origins.

The perspective, 'Doing Transitions', establishes a complex entry into research on the origins of transitions across ages. Transitions are no longer viewed as simple rites of passages that individuals more or less—in the confines of normative orders—successfully navigate, but are considered instead performative social realities (Hirschauer 2004), which are constantly constructed and shaped. Accordingly, the view is not only strengthened for new transitions but also for new forms of already existing transitions. The same accounts for the reciprocal relationship derived from the articulated requirements and criteria for success, practices for their mediation as well as processes of adaptation. In this perspective, all life phases with their corresponding transitions as well as overarching life themes can be explored. For example, transitions in old age, which are, for instance, constructed and formed by the arrangement of care, discourses about seniorhood as well as material shortages of nursing care insurance, can also, in hindsight, be analysed in parallel to transitions in early childhood or act as an entry point to the reconstruction of the importance of and experience with being dependent during the life course.

The question about how transitions establish themselves as performative realities will be the central focus of this research, particularly in terms of the difference between different modes of transition construction and formation and the interaction between the two. The theoretical as well as empirical questions extends the current research focus on transitions as constellations of structures and actions (cf. Heinz 2001; Furlong/Cartmel 2006; Woodman

2009; Walther/Stauber 2013), without losing sight of structural relationships and agency. This is reflected in the application of two theoretical approaches:

The first point of entry is the 'doing difference' approach (West/Fenstermaker 1995). Initially conceived of in terms of 'doing gender' (West/Zimmerman 1987) in gender research, this interactionist approach allows for research on the complex interrelationship between social structures (such as segmented labour markets, a gender-specific division of labour, state regulations), institutions (e.g., schools, families, churches, etc.), symbolic orders (representations, norms, symbolic violence, recognition systems, etc.), social practices (e.g. interactions, performances, etc.) and historical subject formations (e.g. identity formation, subject positions, etc.). The interplay takes different forms; its elements arise from historically-developed power constellations and relationships, which not only reproduce but also extend, neutralise, build up, contradict and, therefore, transform transitions.

The second point of entry is gained from a practice-theoretical perspective (cf. Reckwitz 2003; Schmidt 2012). An understanding of practice as a '[...] routinized "nexus of doing and saying" (Schatzki) [...], [which is] held together by an implicit understanding' (Reckwitz 2003, 290) offers an opportunity to avoid a reductive action-theory perspective on different forms of transition construction and formation: appropriation, articulation or shifts of transitions are thereby not only understood as predominantly intentional acts driven by 'strong subjects'. Instead, they are now considered as a practice that is 'embedded', tied to the incorporation of social orders and the physical disposition of individual actors involved. This perspective is also found in models of person-environment exchanges, as discussed, for instance, in developmental psychology of the lifespan. The latter postulates that neither individual nor contextual descriptions alone explain the mechanisms of action and outcomes, and therefore focuses on interactive, transactional or social-ecological processes (Bronfenbrenner 1999; Baltes/Smith 2005; Wahl/Kruse 2014). In this theoretical perspective, transitions are no longer considered solely from the predominantly ontological perspective but are understood instead as a social practice that is socially framed and discursively constructed. The assumption is that there is no guarantee: success cannot be understood as the rule; while failure is not the exception.

Above all else, the 'doing' perspective argues against a structural essentialism, and in that sense, it draws attention to the practice-theoretical perspective primarily for the problematic assumption of intentional and capable actors and emphasises moments of non-availability, contingency and contextuality (Reckwitz 2003). With these two theoretically compatible entry points, a research heuristic is established whereby the formation of transitions across the life course can be considered part of the interplay between individual constructions and mechanisms of social reproduction. The doing perspective has already been successfully used in the past in analysing the construction of symbolic orders (for example, gender relationships) and has not only drawn attention to the importance of contingency but also has helped to raise awareness of the mechanisms of legitimisation for structures of social inequality. Research that analyses this everyday legitimisation and normalizing practices underscores the proximity of these two concepts to practice theoretical approaches. The latter are increasingly fruitful for analysis of—in the widest sense—educational contexts (Kessl 2011; Alkemeyer et al. 2014). Moreover, both approaches are explicitly interrelated.

The complexity associated with doing transitions is accessed via a heuristic comprising three different levels of analysis: discourse, institution and the individual. Again, this involves the identification, description, reconstruction and analysis of different modes of transition construction and formation.

Discourse: On the most abstract level of processes of social negotiations, discourses and their social consequences come into view. Discourses reveal themselves as reality generating, performative statements that create zones of what is said and not said as well as binding conceptualisations of normality, which do not necessarily reflect individual and collective actors (Foucault 1976, 1991). Discourses therefore frame individual actions and shape social practices by establishing powerful situational definitions, interpretive frameworks and symbolic

orders. A challenge for the research group is, accordingly, the analysis of discourses that—on the foundation of normality and intelligibility—frame the construction and formation of transitions. Furthermore, in light of their discursive state, the perceptions of insecurity and uncertainty to which transitions are connected can be reconstructed. For the enabling of actors, these discourses are relevant insofar as they implicitly or explicitly individualise the requirements of age roles as well as criteria of success or failure (cf. Rieger-Ladich 2012). Informed by discourse theory, the research group will explore the modes of transition construction and formation: What circumstances and situations are thematised as transitions and which are not (mode of thematisation of, for example, passages)? Which life passages confront which requirements (mode of responsabilisation)? Which transitions are attributed to which effects (such as the mode of individualisation, the attribution of success or failure)? And which assumptions of normality and unreasonable demands does this imply for the individuals concerned (see for example Kohli 1985)?

Institution: It is on this intermediate level that transitions are regulated and processed. Using a broad concept of institutions (see for example, Gehlen 1986; Hasse/Krücken 2008), a historically- and socially-situated not withstanding cancellable but also repeatedly affirmed set of rules, requirements, markers as well as processes and procedures come into focus. Therefore, in the institutional formation of transitions a pedagogical core is evident, both in the formal as well as informal practices of preparation, assessment and support with regard to entering new life age roles. This also includes processes of compensation where an individual fails to fulfil an existing requirement. On this level, the construction and formation of transitions can be analysed in terms of modes of institutional regulation and standardisation such as the labour market, the educational system and the welfare state (cf. Heinz 1991; Lessenich 1995; Mayer 1997). Professionals in education and social institutions prepare individuals for transitions as ‘gatekeepers’ ensure the fit between requirements and competencies and moderate compensatory measures (Heinz 1992; Behrens/Rabe-Kleberg 2000). Thus, forms of addressing the perceived risks of transitions through professionalised pedagogical as well as social services are of interest, as they are part of transition and life course regimes and involved in reproducing social inequalities (Walther 2011; Griebel 2011; Walther/Weinhardt 2013; Hof et al. 2014). Here, modes of transition construction and formation involved in professional cooperation and network-like organisational structures are of interest alongside modes of coordination and harmonisation, professionalisation and (re)regulation.

Individuals: This level draws attention to individual actors of a transition, but also on their social environment in the sense of significant others (Mead 1934) like, for instance, parents who experience their own transitions through their children’s transitions, or professionals who prestructure and support individual transitions. During transitions, individuals are confronted with ever-new institutional impositions and expectations and well as their discursive framing. Practices of formation are therefore understood as open-ended social processes and—in terms of the practices of subjectivation—as an indissoluble dialectic of ‘doing’ and ‘being done’ and of ‘being active’ and ‘being subjected’ (Alkemeyer et al. 2013). Accordingly, individual coping and learning processes, which are reflected in individual developmental and life courses, are accentuated but always in the context of social structures and discourses. The institutionalisation of assumptions of normality transitions must be considered in light of success as well as the possibility of failure (Böhnisch 2009; Koller/Rieger-Ladich 2013). The requirements for individuals are embodied in hegemonic models—in both explicit and implicit forms—and devise the tracks of the life course (Thomae 1996). They are constantly adopted individually against the background of biographical patterns and reformulated based on subjective priorities and relevancies but also decidedly rejected, such as in practices of resistance, the transformation of the habitus and educational processes (cf. Welzer 1993; Nohl et al. 2015). It is interesting to note the emergence of different practices of adoption from the negotiations of available socially-structured possible actions as well as subjective motivations and biographical relevance, habitual transformations and individual learning, educational and development processes (cf. Henderson et al. 2006). Social practices are concerned with producing a fit between institutional and subjective modes of formation (Antonovsky 1997;

Bourdieu 1993), whereby 'fit' does not mean a simple adjustment but includes original and creative modes as well.

These three levels are in no way isolated from each other; they can, however, be distinguished from each other for analytical purpose. Such an analysis reveals the construction and formation of transitions first—similar to the multi-level concept of 'transition regimes' (Walther 2006)—in terms of an interrelatedness between discursive framing, institutional regulation and individual forms of appropriation and formation (Fasang 2012; Fleckenstein/Seeleib-Kaiser 2011; Igel/Szydlik 2011; Champion/Bonoli 2011). It is exactly for this interrelatedness that the 'doing' approach as well as practice theory have advantages over current research on transitions and its dominant structural and action theory perspective. In this sense, the 'doing difference' approach, as it is based on practice-theoretical considerations, overcomes established problems: it creates new theoretical and methodological options to explore the emergence of transitions across different life ages. It neither forgets the role of structure nor ignores the relevance of powerful discourses; instead, it underscores the context-specific contributions of collective or individual actors (e.g., children/adolescence, professionals, father/mother, seniors) when doing transitions (see exemplary project descriptions in 3.3).

The question about *how* transitions are constructed and formed, according to the modes of doing transitions, allows the exploration each specific contribution's productivity in terms of the two theoretical approaches and their connectedness to earlier research, which primarily understood transitions in terms of structure and action. Both are therefore able to take the level of construction and formation into consideration for concerned transitions as well as powerful and performative events. This is never frozen in time; both implicit and explicit as well as potentially transformational processes of negotiations take place over the course of transition construction and formation.

The research training programme's research interest is the development and expansion of analyses of the consequences of the patterns of reproduction of inequalities connected to transitions of individual developments and processes understood as exchanges between different levels of the formation of transitions: discourses, which legitimise individual demands towards as well as related knowledge and skills, which differentiate between success or failure and identify risks or risk groups; institutional practices, procedures and processes that verify individual competencies and skills and support individuals during their transitions and, in some cases, are also attached to the consequences of failed transitions; and, finally, individuals' attempts to cope with transitions as well as associated learning processes and changes in status that are reflected in individual life courses trajectories. The social relevance lies in the accurate identification and thematisation of potentially processes of exclusion as well as their transformative potential.

This interest lends itself to transdisciplinary research. As such, the research programme's underlying thematic perspective in its focus on transition construction and formation has a multidisciplinary relevance. Accordingly, it involves theoretical and methodological approaches and research strategies from the different disciplines of educational sciences, sociology, psychology and cultural studies and brings them into a fruitful exchange (cf. Riegel et al. 2010).

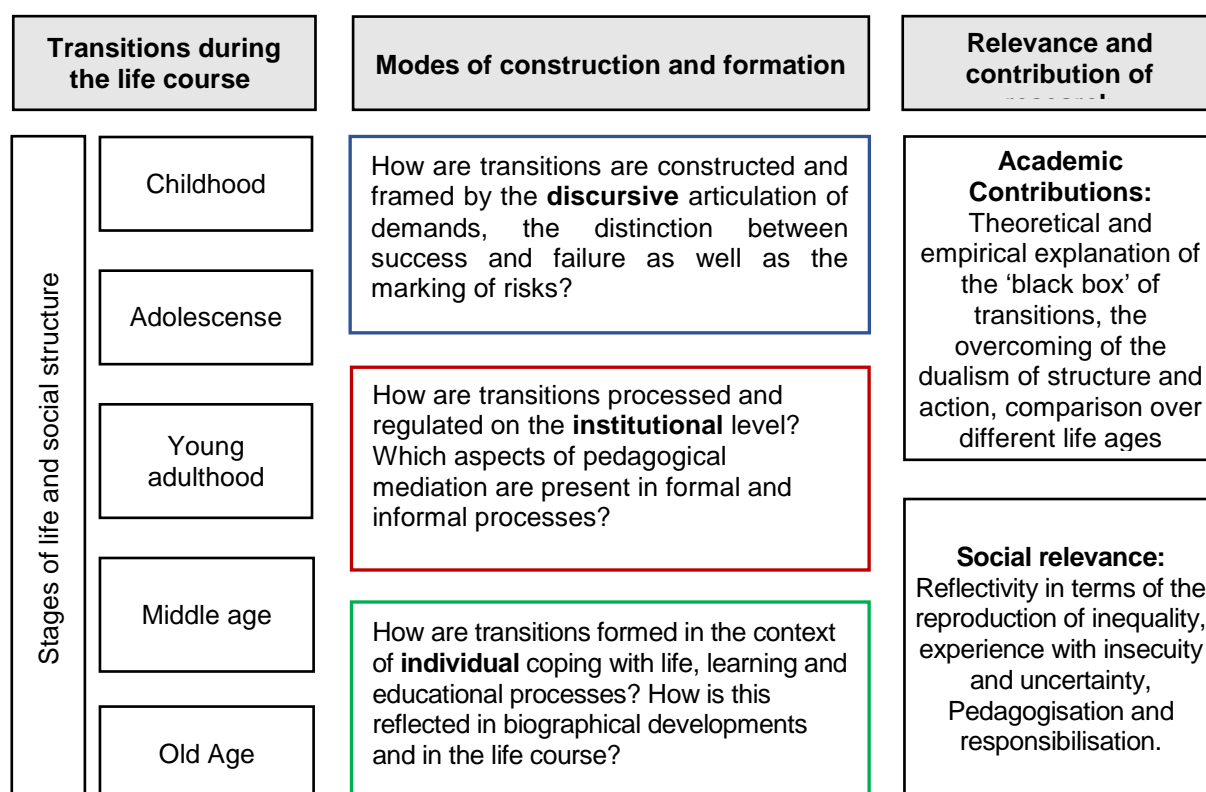
3.3. Research Focus and Methodology

The research training programme seeks to analyse different modes of practical construction and formation of transitions on the level of discourses, institutions and individuals as well as their interactions in terms of Doing Transitions. Starting from a transdisciplinary understanding of transitions as processes of transformation in the context of individual life courses and biographies, the research focuses first on discourses in which requirements, criteria of success and failure and risks associated with transitions are formulated. Second, the research will also examine institutionalised regulatory practices that prepare individuals for the requirements of future roles and support and advise as well as monitor and oversee them during such transitions and the pedagogical aspects associated with them. Third, the research programme

will also analyse practices of coping and formation of transitions at the individual level including learning and educational processes as well as the consequences of complex practices of formation for individual transition processes and sequences.

Accordingly, the research programme traces the levels involved in the formation of transitions across three research foci (see section 2 and Figures 1). The research areas offer different ‘entrances’ into the analysis of the construction and formation of transitions across each specific level, but also remains open to the interplay between discursive orders, institutional-pedagogical practices and individual transitions and development processes. The research programme as a whole and its qualifying programs and workshops offer a space in which these different approaches can be related to each other.

Figure 1: The Doing Transitions Research Programme



In order to avoid overburdening the fellows with the demands of analysing the interplay between the three levels associated with the practical formation of transitions, individual projects will focus on one of the three research approaches. They also, however, are expected to be aware of theoretical as well as methodological ‘bridges and linkages’ (Helsper et al. 2010, p. 123) between each level.

The interest in Doing Transitions in terms of the question of *how* transitions are constructed and formed seems at first glance to be tied to a qualitative research perspective. Nevertheless, the research programme does not predefine a particular methodological orientation or a particular methodological approach. Thus, depending on the research question, standardised quantitative or non-standardised qualitative research strategies could be appropriate (see Schröer et al. 2013). Quantitative research methods can therefore be useful for examining both comparisons of practices of formation as a function of selected contextual factors as well as the consequences of specific formation practices for individual transitions and life courses. Accordingly, the research programme practices methodological pluralism and fundamental equality of various standardised and non-standardised approaches (see, for example,

Atteslander 2003). Beyond different individual priorities and expertise, the researchers involved are not obligated to apply a specific methodological paradigm and can base their decisions about research methodology on their concrete research interests. This is the only way to account for different traditions in transition research as well as for the specific research interests of individual projects. In the context of innovative research questions, integrative methodological designs (see Kelle/Kluge 2001; Rieker/Seipel 2003; Taashakkori/Teddlie 2010) that require theoretical (knowledge) as well as methodological openness are of increasing importance (see also section 3.4).

Depending on the research subject of different modes of Doing Transitions, various research approaches strategies and methods are appropriate. The differentiation between approaches according to their function is, nevertheless, an analytical process, as concrete research designs usually fulfil multiple functions, for example, in terms of being both descriptive and reconstructional:

Descriptions of transition construction and formation practices through the analysis of documents and institutional structures, the observation of individual and collective practices, including formal and informal and professional and everyday conversation. Here, the analysis of artefacts (such as documents or organisational structures, see, for example, Hoffmann 2012; Wolff 2000) are as relevant as ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches (such as participant observation, see Schulz 2013; or conversation analysis, see Bredenstein/Tyagunova 2012; Kolthoff 1994). Descriptive approaches are particularly needed where a new transition or transition form are discovered and analysed.

The *reconstruction* of practices for the construction and formation of transitions in the context of discursive orders using discourse analysis (Keller 2011), in the context of professional pedagogical treatment using qualitative expert interviews (Meuser/Nagel 2010) and/or participant observation (Schulz 2014), in the context of individual subjective construction, coping, and balancing of life plans through biographical research (Ecarius/Schäffer 2010). Reconstructive approaches are appropriate when it comes to the genesis, reproduction and relevance of certain practices for the formation of transitions and their subjective and collective meaning.

The *analysis of associations* between the different levels (discursive, institutional and individual) of the construction and formation of transitions as well as those between transitional forms and transitional processes and sequences through both standardised data collection and quantitative methods. For example, this includes regression analysis of cross-sectional data (see Urban/Mayerl 2011; Wolf/Best 2010), but also path analysis (see Christ/Schlüter 2012; Ho Yu 2007), longitudinal data analysis (Allison 2005; Singer/Willett 2003) or sequence analysis (Scherer/Brüderl 2010) using panel data, whereby, realistically, the dissertation projects are rather based on the secondary analysis of existing data rather than primary data collection by the research fellows themselves, and quantitative text analysis (Laver et al. 2003). Such approaches allow for a focus on the contribution of institutional and/or discursive framing for institutional and educational practices associated with the formation of transitions or in terms of their relevance for individual processes of transition and the reproduction of social inequality during transitions.

Comparisons of practices of the construction and formation of transitions between different historical or national societal contexts (see in particular Walther 2011), between different institutions and/or pedagogical-practical forms of processing as well as between individual processes of transitions. Such comparisons can allow for qualitative comparison methods such as grounded theory or documentary methods in terms of individual or collective courses of actions (cf. Nohl 2006; Strauss 1987) or quantitative methods of comparing transitional processes in connection with different historical and national contexts or different forms of pedagogical treatment. Comparisons are especially appropriate for the examination of the influence of specific discursive and institutional modes of transitions for individual coping, processes and sequences of transitions or for a practical pedagogical interpretive system.

In the general context, the planned research programme can be understood as a multi-level model to which different research questions, designs and methods make contributions that are integrated theoretically on a meta level. A total of twelve positions will be made available for doctoral candidates to cover the research foci at different stages of life using different approaches. Moreover, an explicit component of the research programme is to provide the space for individual fellows to relate their work to findings from the other projects. In a cross-project workshop on data analysis, dissertation projects are discussed in terms of their joint contribution to the analysis of the formation of transitions particularly concerning the interrelationship between different modes of transition. This will stimulate the integration of this overarching perspective as a broader theorisation into their own work (see for example Helsper et al. 2010; Winker/Degele 2010).

Subsequently, the three research priorities will be operationalised with regard to the overarching research question with three exemplary ways to implement these overarching themes in the dissertation projects:

Research Focus 1: The Discursive Level

How are transitions constructed and framed through the discursive articulation of demands and differentiation of success and failure as well as marking risks?

Constitutive for this research question is how the (thematization of) demands and expectations associated with certain changes in status and role taking processes contribute to the construction of new and newly thematised existing transitions across the life course. This includes questions about:

- The discursive orders that are included in the existing forms of institutional regulation and subjective coping with transitions but also (current) discursive practices for labelling, distinguishing, differentiating and problematizing transitions by institutional, pedagogical and individual actors;
- growth in normality assumptions as well as new norms and normalisation that are included in distinctions of successful and failing transitions;
- the implications for the formation of a transition's constitutive goal definition (for example, through the definition of skills as the goal of pedagogical actions) but also about the learning processes and arrangements that are considered important in this regard;
- the designation of risks and risk factors associated with transitions as well as the marking of groups as being 'at risk' and the relationship between ascriptions and mechanisms of the reproduction of inequality.

Thus, this focus addresses the analysis of power relations and processes, the analysis of forms of subjectivation and the forms of knowledge and competencies that are deemed relevant for such forms. In this process, transitional discourses are merged into practices of institutional regulation—as well as practices of pedagogical treatment—and are constructed simultaneously by them. They are also, however, interrelated to individual development and life courses. Discourses reflect changing social trends but are also found in biographic reconstructions of transitions at different ages.

Discursive orders of the formation of transitions can be operationalised by analysing how transitions across the life course are thematised as decision-making, coping and behavioural requirements, for which individuals need to prepare themselves or to which they need to react, and how this knowledge is generated. The object of analysis is also how transitions are constructed as inducements for learning and education, and, at the same time, as inducements of educating, teaching, counselling or assistance. Projects in this focus apply a research approach for the analysis of transition construction using a discourse analysis methodology and uses this as a starting point for examining the interplay between institutional-pedagogical and individual practices.

With discourse analysis, a research perspective is developed that asks how transition-related knowledge systems emerge and how they are reproduced and further developed through the interplay between articulation and invocation (Keller 2011). Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995; Jäger 2009) brings power relations and processes into question, which allows for an analysis of which positions of power emerge from prevailing discourses and how they structure power relations. Material examined through discourse analysis are often political, programmatic and academic texts, but can also be media products. From the perspective of practice theory on discourses (Langer/Wrana 2007), discourse analysis can also be applied to other documents such as pictures and filmed material, recorded conversations and interviews, TV series (Rieger-Ladich 2014) or literary texts (Koller/Rieger-Ladich 2013; for quantitative analysis see Laver et al. 2003; Klüver 2009).

Exemplary Dissertation Projects could focus on the following topics:

Competence discourses at transitions in the context of an activating welfare state and lifelong learning such as school and training readiness, employability and active aging.

A *research question* might address the similarities and differences that can be found in the discourses on school and training readiness, employability and active aging as well as the conclusions that can be drawn in terms of restructuring the life course. Neither these discourses nor their interrelationship have been systematically explored to date.

Methodologically, a discourse analysis can be applied using central documents from politics, media, and pedagogical practice.

Interrelations between the three levels of research: discourses on school and training readiness, employability and active aging frame the educational institutional treatment of transitions in terms of school entry, in vocational guidance and career education, employment support as well as in transitions into old age; these transitions are also key occasions for individuals' biographical constructions.

Alternatively, other discourses could also be analysed similarly, such as the discourse of responsabilisation, or different discourses could be compared at one stage of life, for example, discourses about children's school readiness, children as active learners as well as child welfare and endangerment.

Discourses about lifestyle practices in terms of the best possible preparation for uncertainty and competition in young adulthood, such as self-optimisation.

Here, the *research question* could focus on which demands, criteria for success and risks in relation to which transitional themes are reproduced in media thematisations and constructed by understandings of self-optimisation in young adulthood and what gender-oriented messages they carry.

Methodologically, a discourse analysis could be completed on contributions to print media (for example, German media such as *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, *Stern*), as well as in self-help literature, self-representations and thematisation in social networks (for analysis on webpages, see Schirmer et al. 2015) and television series (for social scientific film analysis see Ehrenspeck/Lenzen 2003).

Interrelations could be pointed out to the conveyance of the 'technologies of the self' in education and transition-related counselling as well as to self-optimisation as a topic of biographic narrative and justifications for particular young adult lifestyles.

Alternatively, similar discourses could be explored at other stages of life, for example, active aging.

Changes in social normality expectations towards mothers and fathers since 1990

A *research question* may concentrate on the changes in the expectations towards mothers and fathers, in terms of how they prepare and support their children at during transitions over the last 25 years in Germany. Are these changes associated with other social developments and discourses of normality?

Methodologically, these questions could be analysed using quantitative text analysis of selected newspapers and magazines for parents.

Interrelations between the three levels of research: Social expectations of normality regarding the mother and father role have direct and indirect effects on parents(-to-be) and also influence their utilisation of institutional services (e.g. counselling, child care).

Alternatively, changes regarding the social expectations towards educators and teachers over time could be analysed similarly.

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