

Revisiting individualization

The transitions to marriage and motherhood in Chile¹

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Abstract

The life course of Chilean women has experienced profound transformations in the past decades. It has been argued that transitions to marriage and motherhood are being postponed as they are experienced by women at an older age and are becoming events that characterize an increasingly smaller part of the female population. These changes have been often interpreted as part of a process of individualization that would have had reconfigured the cultural norms and social practices regarding gender roles and family formation in Chilean society. Nevertheless, the prevalence and diversification of the practices and norms that shape the transitions to marriage and motherhood at an empirical level remain unexplored. This paper aims to assess the individualization of the life course of women in Chile by empirically analyzing the destandardization of the practices and norms that shape the transitions to marriage and motherhood. By analyzing data from *Encuesta Nacional Bicentenario Universidad Católica – Adimark* (2009), it demonstrates that changes in the prevalence of the transitions to marriage and motherhood and the diversification of the practices and norms that shape their timing are ambivalent regarding destandardization. These results suggest that the life course of women in Chile is becoming individualized to some extent, but that this trend of cultural and social change is not consistent and uniform, but rather partial and fragmented, nonlinear, and significantly conditioned by the social structure.

Key Words

Individualization, destandardization, life course, marriage, motherhood, Chile.

The individualization of the life course

In the past decades, the theory of individualization has become one of the most important frameworks to account for cultural and social change in Western industrialized societies and around the world. Profoundly embedded in the reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994; Lash, 1993) and the emergence of a post-traditional order (Giddens, 1991), it reflects a major turn in social theory that aims to account for the centrality of the individual in understanding current social life (Howard, 2007). Following Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), individualization refers to a historical process and compulsory social condition where traditional social norms become fragmented and disintegrated, constraining individuals to actively construct their lives by making choices within a larger range of possibilities that require adjusting, coordinating and integrating emergent and differentiated institutional frameworks. From this perspective, individual biographies and life trajectories would become disembodied from traditional structural and institutional constraints, and reconfigured as they increasingly become a matter of personal decision making. Beck and Beck Gernsheim (2002: 89), have argued that individualization can be understood as ‘a historical process that increasingly tensions and tends to break up people’s traditional rhythm of life – what sociologists call the normal biography’. This means that predetermined and standardized biographical scripts are replaced by the demand and expectation of permanent decision making to create a life of one’s own. For Giddens (1991), as the power of tradition to determine individual action decreases, individuals become increasingly compelled to construct biographies within a plurality of options through the imperative of choice. Similarly, Howard (2007) argues that individualization dissolves and undermines former constraints that used to bound people to imposed standardized lives, thus opening life to personal choice and decision making and reconfiguring individual biographies.

Perhaps some of the most significant efforts to empirically address the effect of individualization in the reconfiguration of individual biographies and life trajectories have been conducted within the field of life course research. Both the conceptual and empirical approaches to the individualization of the life course have been framed in a broader discussion concerning the destandardization of the life course (Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Elchardus and Smits, 2006; Hagestad and Dykstra, 2014; Kohli, 2007; Macmillan, 2005; Mayer, 2004; Widmer and Ritschard, 2009). This discussion revolves around the extent to which the standardized life course that emerged in Western industrial societies has been challenged and reconfigured by a constellation of economic, political, cultural and social

transformations that occurred since the 1960s. Heinz and Krüger (2001) and Brückner and Mayer (2005) argue that the modern life course as a standardized, homogeneous and institutionalized set of temporal structures emerged in the industrial era of Western societies as a consequence of the development of a market economy where lives became progressively structured by the system of labour and characterized by a strict sequence of education, work and retirement. In this context, the expansion of secondary and tertiary education, the organization of working trajectories as stable careers, the increasing income security, early marriage, a large number of children, and the regulations and provisions of the welfare state, were the main factors that contributed to the standardization of the life course (Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Elchardus and Smits, 2006). This modern life course was profoundly embedded in a gender division of labour. As Kohli (2007) suggests, while the life course of men was highly institutionalized by full-time employment and long job tenure, the life course of women was structured around a male breadwinner model, marriage and childbearing, with very restricted possibilities for engagement in paid work.

From the early 1960s, several cultural, social and economic transformations have shaped the emergence of a postmodern life course in post-industrial advanced Western societies. Heinz and Krüger (2001) and Brückner and Mayer (2005), argue that the pervasive value change, the declining power of institutions, the increasing demands for autonomy and self-realization, youth and student rebellions, the extension and intermission of educational paths, the increasing occupation mobility, the flexibilization of work, the weakening of trade unions, and the pluralization of family forms, had a decisive effect in the reconfiguration of the timing and sequencing of life events. As a consequence, the life course would become a matter of individual choice, personal decision, and self-organization. This means that timings, sequences and durations of biographical transitions and trajectories would become more flexible and diverse, and articulate life courses that are less predictable, less collectively determined, less stable and less ordered, and more contingent, dynamic, and self-driven (Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Elchardus and Smits, 2006; Heinz and Krüger, 2001).

For women, the destandardization of the life course has been largely embedded in the reconfiguration of gender roles and the gender division of labour. Among others, Heinz and Krüger (2001), Giele (2004), and Giele and Holst (2004) assert that the increasing participation of women in the education system and the labour market, together with the pluralization of family formation, had a direct impact in women's transition from full-time

homemaker to a dual role of earner and caregiver, and in the decreasing number of marriages, the increase of divorces, and the reduced size of families.

It has been suggested that destandardization would represent a reconfiguration not only of practices but also of the norms that shape life course transitions (Macmillan, 2005). This is consistent with the conceptual framework that defines individualization as a process of reconfiguration of social norms (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Within the life course perspective, age norms (Settersten Jr. 2003; Settersten Jr. and Hägestad, 1996, Settersten Jr. and Mayer, 1997) reflect ideas and expectations on the optimal and appropriate time to experience life transitions. Settersten Jr. and Hägestad (1996: 179) suggest that 'cultural (age) norms are marked by three key features: First, they are prescriptions and proscriptions for behavior; second, they are supported by widespread consensus; and third, they are enforced through various mechanisms of social control'. The relevance of taking age norms into account in assessing destandardization has been stressed by Elchardus and Smits (2006), who suggest that a reconfiguration in the structure of life should be assessed on the normative conceptions of the life course.

Individualization has been used extensively in life course research to address and interpret the reconfiguration of the timing and sequencing of life transitions over time (Berghammer et al., 2014; Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Fussell, 2005; Kohli, 2007; Macmillan, 2005; Mills, 2007; Scherger, 2009). For Brückner and Mayer (2005) the individualization of the life course represents a comprehensive approach to account for transformations where individuals are assumed to acquire greater control over their lives and pursue a wider variety of life plans and biographical trajectories. As Elchardus and Smits (2006) assert, this would be the product of a cultural shift where individuals tend to deviate from conventions, collective norms and traditions, and become increasingly autonomous, reflexive and flexible, and articulate the course of their lives through personal choices and decisions. From this perspective, the individualization of the life course could be observed in the decoupling of social roles, increased deviation from social norms, and progressive disorder of life transitions (Macmillan, 2005). This framework would be particularly useful to interpret the reconfiguration of patterns of behaviour involved in life transitions related to the family. Berghammer et al. (2014) suggest that individualization is essential to understand family changes involved in the second demographic transition, characterized by a pluralization of family forms and accepted behaviours such as nonmarital cohabitation and childbearing, voluntary childlessness, and divorce.

Despite its extensive use both in social and life course research, individualization as a framework to interpret current cultural and social changes is highly contested and debated both theoretically and empirically. Currently, the nature of individualization (Howard, 2007), its intra and inter societal validity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), and its emancipatory potential and subjective consequences (Honneth, 2004), are disputed in social theory and research. In the field of life course research, individualization has been highly contested on the basis of its theoretical ambiguity, contradictory empirical evidence, and capacity to interpret social change in heterogeneous cultural contexts. Firstly, individualization has been too often used with divergent definitions (Mills, 2007) or in an unclear and undefined manner (Scherger, 2009). As Brückner and Mayer (2005) assert, there has been a lack of conceptual precision in the use of concepts to understand changes in the patterns of the life course. This means that the use of individualization in life course research has been substantially ambiguous and imprecise (Mills, 2007). Secondly, individualization has been operationalized very differently in life course research (Mills, 2007) and the available empirical evidence is ambivalent and contradictory. While most quantitative findings tend to refute to some extent that individualization has resulted in increasingly pluralized and differentiated life courses (Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Elchardus and Smits, 2006; Mills, 2007), qualitative findings tend to support individualization as a framework to account for changing patterns in the behaviour associated to life course transitions (Berghammer et al., 2014; Mills, 2007). Thirdly, the individualization of life course transitions would be specific to particular cultural, historical, social, and geographical contexts (Macmillan, 2005; Mills, 2007). As Fussell (2005) argues, the social institutions that have shaped the life course in Western Europe and North America are characterized by different features and dynamics than those of other regions of the world. Overall, the individualization of the life course continues to be in much need for further conceptual and empirical clarification.

Interpreting cultural and social change in Chile

The transitions to marriage and motherhood of Chilean women have experienced profound transformations since the second half of the 20th century. These changes are embedded in broader processes of reconfiguration of traditional gender roles and the family, and driven by a reaffirmation of the values of autonomy and self-fulfilment (Araujo, 2005), the emergence of social discourses based on the notions of rights, non-discrimination and gender equality

(Valdés, 2007), the action of feminist organizations, and changes in institutional and legal frameworks (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2010).

On the one hand, fewer women would be experiencing the transition to marriage and those that do would at an older age. Data from Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (2014b; 2015) demonstrates that in Chile marriage rates per 1,000 inhabitants has decreased radically over time; from 11.5 in 1928, to 7.8 in 1974, and to 3.4 in 2015, and that the average marriage age for women has increased from 24.6 years in 2002 to 30.9 years in 2015. Additionally, Servicio Nacional de la Mujer and Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (2004) stress that the percentage of women that are single, cohabitant, or separated has increased steadily in past decades.

On the other hand, women would be experiencing the transition to motherhood at an older age. Data from Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (2006; 2007) demonstrates that the average age of mothers at the time of birth of their first child increased from 26.11 years in 1984 to 27.75 years in 2004, and that between 1996 and 2004 the percentage of women aged 30-34 years that experienced the transition to motherhood increased from 8.7 to 11.1 per cent. Consequently, Chile would be characterized today by a late fertility structure where women aged 30-34 years have the highest childbearing rates in the country (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2014b). This is consistent with a qualitative study conducted by Yopo (2016), which demonstrates that women are postponing the transition to motherhood because of emerging cultural norms that suggest that they should have children only after achieving, for example, a good financial status to have an adequate household and the resources to educate and nurture their children. Arriagada (2004) has suggested that in Latin American countries undergoing a second demographic transition, a growing number of couples would decide to remain childless. Despite the fact that in Chile fertility rates and the average number of children per women have decreased radically over time, from 27.2 children per 1,000 inhabitants in 1974 to 13.6 in 2015, and from 5.4 children per women in 1962 to 1.79 in 2015 (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2014b; 2015), there is no consistent statistical evidence to assert that the number of women that do not have children has increased over time, and that remaining childless is a personal decision and not a condition enforced by other factors.

Overall, this empirical evidence demonstrate that for Chilean women the transition to marriage is becoming less frequent since fewer women experience it, and that getting married and having a child for the first time are being postponed since women experience them at an

older age. Nevertheless, this evidence provides no information with regards to if these trends of change represent or not an increasing destandardization of the practices and norms that shape the timing of these life course transitions.

These changes, amongst other cultural and social changes in Chilean society, have been often interpreted through individualization. Introduced at the end of 1990, this framework began to be extensively used during the first decade of the XXI century to account for the reconfiguration of individual identities, subjective experiences, behavioural patterns, personal biographies, and social roles in Chile (Yopo, 2013). In this context, individualization has been frequently used to interpret changes in women's experiences of marriage and motherhood. This framework has been used to explore the changing dynamics of couple relationships (Sharim, 2010; Sharim et al., 2011), the emergence of consensual unions (Montilva, 2007), the decrease of fertility (Herrera, 2007), the postponement of motherhood (Fuentes et al., 2010; Montilva, 2008), and the broader reconfiguration of the family (Godoy and Guzmán, 2009; Valdés, 2007). Beyond changes in the patterns of marriage and motherhood, individualization has also been used to account for cultural and social transformations in the fields of labour (Escobar, 2005; Soto, 2009), religion (Costadoat, 2004), education (Palacios and Cárdenas, 2008) cultural consumption (Güell, Peters and Morales, 2012), and social policy (Yopo, Rivera and Peters, 2012), among others.

These studies have made an important contribution to advance the understanding of current trends of cultural and social change in Chilean society. However, they fail to tackle issues that are essential to assess if and to what extent these changes correspond to individualization. On the one hand, these approaches are based mainly on conceptual discussions or qualitative empirical evidence. This means that there is a lack of quantitative evidence to empirically assess the extent to which individualization has produced a pluralization of practices and norms at the population level. On the other hand, these approaches tend to reproduce the theoretical and empirical premises of individualization, neglecting a critical reflection of the advantages and limitations of this framework to account for the particularities of cultural and social change in a context that differs in historical, cultural and institutional terms to the social context where it arose. Fruitful attempts to critically assess individualization in Chile have been carried out by Araujo (2012), and Araujo and Martuccelli (2014). Their criticism focuses on the inappropriate character of individualization as institutional individualism to account for the particular qualities and dynamics of the processes through which individuals are constituted in this particular social

context. However, because their aim is to address the subjective dimensions of individualization, their critique neglects the assessment if and to what extent cultural and social changes have led to a destandardization of the life course.

In order to contribute to a better understanding of the individualization of the life course of women in Chile, its nature and the extent to which it is taking place, in what follows this paper empirically analyzes the destandardization of the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood.

Data and Methods

Empirically, it has been suggested that destandardization 'would mean that life states, events, and their sequences can become experiences which either characterize an increasingly smaller part of a population or occur at more disperse ages and with more disperse durations' (Brückner and Mayer, 2005: 32-33). It has also been noted that 'a destandardization or individualization of the life cycle should result in great variation around the mean ideal age of the different transitions' (Elchardus and Smits, 2006: 309). Following these approaches, this paper assesses destandardization by analyzing if the transitions to marriage and motherhood are characterizing an increasingly smaller part of the population, and the extent to which the lived and ideal ages to experience them have become increasingly disperse over time.

It has been suggested that empirical studies of destandardization benefit greatly from large sample sizes and quantitative methods (Mills, 2007). In this paper I describe changes in the prevalence and timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood for women in Chile by analyzing data from *Encuesta Nacional Bicentenario Universidad Católica - Adimark*² (2009). This survey, conducted annually since 2006, aims to be an instrument to observe Chilean society and provide relevant information on the problems involved in the future of the country. The 2009 questionnaire included diverse topics such as national identity, government type and presidential attributes, fertility and attitudes towards filiation, religious identification and dynamism, and sense of belonging. This instrument represent an opportunity to explore changes in the prevalence and timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood because it enquires about the age practices and norms in which women experienced or would have wanted to experience these transitions³.

The survey was applied in Chile through face to face interviews in households to a sample of men and women (n = 2012) aged 18 and over from all socioeconomic status and districts of the country. The sample was selected using a probabilistic and stratified strategy

carried out through a four stage random selection process, with a sampling error of +/- 2,2%. The data collection processes was conducted between 15 June and 13 July 2009. This paper analyzes the data⁴ of women (n = 1038). Table 1 characterizes them according to age, socioeconomic status, education level, occupation, civil status and religious adscription.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characterization of the sample

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
Age Group			Occupation		
18 to 24	118	11,4	Full Time Paid Work	259	25,1
25 to 34	254	24,4	Part Time Paid Work	137	13,3
35 to 44	264	25,4	On leave	18	1,7
45 to 54	176	16,9	Looking for a Job	66	6,4
55 and more	227	21,9	Housework	388	37,6
Socioeconomic status			Studies	38	3,6
Upper	86	8,3	Retired	82	7,9
Upper-Middle	173	16,7	No Activity	40	3,9
Middle-Upper	288	27,7	Civil status		
Lower-Middle	401	38,7	Single no Partner	213	20,5
Lower	89	8,6	Single with Partner	140	13,5
Education level			Married	458	44,2
No studies	11	1,1	Remarried	6	0,6
Primary Incomplete	123	11,9	Divorced	142	13,7
Primary Complete	134	12,9	Widow	78	7,6
Secondary Incomplete	126	12,1	Religion		
Secondary Complete	314	30,3	Catholic	708	68,2
Technical Incomplete	44	4,2	Evangelical	189	18,3
Higher Education Incomplete	190	18,3	Other Protestant	3	0,3
Higher Education Complete	86	8,3	Other	46	4,4
Postgraduate Studies	8	0,7	None	88	8,5

To describe changes in the prevalence and timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood, descriptive and inferential analyzes were carried out using SPSS v. 24. Measure of central tendency and dispersion were analyzed to assess changes in the mean and its variation between and within age groups. Additionally, tests of relationship were performed

to assess the association and correlation between variables, and tests of difference were performed to determine if differences between age groups were statistically significant. It has been suggested that since the destandardization of the life course is adapted to personal life situations, it tends to vary according to the age of the respondent (Elchardus and Smits, 2006). In this paper, the assessment of changes in the prevalence and timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood over time had to be based on differences between age groups, given the nature of the data⁵. This means that the empirical evidence on destandardization might indicate not only trends of cultural and social change but also cohort differences. Beyond this study, differentiating age, cohort and period effects continues to be one of the most important challenges of life course research (Glenn, 2002).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the transitions to marriage and motherhood

Variable	N	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Age First Marriage	665	22,42	5,096	15	60
Ideal Age First Marriage	980	25,74	4,402	15	45
Age First Child	891	21,82	5,135	13	43
Ideal Age First Child	1022	25,69	4,416	16	41

The transitions to marriage and motherhood

In Chile, the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood are decoupled. Table 2 shows the existing gap between the lived and ideal ages to get married and have a child for the first time. On the one hand, while in average Chilean women experience the transition to marriage when they are 22.4 years old, they assert that the ideal age to get married for the first time is at 25.7. On the other hand, while in average Chilean women experience the transition to motherhood when they are 21.8 years old, they assert that the ideal age to have a child for the first time is as 25.7. Additionally, the age in which women experience the transitions to marriage and motherhood is more heterogeneous and varied than the ideal age, which is more homogeneous and uniform. This data suggests a desynchronization between the practices and norms that shape the transitions to marriage and motherhood in Chile. While women experience their first marriage and birth of their first child at younger and more different ages, they declare that the ideal time to experience these transitions is at older and more similar ages. This means that the age norms that shape the transitions to marriage and motherhood for Chilean women mobilize ideas of the ideal time to get married and have a child that are later than when they actually occur, and that are more

uniform than the practices through which they are enacted. This suggests that postponing these life course transitions is more significant as a social norm than as an observable pattern of behaviour. For Macmillan (2005: 9) this ‘disjuncture between norms about the life course and the ability to actualize such norms in everyday life’ emerges as a consequence of patterns of inequality and social stratification.

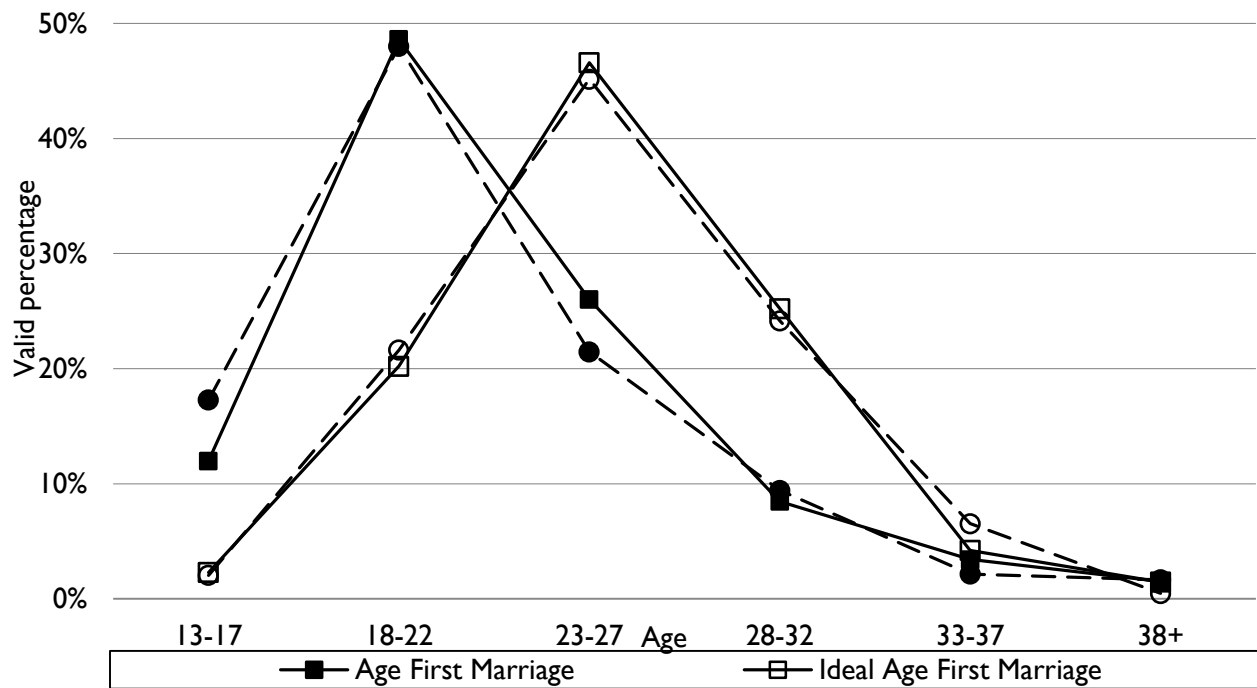


Figure 1. Distribution age and ideal age of transitions to marriage and motherhood.

Despite being decoupled, the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood for Chilean women are associated and experience similar variations. As illustrated in Figure 1, the data analysis showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between the lived and ideal ages to experience these transitions. On the one hand, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the lived and ideal ages to experience the transition to marriage ($r = 0.311$, $p = 0.000$) and to motherhood ($r = 0.185$, $p = 0.000$). This means that women that get married and have their first child at a younger age also tend to believe that a younger age is the ideal time to experience these transitions. On the other hand, there was also a statistically significant positive correlation between the lived ($r = 0.697$, $p = 0.000$) and ideal ($r = 0.640$, $p = 0.000$) ages to experience the transitions to marriage and motherhood. This means that, both at the level of practices and norms, getting married and having children are life course transitions

that are and should be experienced consecutively at a similar age. This is consistent with the results reported by Elchardus and Smits (2006) that demonstrate that in Belgium persists an ideal life course characterized by a sequential order and a strict timing of transitions.

The destandardization of the transitions to marriage and motherhood

As previously discussed, one of the empirical indicators to assess destandardization is if life course transitions become events that characterize an increasingly smaller segment of the population (Brückner and Mayer, 2005). This means that the prevalence of certain life course transitions decrease in a given society. In Chile, there is substantive empirical evidence that demonstrates that the prevalence of marriage for women is decreasing as fewer of them experience the transition to marriage and other forms of relationship such as cohabitation tend to increase (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2014b; Servicio Nacional de la Mujer and Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2004; Valdés, 2007). The case of the transition to motherhood is rather different. Even though there is substantive empirical evidence demonstrating that fertility rates and the average number of children has decreased over time (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2006; 2007; 2015), and some studies suggest that an increasing number of women do not want to have children (Arriagada, 2004), there is little statistical evidence to demonstrate that the transition to motherhood is characterizing an increasingly smaller part of the population. To advance the understanding of the destandardization of the transition to motherhood in Chile, statistical analyses were conducted to assess the extent to which the number of women that do not have children has increased over time.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between women's age and the number of children that they have ($r = 0.497$, $p = 0.000$). This means that older women tend to have more children than younger women and that the larger percentage of women whom have not had children pertain to lower age cohorts. Of the 12.8 percent of the women from the sample that declares having no children, 53.1 percent corresponds to women aged 18-24 and 16.3 percent correspond to women aged 25-34. However, this trend cannot be univocally interpreted as a destandardization because it is also profoundly shaped by the stage of the life cycle in which women are embedded. Further statistical analyses showed that there was a positive correlation between women's age and the number of children that they would have or would like to have ($r = 0.016$, $p = 0.604$). However, this correlation is very weak and is not statistically significant. This means that the

number of women from younger age cohorts that do not want to have children is not significantly different from women of other age cohorts. Figure 2 clearly shows that the ideal number of children tends to be higher for older age cohorts and decrease for younger age cohorts, and that the normative frequency of childbearing tends to decrease as women's age decreases. Nevertheless, the figure also shows that women who would not have wanted or do not want to have children represent an extremely low percentage that does not vary significantly according to age. In making sense of this result it is important to consider that approximately half of the women declare to have been or be willing, to some extent, to have fewer children than they wanted in order to achieve a better financial status (56.5 percent), to develop their professional life (50.9 percent), and to strengthen their couple relationship (46.1 percent). Overall, the fact that only 2.5 percent of the women from the sample declare not wanting to have children, demonstrates the continuity of a strong prevalence of the transition to motherhood in Chilean society. Thus, there seems to be no substantive empirical evidence to support the assertion that in Chile the prevalence of the transition to motherhood is decreasing and that is characterizing an increasingly smaller part of the population. These findings are consistent with the results reported by Fussell (2005) that indicate that in Mexico there is no significant change in the prevalence of childbearing over time.

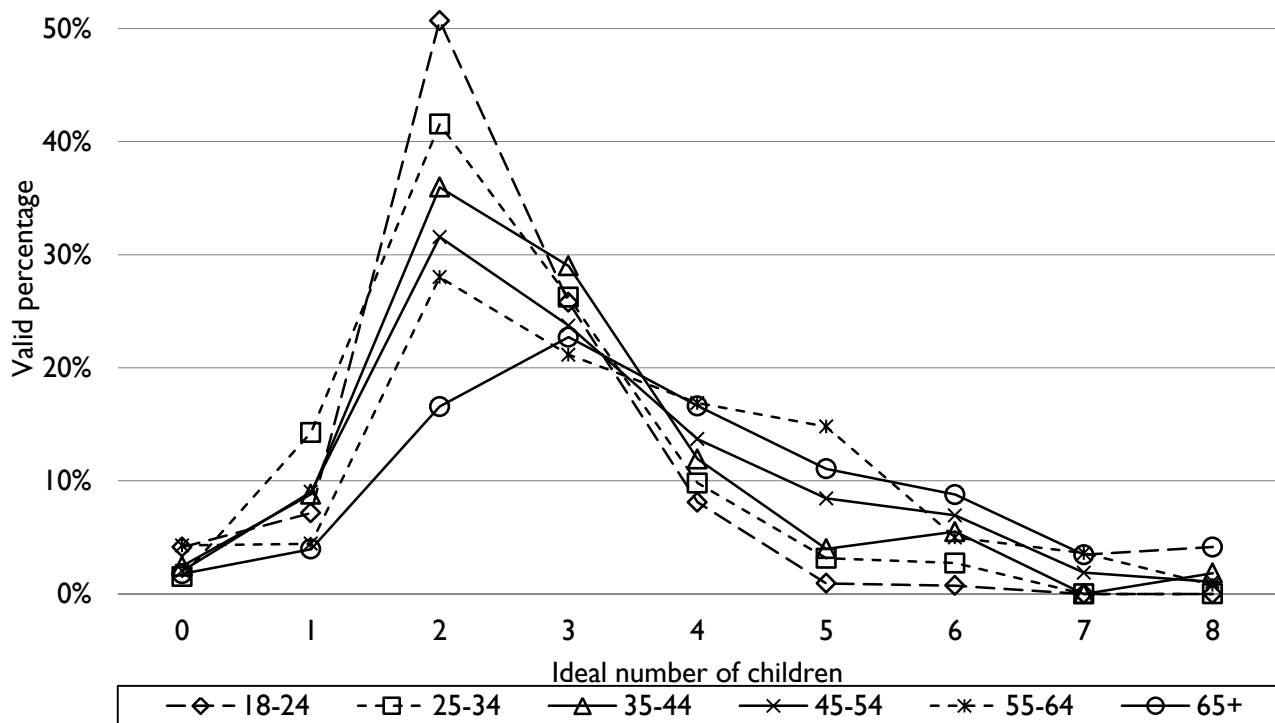


Figure 2. Ideal number of children per age group.

Another empirical indicator to assess destandardization is that the practices and norms that shape the timing of life course transitions become more varied and disperse (Brückner and Mayer, 2005; Elchardus and Smits, 2006). This means that there is a pluralization and differentiation of the lived and ideal ages to experience certain life course transitions in a given population. Assessing the extent to which dispersion has increased over time without longitudinal data poses several challenges. One way of tackling these challenges is observing the variations in the average and dispersion of the timing of these transitions in different age groups. However, this strategy is biased because age and cohorts differences are merged and cannot be distinguished, thus tendencies of life cycle practices can be mistaken for patterns of cultural and social change. Given the nature of the available data, a viable strategy to assess the destandardization of the transition to marriage and motherhood is by analyzing the extent to which the dispersion of age norms increases from older to younger age groups.

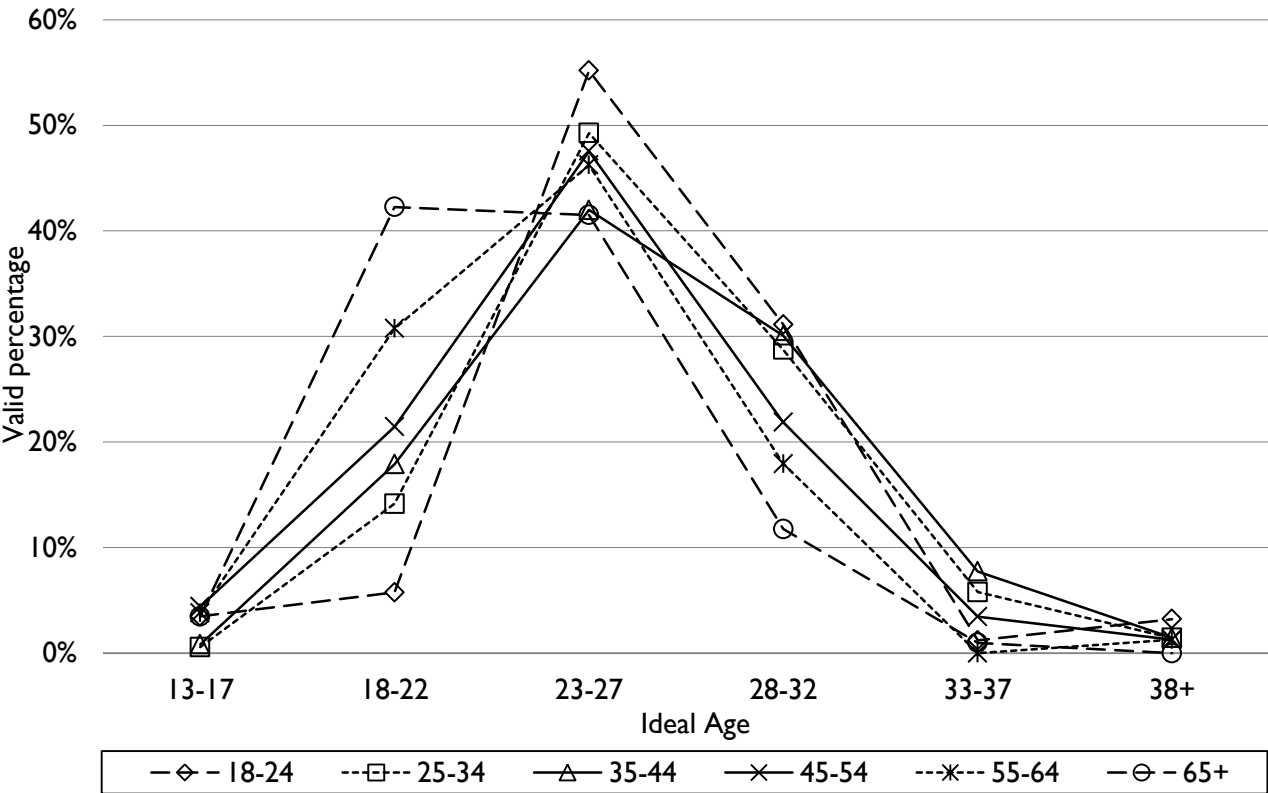


Figure 3. Ideal age first marriage by age group.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between women’s age and what they consider to be the ideal timing to experience the

transitions to marriage ($r = -0.242, p = 0.000$) and motherhood ($r = -0.144, p = 0.000$). This means that for older women the normative timing to get married and have children for the first time tends to be significantly lower than for younger women, for whom it tends to be higher. Further analyses also demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between age groups regarding the ideal timing to experience the transitions to marriage ($f = 14.171, p = 0.000$) and motherhood ($f = 6.390, p = 0.000$). These trends are illustrated in Figure 3 and 4.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics ideal timing transitions to marriage and motherhood per age group

Variable	N	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Ideal Age First Marriage					
18-24	107	26,34	4,120	15	40
25-34	234	26,55	4,125	16	40
35-44	257	26,67	4,527	15	43
45-54	165	25,19	4,451	15	40
55-64	125	24,34	4,241	13	43
65+	92	23,24	3,636	16	35
Ideal Age First Child					
18-24	115	25,70	4,195	16	38
25-34	250	26,20	4,310	17	38
35-44	262	26,20	4,716	16	40
45-54	173	25,72	4,461	16	41
55-64	129	25,14	4,001	16	36
65+	94	23,54	3,896	17	39

The data presented in Table 3 shows that the ideal age to get married is 23.24 years old for women aged 65 and more, and that it increases to 26.34 years old for women aged 18-24. It also shows that the ideal age to get have a child for the first time is 23.54 for women aged 65 and more, and that it increases to 25.70 years old for women aged 18-24. These trends are highly consistent with the empirical evidence of several studies conducted in Chile that demonstrate the postponement of the transitions to marriage and motherhood over time (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2006; 2007; 2014b; 2015). Although the norms surrounding the timing of marriage and motherhood in Chile have changed as the ideal age to experience them seems to have increased over time, these changes do not follow a linear pattern. The data presented in Table 3 shows that the ideal age to get married reaches its

highest value of 26.67 years old for women aged 35-44 and of 26.55 for women aged 25-34. Similarly, it shows that the ideal age to have a first child reaches its highest value of 26.20 years old for women aged 25-44. Overall, these data demonstrates that the norms shaping the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood have changed over time as the ideal age to experience them tends to increase through age cohorts.

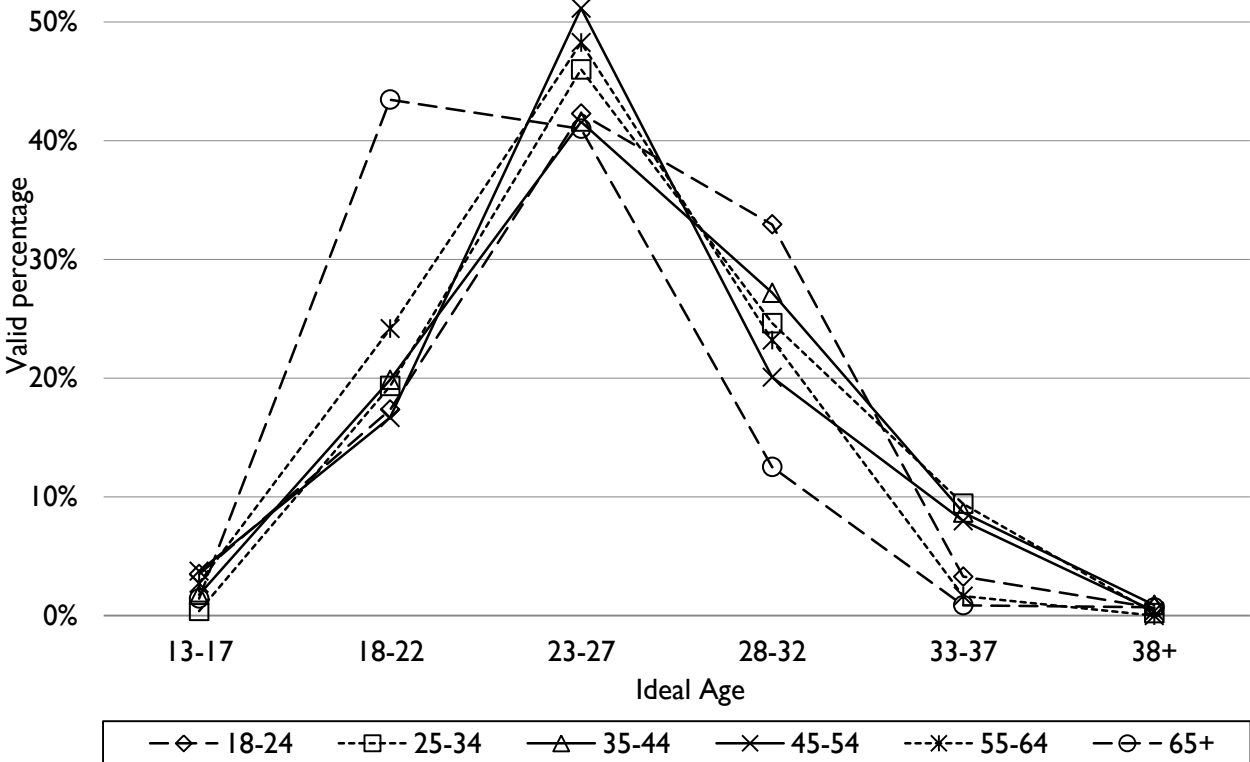


Figure 4. Ideal age first child by age group.

However, changes in the ideal age to experience the transitions to marriage and motherhood are not sufficient to assess the destandardization of the female life course in Chile. Further analysis of the dispersion of the norms shaping the timing to get married and have a child for the first time showed that they tend to become increasingly varied over time. Data presented in Table 3 clearly demonstrates that the dispersion of the ideal ages to get married and have a child for the first time grows sustainably from older to younger age groups. But although the age norms tend to become increasingly disperse over time, again these changes do not follow a linear pattern. The data presented in Table 3 shows that the dispersion of the ideal age to experience the transitions to marriage and motherhood tends to

reach its highest values for women aged 35-44 and 45-54, and then decreases for women aged 25-34 and 18-24. Overall, these changes demonstrate that the norms shaping the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood have changed over time as the ideal ages to experience them tend to become more disperse through age cohorts. This result is consistent with the results by Brückner and Mayer (2005) that demonstrate that in West Germany there is an increasing variability in the average age in which women experience the transitions to marriage and motherhood.

Making sense of change in women's life course

The life course is profoundly embedded in the social contexts and historical times in which it is enacted and cannot be understood apart from them (Elder Jr., 1994; Elder Jr. et al., 2003; Elder Jr. and Giele, 2009; Giele and Elder Jr., 1998). The changes in the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood described in this paper need to be interpreted in the context of cultural and social transformations of gender roles and in Chilean society and the impact that they have had in the reconfiguration of the female life course. It has been extensively acknowledged that changes in the female life course are intertwined with the increasing participation of women in the education system and labour market (Heinz and Krüger, 2001; Giele, 2004; Giele and Holst, 2004). During the 20th century, women in Chile significantly increased their enrolment in primary, secondary and higher education, their average years of formal education, and their participation in the labour market (Larrañaga, 2007; Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2014a; Servicio Nacional de la Mujer and Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2004).

The data analysis showed that the level of education of Chilean women is associated to the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood. On the one hand, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between women's educational level and the age of their first marriage ($r_s = 0.290$, $p = 0.000$) and what they consider the ideal age to get married ($r_s = 0.304$, $p = 0.000$). This means that the higher the educational level of women the later they experience and consider ideal to experience the transition to marriage. For example, while 29.1 percent of women with incomplete primary education got married between 13 and 17, only 3.7 percent of women that completed higher education got married at that age. Also, while 22.7 percent of the women with a postgraduate degree declare that 33-37 is the ideal age to get married, only 1.3 percent of women with complete primary education share that norm. On the other hand, there also was a statistically

positive correlation between women's educational level and the age of birth of their first child ($r_s = 0.364$, $p = 0.000$) and what they consider the ideal age to become mothers ($r_s = 0.297$, $p = 0.000$). Again, this means that the higher the educational level of women the later they experience and consider ideal to experience the transition to motherhood. For example, while 34.6 percent of the women with incomplete primary education had their first child between 13 and 17, only 4.1 percent of women with a higher education degree had a child at that age. Also, while a 39.6 percent of the women with a higher education degree assert that between 28 and 32 is the ideal age to experience the transition to motherhood, only 14.5 percent of the women with complete primary education share that norm.

The data analysis also showed that the occupation of Chilean women is associated to the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood. On the one hand, there was a statistically significant association between women's occupation and the age of their first marriage ($X^2 (40) = 70.255$, $p = 0.002$, $V = 0.146$, $p = 0.002$) and what they consider the idea age to get married ($X^2 (45) = 113.778$, $p = 0.000$, $V = 0.153$, $p = 0.000$). For example, while 65.5 percent of the women that work part time got married between 18 and 22, only 42.6 percent of the women that work full time got married at that age. Also, while 48.7 percent of the women that are enrolled in higher education declare that the ideal age to get married is between 28 and 32, only 20.3 percent of the women dedicated to housework declare that this is the ideal age to experience the transition to marriage. These results suggest that for women that actively participate in the labour market, the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transition to marriage refer to a later age than those of women who do not. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant association between women's occupation and the age of birth of their first child ($X^2 (45) = 78.340$, $p = 0.002$, $V = 0.133$, $p = 0.002$) and what they consider the ideal age to become mothers ($X^2 (45) = 208.319$, $p = 0.000$, $V = 0.202$, $p = 0.000$). For example, while 59.4 percent of the women who declare having not occupation had their first child between 18 and 22, only 43.7 percent of women that work full time declare experiencing the transition to motherhood at that age. Also, while 62.9 percent of the women that are enrolled in higer education declare that the ideal age to have a first child is between 28 and 32, only 17.2 percent of the women dedicated to housework share this norm on the timing of the transition to motherhood. Again, these results suggest that for women that participate actively in the labour market, the lived and ideal ages to have children is later than for the women who do not.

Conclusions

This paper aimed to assess the individualization of the life course of women in Chile by empirically analyzing the destandardization of the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood. The data presented and discussed in this paper demonstrates that the transitions to marriage and motherhood are becoming increasingly postponed as the practices and norms that shape them are timed at an older age. However, it reveals that there is a tension between the lived and ideal ages to get married and have children, since the practices and norms that shape the timing of transitions to marriage and motherhood are decoupled and their postponement tends to be more significant at a normative level than at the level of practices. Despite this tension, the transitions to marriage and motherhood continue to be associated and their timing strictly sequenced both in norms and practices.

These results demonstrate that timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood for women in Chile have experienced significant transformations. However, in itself this trend of cultural and social change does not mean that the transitions to marriage and motherhood are undergoing a process of destandardization and thus that the life course of Chilean women is becoming increasingly individualized. Further analyses presented and discussed in this paper provide ambivalent empirical regarding destandardization. Firstly, while the transition to marriage has significantly decreased its prevalence over time, it demonstrates that there is no substantive empirical evidence to assert that the transition to motherhood is characterizing an increasingly smaller part of female population in Chile. Secondly, it empirically determines that the norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood have become increasingly disperse over time, even though this trend seems to have started to revert for the younger age cohorts. Thirdly, it demonstrates that the practices and norms that shape the timing of the transitions to marriage and motherhood vary according to women's educational level and occupation, thus revealing their socially embedded character. Overall, this empirical evidence suggests that while the life course of women in Chile is becoming individualized to some extent, this trend of cultural and social change is not consistent and uniform, but rather partial and fragmented, nonlinear, and significantly conditioned by the social structure. In this regard, I follow Kohli (2007: 265) in asserting that there are some tendencies toward the individualization of the life course, 'but they are much more limited than often claimed'.

In empirically addressing the destandardization of the timing of the transitions to motherhood, this paper has contributed to make sense of cultural and social changes in the lives of Chilean women, assess the advantages and limitations of the framework of individualization to interpret them, and advance the field of studies on the destandardization of the life course by providing quantitative evidence for a previously unexplored contexts such as Chile. Further advancing this research topic would require examining changes in the timing and sequencing of several life course events and transitions pertaining to different life domains by comparing consecutive age cohorts at a same point of the life cycle over time. It would also require analyzing the extent to which the destandardization of the transitions to marriage and motherhood is being reversed by becoming progressively uniform and homogeneous, and exploring the forces driving this change and its consequences for the structuration of the female life course. Finally, advancing this topic would benefit greatly from further exploring the tension between the practices and norms that shape the timing of life course transitions and explore the ways in which women deal and resolve these tensions in the making of their life course.

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1. A preliminary version of this paper was presented in the session “Futures of Individualization in Local, Regional, and Global Contexts”, at the Third ISA Forum of Sociology, 10-14 July 2016, Vienna.
2. I would like to thank Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and GfK Adimark for making this data set public.
3. The questionnaire included questions such as ‘At what age did you get married for the first time?’, ‘Age in which you had your first child’, ‘At what age would you get or have gotten married?’, and ‘At what age would you have or have had your first child’.

4. The data has been weighted by sex, age and socioeconomic status according to the data of the Chilean population provided by the census of 2002.
5. In Chile, the available data to assess changes in the prevalence and timing of life course transitions over time is very limited due to the fact there are few longitudinal surveys representative of the national population, and even fewer that inquire about the age in which life course transitions have or should been experienced.

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