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Introduction to the special issue: Family change among immigrants. Examples from Germany and Sweden

In a recent review of the state of family sociology in Germany, Huinink (2006) notes that despite a recent increase in research on immigrant families, it remains an area of research that calls for more attention. This special issue of *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung* is an attempt to contribute to this emergent area of research for family sociologists. There are at least two reasons for including immigrants in research on the family. First, although good data are hard to come by, families where at least one of the adults was born elsewhere now constitute an important part of most of the EU countries. Second, many of family sociology's central questions cannot be answered adequately without paying attention to the variations and differences that may characterize immigrant families. In fact, going through the list of research areas that Huinink (2006: 214-215) characterizes as the most important in contemporary family sociology, it becomes evident that there are strong reasons to suspect that by not paying attention to families of immigrants, we will be missing an important part of the story.

Let me give some examples from Huinink's three perspectives on the family: The societal perspective, including changes in family structure, social inequality and the family, and the family and other social institutions such as the welfare state; the perspective on familial relations, including the division of labor and childrearing practices; and the individual perspective, i.e. how individual lives are couched in and influenced by the family.

Looking at the family as a social institution, it is evident that if we exclude immigrant families, then we may provide an inaccurate depiction of the distribution of family structure and changes in family forms as new groups of immigrants form families and older groups converge toward the national norm. The interplay by the family and the state is another arena that is poorly understood, if we do not know much about the special needs, circumstances or expectations that different immigrant groups may have. A welfare state that has been built on the assumption of active participation of both men and women in the labor market (as in the Scandinavian countries, for example), is confronted with a different set of issues related both to fairness and cost if a part of the population has completely different ideas about the role of women in the family and society.



If we look at the family in light of the interaction that takes place within and between families, then it's also clear that we may learn different things if we include immigrant families in our research. The division of labor between men and women, authority relations within families, expectations about intergenerational material support, and child rearing values and strategies are all potentially quite different in immigrant families than in the native population.

Finally, looking at the family as a context for individual development, the immigrant family may serve both as a tremendous resource for its members or as a serious constraint on successful integration into the host country. Understanding decisions about marriage and childbearing, educational choices and careers is furthered by a better appreciation of the families in which individuals are embedded. Such an appreciation is not possible unless both native and immigrant families are included in empirical family research.

There are then strong reasons for encouraging family researchers to view the study of the many varieties of immigrant families as an integral part of family sociology and not just a concern of immigration scholars. As long as most research on immigrant families is published in venues that are not mainstream family sociology, such integration will be hard to come by. Hopefully, this special issue will be a small step in the direction of such integration.

The four papers included in this issue all address central questions about change in immigrant families. Three papers focus on Germany and one on Sweden. In "The process of family reunification among original guest workers in Germany," Amparo González-Ferrer uses data from the German Socio-Economic Panel to question the conventional understanding of when and how the guest workers that were recruited in the 1960s and early 1970s brought their relatives to Germany to settle permanently. She shows that the labor migrants were not made up largely of single men who only decided to bring their relatives when Germany stopped the recruitment in 1973. In fact, a large proportion of married guest workers migrated *together* with their spouse. She also shows that joint migration of couples or rapid family reunification became even more common over time. While she rejects the notion that the 1973 stop for immigration had much effect on family reunification, she finds strong support for the hypothesis that changes in children's allowances in 1975 did create strong incentives for parents to bring any children they might have in their native country to Germany. The analysis presented in this paper clearly could not have been done if the GSOEP did not include samples of immigrants. It also shows forcefully that immigration decisions are not individual decisions taken in a vacuum, but decisions that are embedded in family relationships.

The three other papers all focus on the extent to which immigrants change their family behavior and attitudes to approach those of the host country. Bernhard Nauck, who has been an important early contributor to the study of immigrant families in Germany, provides an overview of changes over the last 40 years of Turkish, Greek and Italian immigrants to Germany. He focuses on three major issues where change has been prominent, namely marriage behavior, fertility and intergenerational relations. The study of marriage and fertility turns out to be quite difficult in Germany, because marriages and births taking place outside the country are not re-

gistered in Germany. This means that register data give a very limited picture of marriage and fertility among people who may choose to marry or have a child outside Germany.¹

Willingness to consider marrying a German is a commonly used measure of the social distance between an immigrant group and the native groups. Using survey data, Nauck shows that by 1995 more than half of Turkish parents would agree if their child married a German. This was up from about a third only ten years earlier. Among Italian and Greek parents the figures were considerably higher at between 85% and 90% in 1995, but also for these two groups were the change between 1985 and 1995 considerable. I was surprised to see that fewer among the young and not yet married express an interest in marrying a German. It would have been interesting to know how native Germans react to marriage between a German and a foreigner. Such data seem not to be available.² Despite the relatively high support for inter-ethnic marriage, Nauck suggests that "restrictive immigration policies ... provide strong incentives for members of the first and second immigrant generation not to look for a spouse in the receiving society but in the society of origin."

Another area of rapid change has been in childbearing. Immigration delays the family formation process and reduces the number of children born. This is especially pronounced for women who have some education. By 1993, only Turkish women have a higher fertility rate than native born West-Germans. In other words, Germany cannot rely on the immigrant population to solve the problem of low fertility.

Attitudes toward family and marriage are also central to the analysis in the paper by Eva Bernhardt and Frances and Calvin Goldscheider. Using Swedish survey data for a sample of young second generation immigrants from Turkey and Poland and a sample of native Swedes, they examine attitudes towards forming partnerships through cohabitation rather than marriage, views on finding a partner outside one's own ethnic group, and preferences regarding the balance of work and family when there are young children in the house. Cohabitation is very common in Sweden, so it's no surprise that more than 85% of native born Swedes found that it's OK even if the couple has children. Almost as many among the second generation Polish group agreed, while only about half of the second generation Turkish immigrants did so. Support for cohabitation under any circumstance is then less strong among the Turkish youth, but it was still less than 20% who thought cohabitation was never OK. On the question of marriage outside one's own ethnic group, young people of Polish origin generally thought that unproblematic, and they believed their parents would agree. Among the young Turkish men and women about a quarter thought it very important to marry within their group, and more than half thought their parents would find endogamy to be important. Just as in Germany, we then see distinct differences between immigrant groups with some expressing views very similar to the native born, and others still showing some distance.

1 The data on fertility of immigrants are so poor that the Federal Statistical Office has stopped calculating fertility rates for immigrants to Germany (Nauck 2007: 41).

2 It's interesting to note that a similar question was asked by the young respondents in the Swedish survey used in the paper by Bernard et al. Also in this study was the question not asked of the Swedish sample.

In the Bernhardt et al. paper, questions were also asked about attitudes towards the Swedish ideal of an egalitarian division of labor between women and men when there are small children at home. The pattern resembles the one found for attitudes towards cohabitation and ethnic intermarriage. Swedish and Polish youth of both sexes express overwhelming support for an egalitarian division of labor. Young women of Turkish origin are almost as likely to prefer an egalitarian model, but their brothers are more skeptical. Less than half of Turkish young men view the ideal work division as being egalitarian, compared to 71% of the women in this group. The gender gap is then substantial, leaving open the possibility that young men of Turkish origin might find it difficult to find a partner within their own ethnic group who shares their view of ideal family life.

This discrepancy between men and women is also central to the findings reported in the last paper by Hanna Idema and Karen Phalet. They use German survey data of Turkish same-sex parent child dyads to study the transmission of gender-role values. The paper provides an exhaustive review of the literature on cultural transmission with a special focus on gender-role value transmission focusing both on the transmission that takes place between generations and the role played by the intercultural relations between migrants and the host country. The findings of the study were complex, but what stood out for me was the extent to which the transmission process was different for boys and girls. Specifically, there was strong evidence of “intergenerational change towards more egalitarian gender role values in women, in combination with the persistence of conservative values in young men.” (Idema and Phalet 2007: 31). Education, especially of mothers, is a prime force enabling the emergence of egalitarian gender role values. It would be interesting to see whether mother’s education also has an influence on son’s in this direction. This would require data on mother-son dyads as well as on mother-daughter dyads. The discrepancy between young men’s and women’s gender role values reported in this paper as well as in the Swedish paper, seems to call for much more research, as expressed by Idema and Phalet in their concluding sentence: “Looking across gender, the key theoretical question to be answered in future studies is whether the egalitarian shift of second-generation women is part of a global trend towards a modern family model of interdependence, or whether these women will have to choose between westernizing in exchange for equal status, or reinventing a tradition that perpetuates gender inequality” (Idema and Phalet 2007: 101).

Clearly, this brief introduction to the special issue cannot do justice to all aspects of the analyses presented in the four papers that follow. Nonetheless, I hope it will be sufficient to make the reader interested in studying each of the four articles in full. I also hope that this issue will encourage other family sociologists to take up some of the challenges and opportunities the presence of immigrants in our midst present us with. I look forward to see more research on immigrant and native families submitted to and published in *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*.

References

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