

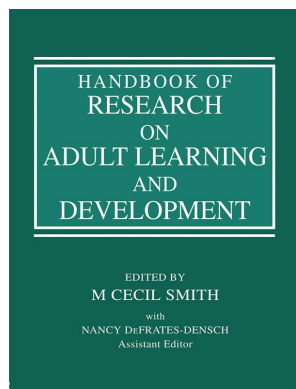
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Gender Strategies

Socialization, Allocation, and Strategic Selection Processes Shaping the Gendered Adult Life Course

Phyllis Moen, Erin Kelly, and Rachel Magennis

Adulthood is a fundamentally different experience for women and men, even those with similar backgrounds growing up. Why is this the case? Research and theory pose several alternative explanations, grounded in ideas about nature and nurture. Most common historically has been a *biological explanation* (nature), pointing to the impacts of genetic, hormonal, and physiological differences between women and men. There are, to be sure, male and female traits rooted in biology or nature. But if this were the only reason for gender differences, we wouldn't find variations in the distinctive experiences and expectations of women and men across cultures, social classes, geographical regions, and history.

Alternatively, the nurture or *cultural explanation* proposes that gender is learned: Even young children begin to grasp the rules of what is expected for boys and girls, men and women (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). *Structural explanations* also fall in the "nurture" camp, pointing to the differing opportunity structures confronting women and men, that is, the social and economic rules and regulations opening up or closing off certain roles, relationships, and resource options based on one's gender (Kramer, 2005; McCall, 2001; Moen & Roehling, 2005). For example, some religious positions (such as pope, bishop) are explicitly reserved for men, and some jobs are typed by gender (until recently, nurses, librarians, secretaries were almost exclusively women; construction workers, pilots and firefighters almost exclusively men), even though this typing may not be "official."

Due in part to the women's movement and the corresponding increase in feminist scholarship since the 1960s, researchers emphasize the social basis of gender, debunking the previously held belief that gender is determined exclusively by biology (Acker, 1992; Anderson, 2005; Bem, 1994; Collins, Chafetz, Blumberg, Coltrane, & Turner, 1993; Folbre, 2001; Moen, 2001). Now, increasingly, social and behavioral scientists use the term "sex differences" when referring to variations in biological traits, reserving the term "gender differences" to represent the actions and characteristics of being a man or a woman that are learned or mandated, in other words, the result of cultural and structural influences. Most scholars have concluded that gender differences can only be understood by considering the *combination* of biological, social, economic, organizational and cultural forces as they intersect throughout the life course (Downey, Eccles, & Chatman, 2005; Kimmel & Aronson, 2000; Moen & Chermack, 2005; Moen, Elder, & Lüscher, 1995; Moen & Spencer, 2006a).

The answer to the question "nature or nurture," in relation to the distinctive lives of women and men is, "both." What is key is that while some differences between women and men are rooted in biology, disparities in the roles, relationships, and resources available to women and to men are the result of institutionalized beliefs, policies, and practices—the culture and structure of gender as enacted in families, portrayed in the media, taught

in schools, reinforced at work, and taken-for-granted in communities (Kramer, 2005; Kimmel & Aronson, 2000). The preponderance of evidence is that gender differences are less about nature (biology) than *second nature* (institutionalized arrangements), that is, the taken-for-granted gender schema, stereotypes and strictures permeating every aspect of contemporary life (Acker, 1992; Bem, 1994; Moen, 2001; Moen & Spencer, 2006b; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Risman, 1998).

In this chapter we focus on the socially constructed components of being a man or a woman in contemporary society, noting that gender opens up or closes opportunities differently throughout the adult course. We describe three related social processes that both produce and perpetuate gender differences and gender disparities throughout adulthood. First are *socialization* processes: the ways women and men learn cultural schema (taken-for-granted beliefs). Socialization teaches each new generation, directly and indirectly by example, what is expected for people of each gender at different ages and life stages (see Parson & Bales, 1955; Rose, 1979; Settersten & Owens, 2002). Socialization processes foster gendered identities as well as different preferences, expectations and motivations for women and men. Second are *allocation* processes: the structural arrangements and power differences in groups, organizations and societies that open up some possibilities for men or for women, while closing others (Acker, 1992; Bem, 1994; Moen, 1992, 2001; Moen & Spencer, 2006a; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Risman, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Williams, 2000). Third are *strategic selections*: Women and men choose to enter or exit some roles and relationships and not others at different points in their lives (Moen & Chermack, 2005; Moen & Chesley, 2008; Moen & Wethington, 1992).

Our goal is to demonstrate that women and men live different adulthoods because they develop different preferences (Becker, 1981; Hakim, 1997) as a result of bringing different expectations and values (socialization) to each fork in the life-course road. Moreover, each fork in the life-course is stratified by gender, offering women and men different opportunities and constraints (allocation). Even whether or not adults perceive that there is a “fork in the road” (i.e., a decision point) sometimes depends on their gender. Choosing which road to take (strategic selections) is guided by both socialization and allocation processes that persist across the life course through ongoing social relationships and institutionalized gender regimes (what we term “convoys”). Still, large-scale transformations can render old gender scripts (learned through socialization and allocation processes) out of date, opening up new opportunities to women and/or men. Wars, economic dislocations, technological innovations, and social movements, for example, can transform gender strategies, as can changes in social policies and regulatory practices (Elder, 1974; Moen, 1992). The early 21st century is just such a time of social transformation. Demographic, cultural, economic, and technological changes are rewriting the nature of gendered adult roles and relationships at work, family, education, religion, community and government. Still, the fundamental mismatch between old scripts and old rules and new realities perpetuates gender inequality (e.g., Moen, 2003, 2005; Moen & Chesley, 2008; Moen & Roehling, 2005).

This chapter consists of five sections. The first provides theoretical and conceptual underpinnings bringing gender front and center in the framing of human development—an *ecology of the gendered life course* approach. The next three sections describe processes of socialization, allocation and strategic selection. Throughout we discuss the three dynamic themes: the concepts of *social convoys*, *institutional convoys* and *cycles of control*. The chapter concludes with a discussion of converging divergences in the adult development of women and men.

Ecology of the Gendered Adult Course

Most scholarship on human development does not explicitly incorporate gender, but focuses instead on “generic” (i.e., non-gendered) processes presumed to operate in the same way regardless of gender. Three prevailing theories of (generic) human development are framed in terms of ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), the life span (Baltes & Baltes, 1990), and the life course (Elder, 1974). We draw upon all three in our ecology of the gendered life course approach (Moen & Chesley, 2008; Moen, Elder, & Lüscher, 1995) in order to provide a vocabulary for understanding and studying gendered development in adulthood. Four concepts are central to our ecology of the gendered life course framing. In addition to *process* (described in the preceding section about the processes of socialization, allocation and strategic selection), this perspective emphasizes the importance of time, context, and *linked lives*. Putting them together and in motion reveals the convoys of relationships (i.e., social convoys) and of rules and regulations (i.e., institutional convoys) that shape the gendered life course. We consider each of these concepts through a gender lens.

Gendered Time, Timing, and Age

Understanding adult development requires attention to the meaning, measurement, and management of *time* over the life course of individuals and across historical periods. Gendered adult development is rooted in child and adolescent development (Moen & Roehling, 2005; Putney & Bengtson, 2002). It also changes with age. And, age itself has multiple meanings: as a biological time clock, as multiple social and institutional clocks and calendars, and as historical (and biographical) chronologies of those born at different time periods (i.e., cohorts). Life course scholars have sensitized researchers to the multiple meanings of age (Elder, 1974, 1992; Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985; Moen, 1995; Riley, 1987; Riley, Foner, & Waring, 1988). We add to this the multiple meanings of gender. This matters because the scripts people follow depend on the combination of their age and gender. Age and gender constitute the backbone of key socialization and allocation regimes in adulthood, creating distinctive sets of challenges and limiting the adaptive strategies (strategic selections) of women and men as they move through adulthood. What is key is that both age and gender are intersecting statuses setting expectations, options and resources throughout the adult years. Moreover, gender and age are not simply markers; rather, they play out as biological, social and historical forces. Note that race and class are also important statuses shaping the gendered adult course (McCall, 2001), but space constraints limits our focus to the age and gender intersection.

Biological Forces across Age and Gender. First, age is an indicator of biological changes in physical and cognitive functioning that set limits on social behavior. Changes in workers’ health over the adult course, for example, can affect their decision making regarding labor force exits, including opting out for a short time, seeking a different job, or earlier timing of retirement.

Biology is an important aspect of gender as well. For example, women’s biological clocks (the span of years when they can bear children) have enormous repercussions over both men’s and women’s decisions about marriage and parenting, although medical advances are stretching out women’s childbearing years. By contrast, the fact that men can father children over a wide age span means that some men launch second families with (new) younger wives in later adulthood. Biology, in the form of cognitive as well as

physiological characteristics tied to both age and gender, is heightened by social forces (including social policies) that can accentuate or mitigate gender distinctions over the adult course (Caspi & Elder, 1988; Caspi, Lynam, Moffitt, & Silva, 1993).

Social Forces across Age and Gender. Second, age is an important determinant of people's social roles, independent of their capacities and preferences, and is reflected in what Riley (1987) refers to as the age stratification system. Consider common sense notions about the "right" time for doing things. Culturally-grounded norms and policies shape expectations and beliefs about the "right" age to be in school, to marry, to start a family, or to retire from a career (Neugarten, Moore, & Lowe, 1965; Rook, Catalano, & Dooley, 1989; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996a, 1996b). This reflects the institutionalized aspects of adulthood, in terms of life-course convoys of expectations and rules around the time, timing, and duration of roles at different ages and life stages (Moen & Chesley, 2008; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996a, 1996b).

There is also a gender stratification system, allocating some social positions and opportunities to men and others to women throughout the adult course (Bem, 1994; Folbre, 2001; Moen, 2001, 2003; Moen & Chermack, 2005; Moen & Spencer, 2006a; Risman, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Williams, 2000). Age and aging serve to widen, rather than narrow gender differences and inequalities (Moen, 2001; Moen & Spencer, 2006b). For example, contemporary young people in high school and college often wear similar styles of clothing, earn similar wages, and take similar classes. It is only as they enter and move through adult roles—especially as employees, spouses, and parents—that women's and men's experiences and resources tend to markedly diverge. Whether these are beginning to converge is an issue we take up in the concluding section.

Historical Forces and Cohorts across Age and Gender. Third, age at a given point in time is an indicator of birth-cohort membership and, thus, of life experiences shared with others of the same generation (Riley, 1987; Riley, Foner, & Waring, 1988; Ryder, 1965). People in different cohorts have different attitudes about gender (Schuman & Rieger, 1992), as well as different options, depending on whether they are women or men. Consider the different experiences of the parents of the Baby Boom cohort (young adults in the 1940s and 50s) versus the boomers themselves (young adults in the 1970s and 80s) versus young adults today. Note that what is taken-for-granted at one point in history changes (e.g., men being the exclusive family breadwinners in the 1950s). Today, dual-earner households are very much the expected norm.

Gendered Contexts (Ecologies) as Dynamic Convoys Shaping the Adult Course

"Context" is another key concept within an ecology of the life course perspective. Social and institutional contexts or *ecologies* (see also Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Dannefer, 1984, 2000) typically differ by both age and gender. "Ecology" refers to the relationship between organism and environment. We view adult development as dynamic ecological processes of interaction between individuals and their psychosocial environments as both change over time. Individuals are not passively located within particular contexts or ecological niches, however. Rather, they make strategic selections into and out of roles and relationships (and the corresponding ecologies) in an effort to meet both their own needs and goals and others' expectations of them. Still, the array of possible adaptive strategies is always constrained by the social and cultural environments available to women and men of different ages and in different cohorts.

Social Convoys (Linked Lives). Another key concept in the ecology of the life course tool box is that of *linked lives*, the fact that people go through their adult course within a web of relationships. The life-course concept of linked lives (Elder, 1974, 1985) highlights the ways individuals' choices are always embedded in and shaped by the people in their lives.

Kahn and Antonucci (1980) coined the term "social convoy" to capture this notion of linked lives, of people connected in some way, moving through life at different rates and in different ways. Kahn and Antonucci depict such convoys as supportive of human development (in the same way that escorting ships provided protection to transports during World War II). We broaden the meaning of social convoy to recognize that while relationships with children, siblings, parents, spouses, and close friends may indeed be "supportive," they can be sources of conflict and strain as well. Lives are also linked with those of coworkers, neighbors and other social network members. Moreover, a person's social convoy of relationships can shift in size, supportiveness and strain over the adult course as various relationships emerge, end, change or persist throughout adulthood.

What is key is that the nature of linked lives differs for women and men. Jessie Bernard (1981) pointed out that each marriage is, in reality, two marriages: "his" and "hers." So, too, do we find two prevailing ecologies of adult development: "his" and "hers." Yet, as we discuss in the concluding section, there is also evidence of growing within-gender variation as well.

Most people's social networks consist of women and men of different ages, and of different salience (one's parent versus a neighbor, for example). Adulthood for many Americans involves managing their (often conflicting) relationship goals, expectations, and obligations—as parents, as adult children of aging parents, as siblings, as neighbors and friends, as husbands and wives. For example, young adults are often surprised to find that their parents continue to have certain expectations for them, no matter how old or financially independent they may be. And couples must coordinate two careers and, increasingly, "blended" families (including children from prior marriages). Single parents often have to also coordinate children's schedules with their former spouses and current partners.

Institutional Convoys. Social convoys are the *people* that accompany individuals through their life course development. But lives are also linked with organizations and institutions. Mothers and fathers must coordinate with their children's schooling and recreational rules and timetables. Caregivers to aging or infirm relatives seek to understand and coordinate with health care, Medicare, long-term care and other bureaucratic institutions. And all of this often occurs in tandem with coordination of employers' rules and timetables, as well as those of federal and state governments and community organizations.

We developed the term "institutional convoys" to capture the cultural and organizational expectations, norms, rules, and regulations that open or close role, relationship and resource options for women and men at different ages and life stages. These expectations, norms, rules, and regulations are often age-graded and gender-differentiated. Indeed, gender itself is something of a social institution (Martin, 2004). Most people are unaware of how much their lives are linked to organizational convoys (such as schools, families, businesses, government, hospitals, military, churches, synagogues, and membership groups) from birth to death. These institutions shape individual behavior in both obvious and more subtle ways. Moreover, even when individuals seem to violate institutionalized expectations, norms, rules or regulations for someone of their gender

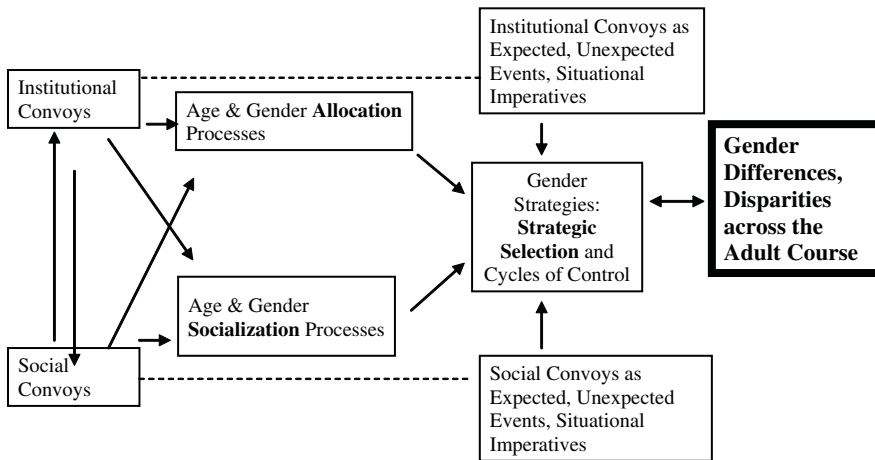


Figure 13.1 Socialization, allocation, and strategic selection processes shaping the gendered adult course.

and age, their accounts (i.e., explanations to themselves and to others) are contrasted with existing institutional “givens” (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The next sections follow our model of factors leading to both inequality and life quality for contemporary men and women, as depicted in Figure 13.1.

Gendered Socialization

DiRenzo (1977) defines socialization as the process and/or structure of social learning in which uniquely human attributes are developed and/or actualized in the human organism. Liao and Cai (1995) define socialization as a process in which individuals learn and maintain the morals and values of society (see also Kramer, 2005).

Learning Gender

There is an early literature describing how we learn to be men and women, focusing on the role of families in socializing each new generation (Lash, 1979; Mead, 1949, 1970; Parson & Bales, 1955). But people also learn gender and age “scripts” in schools and neighborhoods, as well as from the media, churches, mosques, synagogues, peer groups, coworkers and civic group members.

As a result of both formal and informal learning (socialization), gender and age are, literally, in our heads, as “scripts” guiding our own behavior and expectations of self and others (Fenstermaker & West, 2002). We develop age and gender stereotypes and values by hearing, seeing, and using polarizing language, categories, expectations, and assessments as short-hand heuristics and habits (Moen & Spencer, 2006a; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Consider, for example, the ways gender permeates how we think about and refer to people (e.g., “ask that woman over there”), roles (e.g., about nurses, “where is she?” and physicians, “is he in yet?”), and divisions of labor (e.g., “taking out the garbage is a man’s job”). Gender and age as ways of categorizing and dividing behavior and beliefs, risks and resources combine to shape adult roles and relationships in ways that seem “natural” (i.e., second nature). Beliefs about men’s greater status and competence implicitly shape the expectations of both men and

women about their own competence and performance compared to others, independently of their actual underlying abilities (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

The Long Arm of Early Socialization

A life-course formulation emphasizes the importance of early experiences. This is especially true in terms of what children learn about gender (Liao & Cai, 1995; Fenstermaker & West, 2002). Liao and Cai (1995) find that contemporary American mothers continue to encourage very different gender-role behaviors in boys and girls.

To understand behavior at any one life stage requires knowledge of prior processes of socialization. Heinz, for instance, describes young people's "biographical action orientation" (Heinz, 1999, 2002a, 2002b) that serves as a guide to behavior as they move into and through adulthood. As an example of the cumulative processes of early decisions, young women are less apt to take calculus in high school, a choice (reflecting earlier gender socialization) that has enormous implications in terms of their subsequent majors in college. For instance, this choice to opt out of high school calculus considerably reduces the odds that women will move into careers in engineering or the natural sciences, given that these careers require training in mathematics, which is widely seen as a valued, but male-typed task (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002).

Such early socialization plays out throughout adulthood. In a recent four-year (2000–2003) Norwegian study of an entering cohort of undergraduate students in varying professions, Daehlen (2005) found preferences for work to be deeply rooted in a person's early socialization, acquired well before the choice of a higher educational program and sustained through such programs. This study offers evidence that gendered preferences are formed well before the transition to adulthood.

But socialization processes are ongoing throughout the life course, shaping adult beliefs, values and expectations (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978). Daehlen (2005) also found that job values do change with education, more or less in the same direction for male and female students (see also Johnson, 2001). Another recent study by Goodwin and O'Connor (2005) reanalyzed data from interviews of young men (who were ages 16–18 in 1962), following up with 94 re-interviews in 2001. They found that the career paths of the respondents they located were extremely gendered. Almost all the men had found jobs through male relatives, they all stressed making money as important, and reported that years ago the Youth Employment Office had steered them into traditionally male jobs.

Socialization into Cohorts

Recall that adults born around the same time period are often grouped together as identifiable cohorts. People of the same cohort share similar experiences and are often socialized in similar ways, experiencing the same technologies, historical circumstances, and social policies and practices. The result is often greater differences across than within cohorts in beliefs and values related to gender and adult pathways. Members of, for example, the aging Baby Boom cohort (born after World War II, from 1946 through 1964), and Generation X (born 1965 through 1975) have somewhat different beliefs about women's and men's roles. Note that family members, neighbors, friends, and coworkers of different ages are also members of different cohorts, socialized differently and viewing their lives—past, present and future—from vastly different vantage points.

What gives each cohort its distinctiveness are the shared events and experiences of

people who are roughly the same age when major historical events occur. For Americans moving into adulthood in the early 1960s, a defining moment was the death of John F. Kennedy. For those not yet born, Kennedy's death is the stuff of history books and documentary films. For most Americans who were adults or adolescents at the turn of this century, *the* transformative experience of their lives occurred on September 11, 2001, when planes flew into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

There are other ways that *when* people are born—which birth cohort they belong to—has enormous implications for the course of their adult years. Men in certain cohorts have gone to war while their younger or older brothers (in different cohorts) watched these same wars on newsreels or television, safely at home. And the cohort of young women today is the first participating actively in the military in roles previously allocated to men.

Cohort differences are especially evident in societal expectations and gender norms around paid work and unpaid family work. Men in the post-war boom years of the 1950s and 60s were socialized into the American Dream and American values about a *career mystique* of hard work, independence, and occupational success (Moen & Roehling, 2005) even though large segments (minorities, poorly educated, immigrants) could never climb the career mystique ladder.

The career mystique myth crystallized in tandem with the *feminine mystique* (Friedan, 1963)—a belief in the 1950s and early 60s that women were socialized to be exclusively wives and mothers, finding total fulfillment in full-time domesticity. The problem was that many working-class and poor women couldn't afford to be out of the workforce, often moving in and out of marginal jobs, and middle-class women in college were learning different lessons about using their skills and training in the world of work. Friedan's book (1963) tapped a nerve, revealing many homemakers longing for a different kind of engagement and, in doing so, (re) launched the Women's Movement.

The cohort of women coming of age in the 1970s and 80s rejected the feminine mystique, only to learn and embrace the *career* mystique instead. The Women's Movement became an important socializing force encouraging women to want and even demand "men's" jobs, "men's" career aspirations, and "men's" salaries and occupational achievements—as the path to gender equality. But the career mystique—that a lifetime of working hard always pays off in occupational and economic success—was a false myth, never accessible to most workers. *And* it was predicated on having *someone else* (a wife) to take care of all the details of daily living. Accordingly, feminists began to call for men to do their fair share of the unpaid family care work, not recognizing that the structure and culture of paid work made doing so difficult for all workers, regardless of gender.

The feminine mystique is gone, although women are still socialized and allocated to the nation's carework of youth, the disabled, and the older frail and infirm. The career mystique remains dominant in American culture, however; the epitome of independent adulthood, the accepted path of optimal adult development to success, fulfillment, and gender equality for men and women (Becker & Moen, 1999; Moen & Roehling, 2005; Stewart & Healy, 1989). The result is role conflicts, strains, time pressures and overloads for employees in demanding jobs and/or high occupational aspirations who also have family demands and/or high family aspirations.

The result? Contemporary 21st-century cohorts of young workers—men and women—are being socialized to simultaneously both embrace and question the career mystique. Recall that socialization involves learning from observations. Many young people can no longer see the payoffs of following the lock-step career mystique path in light of corporate downsizing, mergers, and outsourcing, as well as the strains they observe in the

lives of their parents' generation. Their beliefs about adulthood, gender equality and the path to success are often inconsistent, ambivalent, and vague (Orrange, 2007; Moen & Orrange, 2002).

Old scripts are increasingly out of date with new realities on a variety of levels. Consider how young people are socialized to embrace marriage and parenthood *and* to challenging these as fundamental to adulthood. Rates of marriage decreased from 143 per 1000 in the mid-1940s to 76 per 1000 by 1988. Those who do marry are doing so later. For example, in the U.S. the median age for women rose from 21 to 25 and from 23 to 27 for men from 1970 to 1997 and rose slightly again to 25.3 for women and 27.1 for men from 1997 to 2005 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997, 2006). The age at first childbirth has followed a similar pattern. In 1970 the average age for first childbirth was 22.1 whereas in the year 2000 it is 24.6 (Mathews & Hamilton, 2002). There is also diversity in adult experiences across cultural groups. For example, African American women are much less likely to marry. In 1990, fewer than 75% of them married, and by 2004 less than half (48%) of them married, compared with 90% of white women in 1990 and 66.1% in 2004 (American Community Survey, 2004). Hispanic women have similar patterns; in 2004, 49.5% married versus 64.3% of non-Hispanics (American Community Survey, 2004).

Women who gave birth to the large Baby Boom cohort in the post-World War II economic growth years of the 1950s often had mothers or older sisters with small families, given that fertility had previously dipped in the lean Great Depression years in the 1930s. Since then, fertility rates have declined significantly (from a high of 3.0 children to current rates of 1.5). There is also an increasing number of women who are choosing not to bear children. Others groups are becoming parents for whom parenting might have not been possible in the past (e.g., gay and lesbian parents; see Anderson, 1999).

Socialization involves taking things for granted, as the way things are, and as the way things should be. Azar (2002) observes that what we think of as the typical life course—a sequence of leaving home, marriage, child rearing, launching and survival at age 50 with the first marriage still intact (unless broken by divorce) was not, in fact, the dominant pattern of family timing prior to the early 20th century. Before 1900, only about 40% of women in the U.S. experienced this life pattern (Uhlenberg, 1974, cited in Harevan, 1982). The remainder either never married, never reached marriageable age, died before childbirth, or were widowed while their children were still young.

Socialization is On-Going

Social and institutional convoys are the sources of on-going socialization processes: they transmit to the next generation taken-for-granted norms and expectations about how adulthood should unfold—such as the incidence, timing, durations and trajectories of relationships and roles. In particular, both social and organizational ties foster gendered and age-related expectations about the sequencing, duration and timing of the roles and responsibilities of employment, marriage, and parenthood. Socialization is also subject to changes in the life course of an individual and their social networks (Liao & Cai, 1995). For example, consider the transition to parenthood with the birth of a child. This new member of the parents' social convoy invokes all kinds of responses in adults who suddenly are mothers and fathers—changes in their sleep patterns, their identities, their values and priorities, their working hours and leisure, their relationships with one another and with friends, neighbors, parents, parents-in-law, and other extended kin. Fast forward 30 years, and this social convoy member at age 30 is very different, as is the relationship between parents and the now-adult child. Fast forward

yet another 30 years, and this adult child at age 60 may well be helping to care for her aging parents.

Becoming a parent cannot be understood separately from the taken-for-granted norms and scripts that define what it means to be a mother or a father in distinctive ways. Mothers are (still) expected to do most of the child care and fathers (still) expected to do most of the breadwinning, even though both are likely to be in the workforce. Different expectations and beliefs about those who make the transition to parenthood “early,” “on time,” or else “late” in life according to existing social norms. Institutional convoys give social relationships structure and meaning and they constrain options around motherhood and fatherhood and differ by culture, locational differences by social class, marital status, immigrant status, race and ethnicity.

Adult opportunities still follow informal gender norms and expectations although they are no longer formally regulated by gender. Consider, as a case in point, educational socialization. On the surface, educational policies are gender-neutral. But Goodwin and O’Connor (2005) find that “schools reinforce different cultural values, dominant masculinity types, vocational preferences, and, via the curriculum, link types of knowledge and skills with masculinities and femininities” (p. 453). This accentuates men’s traditional expectations and values about male adulthood as years of breadwinning and continuous, full-time hard work (see also Moen & Roehling, 2005; Townsend, 2002). Individuals learn through socialization processes the institutionalized nature of the life course. That, in turn, provides individuals at different life stages with “available lists of reasons, motives, and aspirations” (Meyer, 1986, p. 205), such as expectations regarding parenthood, employment, and retirement (see also Altucher & Williams, 2003; Brines & Joynes, 1999; Carr, 1997; Clausen, 1995; Cooney & Mortimer, 1999; Freund, 1997; Gerson, 1985; Han & Moen, 1999a, 1999b; Moen, Sweet, & Swisher, 2005; Pixley & Moen, 2003; Wethington, Pixley, & Kavey, 2003).

Socialization to Later Adulthood

Socialization to later adulthood is also changing. In their study of pre-Baby Boom workers, Han and Moen (1999a, 1999b) found that the age employees began planning their retirement has gotten progressively earlier for each successive cohort. Respondents who were born in the 1920s typically began to plan at age 54. By contrast, those born between 1935 and 1943 started planning in their mid forties (on average, at age 46). Early planning appears to be related to an earlier expected retirement age, with the most recent cohort in their study (born between 1935 and 1943) expecting to retire from their career jobs in their late 50s.

Given the new uncertainties surrounding both occupational career progression and retirement, we would expect the Baby Boom cohort and those following in their wake to be particularly aware of the need for planfulness. A study of Baby Boomers’ saving patterns reveals that almost half (46%) save regularly, with another three in ten (30%) saving occasionally (Gist, Wu, & Ford, 1999). The two most frequent explanations for saving are for precautionary reasons related to life course risks, such as unemployment, illness, security (28.8%) and for retirement (23%).

Moen, Huang, Plassmann, and Dentinger (2006) found that dual-earner spouses’ levels of retirement planfulness are positively related, but in different ways, depending on gender, cohort, and family circumstances. Husbands tend to plan more financially, while wives tend to plan more in terms of their lifestyles following retirement. Perceived control (mastery), income adequacy, and work load all positively predict both husbands’ and

wives' planfulness. Husbands' planfulness tends to shape their wives' planfulness. But in couples without children at home and in the leading edge of the Baby Boom cohort, it is wives' planfulness that influences their husbands' level of planning, not vice versa. Spouses in younger couples (those in the trailing edge Baby Boom cohort) typically make plans independently of one another.

Gendered Allocation of Roles, Resources, and Relationships

Gender Systems of Stratification

Gender socialization—the ways adults as well as children learn how to be male or female (see Figure 13.1)—can explain part of the story, but scholars increasingly focus on processes of gender *allocation*. This is the institutionalized packaging of resources, constraints and options by gender within families, schools, workplaces, religious, civic and other organizational structures and groupings. As Ridgeway and Correll (2004) point out, gender used to be described as an identity or role that is taught in childhood and enacted in family relations. Now the definition is moving toward thinking of gender as an institutionalized system of social practices. These practices divide people into two groups, men and women, and works to maintain the inequality between the two based on these made up differences.

Gender socialization is about *learning* gender, fostering differences in women's and men's beliefs, values, and identities. Gender stratification is about *dividing* by gender, allocating positions, power and material resources based on whether one is male or female. It is the systematic way that roles, resources and rewards are distributed that perpetuates gender inequality. This takes place in large part because organizational rules, routines, and regulations serve to structure the adult course in gendered ways (Mayer & Tuma, 1990).

Why is there inequality—economic, political, social and interpersonal—between women and men? Even more important than socialization processes are the institutional arrangements that stratify women and men by their gender. Kohn and Schooler (1983) define stratification as the hierarchical distribution of power, privilege, and prestige. Groups and organizations of all types allocate roles, resources and relationships—along with power—based on a range of factors. The allocation of power, privilege and prestige in society and in organizations depends on one's social background, race and ethnicity, educational achievement, and occupational level, of course, but also on the combination of age and gender (Anderson, 2005; Kramer, 2005; Kimmel & Aronson, 2000; McCall, 2001).

Gender stratification is fundamentally about disparities in economic power (Anderson 2005; Blumberg 1984) between men and women. Serguino (2007) argues that socialization forces in the form of gender ideology, norms and stereotypes reinforce material inequality between women and men, thereby reinforcing the gender stratification system.

Social Policies as Gender Systems

Twentieth century social policies and practices have created, reinforced, and perpetuated different life courses for men and women. First were efforts to institutionalize life into segments predicated on middle-class men's experience. In fact, the very notion that adulthood consists of distinctive and identifiable paths is a product of primarily mid-20th-century policies and practices developing in Europe and America around the institutions of education, employment, and retirement (see Kohli, 1986a, 1986b; Marshall, Heinz,

Krueger, & Verna, 2001; Meyer, 1986). In the middle of the 20th century, educational, employment, and pension legislation and regulation forged a *lock-step life course*, consisting of first full-time public education as preparation for adult roles, then an adulthood of continuous, full-time employment, followed by full-time leisure during the “golden years” of retirement. This adult path of continuous, full-time, year-round employment, bracketed by schooling at one end and retirement (or death) at the other, became institutionalized as the (only) route to adult fulfillment and success—the structure of the career mystique (Moen & Roehling, 2005). Government policies (e.g., Social Security, unemployment insurance, Medicare, disability regulations, the Fair Labor Standards Act) all took as a given both the lock-step path of (men’s) continuous, full-time employment and the breadwinner-homemaker gender divide. These policies, together with the regulations guiding business practices, constitute an age-graded regime giving structure to the life course: the shared understandings and taken-for-granted rules, roles, relationships, resources and risks associated with adulthood at different ages and life stages.

But note that this lock-step arrangement was predicated on *men’s*, not women’s, lives. Most middle-class women’s adulthood in the middle of the 20th century gave primacy to marriage and mothering, with only intermittent ties to the workforce. The primacy of family goals and obligations continues to shape women’s lives even though most are entrenched in the workforce (Carr, 1997; Garey, 1999; Gerson, 2001; Han & Moen, 1999a, 1999b, 2002; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Thus the social organization of the life course is *gender-graded* as well, typically producing diverging pathways for men and women, even though they may begin life with similar backgrounds and abilities (Moen, 1996a, 1996b, 2001; Moen & Roehling, 2005) fostering work-family conflicts and strains for women and their families. The life course as an institution allocating roles and resources overtime is also replete with informal norms that shape women’s and men’s cognitive assessments, their “ambitions, stock-taking, and self-image at various times during their lives” (Kruger & Baldus, 1999, p. 356; see also Altucher & Williams, 2003; Becker & Moen, 1999; Blossfeld & Huinik, 1991; Moen & Orrange, 2002; Townsend, 2002).

Today, age divides are more visible (often written into policies, such as kindergarten for five-year-olds or retirement for 65-year-olds) than are gender divides. It is easy to “see” the life course as a convoy of institutionalized rules and regulations when we think about the ages one can purchase alcohol, marry, vote, or retire. By contrast, there are few overt regulations about gender. Yet this was not always the case.

Consider the ways jobs were allocated by whether or not one was male or female (or pregnant), or how workers were allocated Social Security credits, both of which disadvantaged women. Until the late 1960s, job want ads in newspapers specified the gender of the employee, with clerical and secretarial positions specifically seeking women (Pedriana, 2004). Teachers in some school districts in the 1960s and 1970s could not continue to teach if pregnant. Before 1978 one could not receive a year’s Social Security credit except by remaining in the workforce continuously throughout the year, something problematic for women, given they were likely to move in and out of paid work for caregiving or other reasons (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2005). Both of these policies were revised in tandem with both the women’s movement and the influx of married women into the workforce (Moen & Roehling, 2005).

Work Organizations as Gender Systems

Employment has been a “master” adult role, the path to economic independence, self-esteem, meaning, and security. It is the fundamental public ecology and institutional

convoy in which adult life plays out. But jobs remain gendered, even though they are no longer labeled “for men only” or “for women only.” Employers commonly steer women (or men) toward some jobs rather than others, contributing to the ongoing gendering of jobs (Fernandez & Sosa, 2005). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) describe how small biasing effects such as these accumulate over careers and lifetimes to result in substantially different employment experiences and rewards for men and women who are otherwise similar in social background.

Characteristics of jobs, career paths, and the working environment are extremely consequential for the developing individual and tend to differ by gender. Considerable theoretical progress and empirical evidence link high demands on the job and low levels of job latitude with heightened feelings of strain (Elsass & Viega, 1997) leading to poor health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease and elevated blood pressure. But men are more apt than women to occupy jobs with both high demands and high control (Bosma, Stansfield, & Marmot, 1998; Cheng, Kawachi, Coakley, Schwartz, & Colditz, 2000; de Jonge, Bosma, Peter, & Siegrist, 2000; Dwyer & Ganster, 1991; Fox, 1993; Schnall, Landsbergis, & Baker, 1994). Moreover, Marshall, Barnett, and Sayer (1997) find evidence suggesting that the demand-control model may be more applicable to employees in manufacturing sector jobs (typically men) than to those in service jobs (typically women). They find that, for employees in the service sector, job control does not moderate job demands, while the intrinsic rewards associated with serving others tend to benefit service employees' health.

Families and Work-Family Linkages as Gender Systems

Contemporary adulthood is replete with ostensibly gender-neutral paths. Even the career mystique of continuous full-time employment, often in the same occupation or organization throughout most of adulthood, is now seen as available to men and women alike. However, family obligations are neither gender-neutral nor integrated into the designs of jobs and career paths. Most women find it patently impossible to pursue the career mystique and simultaneously their own (and others') caregiving role expectations as wives, mothers, and adult daughters (Pavalko & Artis, 1997). The result? Men have typically reaped greater advantages than have women, with their lock-step work histories enhancing future career options and expectations (O'Rand & Henretta, 1996).

When all adults in a household are in the workforce, an increasing number of employees are experiencing work-family conflicts and strains. “Good” jobs (those with benefits, for example) were designed for workers (men) without family responsibilities. The “man in the grey flannel suit” office worker and the unionized blue-collar worker in the 1950s could follow the career mystique of working long hours on a continuous basis throughout their adult years precisely because they had wives working as full-time homemakers. They also had jobs paying a living wage, and could expect both their wages and their job security to increase as they gained seniority by remaining with the same employer throughout a lifetime of employment (Moen & Roehling, 2005).

Supposedly ungendered pathways are, in fact, *not* gender neutral so long as jobs are designed for people without family responsibilities, and gender schema and cultural expectations continue to assign women responsibility for society's unpaid family care as well as for kin-keeping and community-building. Moen and Roehling (2005) conclude that most employing organizations are “work-friendly,” not family-friendly. Menino, Rubin, and Brayfield's (2005) analysis of the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce reveals that not only is the workplace environment typically *not* supportive of

employees with family responsibilities, but the environment is worse for women. Women report higher levels of both home to job and job to home spillover than men. Purportedly supportive workplace policies are often merely band-aids, doing little to reduce time pressures and strains. Absent are authentically supportive workplace cultures and supervisors.

Family life and occupational careers are both typically examined exclusive of other social roles and of each other. Life course scholars are beginning to look at the ways in which gender, relationships and roles intersect across the life course, at the interdependency between work and family obligations as well as the interdependency between the lives of different family members. Some innovative research (Home, 1998; Wethington, 2000) examines “contagion,” that is, the spill over of stress from one family member to another (see, for example, Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989).

Social Clocks as Gender Systems

Yet another framing of the adult course is to consider the ways individual lives unfold in the face of institutional clocks and the correlative taken-for-granted culture of what constitutes being “on” or “off” time in adult passages (Neugarten, 1968; Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985). People leave old roles and enter new ones—such as that of retiree—at particular points in their life biographies. Han and Moen (1999a, 1999b) term this *biographical pacing*, defined as the age at which individuals undergo key status passages—whether and when one marries, has children, takes a job, goes back to school, changes jobs, retires, goes back to work, remarries, or moves (see also Sweet & Moen, 2006). Viewing adulthood from the vantage point of biographical pacing emphasizes the life-course concept of timing and the social clock aspects of gender systems, with individuals defining the passages in their lives (and the lives of others) as being either on or off time—for example, retiring earlier or later than the conventional norm (Brim & Ryff, 1980; Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976; Settersten & Hagestad, 1996a, 1996b; Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Mortimer, Oesterle, & Kruger, 2005; Mortimer, Vuolo, Staff, Wakefield, & Xie, 2006; Wheaton, 1990). Social clocks are often different for women and men, with women having more temporal latitude around job and retirement clocks and men having more temporal latitude around marriage and parenting clocks. Institutionalized clockworks shape not only individual life pathways but the subjective side of adulthood as well, coloring women’s and men’s expectations, self-concepts, goals, identities, and affinities (Downey et al., 2005; Moen, Sweet, & Swisher, 2005). Thus, the predictability, timing and clustering of role occupancies or transitions change their meaning and their implications for identity and adult development more generally.

An emerging issue in life course research is the effect of variation in the pacing and clockworks of life events. Mortimer, Staff, and Oesterle (2003), for example, find alternative paths of labor force participation on the way to adulthood among high schoolers. Similar proportions (~26%) of both boys and girls follow a high investment employment path of high duration, and high intensity. Similar portions (~23%) of both boys and girls also follow an occasional employment path towards adulthood. But young men are almost twice as likely as young women to not work at all throughout high school (9.9 to 4.6%). Young men are also more apt to have a sporadic work history of low duration but high intensity (28.2 to 14.3%), and are less likely than their female classmates to follow a steady (i.e., high duration, low intensity) employment pathway during the high school years (18.2 to 30.6%). Moreover, Mortimer and colleagues (2003) find that those in sporadic

paths—disproportionately men—experience more stress, but also more opportunities for learning, as well as having greater potential for advancement. By contrast, those persons engaged in steady, low intensity occupational paths—disproportionately women—obtain lower earnings and have less stress, but they also have fewer opportunities for human capital development. There has been, to date, little research on biographical pacing as a predictor of behavior or beliefs, and yet it makes intuitive sense that life stage experiences and location—in terms of occupational and family pathways—should shape adult identities as well as plans and expectations for the future.

One manifestation of the unraveling of the social clock aspect of adult development path is the fact that first women and now men as well are increasingly returning to school as adults, often after marriage and childbearing, or even as they approach or enter retirement (Bradburn, Moen, & Dempster-Mc-Clain, 1995; Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998; Suitor, 1987; Sweet & Moen, 2006).

Biographical pacing is patterned by social class, race and ethnicity, and other social markers, as well as by health and ability, age and gender, and chance events. Recall that a life course theoretical lens (e.g., Elder, 1985, 1998a, 1998b; Moen & Wethington, 1992) also points to the importance of prior as well as coterminous events for understanding the gendered nature of adulthood. People's lives thus reflect the interplay between their past experiences, ongoing social and institutional convoys, and large-scale technological, economic, and policy shifts. While considerable advance has been made in capturing the patterned constellations of paths shaping adolescent development (Booth, Crouter, & Shanahan, 1999; Moen, 2003; Mortimer, Staff, & Lee, 2005; Mortimer, Staff, & Oesterle, 2003; Shanahan, 2000), we know little about the dynamic interplay between work, family, gender and human development in middle and later adulthood. This points to the need to capture, through life histories or longitudinal data, the patterned dynamics and social clocks of adult lives and identities as they are constructed and reconstructed over time.

Changes in Gender Systems

Institutional convoys—the taken-for-granted regime of age-graded (and often gender-graded) norms, rules, and regulations allocating options and risks at different ages and life stages—do change as a result of historical events, scientific and technological advances, demographic and economic shifts, policy initiatives and other social transformations.

Most contemporary workers are single, single-parents or dual-earners—without homemakers as back up for family and other obligations. Regardless of status or tenure, both men and women in all kinds of occupations and at all ages confront global economic changes fostering greater job and economic insecurity, along with concerns about health insurance, prospects for advancement, and/or retirement pensions. New information and communication technologies are escalating work demands and speeding up the pace and pressures related to the time and timing of work. The reality is that very few contemporary adults—women or men—have the time, option, or inclination to devote themselves exclusively to their jobs. Moreover, doing so is no guarantee of an adequate income, job security, health care and other protections.

It is only in the last four decades that employers have even attempted to help employees reconcile work and family responsibilities by adding maternity leaves and later gender-neutral family leaves (Kelly & Dobbin, 1999) and creating new child care benefits (Kelly, 2003). Recent research confirms that access to family-supportive policies like leaves and child care benefits has an important effect on women's pattern of labor force attachment, including whether they leave the labor force (Estes & Glass, 1996; Liebowitz &

Klerman, 1995), how quickly they return to full-time work (Hofferth, 1996), and whether they change jobs around the time of a birth (Glass & Riley, 1998). Those employment decisions, in turn, affect mothers' wages and career advancement (see Kelly, 2005a, for a review). Employers have not added these family-supportive policies out of the goodness of their hearts, or even because the evidence of their benefit to the organization was clear and convincing, but instead because public policies and the public's expectations have changed over this period (Kelly, 2005b). In other words, women's decisions about how they will try to "balance" work and family are shaped by company policies and practices that are, in turn, shaped by public policies and by broader cultural shifts about what we expect from good employers.

The notion of orderly career paths embedded in the career mystique dream is no longer a reality even for most middle-class men. In their follow-up study of boys in Great Britain (who were first interviewed at ages 16–18 in 1962–64 and then reinterviewed in 2001), Goodwin and O'Connor (2005) found that as this group proceeded through adulthood they did not follow single careers paths as they had expected, but moved in and out of positions, occupations, and employment based on the fluctuations of the local labor market.

In sum, whether reflective of reality or not, the lock-step institutional life course represents time structures and cultural clocks and calendars that constitute both informal timetables and norms (at what age young people should, for example, become financially independent of their parents) and formal policies (such as at what age people become eligible for Medicare). The multilayered clockworks of the adult course are important because they open up or close opportunities (such as the "right" age to attend college) that can have enormous long-term impacts on life chances and life quality. They also infuse the same transition—such as parenthood—with different meanings and consequences, depending on whether the new parent is a father or mother, and whether that new father or mother is age 15, 25, or 45.

Thus far we have described the life course as an institution that is historically constructed and reconstructed, showing that the rules and regulations around age and gender change for different cohorts of people in light of historical events (such as the women's movement), technological and economic transformations, the move to a service economy (and now a global economy), and social policy development (such as the Family and Medical Leave Act and Social Security). But they change slowly, often lagging behind alterations in the real-world experiences of adults.

Gender Strategies (Strategic Selection)

Both gender learning (socialization) and gender systems (allocation) shape the gendered adult course in the form of preferences and options. In this section we describe processes of *doing gender*, that is, following expected gender scripts in daily life. We propose that doing gender involves processes of strategic selection within the array of options and expectations available in light of prevailing gender beliefs and values.

Doing Gender

Following gender scripts in daily life is what West and Zimmerman (1987) call "doing gender," that is, people engaging in what they believe is behavior expected for their gender. In this way gender distinctions (and therefore gender inequality) are reified, created and recreated through everyday social interactions. As individuals enter public settings

that require them to define themselves in relation to others, their default expectation is that others will treat them according to socialized *gender beliefs*. Most people, most of the time, largely and often unwittingly comply with the pressure of gender-based expectations in most of their behavior (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This is especially the case since deviating from gender norms leads to social stigma, anxiety, and distress (Serguino, 2007).

We add to this our assessment that adults in fact are doing age *and* gender, following their own expectations, as well as their beliefs about the expectations of others that perpetuate existing age and gender divides. But age/gender socialization and allocation processes are shifting. The early 21st century is a time of opening up of an unprecedented array of both options and risks to women and men at different ages and stages.

An ecology of the life course perspective views doing gender as a series of adaptive strategies as men and women attempt to regain control over the circumstances of their lives (see Figure 13.1). Life course scholars focus on active decision making; people are agents in shaping their own life courses (Clausen, 1991; Elder, 1985; Krüger & Baldus, 1999; Marshall, Heinz, Krüger, & Verma, 2001; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003; Shanahan, 2000; Shanahan, Hofer, & Miech, 2002). Unfortunately, their choices often reproduce gender differences and disparities that are then accentuated across the life span.

In times of relative stability, when there are few social transformations in the ecologies of adulthood, development seems predictable, and the adaptations women and men make throughout their adult years tend to follow culturally endorsed and taken-for-granted age and gender scripts. In such times of social stability, adult development means following in the footsteps of (same sex) parents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. In times of social change, by contrast, the “right” strategies for moving into and through the adult years are suddenly ambiguous, often requiring people to make deliberate, unscripted choices in the face of uncertainty (e.g., strategic selections about whether and when to get additional schooling, marry, have children, switch employers, leave the workforce, retrain for a new career, move aging parents to live geographically closer, change jobs, divorce, move, retire, or even to act a certain way in a particular social setting). Moreover, adults make these strategic choices within an outdated social and cultural environment replete with the last century’s gender scripts and gendered structural arrangements.

Cycles of Control and Life-Course “Fit”

Building on theories of stress as a consequence of a disjuncture between resources and needs or demands, life course scholars view individuals and families as making strategic selections (of roles and relationships, but also behavior) as a way of (re)gaining a sense of mastery or control over their lives. Such patterned responses to current (or anticipated) gaps between resources and needs throughout adult life we term *cycles of control* (Elder, 1974; Moen & Chermack, 2005; Moen & Spencer, 2006a; Moen & Yu, 1999, 2000). Individuals or groups seek to remedy any disjuncture between the pressures or needs they experience and their available resources by seeking better life course “fit”—either increasing their available resources, reducing their pressures or needs, or redefining the situation to make it more acceptable (see Figure 13.1). Note that enacted role behavior shapes beliefs and values to be more congruent with that behavior (see Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Lioa & Cai, 1995; Moen & Erickson, 1995).

A sense of personal control or mastery (also called efficacy) is defined as a perception of being in charge of the circumstances of one’s life (Bandura, 1982, 1989), and is

typically higher among men than women. It has been and remains an important concept in social science research. Bandura (1982) holds that “self efficacy is concerned with judgments about how well one can organize and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements” (p. 23). Bandura and others (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1993, 1995; Rodin, 1987, 1989; Zarit, Pearlin, & Schaie, 2002) theorize personal mastery as a key psychological resource, one that is particularly important in the face of stressful events or chronic strains. It has been linked theoretically and empirically with both direct and buffering effects in reducing the risks of distress and the impacts of stressors on psychological well-being (Koeske & Kirk, 1995; Moen, 1997; Rodin, 1989; Spector & O’Connell, 1994; Spector et al., 2001).

But where does a sense of personal mastery come from? Research shows that this sense of efficacy is related to actual experiences of effectiveness, as well as the toolbox of resources (e.g., education, income, social network) individuals can potentially draw on in response to the crises and chronic pressures in their lives. Thus, conceptually we are theorizing two types of control: 1) the degree of autonomy and choice individuals experience within the work and family ecologies in which adulthood is played out; and 2) the subjective assessment by individuals of their abilities to take charge of their lives. Moreover, both men’s and women’s sense of efficacy varies with shifts in life course “fit” between demands and resources over the adult course (e.g., de Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, & Bongers, 2003; de lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, & Bongers, 2004; Downey & Moen, 1987; Karasek, 1979, 1998; Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

Our ecology of the gendered adult course framing underscores the gender- and age-related distributions and combinations of employment and family needs and pressures as well as personal, social and financial resources. Sociologist Glen Elder (1995) describes control cycles wherein individuals feel more or less vulnerable, or more or less able to cope with the exigencies at hand. This is congruent with Heckhausen and Schulz’s (1995) life-span theory of control, Baltes and Baltes’ (1990) selective optimization with compensation (SOC) theory of human development, and Carstensen’s (1992) social-emotional selectivity theory. Each of these theories emphasizes the importance of ecological contexts. Each depicts adult development as an unfolding process whereby individuals seek to maximize their effectiveness at all ages by selectively choosing some relationships and activities over others. Doing so enables adults to both accentuate their resources and play down the intellectual and physical deficits that accrue with age.

Life course scholars propose that it is the *gap* between needs/pressures and resources that produces cycles of control, or, conversely, cycles of stress for women and men at different times in their lives. In particular, the concept of life course “fit” (Moen, Sweet, & Swisher, 2005; Sweet, Swisher, & Moen, 2005; Swisher, Sweet, & Moen, 2004) consists of adults’ perceptions of the nexus or gap between pressures and the resources with which to deal with them, as well as expectations of future gaps. This resources-to-needs ratio varies by age, career development, and family stage, as well as by gender and location within the socio-economic structure. Expected or unexpected events can also reduce perceptions of life course fit. People currently undergoing or anticipating a family or workplace transition (a new child, a chronic or acute illness, a layoff or promotion) are at risk of a shift in either pressures or resources, or both, shifts that can precipitate change in adults’ control at home and at work, as well as their perceptions of personal mastery.

Adulthood entails a series of adaptive strategies as men and women seek to gain, sustain, or regain life course fit and with it a sense of personal control in the face of insufficient resources to meet their goals, expectations, and the demands upon them (Moen

& Wethington, 1992). Adults of different ages, at different life stages, and with different pressures and resources, strategically select (or are allocated to) roles and relationships, and with them particular ecologies. Such selections concern, for example, the timing and types of education, occupations, employment arrangements, marriage, parenthood, family size, residence, relationships, and proximity to kin. At historical periods when adult roles are tightly age-graded and gender-graded, adulthood consists of established roles and scripts that reify age and gender distinctions. Scholars (Heinz & Marshall, 2003; Kohli, 1986a, 1986b, 1994; Marshall, Heinz, Kruger, & Verma, 2001; Mayer & Tuma, 1990) refer to this as the standardized, lock-step life course that emerged in Europe and North America through the institutionalization of public education, adolescence, occupational paths, retirement, social welfare regimes, and old age. These institutional arrangements are outdated, however, given the enormity of social changes in longevity, technology, the political economy, and gender roles. The result?—an exacerbation of strains across the adult course for women and men.

Five Propositions about Strategic Selections and Gender

Most social and behavior research looks for differences in outcomes based on what Bronfenbrenner terms different “social addresses”: ecologically significant categories such as occupation, family composition, educational level, social class, and (of course) gender. But from a cycles of control perspective, we know that women and men are not randomly distributed across different jobs, different work hours, different family types or circumstances. Neither do they necessarily remain in these situations. We summarize our thinking about strategic selections of women and men through the adult course in five propositions.

Adult Development is an Ongoing “Project.” The adult course has become something of a project, as men and women make strategic choices in efforts to regain a sense of control over their lives and improve their life course fit. The adaptive strategies they “choose” remain gendered, however. Women continue to be allocated (and often feel) responsibility for most domestic chores, child care, and family timetables, even though most now have jobs (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Gerson, 1985; Hertz, 1986; Hochschild, 1989, 1997). Men are seen as—and continue to feel—responsible for “bringing home the bacon,” despite the fact that most households require two incomes to survive and men increasingly want to actively participate in parenting. Gender also continues to shape life chances and life quality, even though few people now believe that women and men are inherently different in ways that would justify strict role divisions and resource disparities.

Viewing adult development as a project clarifies strategic selections and course corrections as on-going. For example, women and men construct particular family ecologies by tending to marry people of similar social positions and values or else someone who is their polar opposite (Kalmijn, 1998; Lucas et al., 2004). A considerable body of research also shows the gendered developmental impacts of family conditions and transitions. In reviewing evidence on the transition to parenthood, Demo and Cox (2000) note that studies following people into parenting find variability in their adjustment to it. Their review suggests that parenting stress is similar for both new mothers and fathers. They also conclude that mothers and fathers both report lower stress when fathers take part in child care at home. From the vantage point of cycles of control, life course fit and strategic selection, one can consider how women and men select themselves into or out of parenthood, and into and out of active parenting, including how men opt to take part

in the care of their new infants. This also points to the institutional convoys constraining active parenting options of new fathers: the fact that women but not men are expected to do most of the infant care, and men but not women are expected to remain full-time breadwinners throughout adulthood, regardless of family care needs.

Adaptive strategies themselves may shift over the life course, becoming more or less gendered. For example, Josselson (2002) makes the important point that girls learn early to put aside their own feelings to please others, but may rethink such strategies in middle adulthood. Josselson also notes that as a woman's life progresses, she may see that what seemed like a choice at the time was in fact determined by fear, passivity, impulsivity, unconscious wishes, or external pressures.

Thus, the gendered ecologies of adulthood aren't just "out there;" they are both the consequence of men's and women's strategic selections of some roles and relationships and not others, choices made in constrained, shifting, and progressively more ambiguous cultures and structural arrangements (see Figure 13.1).

Structural Constraints Limiting Options Affect Men's and Women's Health and Life Quality. Various strands of research evidence support our theorization of adulthood as a project: dynamic processes of strategic role and relationship selections that position women and men in different circumstances, with different options, resources, challenges and constraints. For example, occupational health scholarship (e.g., Karasek, 1979, 1998; Karasek & Theorell, 1990) demonstrates that adults' job control (in terms of how one does the work) promotes health and well-being. But such latitude on the job is not distributed evenly across men and women in the workforce. Karasek and Theorell (1990) note that men are more likely than women to have high control over their work circumstances. Moreover, they find a negative relationship between decision latitude on the job and workplace demands for women. This means that women tend to be in jobs with low control but high job demands, precisely the arrangement which exacerbates strain. When men work in jobs with high demands, these jobs also tend to offer them greater control over their work circumstances and demands. Karasek and Theorell find that degree of job control becomes the difference between whether job demands promote growth and learning or psychological strain. Another related study shows that having more job autonomy actually increases negative home to job spillover for men, whereas it decreases it for women (Mennino, Rubin, & Brayfield, 2005). These authors point out that this:

... illustrates the discrepancy between having more job autonomy, as the men in this study do, and increasing demands on men to be more involved in domestic responsibilities. These combined pressures can only lead to more spillover between home and the workplace unless institutional support is present. (p. 120)

Consider, as another example, how being in gender-atypical occupations plays out in adult development. Evans and Steptoe (2002) examined well-being among men and women in England who were employed in a traditionally male-dominated occupation (accountancy) and in a traditionally female-dominated occupation (nursing). The highest levels of anxiety were found among women in accounting, and the highest rates of absence due to sickness were found among men in nursing. The researchers concluded that "men and women working in jobs in which they are in a minority, and where the culture is dominated by the opposite sex, may be especially vulnerable to stress-related problems" (p. 490). Our control cycles theory of gendered strategic selections encourages analysis of the kinds of people who enter or remain in male- or female-dominated

occupations. At the very least, scholars using cross-sectional data should reflect about such selection processes (for example, who is in certain occupations, or not in the workforce and how did that come about), even if it is impossible to establish them empirically with single point-in-time data.

Pavalko and Smith (1999) find that the amount of time that women spend in employment tends to slow the progression of physical health limitations as they age. Conversely, providing care for an aging parent or another infirm relative is negatively related to both physical and emotional well-being. Ali and Avison (1997) investigated women's transitions into and out of paid work in their longitudinal study of single and two-parent families living in London, Ontario. They found single women who leave their jobs suffer a substantial increase in distress due to loss of income, while married women who leave jobs do not. Moreover, when a transition into employment is coupled with significant increases in caregiving strain for married women, their emotional distress increases. From a control cycles vantage point, we can theorize [ask] why some women spend a great deal of time in the workforce, while others move in and out, and some other leave the workforce early or delay entry. We can also theorize possible distinctions in resources and options between women who are married or single, as well as between those who are or are not involved in caregiving.

Strategic Selections have Long Term Consequences. Women and men make ad hoc choices that may make sense at the time but that sometime have long-term deleterious consequences. Men's focus on paid work and women's focus on unpaid family care work perpetuate gender disparities in income, status, benefits, and other resources. Our cycles of control model theorizes individual strategies of adaptation as embedded in a web of social relations and social structures offering, in fact, only a limited number of options. For example, even though most American workers report a desire to put in less time at work (Clarkberg & Moen, 2001), women and men cannot work fewer hours without real penalties in terms of health care, wages, and job security (Kelly, 2005a; Moen & Roehling, 2005), and women are more apt to incur these penalties.

Because women tend to move in and out of paid work and in and out of various (often unrelated) jobs more than do men (Han & Moen, 1999a, 1999b, 2002; Rosenfeld, 1992; Sorensen & McLanahan, 1987; Williams & Han, 2003) they seldom reap the rewards of following the lock-step career mystique, producing widening economic inequalities by gender with age (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 1998; Crompton, 2006; Folbre, 2001; Moen & Roehling, 2005; O'Rand & Henretta, 1996; Padavic & Reskin, 2002; Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 2000; Waldfoelgel, 1995, 1998).

In this way, both women's and men's strategic role selections—which often do make sense for them and their families—remain gender strategies, unintentionally reinforcing older patterns of gender inequalities for those who chose them, as well as reinforcing stereotypes that affect the possibilities for all women and men. The repercussions are tangible. Looking only at fulltime, year-long employees in 2004, women earned 76.5 percent as much as men. If part time and part year workers are included in this measure, the ratio would be much lower (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2005).

Strategic Selections are More Deliberate and Difficult in Times of Social Change. Rational choice theory (Becker, 1981) depicts individuals as making optimal decisions, but "optimal" is difficult to cipher within a kaleidoscope of change. Consider the irrelevance of, for example, etiquette manuals developed in Victorian England as guides for behavior today. In times of social change, parents, teachers, and other models and mentors cannot provide

to members of the next generation useful preparation and metrics for assessing “optimal” choices throughout the adult experience. Individuals coming to or moving through 21st-century adulthood are offered as their only resource “outdated guidebooks,” presenting obsolete blueprints and irrelevant advice. Contemporary young, middle-aged, and older adults are no longer sure about where they are, much less where they are going.

We theorize that women’s and men’s strategic selections reflect processes of on-going learning—about the world and about oneself—precisely because existing scripts are no longer relevant. But old strategies die hard. Age- and gender-graded institutional arrangements serve to pull people back into traditional adult paths that remain divided by gender as well as age. As Powell and DiMaggio (1991) point out, existing social arrangements provide a guide to action and produce shared expectations that, in turn, foster psychological security. Attempts to change existing arrangements are often resisted because they threaten individuals’ sense of security, increase the cost of information processing, and disrupt routines (see also Moen & Orrange, 2002).

Endorsing Gender Equality is not Enough to Change Gendered Institutions. Most Americans now endorse gender equality in every sphere, and landmark legislation has reinforced the belief in and the right to equal access and opportunity in education, jobs, and community roles. But some variant of traditional gendered divisions of housework, childcare, and paid work persists even when both spouses work full time outside the home.

We argue that gender inequality is now less a consequence of discrimination and patriarchy than a function of a series of mindful, seemingly pragmatic decisions on the part of employers, employees, and families. For example, cultural beliefs presuming that a mother will prioritize family over paid work bias employers’ and managers’ expectations about her ability, performance, and appropriateness for authority even more strongly than for a woman who is not a mother (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). There is growing evidence that women who are mothers of dependent children face special disadvantages in the labor force even compared to other women (Budig & England, 2001). Women are more likely than men to work part time or to avoid overtime in order to manage child-rearing and other caregiving work (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2005) that remain principally “women’s work.” Many employers’ stereotypical expectations that women are not interested in long-term careers are thereby reinforced. Some managers then assume that all women—or at least all mothers—are less committed to their jobs. Of course, such assessments are inaccurate and arguably constitute sex discrimination (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Kelly, 2005a; Williams & Segal, 2003). Men in turn, continue to embrace the role of family breadwinner, accentuating their willingness to devote enormous amounts of their energy, focus, and time to their jobs.

Two studies of caring for aging or infirm relatives offer suggestive evidence as to the gendered processes and consequences of strategic selection, as well as the absence of institutional supports. Fredriksen (1996) captures some of these control cycle processes in a study of university employees who also have caregiving responsibilities, defined as “assist[ing] an adult family member or friend who has a health problem or disability.” Caregiving demand was defined as the number of children in house, number of hours providing informal adult care, and characteristics of care recipient (i.e., age, resides in home, functional impairment). Women are more likely than men to both be caregivers (strategic selection) and to report higher levels of caregiving strain, work interference and role strain (consequences of strategic selection). Not surprisingly, women tend to have fewer resources and higher levels of caregiving demand. While men tend to help spouses, women tend to help everyone (see also Gerstel, 2000; Sarkisian & Gerstel,

2004). Women employees in this study also were more likely to anticipate job termination as a response to their caregiving responsibilities. The women caregivers also endorsed employer-provided benefits more than did their male colleagues.

Marks (1998), drawing on data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, finds that caring for a disabled child or spouse is associated with poorer health for women, while only spousal care was associated with negative effects for men's well-being. Marks also finds caregiving is conducive to well-being, net of work-family conflict. She concludes:

[I]f steps were taken to make work-family conflict less problematic for employed caregiving women, women caregivers would evidence considerably less distress than they currently do, and some additional psychological benefits of the caregiver role would emerge more clearly. (p. 962)

Contemporary gender strategies have less to do with gender *values* than with outdated government and business policies that limit options in the time and scheduling of jobs and the inflexibility of career paths (Moen & Coltrane, 2005).

Conclusions: Converging Divergences?

The gendered adult course itself may seem “natural,” but it has been constructed historically through cultural beliefs and norms about the ways women's and men's lives should play out, as well as through institutionalized organizational structures that constrain and open options by gender.

In this chapter we have theorized a dynamic ecology of gendered adult development. Our ecology of the life course perspective locates lives in historical time, emphasizes the unfolding of roles and relationships over time, and recognizes the importance of agency as women and men respond to and shape the gendered environments around them. Although gender differentiation is now more subtle than it was in the past, gender remains a visible source of both difference and inequality, especially related to the most gendered role of all—parenthood—and its impacts on employment experiences.

Contemporary adult development is taking place on a moving platform of multilayered social, economic, and technological transformations rendering existing gender scripts and gender systems obsolete. The mismatch between contemporary exigencies and outdated scripts and structures (geared to a very different, 1950s-style adulthood) means that women and men of all ages and stages make strategic adaptations within a climate of uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk.

The result? An increasing degree of variability both within and across gender and age in the experiences and exigencies of adult life. We call this trend *converging divergences* (Moen & Altobelli, 2007; Moen & Chermack, 2005; Moen & Spencer, 2006a), in that neither men's nor women's lives now follow taken-for-granted timelines. “Convergence” invokes processes of increasing similarity (in, for example, women's and men's labor force participation) over historical time. Most men and men women now participate in both paid work and unpaid family carework. Adult insecurities are also converging across gender lines, in that many women and men—even those in the middle class—have neither job nor income security, regardless of their tenure in a particular job or corporation. “Divergence,” on the other hand, suggests a widening of within-gender disparities as a consequence of the deinstitutionalization of traditional gendered expectations around paid work, families, and adulthood. We hold that adult development is both converging (across gender) and diverging (within gender categories).

Basic processes of gendered development unfold in the real-world environments of home and work, as adults seek to integrate and gain a sense of control over the disparate aspects of their lives. People today come to each role transition—marriage, employment, parenthood—with no common set of experiences or expectations. Moreover, people are constrained by their own or significant others' prior choices (buying a home, taking one job over another, marrying, having a child) and by multi-layered social transformations that call for pragmatic, rather than optimal, actions. In decisions large and small, gender continues to operate as a master status (Bem, 1999; Merton, 1968), directly and indirectly shaping identities, relationships, risks, and resources, as well as role trajectories and transitions, but there are also significant variations among women as a group and among men as a group.

Our ecology of the gendered life course theorizing of the adult course suggests a complex process of adult development as individuals strategically respond to policies or practices premised on standardization (as reflected in outdated cultural and organizational allocation and socialization of people by age and by gender) along with emerging processes of individualization. A global economy, new technologies, and values of gender equality, along with other transformations, mean that contemporary adulthood is a complicated project; often challenging institutional timetables and expectations related to education, occupational career paths, marriage, parenthood, and retirement (see also Neugarten, 1968; Rossi, 1980; Stewart & Healy, 1989). Today, the linear path of adulthood as a lock-step movement from schooling to employment to retirement is being upended as people return to school at different ages, get laid off from (supposedly) lifetime career jobs, take up jobs in completely different fields, or are often are “encouraged” (through buy-outs and layoffs) to retire earlier than they expected. Older workers function under age stereotypes about their inability to learn new skills, and worry about their job security (Bybee & Wells, 2002).

Family clockworks are in similar disarray. Young adults sometimes move back home when they can't support themselves. As Mortimer, Staff, and Lee (2005) point out, what it means to be an adult is no longer self-evident to young people in the midst of that transition. Women and men are postponing marriage, never marrying, or leaving marriage. Even, parenthood now occurs on many different time tables. Women are having their first child at 15 and 50, or not having children at all. Men in their 80s are fathering kids, often with second or third (younger) wives. Demographic changes are also reconfiguring the adult years as Baby Boomers move toward and through the traditional retirement years. Increasing longevity means that adult children are now more apt to share more years with their aging parents and daughters especially, but sons as well, are likely to care for infirm relatives.

We end this chapter where we began: to understand the gendered nature of contemporary adult development requires attention to time, ecological context and dynamic processes of socialization, allocation, and strategic selection. We have shown that dynamic convoys of institutions and relationships shape how adults spend time—including the entire adult course—in gendered ways. These convoys shift across the adult course as new roles and relationships are entered, others are exited, and still others shift as a result of maturation, experience, or both (such as the changing parent-child relationship over a 60-year period). Moreover, social and institutional convoys around work and family roles and relationships are themselves in flux, as a result of a changing workforce, a global information economy, egalitarian gender norms, and shifting family life. These large-scale social transformations are creating new risks, uncertainties, and challenges,

producing considerable absence of life course “fit” in adulthood for women and men at different ages and life stages.

The mismatch between outdated rules and updated but ambiguous realities is producing a sense of ambivalence about current and future ways of living (see also Bourdieu, 1990; Lüscher & Pillemer, 1998; Orrange, 2007; Sewell, 1992; Sutor & Pillemer, 1994) and of “doing” gender (Bem, 1994; Moen & Spencer, 2006a; Orrange, 2007; Risman, 1998; West & Zimmerman, 1987). We propose the future trends of converging divergences across gender divides in adult development, as women and men pursue similarly diverse paths—in whether and when to marry, have children, divorce, move, go back to school, shift jobs, retire.

There are two ways to change the gender stratification system, from the top down and from the bottom up. Some scholars argue that you have to first change beliefs, norms and stereotypes and then concrete changes will appear (such as equitable income). Other scholars suggest that changing gender systems and structures leads to corresponding changes in gender stereotypes, beliefs and norms (Serguino, 2007). We have made the point in this chapter that contemporary gender inequalities are in large part the result of the fact that jobs remain structured for breadwinners with homemakers, even though neither men nor women are apt to have such back up. When couples have children, therefore, it is women’s wages and career progression that suffer (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). But the temporal organization of jobs and career paths—the “typical” work day, workweek, work year, work life institutionalized in public and corporate policies and practices—limits employee control and flexibility in arranging their daily schedules, as well as their control and flexibility over arranging their career paths. Gender equality is difficult if not impossible without the development of greater career and schedule flexibilities in the clockworks of workdays, workweeks, work years, and work lives (Kelly & Moen, 2007). Without such fundamental work redesign, the only way to gender equality seems to be for women and men alike to function as if they have no obligations outside of their jobs.

The absence of relevant blueprints for contemporary adulthood can be disconcerting, to be sure. But it also presents opportunity—for individuals, couples, schools, employers, communities, and governments to reimagine and reinvent alternative scripts of the adult experience. Organizations and nations *can* create a range of options for meaningful, productive and integrative pathways that move beyond the gendered adult course. The challenge is to recognize the need and the value in doing so.

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