

Transition to Parenthood and Multidimensional Well-Being. Does Personality Play a Role?

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Introduction

The life course perspective envisions lives as multidimensional pathways made of interdependent trajectories such as family, employment, residence, health, sociability trajectories, or psychological well-being (Elder, 1985). Multidimensionality involves at minimum two or more life domains simultaneously. This means that while the occurrence of events and transitions may be specific to one life domain, there may be spillover effects from one trajectory to the other. Negative spillover effects diffuse the consequences of hazards across life domains (e.g., Feijten, 2005; Widmer et al., 2012). Positive spillovers, on the other hand, are the consequence of circulation of resources from one domain to the other and trigger resilience (e.g., Bakouri & Staerklé, 2015; Jacob & Kleinert, 2014). Spillovers may be factual, such as changes in employment status or family configurations, or they may happen at the level of attitudes, identity redefinition, and changes in perceptions, touching on the subjective side of individual life-course trajectory (e.g., Hanappi, Ryser, & Bernardi, 2014; Joseph & Linley, 2005).

In this paper we investigate the empirical evidence for spillover effects across the life domains of family, work, leisure, and emotional well-being. Adopting a longitudinal perspective, we focus on changes of life-, job- and leisure-satisfaction before and after childbirth. We additionally examine how fixed personal resources or attributes, particularly gender and personality traits, may moderate these spillover effects.

Life satisfaction—the cognitive evaluation of one’s overall well-being—is considered here as an outcome indicating resilience, as it is known for being only temporarily affected by major life events (Cullati, Courvoisier, & Burton-Jeangros, 2014; Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012). Admittedly, the literature on changes in life satisfaction before and after childbirth is burgeoning (e.g. Anusic, Yap, & Lucas, 2014a, b; Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014). Yet, little of this research simultaneously considers changes in satisfaction with other life domains, such as job satisfaction or satisfaction with amount of leisure, their reciprocal interdependence and potential moderators of these relationships. Furthermore, the literature looking at family related transitions and various dimensions of well-being is largely written from a singular disciplinary perspective. However, the understanding of how people react to certain life events could benefit from a more comprehensive theoretical approach that is able to connect and transcend disciplinary boundaries. This study intends to jointly address sociological, demographic, and psychological explanations of individuals’ experiences of vulnerability and the interplay between family, work, leisure, and emotional health.

In a first part of the paper we review the existing research on family related transitions and their effect on life, work, and leisure satisfaction outcomes. We will also explore the literature on possible moderators of these relationships. We then engage in an original longitudinal analysis that examines the causal effects of a specific family transition – the transition to parenthood – on changes in general life satisfaction, as well as satisfaction in specific life domains like work and leisure.

Several demographics, such as gender, or personal characteristics, such as personality, will be studied as potential moderators.

Background and theoretical considerations

Research only recently started to look at trajectories of job satisfaction (e.g., Boswell, Boudreau, & Tichy, 2005; Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011). The way major life events such as the birth of the first child trigger changes in job satisfaction is also almost completely ignored (for an exception, Georgellis, Lange, & Tabvuma, 2012). In their meta-analytic review, Amstad and colleagues (2011) for example, deplored the lack of longitudinal studies assessing family-work processes and the preponderance of only crude investigations of how parenthood affect work-related outcomes. The birth of a first child constitutes a major event in people's life, necessitating several rearrangements in the allocation of time and resources. As such, in addition to changes in their life satisfaction, first parenthood is likely to modify individuals' satisfaction with their work or with the amount of their leisure. We therefore first examine the relationship between first childbirth and changes in work and leisure satisfaction. Such analysis is particularly interesting since recently the cross-domain influence of family challenges on some work-related outcomes such as turnover intention and work strain has been tempered (Nohe, Meier, Sonntag, & Michel, 2015; Nohe & Sonntag, 2014).

We additionally look at moderating effects of personality on the causal link between the transition to parenthood and life, work satisfaction, as well as leisure satisfaction. We are inspired here by interactionist models taking into account events and individuals' personality to explain their joint contribution to changes in job satisfaction (Ilies, Schwind, & Heller, 2007). Our perspective is that personality, in addition to influencing baseline levels of individuals' satisfaction with different life domains (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Judge & Hulin, 1993), also impacts the way people react to what happens in their life (e.g., Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). As such, personality should modify the way the first child affects changes in job and leisure satisfaction. Until now, existing research on the moderating effect of personality on the relationship between major life event and changes in satisfaction has been inconclusive. Conscientiousness, for instance, has been shown to influence changes in life satisfaction due to unemployment (Boyce, Wood, & Brown, 2010). But attempts to replicate these findings with a variety of personality dimensions and life events have failed (Anusic, Yap, & Lucas, 2014; Yap, Anusic, & Lucas, 2012). One possible explanation might reside in the fact that life satisfaction is usually considered as more stable than domain specific satisfaction since it integrates people's satisfaction with several domains (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2003). If this is the case, then it might be easier to observe how personality influences the way people deal with the challenges and hindrances that having one's first child poses to specific domains than to their (overall) life satisfaction.

Finally, we anticipate gender differences in the extent to which life, work, and leisure satisfaction evolve before and after the transition to parenthood, as highlighted by previous findings (e.g., Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014).

Data and methods

Data

We use data from 30 waves (1984-2013) of the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), a large-scale representative longitudinal study of the German adult population (Wagner, Frick, & Schupp, 2007) and one of the longest running panels.

The SOEP includes reliable measures for the key mediators examined in our study (e.g., personality) and all the necessary information allowing for the examination of changes in life, work and leisure satisfaction before and after childbirth. Its substantially large sample size enables us to perform analyses across multiple population subgroups. We only select respondents for whom first birth occurred during the participation/ observation window (i.e., 1984-2013), who were between 14 and 49 years old at entry into the panel, and who participated in the panel both before and after childbirth. Final sample size comprises 4,330 respondents (2,042 men and 2,288 women).

Measurement of variables

We measure *life*, *work*, and *leisure satisfaction* on an identical 11-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ('completely dissatisfied') to 10 ('completely satisfied'). The SOEP provides data on satisfaction related outcomes annually. Information on the timing of first childbirth is taken from the birth biography data file. The five constructs of personality (neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness) are measured on 3-item scales.

Time-varying controls include: *education* (i.e., number of years spent in education or training), *age* (categories: 1 '17-25', 2 '26-30', 3 '31-35', 4 '36-40', 5 '41-45', 6 '46-50', 7 '51-58'), *survey period* (1 '1984-1988', 2 '1989-1993', 3 '1994-1998', 4 '1999-2003', 5 '2004-2008', 6 '2009-2013'), *employment status* (1 'full-time', 2 'part-time', 3 'not working'), *self-rated health status* (1 'bad', 2 'poor', 3 'satisfactory', 4 'good', 5 'very good'), and *marital status* (1 'married', 2 'single', 3 'widowed', 4 'divorced', 5 'separated').

Analytical approach

We estimate fixed effects models to study intra-individual change in general and work-related satisfaction measures. Fixed effects models subtract within-person means over time from both sides of the equation ("within transformation"), thus relating temporal variation in satisfaction only to temporal variation in the explanatory variables. The main benefit of this approach is that it nets out all time-constant heterogeneity between individuals, even if unobserved. In fixed effects models with panel data, only variables that vary over time enter the estimation. Because personality is a time-constant variable, we perform all analyses on groups of different personality types. Within this extended abstract, we only look at the following three personality groups: those with high (i.e., above average) neuroticism, high extraversion, and conscientiousness. To examine a more detailed time profile of satisfaction and see how outcome variables vary not only at time of childbirth, but both years before and years after transition to parenthood, time fixed effects (i.e., dummy variables) are included in all models. These dummy variables denote seven time periods: (a) 3 years before (reference period), (b) 2 years before, (c) 1 year before, (d) year of childbirth, (e) 1 year after, (f) 2 years after, and (g) 3 years after childbirth. This method enables us to uncover changes in satisfaction related to the anticipation of, initial reaction to, and longer-term adaptation to the transition to parenthood.

Preliminary results

Table 1 reports the results of a set of fixed effects models of life satisfaction, stratified by gender and personality group. The data show an increase in life satisfaction for both men and women at the time of first childbirth, but more so for highly extroverted

women, who also experience a boost in happiness a year after the transition to parenthood. Table 2 contains the estimates of fixed effects models of work satisfaction. While first childbirth produces no significant changes in the job satisfaction of fathers, women's transition to parenthood triggers significant decreases in satisfaction with work, both during the year of childbirth and the years that follow. Personality plays an important role, with women that score high on conscientiousness and particularly neuroticism experiencing the largest drops in job satisfaction. Finally, Table 3 presents findings related to leisure satisfaction. We observe a similar significant decrease in leisure satisfaction during and years after first childbirth for both men and women. Personality type is salient for both genders, as highly neurotic and highly conscientious men and women report significantly lower levels of leisure satisfaction, particularly three years after the transition to parenthood.

Future plans

We intend to further explore the mediating role of personality by including interactions with personality in the same model to properly test for significant differences between personality groups. Future plans also include theoretical explorations concerning the manner in which personality provides different buffering and/ or hindering tools for women differently than men while they experience the transition to parenthood.

Table 1. Fixed effects models of life satisfaction

	Men				Women			
	Total sample	High neuroticism	High extraversion	High conscientiousness	Total sample	High neuroticism	High extraversion	High conscientiousness
First child birth (ref.: 3 years before)								
2 years before	0.022	0.155	0.030	0.006	-0.014	-0.002	0.023	-0.032
1 year before	0.102	0.275*	0.056	0.078	0.149**	0.087	0.182**	0.131*
Year of birth	0.156*	0.315*	0.110	0.107	0.290***	0.254*	0.340***	0.284***
1 year after	0.010	0.197	-0.039	-0.033	0.124	0.116	0.175*	0.132
2 years after	-0.053	0.087	-0.100	-0.109	-0.043	-0.124	0.032	-0.057
3 years after	-0.078	-0.136	-0.128	-0.163	-0.045	-0.076	0.055	-0.055
<i>N (observations)</i>	9,178	2,255	5,691	7,587	10,089	4,040	6,857	8,524
<i>N (individuals)</i>	1,731	416	1,016	1,361	1,925	738	1,243	1,543

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Models control for education, employment status, age, survey period, marital status, and self-rated health.

Table 2. Fixed effects models of satisfaction with work

	Men				Women			
	Total sample	High neuroticism	High extraversion	High conscientiousness	Total sample	High neuroticism	High extraversion	High conscientiousness
First child birth (ref.: 3 years before)								
2 years before	0.061	0.270	0.103	0.117	-0.122	-0.176	-0.144	-0.101
1 year before	0.069	0.188	0.016	0.081	-0.323**	-0.537***	-0.294*	-0.313**
Year of birth	0.033	0.245	0.035	0.071	-0.398**	-0.697***	-0.307*	-0.393**
1 year after	0.045	0.243	-0.011	0.081	-0.460**	-0.573*	-0.296	-0.364*
2 years after	0.018	0.169	-0.057	0.053	-0.481**	-0.550*	-0.310	-0.377*
3 years after	0.031	0.217	-0.035	0.064	-0.481**	-0.467	-0.392	-0.431*
<i>N (observations)</i>	8,447	2,085	5,237	7,017	5,998	2,445	4,187	5,210
<i>N (individuals)</i>	1,713	412	1,007	1,350	1,651	649	1,101	1,362

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Models control for education, employment status, age, survey period, marital status, and self-rated health.

Table 3. Fixed effects models of satisfaction with amount of leisure

	Men				Women			
	Total sample	High neuroticism	High extraversion	High conscientiousness	Total sample	High neuroticism	High extraversion	High conscientiousness
First child birth (ref.: 3 years before)								
2 years before	0.013	-0.011	0.091	0.033	0.032	0.053	0.039	0.073
1 year before	0.015	-0.049	0.047	0.013	0.199*	0.169	0.205*	0.224*
Year of birth	-0.192*	-0.036	-0.152	-0.192	-0.198*	-0.267	-0.149	-0.132
1 year after	-0.240*	-0.277	-0.176	-0.261*	-0.394***	-0.426*	-0.374**	-0.321**
2 years after	-0.369**	-0.330	-0.369*	-0.393**	-0.444***	-0.543**	-0.395**	-0.409**
3 years after	-0.420**	-0.563*	-0.365*	-0.414**	-0.548***	-0.642**	-0.483**	-0.532***
<i>N (observations)</i>	8,716	2,165	5,479	7,285	9,557	3,879	6,595	8,180
<i>N (individuals)</i>	1,730	416	1,015	1,360	1,925	738	1,243	1,543

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Models control for education, employment status, age, survey period, marital status, and self-rated health.

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