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Linkages between family background, family formation and disadvantage in young adulthood

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1. Introduction

Family change has been an important driver of the rise of socio-economic inequality in Western societies (Amato et al. 2015; Anon 2018; Putnam 2015). In all Western societies there have been increases in unmarried cohabitation, the number of children that are born outside of marriage, and divorce (Lesthaeghe 2010; Perelli-Harris et al. 2010; Shanahan 2000). According to the “Diverging Destinies” theory, single parenthood and divorce have particularly increased among the lower social strata, leading to increasing disadvantage for children born in low educated families (McLanahan 2004). While much research has focused on the intergenerational transmission of social status and children’s socio-economic outcomes, this dissertation focuses on the influence of family background on the way people form their own families. Understanding family formation is important as it may form the foundation for how social inequality is passed on to the next generation. This dissertation aims to increase the understanding of how the relationship between family background and family formation has changed over time, and how family formation today is linked to advantage and disadvantage.

William J. Goode once predicted that with the increasing development of societies, the number of arranged marriages would decrease, indicating that the influence of parents on their children’s family formation patterns would also decrease (Goode 1963). However, even if in line with Goode’s prediction the influence of parents may have decreased, this does not mean that social background no longer has a large influence on family formation behavior. Yet, theories on family formation change pay relatively little attention to the role of family background. Furthermore, studies usually focus on someone’s own socio-economic position at the moment of entering family formation, with limited attention to the influence of characteristics of the parental home. However, the literature on social mobility shows that

individuals with higher educated parents are (still) much more likely to become highly educated compared with those with lower educated parents (Bar Haim and Shavit 2013; Breen and Jonsson 2005). If the parental home remains to have such a strong influence on education, it is also likely to have a strong impact on other domains of life, such as family formation. More generally, just as educational level mediates the impact of parental education on career success, family formation may play an important role in the intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantage.

To contribute to our understanding of these issues, this dissertation covers two main research questions. The first research question is: How has the relationship between socio-economic background and family formation developed over time? The second research question is: What are the consequences for the individual of choosing a particular family formation pathway? In answering these questions, I adopt a life-course perspective (Elder 1994), in which family formation is considered as a process rather than it being split into single events. In this perspective, events in family formation have to be studied in relation to one another as the linkages between the events constitute what family formation entails. Furthermore, this dissertation takes into account that life courses take place within a context and that lives are interdependent. I examine how characteristics of the lives of one's parents impact one's own family life-courses and early adult life-outcomes. My main focus is on the role of parental education, although in two Chapters (4 and 5) I also examine the role of childhood family structure, parental income and racial background. Furthermore, a particular innovation of this dissertation is that it also examines to what extent the impact of the parental home has changed over time in different contexts.

Another contribution of this dissertation is that I measure the impact of family formation by linking it to indicators of subsequent wellbeing. The consequences of specific family formation patterns are often unclear. For instance, someone who gets married and has children

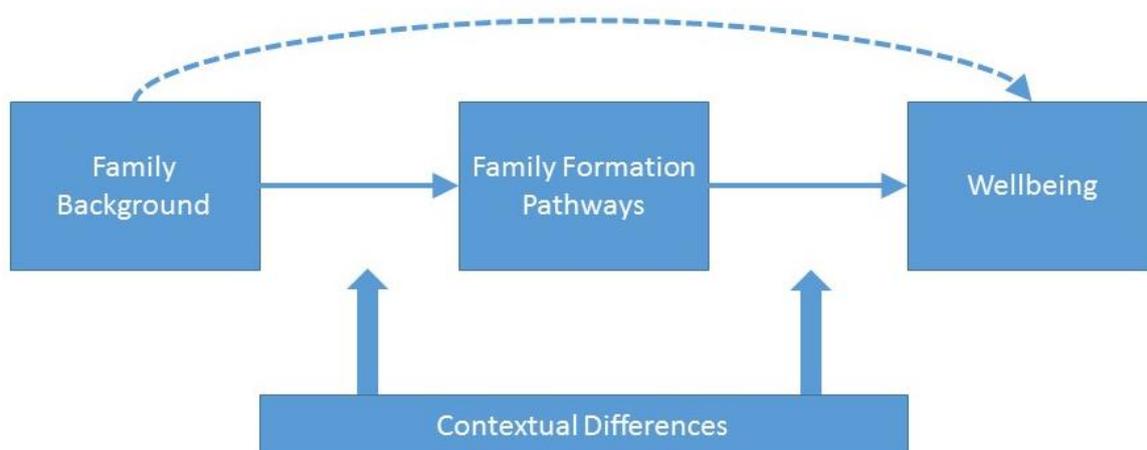
does not necessarily have a better quality of life compared with someone who remains single. There is research indicating that some family formation patterns, such as childbirth outside of marriage, are related to disadvantage (McLanahan 2004; Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011). However, most research on family formation does not reveal explicit linkages between family behavior and subsequent wellbeing, and when it does, it usually investigates the impact of one particular element of the family formation process, rather than investigating how family formation pathways as a whole impact wellbeing later in the life-course. Naturally, there is an abundance of indicators of wellbeing, some subjective and some more objective, which cannot be covered in a single dissertation. In this dissertation, I chose to study more objective indicators of wellbeing, as I want to unravel how family formation patterns are related to advantage and disadvantage in important life domains. Therefore, I link family formation patterns to two specific life-outcomes in young adulthood: income (economic outcome) and obesity (health outcome).

Figure 1 displays the theoretical model that underlies the structure of the dissertation. The figure represents the linkages between family background, family formation pathways and wellbeing, in which family formation pathways are expected to mediate the relationship between social background and wellbeing in (young) adulthood. The strength of all linkages may depend on the context, in which I consider differences both between countries and over time (period). Social background refers mainly to the socio-economic background, captured by socio-economic status of the parents, but in Chapters 4 and 5 I also include childhood family structure and racial background. Family formation pathways refer to how individuals start their own families and do not (necessarily) cover their whole family trajectory across the life-course. Finally, wellbeing in this dissertation is captured by more objective indicators that are associated with (dis)advantage rather than by subjective wellbeing. While there are many indicators to choose from, I chose to examine financial security and health. My first research

question on how the relationship between socio-economic background and family formation has evolved over time relates to the left side of the model. My second research question on the consequences for the individual of choosing a particular family formation pathway is covered on the right side of the model.

The outline of the remainder of this chapter is as follows. First, I discuss the theoretical framework of this dissertation, which will be split in three parts; mechanisms on how socio-economic background influences family formation, changes over time in the link between socio-economic background and family formation, and consequences of family formation for wellbeing. Second, I discuss the methodological approach used in this dissertation. Finally, I outline the chapters of this dissertation.

Figure 1 Theoretical model



1.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1.1 The link between socio-economic background and family formation

Research has demonstrated that in most Western countries socio-economic background influences family formation. Young adults with a high socio-economic status (SES) background are more likely to postpone family formation events than young adults with a low SES background. This is true for entry into cohabitation, but even more so for entry into marriage and parenthood (Anne Brons, Liefbroer, and Ganzeboom 2017; Koops, Liefbroer, and Gauthier 2017; Sassler, Addo, and Hartmann 2010; Wiik 2009). Furthermore, young adults of lower social background have a higher chance of becoming parents outside of marriage, in particular when single parenthood is concerned (Amato et al. 2008; Koops et al. 2017). Multiple explanations have been suggested as to why family formation patterns are different for those from high and low socio-economic background. Many of these explanations point to differences between social classes in the way that they socialize their children and in the resources they can provide them.

Keijer et al. (2018) distinguish two ways in which social background can influence the family formation behavior of the children later in life. First, through the transmission of family values. Research demonstrates that the attitudes of parents and their children on marriage, fertility and divorce are often similar (Axinn and Thornton 1993; Musick 2002). Keijer, Liefbroer and Nagel (2016) show that highly educated parents often have higher age expectations regarding marriage for their children, and that children's own preferences for the timing of family formation are therefore also at a higher age than those of children with lower educated parents. Second, social background can impact family formation of the children through parents serving as a role model for their children's family formation behavior. High socio-economic status (SES) parents are less likely to have entered marriage at a young age.

On the other hand, low SES families generally have their children earlier, in some occasions even in their teens, making their children themselves also more likely to experience childbearing early (Barber 2000). There is a strong link between marital and fertility timing of the parents and that of their children (Axinn and Thornton 1993; Barber 2001), but also more in general family pathways that are similar between parents and children (Fasang and Raab 2014; Liefbroer and Elzinga 2012).

Preferences of parents and children may not always be easily distinguishable, but there are some preferences that could be considered as the youth's own, such as preferences around partner choice. According to marriage market theory, individuals differ in their desirability based on their social status, with individuals of high SES families being more desirable because of their SES background than those from a low SES background (Oppenheimer 1988). At the same time, individuals usually choose to marry someone with similar social background and social status (Kalmijn 1998). Those who are more desirable on the marriage market may be less inclined to marry early because they want to search for a high status partner, who are more scarce on the market, leading to the postponement of family formation (Oppenheimer 1988). Individuals from high SES background may also be more reluctant to marry straight away, because they want to take more time to be sure that the partner is the right one. Rather, they may first cohabit with their partner and only when they think that they are ready for the next step, proceed to marriage and having children. This kind of cohabitation is referred to as a "trial marriage" (Hiekel, Liefbroer, and Poortman 2014). On the other hand, individuals from disadvantaged background may have lower expectations and aspirations with respect to their partner and therefore proceed faster with family formation.

The transmission of family values through socialization is not the only mechanism linking social background to family formation. There are general differences in preferences and aspirations between those of high and low social SES background, which ultimately result

in different family formation pathways. Education and career aspirations play an important role. High status parents motivate and support their children to be successful in education in order to facilitate their later careers, helping them to maintain their social status throughout their lives in order to avoid downward mobility (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). This does not imply that low educated parents do not wish their children to be successful in education, but rather that the aspirations of low educated parents are lower than those of high educated parents. As a result, low educated parents may push their children less towards attending higher education (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997), making children of high status more likely to stay longer in education than children of low social background. These educational differences also result in differences in family formation. Family formation usually starts after exiting the educational system. Staying in education serves as a moratorium preventing family formation, as evidenced by the fact that marriage and fertility rates are higher for those out of the educational system than for those still in it (Blossfeld and Huinink 1991a; Thornton, Axinn, and Teachman 1995). In sum, children from high social origin often are more successful in education, making them more likely to postpone family formation, whereas youths from disadvantaged social origin may more often enter family formation at a young age as an alternative to pursuing higher education (Amato et al. 2008).

Next to socialization differences in preferences and aspirations, resources and constraints are also important in explaining social background differences in family formation. Wealthy parents can help their children facilitate the transition to married life (Avery, Goldscheider, and Speare 1992), for instance by helping their children purchase a house (Helderma and Mulder 2007). Differences in educational outcomes can also be explained from a resource perspective. High SES parents are more likely to invest in their children's education making them more likely to become highly educated (Acemoglu and Pischke 2001). There are also theories as to why children from higher socio-economic background fare better

in the education system. Best-known is the theory of Bourdieu, for whom children of higher SES background possess more cultural capital (tastes, preferences and language use) than children of lower SES background. This helps the former to navigate the educational system better than the latter (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). A study conducted by Lareau (2006) reaches a similar conclusion, but focuses on the way that children from middle and lower classes are raised, and how middle class children are raised in a more structured and empowering way that facilitates their educational and later career success. Thus, as advantaged children are provided with more resources to support their educational careers, disadvantaged children are more left on their own in terms of their educational attainment. Yet, even if children from low social background have received sufficient grades to enter university, they may still be less likely to do so compared with children from high SES background, because of lack of financial resources. Thus, disadvantaged children are not only less motivated or willing to continue in education, but also less able. As mentioned above, the lower likelihood to stay in education makes them more likely to enter family formation early.

Resources related to the parental home can also influence the family formation process. Children of high SES may be less inclined to leave the parental home and start a family of their own, because the circumstances are good and also their consumption aspirations are higher. So they might only want to leave the parental home when they have reached the point in their lives in which it is possible to afford the life-style of their parents (Avery et al. 1992; Easterlin 1980). On the other hand, children raised in poverty may take on every opportunity to leave the parental home, including living with an unstable partner, as this may still be better in terms of psycho-social conditions than staying in the parental home (Gierveld, Liefbroer, and Beekink 1991). Leaving the parental home abruptly may also result in entering a cohabiting relationship prematurely, which could be the start of a more unstable cohabiting relationship pattern.

Constraints can also influence the preferences of children. Disadvantaged youths may feel that a high-status job is unachievable for them and may therefore drop out of school. Furthermore, disadvantaged youths are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as having unprotected sexual intercourse, thereby having a higher risk of becoming pregnant (Miller 2002). Friedman, Hechter & Kanazawa (1994) describe how youths instead of their career may focus on family formation. Disadvantaged youths may feel that while being successful in education is impossible, they can achieve starting a family. Edin and Kefalas (2005) describe how disadvantaged teenagers in the United States, even though they know that becoming a parent at a young age with an unstable partner is risky, may prefer to have a child as this is a goal within their reach. Thus, perceived barriers may alter youths expectations on what is an attainable family pathway for them.

In sum, there are multiple mechanisms through which social background can have a pervasive impact on social background. The focus of this dissertation will however not be on testing specific mechanisms, but rather on measuring the impact of social background on family formation and life-outcomes in young adulthood. Instead, a prime focus of this dissertation is to what extent the influence of socio-economic background has changed over time. I will discuss this issue in the next section.

1.1.2 The link between socio-economic background and family formation change

The most influential theory that describes why changes in family formation have occurred is the Second Demographic Transition theory (from now on SDT), first posited by Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa (1986). As the name suggests, the second demographic transition occurs after

the first demographic transition. The first demographic transition links modernization and the decline of mortality as a result of medical advancement and improved hygiene in societies with a sharp decline in fertility (Kirk 1996). According to the SDT theory, a second transition occurs after societies develop a welfare state, in which economic safety is guaranteed for a vast majority of the population. This allows individuals to make choices independently and more focused on their own needs, rather than being constrained by social institutions or family obligations. Key changes in family formation include the postponement and the decline of marriage, postponement and decline of fertility and the rise of couples living together unmarried. International research on this topic has demonstrated that very many Western countries these changes indeed occurred (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004; Kiernan 2004; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008)). Lesthaeghe and colleagues describe the cultural change underlying the family life changes as a Maslowian drift; if human beings are provided in their most basic needs, they have more room for developing their own goals and aspirations, also referred to as self-realization (Lesthaeghe 2010). This process can be described as an increasing individualization of society and according to the theory it is this cultural shift that made people opt for different ways to start and maintain family life. While the SDT theory focusses on individualization, the theory does acknowledge other cultural and structural changes in society that can have an impact on family change, including secularization, the reduced power of the Church on family life, educational expansion, allowing more people to liberate themselves from more traditional ways of thinking, technological development (UID, contraception), providing humans better tools to plan fertility, and feminism, empowering women in making more independent decisions regarding their family life (Lesthaeghe 2010).

According to the SDT theory, the highly educated are the frontrunners of family formation change as they are more liberal and therefore more inclined to part with existing traditions in a society if this suits them. This also implies that children of the highly educated

are subsequently more likely to choose for new family formation pathways as their parents have more liberal views on family formation. The idea of the SDT theory is that while family formation changes may at the start only be visible among the higher social strata, eventually change diffuses across all layers of the society. Thus, according to the SDT theory the impact of SES background would increase at the early stages of the SDT, but then decrease as family formation behavior becomes more common and accepted among all members of the society. Although not explicitly mentioned in the theory, its emphasis on individualization implies that individuals will increasingly make important life decisions, such as when and how to start a family, on their own and be less influenced by third parties such as parents, family or social institutions. Thus, from the perspective of family change as portrayed by the SDT theory, one would expect the influence of SES background to become the weaker, the more attitudes and behaviors related to the SDT permeate societies.

There are, however, also indications that the impact of SES background has not decreased, or that it has even increased, in Western societies. The link between social class and divorce could be an explanation for increasing social class differences in family formation. The SDT theory describes the rise of divorce as one of the major changes that occurred as part of this transition. However, the SDT theory itself does not link divorce with social class. The relationship between divorce and social class has changed over time, as first the higher social classes were more likely to divorce, while more recent studies show that it is the lower social classes that have become the most likely to experience divorce (De Graaf and Kalmijn 2006; McLanahan and Jacobsen 2015). This means that children growing up in low SES households are more likely to experience parental divorce and thus the disadvantages stack up for the disadvantaged children. McLanahan (2004) describes this process in the United States, and calls “Diverging Destinies” the phenomenon of lower SES background increasingly experiencing marital dissolution and living with single parents over the years, implying that

the changing family patterns between the high and low social classes may play an important role in exacerbating social class inequality. The higher likelihood of lower-class children to experience parental divorce may also play a role in family formation differences between social classes once these children have reached adulthood. Research on the impact of parental divorce on the family formation behavior of children demonstrates that children of divorced parents are less likely to marry, but that they cohabit earlier compared with those from intact homes (Härkönen, Bernardi, and Boertien 2017; Wolfinger 2005). Thus, children from lower SES background may partly display different family formation behavior compared with their peers from higher SES background, because of their higher likelihood of having experienced a parental divorce, which was less the case in the decades before.

The Diverging Destinies narrative resonates with a common criticism on SDT theory, i.e. that SDT theory only considers cultural change and neglects differences in economic circumstances across time and place (Zaidi and Morgan 2017). Perelli-Harris and colleagues claim that those with little economic resources choose unmarried cohabitation and childbearing outside of marriage over married family life not because they prefer to, but rather because they do not have the resources to marry (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010; Perelli-Harris and Gerber 2011). The Pattern of Disadvantage (PoD) theory, as it is referred to in the literature, posits itself as an alternative to predictions made by SDT theory, by claiming that many decisions regarding family life are the result of economic constraints rather than of cultural preferences. In support of this claim, Perelli-Harris and colleagues find that even among countries that are considered to have experienced the SDT, those with lower education are more likely to have a child outside of a relationship or within cohabitation rather than marriage. Next to the PoD theory, Blossfeld and Mills (2013) argue that globalization of the economy has a significant impact on family formation behavior, particularly the rise in uncertainty on the job market, leading to postponement of family formation.

Many scholars have criticized SDT theory for being a theory on family change that applies mainly to Northern and Western Europe and not to other developed countries around the world (Sobotka 2008; Zaidi and Morgan 2017). They state that family values are rooted in the culture and institutions of a particular country or region and therefore family behavior change will differ between contexts and are difficult to compare. Proponents of the SDT, on the other hand, argue that the basic principles of the SDT are visible in all developed countries, but that different countries or even regions within countries vary in the time that the SDT occurs (Lesthaeghe 2010; Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2005). Nevertheless, following SDT theory one would ultimately expect convergence between countries in their family formation behaviors, but also a convergence in a weaker link between social background and family formation for all countries. On the other hand, from alternative perspectives, such as the diverging destinies and PoD, one would not expect a decrease in the influence of social background, but even a potential increase of the influence of social background on family formation, as social inequality increases in a country. Therefore, societies may vary in the strength of the link between social background and family formation, depending on social inequality and poverty. Thus, a country comparison may reveal the empirical validity of different perspectives.

Only few studies have provided empirical tests of change over time in the impact of social background on family formation. Results from these studies are mixed. Some find a decrease in the impact of SES background, but these are only in single country contexts, such as Norway and US (South 2001; Wiik 2009). Cross-country comparative research finds an impact of socio-economic background in multiple Western countries, but these studies do not examine whether within countries there has been change in the influence of SES background over time (Anne Brons et al. 2017; Koops et al. 2017). Yet, all this research thus far has focused on single transitions, such as cohabitation, marriage and parenthood. This dissertation will examine the impact of socio-economic background on family formation more holistically.

While it is interesting in itself to examine how the link between socio-economic background and family formation changed over time, examining the consequences for individuals of certain family formation patterns has strong societal relevance as well. I will discuss this issue in the next section.

1.1.3 Consequences of family formation on wellbeing

While there may be a clear link between social background and family formation, which could have also changed, the question arises to what extent it matters. As mentioned above, the new diversity and differences along different social backgrounds may be partly the result of different preferences regarding family formation, but when differences in family formation facilitate the transmission of intergenerational disadvantage, research on links between social background and family formation becomes of major societal relevance.

An important way in which family formation links with inequality over the life course is through the potential incompatibility with career. Above, we mentioned how being enrolled in education often prevents individuals from starting a family. Education is a means for disadvantaged youths to climb the social ladder. However, disadvantaged youths may not be able to pursue an academic career because of family obligations. For instance, when someone becomes a parent in his or her late teens, he or she may have to search for a job in order to cover the costs of having a child, whereas if there would not have been a child, this same person would have entered tertiary education, which would have provided the person with more valuable human capital. Research demonstrates that teenage single parenthood has detrimental effects on income for both men and women over the life course (Christopher et al. 2002; Dariotis et al. 2011). It may not only be parenthood that has an impact on career development.

For instance, having a spouse may also hinder career development, as individuals may be less inclined to move for a job opportunity if it means leaving their spouse behind. In short, career and family are not always compatible, but when individuals have more time to first develop their careers before being potentially constrained by family life, they become more able to build human capital, which provides them more economic security over the life course.

Since family and career are so intertwined and dependent on one another, one cannot study the impact of different family formation patterns without considering educational and work careers. As a result, the study of family formation also links to another important line of research, i.e. research on the transition to adulthood (Billari, Philipov, and Baizán 2001; Furstenberg 2010; Hogan and Astone 1986) or emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000). Research in this area focusses on when major transitions such as leaving the parental home, leaving education, entering the labor market, cohabitation, marriage and parenthood take place and in what order (Aassve, Billari, and Piccarreta 2007; Amato et al. 2008; Sironi, Barban, and Impicciatore 2015). As the list of transitions demonstrates, the transition to adulthood is a demographically dense life-phase in which many key life-events take place (Rindfuss 1991). This type of research, however, often views life-course pathways as outcomes in themselves and does not make the consequences of specific life-course pathways.

Family formation pathways do not only affect career and income, but also other aspects of wellbeing and health of a person. For instance, Waite and Gallagher (2002) analyzed the benefits of married life in the US. They find that, apart from better finances, married couples generally have a better wellbeing, live longer and have better sex. However, marriage is not only associated with benefits, as multiple studies have shown that marriage is related with higher prevalence of obesity. Furthermore, those who marry run the risk of divorce and life-outcomes of the divorced are relatively poor (Covizzi 2008; Waite and Gallagher 2002). The benefits of marriage may also depend on characteristics of the marriage. For instance,

Berrington (1999) finds that those who enter a marriage early are more likely to divorce compared with those who enter marriage relatively later. Thus, the benefits of family life are likely to be linked with how family life started.

Social background influences what kind of life path an individual chooses and the different life paths are in turn associated with different levels of (dis)advantage. This means that advantaged youths are also more likely to choose pathways that are associated with better outcomes in terms of wellbeing, whereas for disadvantaged youths it is the other way around. The idea that disparities over the life-course become larger is also referred to as the Cumulative Disadvantage theory or framework. This cumulative (dis)advantage framework was first introduced by Merton (1968) to describe differences in the careers of academics, but it was later applied more generally to careers, but also to the life-course in general (Claudia. Buchmann and DiPrete 2006; Dannefer 2003; Elman and O’Rand 2004). The role of family formation in cumulative (dis)advantage could be twofold. First, certain family formation pathways may be linked to relatively immediate disadvantages. As mentioned before, those starting a family early may have to forgo on postsecondary education, which lowers their labor market position compared with others that do obtain a higher educational degree. Second, family formation could influence subsequent family outcomes that in turn could be related to more positive or negative outcomes. For instance, those who have a child early without a partner may find it more difficult to find a high-quality partner later. On the other hand, those who enter family life successfully may have provided themselves a foundation for a stable life, giving and receiving the financial and emotional support they need. Thus, what occurs during the start of the family life-course has major implications for what follows and thereby the wellbeing of individuals.

Measuring the impact of family formation on indicators of wellbeing is challenging. In the next section I will discuss methodological challenges.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

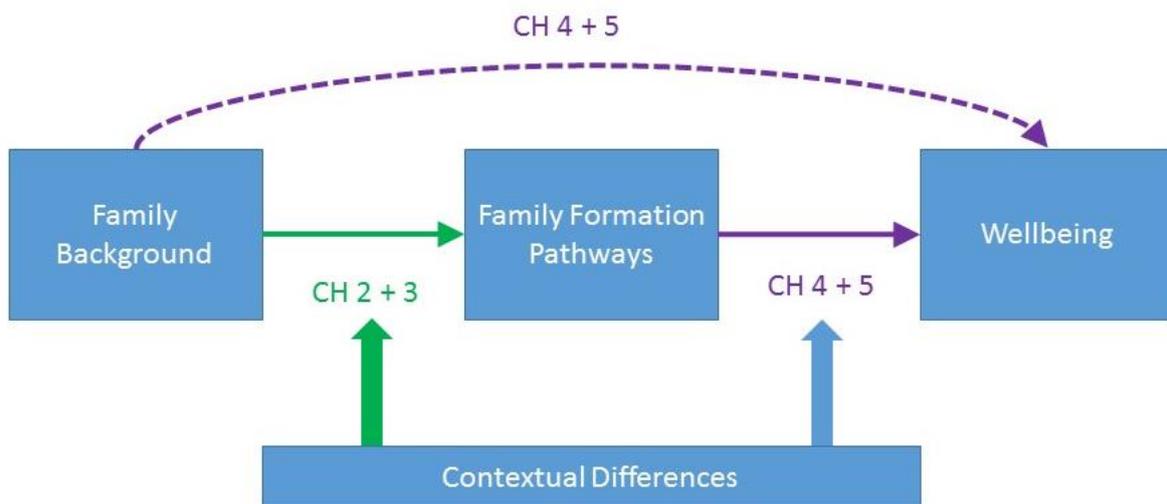
Family formation is a process and not a simple sum of events or transitions. One therefore requires a method that can capture this life-course complexity. Much research on family formation has used event history analysis (EHA) (e.g. Baizán, Aassve, and Billari 2003; Blossfeld and Huinink 1991; Liefbroer and Corijn 1999), and in this thesis I also use discrete-time event history logistic regression (Allison 1982). An advantage of this method is that one can (more easily) assess what the impact is of indicators that vary over time. The use of EHA also facilitates a macro-micro approach. In Chapter 2, for instance, I use a macro indicator representing the national economic conditions in a particular time period, in order to assess whether the relationship between socio-economic background and relationship formation changes depending on these conditions. Next to models predicting the timing of first union and first marriage, I also use competing risk models in which one can assess the relative risk of following one transition over the other, in this case unmarried cohabitation over marriage.

While investigating the risk to experience certain transitions, such as marriage and parenthood, or the competing risks to experience either of two events, such as marriage or cohabitation, provides useful insights, family formation is a process in which the type, timing and ordering of events provide specific meaning to the family formation process as a whole (Billari, Fürnkranz, and Prskawetz 2006). For instance, cohabitation can be perceived as ‘trial marriage’ when it precedes marriage, but can be viewed as an alternative to marriage when the couple never marries (Hiekel et al. 2014). Therefore, more recently, scholars have started to use more holistic methods such as Sequence Analysis (SA). In sequence analysis, pathways are defined by their distance to one another. The more dissimilar sequences are, the larger their distance (Abbott and Tsay 2000). Using a distance matrix as an input, one can subsequently cluster sequences that show relatively high similarity. SA can also provide information on

general characteristics of sequences, such as their entropy and turbulence (Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007; Gabadinho et al. 2011). Research using SA has been able to describe more in depth family change and country differences in family formation and the transition to adulthood across countries (Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007; Lesnard et al. 2016; Van Winkle 2018).

In this dissertation, I use both EHA and SA in order to study (aspects of) family formation. Not only does this dissertation use these methods, it also uses advanced applications of these methods. SA is often used in more exploratory research. In this dissertation I demonstrate that SA can also be of more analytic value, by using it to create metric independent variables, which represent differences in career and family pathways. In the next section, I will provide an overview of each chapter including the methods that will be used in each of these chapters.

Figure 2 Theoretical model displaying which parts are studied in different chapters



1.3 CHAPTERS OUTLINE

Figure 2 displays the parts of the theoretical model that will be covered in the different chapters. In Chapters 2 and 3 I aim to answer the first research question: how has the relation between social background and family formation developed over time? Both chapters use parental education as an indicator of SES background, as it captures both a cultural and economic aspect of (dis)advantage. In Chapter 2 I examine to what extent the influence of parental education on union formation changes over time and across the life-course in the Netherlands. More specifically, the study examines the influence of parental education on the timing of the first union, the timing of first marriage and the choice for either unmarried or married cohabitation as the first union among Dutch born between 1930 and 1990. As mentioned above, according to SDT theory one would expect the influence of parental education to decrease over time. Next to possible cultural change I also assess whether changes in national economic conditions may account for the variation of the influence of parental education on union formation. For this, I apply event-history analysis. Parental education is measured by mother's and father's education. Furthermore, the study examines whether the effect of mother's and father's education on union formation varies with age, birth cohort, economic conditions and gender.

Chapter 3 expands on Chapter 2 in two ways. First, this chapter examines the influence of parental education over time on family formation rather than (only) first union formation. Second, instead of one country context (the Netherlands), this chapter includes four European countries, Sweden, France, Italy and Romania. The first two countries can be considered as having experienced the SDT early, whereas Italy and Romania experienced the SDT later. The question is to what extent the influence of parental education on family formation has developed (dis)similarly across these four European countries. Data from the first wave of the Generations and Gender Survey (Vikat et al. 2007) is analyzed using Competing Trajectories

Analysis (Studer, Liefbroer, and Mooyaart 2018). Competing Trajectories Analysis (CTA) is an analytical procedure which combines sequence analysis and event-history analysis. Applying this procedure, I examine over time change in the influence of parental education on timing of family formation and on what kind of family pathway is opted.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the second research question: What are the consequences for the individual on choosing a particular family formation pathway? Both chapters use the same data set, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997). This is a panel research conducted in the United States by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Respondents were first contacted in 1997 when they are still in high school, between the ages of 12 and 17 and then followed annually ever since (biannually since 2011). Each year respondents report their monthly status in terms of education, employment (weekly), relationship status. Using this information, I construct career and family sequence data for each respondent. In Chapters 4 and 5, social background is operationalized in a more multifaceted way. The data also contains a parental supplement, which contains information on parental education and parental income. Finally, I also use childhood family structure and race as social background indicators in both chapters. Thus, in these chapters a broad and diverse set of social background indicators are included.

In Chapter 4 I aim to broaden the understanding on intergenerational transmission of advantage through a life-course perspective. In this study I link social background and life-course pathways in the transition to adulthood, i.e. career and family pathways from the age of 17 until 25, with income trajectories from 25 to 32. It is important to examine income trajectories as income from a single point in time can provide a distorted view (Cheng 2015). In this study I examine whether social background remains to have an impact on income trajectories even if one takes into account the career and family pathways that an individual followed. Furthermore, I examine whether both family pathways and career pathways matter for income trajectories. To measure the influence of social background and career and family

pathways during the transition to adulthood on income trajectories in young adulthood growth curve analysis is used. Optimal Matching (Abbott and Tsay 2000) is used to cluster career and family pathways. From each of these clusters a medoid sequence is obtained, which is a sequence that best represents the cluster. Next, the relative distance of a respondent's trajectory to each of these medoids is calculated. These 'Grade of Membership' variables (Manton et al. 1992) are then included, together with the social background variables, in the growth curve model to predict whether having a career or family sequence more or less similar to the medoid of that cluster is associated with higher income and income growth.

In Chapter 5 I examine the combined influence of career and family pathways on obesity risk. Multi-channel sequence analysis (Gauthier et al. 2010; Pollock 2007) is used to cluster different types of career-family pathway combinations. After this analysis, I construct a variable indicating to which cluster a respondent belongs. This variable is then included in a logistic regression with obesity risk at age 28 (this age is chosen as group of the respondents have only just reached this age) as the dependent variable. The same social background indicators as in Chapter 4 are included. Furthermore, a variable on obesity status at age 17, i.e. prior to the transition to adulthood is included. Therefore, this chapter controls for possible selection of obese youths into certain career and family pathways.

In Chapter 6 I summarize and discuss the results from the empirical chapters. Implications of the results are discussed as well as directions for future research on the influence of social background on family formation.

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