



Working Paper

Delaying Parenthood in East and West Germany

A Mixed-Methods Study of the Onset of Childbirth and the Vocabulary of Motives of Women of the Birth Cohort of 1971

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Abstract

In this paper we analyze the delay in first births among East and West German women born in 1971 on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative data. The data comes from the German Life History Study (GLHS) and, in particular, two nationally representative quantitative surveys conducted in 1996-1998 and 2005 as well as narrative interviews conducted from 2004 to 2006. Median ages for first marriage and first births have been increasing in West Germany for more than three decades and in East Germany since 1991. The 1971 birth cohort is of particular interest, because it is the first cohort where the family formation process took place within re-unified Germany. In regard to the onset of childbirth the West German part of the cohort represents the continuation of a delaying trend whereas the East German cohort represents a drastic reversal in regard to the age of first child.

Our qualitative material documents widely differing parenthood motives and behavior between East and West German women. As perceived by women, West German men avoid and delay commitments and thus complicate maternal aspirations for West German women, who in addition face problematic incompatibilities of career and family. In contrast, for both East German women and men parenthood appears to be a taken for granted even under difficult economic circumstances.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we want to contribute to understanding the delay in family formation among women born in 1971 and living in East and West Germany. By family formation we mean the process which leads to first births via non-marital-unions and/or marriages. Delays in first births are seen as one cause for very low fertility and the increase in childless couples. In particular we want to examine whether East and West German women of the first post-transition generation still differ in regard to age of onset of childbirth and how they subjectively account for delays.

Our data comes from the German Life History Study (Mayer 2008) and, in particular, from two nationally representative retrospective surveys – a panel follow-up as well as narrative interviews with persons from the same samples. The primary material which we will use here consists of three parts: i) the quantitative data from the retrospective surveys and the panel, ii) biographical interviews, and iii) the corresponding cases of the same persons reconstructed from the quantitative surveys. In addition, and as a descriptive first step, we will show results from Kaplan-Meier estimations and Cox regressions for the whole of the East and West German cohort samples in comparison to cohorts born between 1930 and 1960 viz. 1964.

Median ages for first marriage and first births increased in West Germany for more than three decades and in East Germany since 1991. According to period data, the overall median age at marital first birth in Germany had its lowest point in 1970 with age 24, and has since risen beyond age 29. By 2006, period fertility had converged between East and West Germany (Dorbritz 2008; Tivig/Hetze 2007: 18). The causes for this unprecedented delay in the onset of family formation (and thus in the conclusion of the transition to adulthood) have been attributed to educational expansion and the implicit lengthening of time in education and training (Blossfeld/Huinink 1991; Huinink/Mayer 1995; Kreyenfeld 2006), uncertainties in the labor market (Bernardi et al. 2007; Kurz 2008), a decline in collectivist and material values, and a rise in individualistic values (Lesthaege/Surkyn 1988). In addition, some have pointed to a shift towards more hedonistic and consumption-oriented values and life styles, and women's increasing education and labor market integration leading to conflicts arising between women's rising career investments (Brewster/Rindfuss 2000), the lack of adequate child care as well as the rise in non-marital unions (Meyer/Schulze 1992). For East Germany, three additional causes must be considered: a) the influence of the specific conditions of GDR early parenting, b) the traumatic disruptions of unification, and c) behavioral models and institutional conditions of West German women. They combine with and add to the above causes.

Central issues in this unresolved debate are the juxtaposition of: a) distal versus proximate causes and b) of values versus rational choice calculations. By proximate causes, we mean those conditions which relate to situations and decisions in the immediate context of first birth, whereas by distal causes we mean the indirect effects of earlier conditions on childbearing, such as education, careers, and finding a partner. Another important issue in this debate is c) the question of whether the delay in family formation is due more to women's life circumstances and preferences or due more to those of men. In this paper we limit ourselves to looking at the role of partners and spouses from the perspec-

tive of women. In another study we are also looking at the same issues from the perspective of men (Mayer/Schulze forthcoming: ch. 5).

The comparison between East and West Germany should allow us to open a special window in regard to several of these issues. Although family policy incentives for marriage and first births were curtailed in East Germany after unification, child care facilities continued to be much better than those in West Germany (Trappe 2006). East German women spend fewer years in schools, still have higher rates of labor force participation, and embraced attitudes which take the combination of work and motherhood as less problematic than West German women (Statistisches Bundesamt 2006: 523). East German women are more accustomed to handling economic scarcity and cramped housing conditions, but were exposed to a sudden increase in consumption options after 1989. Since the seventies, East German women had a 'culture' of early births with or without marriage and a very low rate of childlessness (Huinink/Kreyenfeld 2006; Bernardi et al. 2007; Trappe/Sørensen 1995). Although problems of unemployment also inflicted West German women, as well as finding good jobs after training, these problems were exacerbated for East German women after unification (Diewald 2006; Trappe 2004). The East-West comparison allows us, among else, to study the impact of education on the onset of parenthood within two German sub-societies characterized by different scales and structures of social inequality. East Germany was (and partly still is) a more egalitarian, homogeneous society with fewer class barriers, while West Germany has a pronounced class structure based on its education and training system. As a consequence one can expect to observe smaller educational differentials in regard to the onset of family formation among East Germans than among West Germans. This was not least supported by the generous family policies of the former GDR, but it is unclear whether (and to what extent) this low impact of educational differentials has maintained after unification.

This study focuses on the East and West German women born in 1971. They are special and representative in a broader sense. The West German women of this cohort made further advances in attaining higher education and vocational or professional training. Toward the end of the eighties, they had considerable difficulties in finding apprenticeships, but had an easier time of entering the labor market after their apprenticeships (Hillmert/Mayer 2004; Mayer 2004: 204-209). The East German women of the 1971 cohort had mostly completed their vocational training when the economic restructuring started in 1990. They were faced with risks of job loss and interrupted careers and engaged in widespread retraining and occupational reorientation (Trappe 2004; Matthes 2002, 2004). This East German cohort, together with the 1970 cohort, started the massive delay in age at first birth (Dorbritz 2008: 564; Scheel 2007: 30).

In regard to methods, we use retrospective survey and panel data to establish the main explananda, i.e. the age of entering unions and of first birth as well as the collective labor market conditions. We use the quantitative data for singular cases to reconstruct the educational, family, and work trajectories. We use qualitative data from narrative interviews to search for the subjective vocabulary of motives for delaying family formation. In presenting and interpreting the material from our narrative interviews, we focus on five alleged general causes or mechanisms of the delay in family formation for

women: a) consequences of lengthening the education and training period, b) labor market and economic insecurity, c) value orientations in regard to marriage and parenting, d) problems of compatibility between employment, careers, and raising children, and e) conditions pertaining to a partner or spouse. We also focus on some specific conditions related to education and social class in differentially enhancing or diminishing the likelihood of earlier or later entry into parenthood. These relate, among else, to the duration of investing in education, training and career, and the assets the partners bring into a union and thus determining their class position.

The paper is organized in the following sections. In section 2 we offer a brief summary of competing theories of the timing of first parenthood. In section 3 we provide contextual information on East and West Germany for the women of this cohort. In section 4 we describe our data sources and discuss the advantages of combining quantitative and qualitative data and the respective methods of analysis. In section 5 we present, as quantitative background, a descriptive of Kaplan-Meier estimates for cohorts born between 1929 and 1971 for three aspects of family formation: non-marital unions, marriages and first births, as well as Cox regressions for the effects of education. In sections 6 and 7, we present four case studies each of West German women and East German women. In section 9 we summarize the results and attempt a preliminary assessment of our experiences with mixed methods.

2. Theory

In this section we provide a brief review of extant theories on the timing of family formation and the potential impacts of social class and education. The major purpose is, on one hand, to guide the selection of topics in our empirical material and, on the other hand, to reflect on our choice of method.

Theories explaining the timing of family formation can be roughly sorted into five categories: a) life course contingencies and biographical experience, b) value commitments, c) rational choice cost-benefit calculations, and d) institutionally constrained opportunities (Huinink 2007). While these approaches focus primarily on the respondent's characteristics, an additional mode of explanation focuses e) on characteristics of the partner or couple.

Theories informed by a life course perspective see the timing of family formation as an outcome contingent on prior life time commitments in several life domains. Blossfeld and Huinink (1991) postulate an "institutional effect," according to which family formation and parenting are – given fertility control – ruled out as behavioral options while people are in school and training due to an assumed lack of income and time resources. Accordingly, the increasing time spent in education and training (Brückner/Mayer 2005; Jacob 2004) should lead to a delay in the onset of family formation (see also Huinink/Mayer 1995; Kreyenfeld 2006). To this set of potentially delaying life course contingencies we also have to add the transitional phase of career entry leading to a permanent contract. Thus the life course contingency theory would predict delays of the onset of family formation to be associated with extended durations until the end of the first phase of career entry.

Biographical uncertainties form the second set of explanatory conditions. Experience or expectation of unemployment, instability of jobs and earnings, and residential mobility should lead to a delay of entry into marriage and parenthood (Bernardi et.al. 2007; Kurz 2008).¹ Entry into marriage and parenthood entail long lasting commitments which are avoided or delayed especially if employment and career prospects are unclear. Among our cohort, biographical uncertainties should have been especially acute for the East Germans, although their subjective experiences might have been modified – either enhanced or dimmed – by the fact that for East Germans this was more a collective than an individual fate (Huinink/Kreyenfeld 2006).

Value orientations are a third assumed cause of the delay in marriage and parenthood; specifically the shift towards more individualistic, hedonistic and consumption-oriented values and life styles. A life as a single or a double income childless couple allows much higher levels of consumption than life as parents with one partner earning little or nothing (Brewster/Rindfuss 2000). Value orientations are either assumed to be stable and prior to the transition to adulthood, or they are assumed to be dependent on age and life course circumstances. Thus, for instance, a hedonistic life style might imply diminishing returns, and therefore value orientations in regard to marriage and parenting might change over time. Peer group influences may change over time when one's friends start to get married or have children. Value orientations, both as a permanent and as a variable disposition, differ between East and West Germans. For instance, West German women, much more so than East German women, believe that mothers should stay at home while the children are very small (Statistisches Bundesamt 2006: 523).

The fourth set of potential conditions relate to rational decisions based on the situational costs vs. the benefits of having children (Becker 1981; Huinink 2007). These costs are higher for highly educated and trained women due to their opportunity costs in career advancement and income loss with the family option.

Furthermore, institutionally determined opportunities and constraints set the parameters for individual and joint decisions. These apply most importantly to provisions of child care and other conditions fostering or hindering the combination of full-time employment and having children. The GDR provided public full day facilities from toddlers to school pupils. Although these facilities lost partial support after unification in East Germany, they still continued to function on a much higher level than in West Germany (Büchel/Spieß 2002; Trappe 2004; Huinink/Kreyenfeld 2006).

Finally, whatever the dispositions and characteristics of women might be, family formation also depends on the orientations and life circumstances of men as partners and spouses and the manner in which men's and women's resources and dispositions are negotiated within those partnerships (Dinklage 2005; Helffrich/Eßbach 2004; Kreyenfeld 2006; Kurz 2005; Schmitt 2004).

¹ An earlier version of a theory connecting biographical turbulence to a decline in fertility was put forth by Birg et.al. (1991).

Huinink and Mayer proposed a theory about historical changes and current conditions of the relationship between social inequality and family formation:

“The families of origin and the socio-economic backgrounds of husband and wife, as well as the social status of the husband, were important and very visible in the first two [historical] phases of this process. In the first phase, the families of origin tended to be the major actors, at least for the main inheritors, In the second phase, the status of the husband and the parental resources of the wife dominated the family formation process. The question then arises: how does social stratification enter into family formation in its most recent phase? [...] first, the pattern of family formation for women (timing and events) are regulated to a large extent by women’s educational participation, educational inequality, and prospects in the labor market; second, for men, their placement and career in the occupational class structure remains pervasive.” (Huinink/Mayer 1995: 169)

Huinink and Mayer claim that in recent periods traditional norms toward gender roles and parenthood have mostly lost their regulative force in individual life planning. Direct parental influences on mate selection tend to become marginal and social pressures in regard to timing and number of childbirths have diminished markedly in comparison with earlier historical periods. New normative models of parenting become effective and children are treated more and more like “luxury goods” where the quality of children becomes much more salient than the quantity. From “child-centered” families, developments lead to self-centered parents or non-parents. The norm of “responsible” parenthood provides many arguments for having no children or just not yet. In the “egalitarian” mode of family formation, both men and women have more individualistic attitudes toward partnership and family, depending on their current and anticipated life course conditions and plans.

Under these circumstances the “male breadwinner” becomes less and less taken for granted and it is crucial for women to invest an extended period of their lives in education and preparation either for a career or at least a steady source of livelihood. The meaning of women’s education has shifted in the sense that they are looking more for vocational and professional training than for general education. Once women have gained equal or partially more than equal access to general education, it is rational for them to also reap their investments by seeking qualified jobs with career prospects. Being in education and training and starting a career then not only applies to more women, but it has also major consequences for the timing of marriage and childbearing.

As women see themselves less as part of the family than as a collective actor maximizing the welfare of the family as a whole, the less an extreme form of the division of labor within the household makes sense: “Women can pursue their own goals only insofar they are achieving more equal power within the family [...] Thus it is in the interest of women to contribute not only a supplementary, but rather an autonomous and equal share of the household income” (Huinink/Mayer 1995: 173).

Because women have drastically increased their share in secondary and higher education as well as in the corresponding higher status employment positions, they are now, for the first time, stratified by their own status resources, and much less by the status resources of their parents or their husbands. Thus women should be increasingly stratified in regard to a) their educational and skill resources, and

as a consequence in b) the temporal transition to marriage and parenthood according to duration spent in education and training, c) in their cognitions and norms regarding partnership, family and parenthood, d) the life time they are committed to employment, and e) in regard to the economic resources they bring into the household budget.

How then would we expect parental social class and one's own education and class position to impact the timing of family formation? Higher social class background may bring with it the experience of a childhood with siblings and without any deprivations, which are implied by larger families of less advantaged status. Higher social class background makes the selection of higher education more likely for women. This should prolong the overall period in education and training for women of high class background. But, material resources provide more certainty about goals and their attainability, and might make time until career entry actually shorter than for women of lower class background. For women of lower class background, career commitment is a prerequisite for achieving (upper) middle class status. Thus, delaying marriage and childbirth might be part and parcel of the mobility process, while women of higher class background can more easily afford to start a family with the material backing of her (and her partner's) parents.

Women have also changed their position in the marriage market. While in former times the market position of the husband (and his inherited wealth) determined his position in the marriage queue, for women that position was largely determined by the relative rank and resources of her parents. In the "egalitarian" mode of family formation, the skills and earning power of women becomes an asset in the marriage market. Investments in education and career therefore should guide women and trigger a delay in the onset of family formation. We can therefore distinguish prototypically three class-specific strategies of family formation. First, women with compulsory schooling, without training and with low earnings capacity have low attraction on the marriage market, but often see marriage and motherhood as their main avenue to gain status. That should either result in early marriage and first birth (at times non-marital), or a delay due to the difficulty in finding an attractive partner. The second strategy is the one for women with a middle level of schooling and training, e.g. Realschule and apprenticeship. They can enter the labor market relatively early and do not typically have very high career commitments. Thus they should marry relatively early and also have children relatively early. The third strategy of family formation is combining higher education and strong career investments. This should result in significant delays in marriage. In these contexts educational homogamy becomes the rule of the game (Blossfeld/Timm 2003) due to the following processes. First, by extended periods of education and training, the learning site becomes the favorite meeting ground. Second, egalitarian mate selection implies first preference to partners which are alike in their orientations and attitudes and similar in the resources they bring into the union.

In West Germany, and less so in East Germany, marriage and/or cohabitation precedes childbirth. Thus finding the right partner who is able and willing to become a father is a necessary precondition of parenthood. Establishing a secure career is therefore a crucial step not only for women, but even more so for men. This might be problematic in the lower class strategy, since potential partners might

be well out of their education and training period, but still not anchored in a secure career. In the middle level strategy both women and men might have the best chance to complete training and career entry and to be ready for family formation. The higher class strategy appears to be the most problematic. Given the length of German university studies highly qualified women enter the labor market relatively late and afterwards need some additional years to build their careers. Since power relations within the partnership or family are maintained either by a lower status of the woman or by an age differential (or both), highly qualified women might have particular difficulty finding the right partner at the right time.

The impacts of parental class background, education and one's own class situation on the processes of family formation operated very differently in West and East Germany, obviously during the time of the GDR and FRG, but also in the immediate aftermath.

By ideology and practice, class differences in the GDR were small. Due to the mass exodus of the self-employed and upper middle class, even most academics were working class origin. Class leveling was further advanced by very selective access to upper secondary education which favored those with working class background and/or political loyalty. We therefore can expect more cross-class marriage and cohabitation in East Germany. This, in turn, considerably widens the pool of potential marriage partners in East Germany in comparison to West Germany and should lead to earlier family formation and parenthood in East Germany.

3. The East and West German Contexts of Family Formation

Although after unification in 1990 both East and West German women lived under formally identical conditions of institutional settings and policies, their respective contexts for family formation still differed in major ways. First of all, potentially influential differences were fixed before 1989/1990. These relate, above all, to the kind of educational and vocational investments of young women in the two Germanys as well as the social norms relating to women's full time employment and the desirable age of marriage and childbirth. The East German normative and actual regime of a very early start of family formation – partially based on generous family subsidies and access to housing (Huinink/Wagner 1995; Meyer/Schulze 1992; Kreyenfeld 2006; Scheel 2007; Trappe/Sørensen 1995) – did not only set an example for the women of the 1971 cohort, but affected them at least to the extent that they lived in the GDR until about age 19. The age specific birth rate of this cohort rose from 1986 to 1991, i.e. up to age 20, fell until age 23, and then rose again. The result is an age-specific birth rate with two peaks, one at age 20 and other at around age 28 (Dorbritz 2008: 564; Scheel 2007: 30). But highly differential conditions also applied for the period after 1989-1990. On the positive side, facilities of early and all-day child care were still vastly superior in East Germany in comparison to West Germany. On the negative side, the disruptions of the privatization shock were felt particularly strongly by women and especially young women who had to find employment after vocational training. The following document illustrates some of these differences.

Table 1: Educational Attainment of Women of the Birth Cohort 1971 in West- and East Germany

Educational Attainment	1	2	3
West Germany	18.3	39.2	42.5
East Germany	4.5	73.3	22.2

Categories: 1 = Less than Hauptschule, special schools, Hauptschule, POS 8th grade, 2 = Realschule, Mittlere Reife, POS 10th grade, 3 = Gymnasium or EOS, Abitur.

Source: *German Life History Study*.

About a fifth of the West German women in this cohort left school at Hauptschule-level, two fifths with Mittlere Reife and two fifth with Abitur. Hauptschule is the lower secondary track, and implies 9 or 10 years of schooling. Mittlere Reife is the graduating certificate for the Realschule after 10 years of schooling which is the intermediate secondary track. Abitur is the graduating certificate of the Gymnasium in West Germany after 13 years, or the EOS (Erweiterte Oberschule) in East Germany after 12 years of schooling. Almost all East German women had at least a 10th grade certificate of the Polytechnical School and only one fifth completed the Abitur.² Their lower participation in upper secondary education meant that on average they finished their vocational training and entered the labor market earlier than West German women. At the beginning of the unification period about half of the East German women were employed, two fifths were still in training, seven percent were out of the labor force, and seven percent were unemployed. Among West German women at the same age, 45 percent were still in training, one tenth still were in school, 38 percent working, five percent were out of the labor force and one percent unemployed. Unemployment of East German women then rose quickly to about ten percent through the ensuing years.

East German women of the 1971 cohort more often could not attain the occupation they desired and had to obtain on average more spells of full time training in comparison to West German women, in order to find their place in the labor market. East German women changed jobs more quickly and more often had to change their occupation (Table 2; Mayer/Schulze forthcoming: ch. 4).

These data show that the work trajectories of both East and West German women of our cohort were complex and often difficult, but markedly more so for the East German women. The fact that women in East and West Germany on average had a second training period (here defined as full time training of

² The closest we could achieve in comparing our sample data with official records is the Microcensus of 1991 (the first for unified Germany) and in that data set the educational level of the 18 year olds living in the household of their parents. They should approximate the cohort born 1973. For West Germany, the proportion with Abitur or in upper secondary track is 35.2 %, for East Germany 18.3 %. Given the fact that some of our respondents obtained their Abitur later, the comparisons point to, at best, a slight overrepresentation of the better educated in our sample. We thank Markus Klein from the Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung for these computations. Kreyenfeld (2006) used the microcensus of 2004 to estimate the educational participation rates for the 1970-1973 birth cohort, i.e. age 33-34 at age of interview). For West Germany her

at least six months) could be a major condition for delaying motherhood, especially if one takes into account the fact that second training spells are often undertaken after several years of employment. In regard to subjective perceptions of occupational opportunities, however, East and West German women are fairly similar.

Table 2: Labor Market Experiences of East and West German Women of the Birth Cohort 1971

	East	West
Could not realize occupational goal, in %	53.4	49.3
Mean number of training spells	1.96	1.80
Mean number of jobs	3.92	3.64
Mean duration in first job, in months	45	50
Mean duration in first occupation, in months	106	145
Ever unemployed, in %		
Duration unemployed*		
Perceived bad or very bad occupational perspectives, in %		
in 1996-98	16.7	17.7
in 2000	26.1	22.2
in 2005	22.5	28.3

Source: German Life History Study (Mayer/Schulze forthcoming, Ch. 2 and 3). Number of training spells, jobs and occupational changes refers to the time up to age 34. Proportion of labor force experience unemployed.

If we follow the lives of our sample throughout the available observation period up to age 34 we find that between five and ten percent of the West German women were unemployed at any given month, whereas this was the case for ten to fifteen percent of the East German women, increasing with age. West German women in this age period were twice as likely as East German women to not be in the labor force (mostly for family reasons). This shows that East German women tried to hold on to full time employment despite the severe situation on the labor market (Mayer/Schulze forthcoming: ch. 3).

From the data of our panel study (see section 4) we can also provide an overview on family forms and family values (Table 3). In 2005 East German women were less often married, but were more often mothers than West German women. East German women almost four times as often grew up in a family where their mother worked full time until they were 16 years old. In regard to family norms, East German women more often see marriage as an obsolete institution and do not find marriage necessary to raise children. Unmarried West German women were three times more likely than unmarried East German women to see children as most the important reason to marry. Among unmarried West German, twice as many said they would like to marry, but had not found the right partner yet. Among those women who did not have a child yet at age 34, West German women stressed somewhat more

results give 29.5% for Hauptschule or less, 34.1% for Realschule and 31.8% for Abitur, for East Germany 4.2% for less than 10 years POS, 68.9 % for POS and 23.9% for Abitur.

that the partner did not want children and that children are a burden, while East German women stressed somewhat more that their job situation was too insecure. While most of the latter differences do not reach statistical significance, they are part of a consistent pattern.

Table 3: Family Forms and Family Values – East and West German Women of the 1971 Cohort

	East	West
Ever married at age 34	33.0	47.3
Cohabiting at age 34		
Mother at age 34	43.4	39.4
Mother always worked until Age 16	81.9	24.5
Marriage is an obsolete institution, agree %	19.1	12.4
Marriage is the best way to raise children	24.1	40.0
Would like to marry, but have not yet found the right partner*	16.6	31.5
Would only marry for the sake of children*	8.4	25.0
A toddler suffers when his mother is working	26.1	46.3
Best alternative of child care when mother is working		
Father	28.9	58.2
Day Care	54.2	9.2
Partner does not want children**	3.7	2.9
Job situation too insecure**	3.3	3.9
Children are too much of a burden**	4.1	3.7

*Only unmarried respondents.

** Women without Children, mean value for 1-5 scale with 1=full agreement, 5= full disagreement.

Norms and perceptions about child care also differ hugely between the two Germanys. While only 26 percent of East German women agree with the statement “A small child suffers when its mother is working”, 42 percent of West German women agree. When asked for the best form of child care, if it is not the mother, 54 percent of East German women picked “Day care” and only 9 percent of West German women, while the latter 58 percent selected the father as the best alternative.

4. Data and Methods

The quantitative data used in this study was collected as part of three different surveys of the German Life History Study (Mayer 2008).³ All surveys of the German Life History Study concentrate on small ranges of birth cohorts in order to capture fine-grained period and cohort effects and focus on retrospective event histories in separate life domains such as residence, family of origin, marital family (in-

³ The data of the German Life History Study (GLHS) is being distributed through the Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung (GESIS) in Cologne. Basic information and all methods of documentation can be downloaded from www.yale.edu/ciqle as well as the web page of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin.

cluding partners and partner's characteristics), education, training, employment, and careers. Events and transitions were recorded forward in time and dated monthly. The 1996-98 data on the East German cohort born 1971 (n=610) was collected mostly by computer-assisted phone interviews (Matthes 2002; <http://www.yale.edu/ciqle/glhsindex.html>). Sampling was based on a regionally stratified random sample based on the former GDR central register. The response rate was 49.5 percent. These data include a few cases where East Germans of the initial sample had moved to West Germany. The East German 1971 cohort was chosen because its members had finished vocational training at the time the Wall came down and were thus the first cohort to enter post-socialist labor market under the "system". In 1998 and 1999 we collected data for the 1964 and 1971 birth cohorts in West Germany (n=2909), again by telephone interviews, in cooperation with the Federal Institute for Labor Market Research (IAB) (Hillmert 2004). The response rate was 66.1 percent. Both the 1964 and 1971 West German cohorts were of particular interest due to the economic downswing in the eighties and nineties and the alleged impacts of international competitive pressures.⁴ The 1971 cohort part of that data set is being used in this paper. All the data of these surveys were collected in cooperation with infas (Bad Godesberg).

In the year 2005 we re-interviewed 1,073 of the 1,805 men and women born in 1971 from both the 1996-98 East German Study and the 1997-98 West German Study (Matthes 2005) in our own telephone laboratory at the Max-Planck-Institute for Human development in Berlin. Field time for the quantitative panel ran from early 2005 to the end of June 2005 and was truncated due to restricted funds.⁵ Selectivity, therefore, is a consideration. However, as Table 8 shows, panel respondents and panel non-respondents differ only partially in regard to their ages at first marriage and first child at the point of the first wave. West German panel respondents have higher rates of marriage and higher rates of childbirth than non-respondents, while for East Germany both marriage and birth rates are almost identical. Thus, our West German panel selection appears to be less delaying than the non-respondents. It should be noted, moreover, that the estimates of vital demographic rates with the data from the German Life History study are (given the small sample sizes) astonishingly robust in comparison with corresponding census figures (see Rohwer/Pötter 2005; Scheel 2007: 57-58).⁶

The quantitative data used here comes from retrospective surveys and is therefore subject to recall measurement error. In regard to event-based life history data the recall error is only a minor fraction of the total survey error (Groves 1989) and depends to a high degree on both the instruments of data collection and the time and money spent on editing the data. In the German Life History Study we made huge investments in both of these aspects of data quality (Mayer 2008; Reimer 2005a, 2005b). In fact the 2005 panel study was combined with a precursor methods study in which we developed

⁴ This interplay of cohort size, labor market conditions and policy measures was the central focus of our monograph on the latter two cohorts (Hillmert/Mayer 2004).

⁵ The panel data for the East Germans again includes cases which had moved to West Germany

⁶ Scheel (2007: 58) computed the East German cumulative cohort fertility up to age 34 from the panel data of the German Life History Study (1.18) and the data from official statistics (1.20). The small parameter difference might be accounted for by the West migrants in our East German sample.

and tested computer-assisted questionnaires informed by the psychology of autobiographical memory to minimize recall error (Reimer/Matthes 2006).

How did we select the cases for the qualitative study and how did we select the cases from the available narrative interviews for the inclusion in this paper? 1073 realized interviews from the panel study served as the basis for the qualitative sample. As a first step, we selected a roughly similar number of primary sampling units (PSU's) for West and East Germany. The rationale for selecting according to PSU's was essentially to reduce interviewer transaction cost. Within each region we then selected North-South and urban-rural PSU's. Within each PSU we then drew up a list of men and women of lower vs. higher education and training, roughly similar to the respective population distributions. These addresses constituted the pool of eligibles. The matching between the respondent and interviewer schedules then, finally, decided the actual qualitative sample. Out of the 30 narrative interviews there are 16 women and we selected eight cases, each according to the East/West and higher/lower education/training criteria. Field time for the qualitative study took place mostly in the year 2005, with some additional interviews conducted in 2004 and 2006. All the names of the respondents in the qualitative case studies are anonymized and local references are "blurred". We also excluded or slightly changed other information by which persons could be too easily be identified.

Table 4: Qualitative Study Birth Cohort 1971 – Distribution of Cases According to Selection Criteria

Education/Training	East Germany		West Germany	
	Lower	Higher	Lower	Higher
Women	5 (2)	3 (2)	4 (2)	4 (2)
Men	6	1	4	3

Education/Training: Lower Apprenticeship with Mittlere Reife, POS or Abitur; Higher: University and Fachhochschule. Numbers in brackets refer to the cases selected for this paper.

In the present study we are pursuing a modest mixed-methods strategy in combining quantitative and qualitative data. We do not, for instance, run parallel analyses on the qualitative and quantitative data in order to test theoretical assumptions about "causes". Nor are we using the quantitative data to test hypotheses derived from the interpretation of the qualitative material, or vice versa, probe into mechanisms suggested by the narrative evidence through a quantitative analysis. Nor did we select our qualitative cases from particular cells produced by prior numerical evidence in causal models. All these are legitimate and potentially fruitful uses of mixed methods. Our aims, however, are more modest. We will use the full quantitative data to establish a) the explananda for the present study, i.e. age at union formation and first birth for the 1971 cohort in comparison to earlier cohorts and educational differentials in age at first birth, and b) to document, as in section 3, the contexts of family formation processes in the two Germanys. In regard to the selected cases, we are using the quantitative materials from two surveys also c) for the factual reconstruction of the education, training, residential, and

family history. This information is the basis of the individual case descriptions in these respects in the text below. And, finally we are using the qualitative materials from the narrative interviews to probe the causes and mechanisms, i.e. the vocabulary of motives (Bernardi/Keim 2007; Bernardi et al. 2007) suggested by theories as outlined in section 2. We are, in addition, looking for mechanisms and topics which are not in the focus of the theoretical debate. In this sense, this should be considered a descriptive analysis in the quantitative part and an exploratory, hypothesis-generating exercise in the qualitative part.

We suggest that the various causes and mechanisms outlined in section 2 ideally require different methods of data collection and data analysis. First, it should be noted that both quantified life histories and qualitative biographical self-accounts provide very rich data on the synchronic and diachronic contexts of individual lives. Thus, the “rich context” argument cannot be claimed only by the qualitative side of the theoretical debate. Therefore, one has to look for more subtle differences between the two approaches. Life course contingencies might trigger the delay of family formation without conscious deliberations on the part of the actors. For instance, parents or young girls do not make a decision about their age-dependent fertility probabilities when they decide to enter Gymnasium at age 10, but this step might often imply a sequence of activities and commitments in education, training and professional work which can push the potential onset of family formation from the late teens to the early thirties.

Likewise, continuities and discontinuities of working lives are best captured in standardized event histories, but their subjective interpretation as biographical uncertainties involves perceptions and subjective assessments. Therefore, standardized reconstructions of life courses will most likely produce the best data for capturing life course contingencies and complex job trajectories, while biographical uncertainties will more likely reveal themselves in qualitative interviews.

Similarly, while institutional and context conditions can be derived from systematic comparisons between countries and sub-systems – such as East and West Germany before and after unification – value commitments should manifest themselves more validly in subjective accounts. And whether fixed value orientations, adaptive value orientations, or short term rational choice calculations prevail should best be determined on the basis of extensive qualitative materials. Data on the life courses of partners and spouses are not well covered, even in extensive life history studies like ours, and evidence of the partner’s influences, beliefs and intentions can be better retrieved from subjective accounts. Not least, before we actually attempt any explanation or understanding, it is crucial to establish the distribution of the phenomena under study. Therefore, we will use the data from our representative sample surveys to calculate the age specific rates of cohabitation, marriage, and first birth. We will use the data on standardized life histories for reconstructing the individual temporal patterns of the education-training-career trajectories and we will use the data from the qualitative interviews to attribute the degree of biographical uncertainty, the value commitments in regard to marriage and children and the degree to which situation-bound rational choice deliberations prevail.

5. Entry into unions and onset of first birth of East and West German women born 1919-1971

As a descriptive background, we first look at the ages of first cohabitation, first marriage and first birth for West and East German women. The main purpose of this exercise is to locate our specific cohort in overall cohort development and to establish our *explanandum* for the 1971 population as a whole. For West Germany the estimates describe the women born 1929-31, 1949-51, 1954-56, 1959-61, and 1971, for East Germany the women born 1929-31, 1951-53, 1959-61, 1964 and 1971. As a short cut we will denote the cohort groups in the following text by their midpoint years.

Table 5: Medians and Quartiles of the Age of Women at Their First Union Formation in West Germany

	Birth Cohort	25%	Median	75%
First Marriage	1929-1931	21.3	23.7	26.6
	1939-1941	20.4	22.2	25.0
	1949-1951	19.6	21.5	24.6
	1954-1956	20.7	23.3	30.3
	1959-1961	21.5	25.6	/
	1964	22.6	25.5	30.4
	1971	23.8	28.3	/
First Cohabitation	1929-1931	24.2	26.4	/
	1939-1941	21.1	25.3	/
	1949-1951	21.1	24.7	/
	1954-1956	19.8	22.0	27.2
	1959-1961	19.3	22.3	/
	1964	20.4	23.0	27.2
	1971	21.1	23.8	28.6
First Marriage or Cohabitation	1929-1931	21.3	23.7	26.5
	1939-1941	20.4	22.1	24.8
	1949-1951	19.5	21.4	23.8
	1954-1956	19.7	21.5	24.8
	1959-1961	19.4	22.0	25.8
	1964	20.5	22.8	26.3
	1971	20.9	23.6	28.1

Source: German Life History Study, Kaplan-Meier estimates. Denote that the respective parameters could not be observed at the time of the interview.

Entry into cohabitation and first marriage – West German women (Table 5). The (relatively few) women of the cohort born around 1930 who entered a non-marital union did so relatively late, by age 26, and later than those who married immediately. The age at entry cohabitation then fell to age 22 for the 1955 cohort and then started to rise again up to almost age 24 for the 1971 cohort. Age at first marriage was 24 for the 1930 cohort of West German women, fell close to age 21 for the 1950 cohort, and then rose again to a very high median age of 28 for the 1971 cohort. Overall stability is much higher if we take age at entry to any union – either cohabitation or marriage – as our criterion. Except

for the 1930 and the 1971 cohort – with median union entry ages of 23.7 and 23.6 – all intervening cohorts entered their first union around age 22.⁷

Table 6: Medians and Quartiles of the Age of Women at Their First Union Formation in East Germany

	Birth Cohort	25%	Median	75%
First Marriage	1929-1931	20.9	22.5	25.7
	1939-1941	20.0	21.4	23.8
	1951-1953	19.8	21.1	23.6
	1959-1961	20.0	21.5	24.3
	1971	24.5	32.8	/
First Cohabitation	1929-1931	20.5	22.6	28.9
	1939-1941	19.2	20.9	24.4
	1951-1953	19.4	21.3	25.1
	1959-1961	19.3	21.1	24.8
	1971	19.8	21.8	26.1
First Marriage or Cohabitation	1929-1931	20.6	22.2	24.8
	1939-1941	19.8	21.3	23.5
	1951-1953	19.4	20.8	22.8
	1959-1961	19.3	20.8	22.6
	1971	19.8	21.7	25.5

Source: German Life History Study, Kaplan-Meier estimates.

Entry into cohabitation and marriage – East German women (Table 6). East German women born between 1930 and 1960 entered their first cohabitation⁸ around age 22 with the highest age for the 1930 cohort at 22.6 and the lowest age for the 1940 cohort at age 20.9. The age at first cohabitation rose only moderately for the 1971 cohort with the age of 21.8. A quarter of the East German women of the latter cohort started to cohabit in 1991 at the height of the transition turbulences. In this they did not behave differently from earlier generations. Half of that cohort was cohabiting in 1993 and only the third quarter passed through initial cohabitation in 1997 with a further delay of about two years (age 26.1). Thus, cohabitation behavior still followed conventional ages for most women of the 1971 cohort. Ages of first marriage for East German women trailed ages at first cohabitation very closely – with about half a year delay – until the cohort born in 1960, with a phenomenal increase for the 1971 cohort to a median age much later than the one for West German women, 33 years. If we are looking at ages of any union entry we again find a very remarkable stability – all cohorts show median ages between 21 and 22 with a notable increase in the variance for the most recent cohort.

⁷ Slashes denote that the respective parameters could not be observed at the time of the interview. These restrictions apply especially to the cohorts born around 1950, and 1960 which were observed up to age 27/28, and the cohorts born around 1955 which were observed up to about age 34/35 (for the survey designs, see also Mayer 2008).

⁸ Cohabitation is defined here as sharing a household together for at least one month.

Table 7: Medians and Quartiles for the Age of Women at the Birth of Their First Child in West and East Germany

	Birth Cohort	25%	Median	75%
West Germany	1929-1931	22.3	25.8	29.3
	1939-1941	21.6	23.8	27.9
	1949-1951	20.9	25.0	31.0
	1954-1956	22.8	27.0	34.6
	1959-1961	24.0	28.2	/
	1964	24.8	28.1	34.4
	1971	26.0	30.8	/
East Germany	1929-1931	21.2	23.5	26.3
	1939-1941	20.3	22.7	25.6
	1951-1953	20.3	22.3	24.8
	1959-1961	20.5	21.8	23.8
	1971	23.5	27.6	/

Source: German Life History Study, Kaplan-Meier estimates.

Transition to first birth – West German women. (Table 7) The delay in childbearing for West German women is even more marked than the delay in marriage. Women born around 1930 were 26 years old when they had their first baby. This age dropped to age 24 for the 1940 cohort and has since continuously risen by seven years up to age 31 for the 1971 cohort. Kreyenfeld (2006: 19) gives a corresponding estimate of 29.8 for the 1970-73 cohorts based on microcensus data. To the extent that we are already able to observe this delay in childbearing, given data and time limitations, it is pervasive throughout the cohort, e.g. even the age at which 25 percent of women pass the childbirth threshold has shifted upwards, corresponding to the shift in median age.

Transition to first birth – East German women (Table 7). Until unification, age at first birth for East German women decreased – from median age 23.5 for the 1930 cohort to 22 for the 1960 cohort. But not only did age at first birth decrease, the age range at first birth for East German women also decreased (the inter-quartile deviation shrinking from 5 to 3 years). In 1989-1990 the period birth rate plunged dramatically almost by half. At that time there was much speculation whether East German women would just delay childbearing or whether there would be a decline in the birth rate (Dorbritz 2008; Witte/Wagner 1995; Konietzka/Kreyenfeld 2004; Huinink/Kreyenfeld 2006). For our 1971 cohort we observe (so far) both tendencies. There is a marked delay in childbearing in the aftermath of unification. Age at first birth rose by almost 6 years up to age 27.6. Kreyenfeld (2006: 19) gives a median estimate for the aggregate 1970-73 cohort of age 27.1 based on microcensus data.

However, while the delay in marriage was highly consequential for childbearing in the West, delay in marriage in the East did not imply that first childbirth was delayed to the same extent. This is partly due to the high incidence of non-marital births in the East. In 1989 the proportion of single mothers to all mothers in the GDR was 33 percent. In the time after unification, this share grew rapidly and was

57 percent in 2003 – thereby 36 percent higher than the corresponding proportion of single mothers in the West (Konietzka/Kreyenfeld 2005: 33).

Table 8: Percentages ever married and having a first child – East and West German Women Born 1971 at Age 27 and at Age 34

	Percentage Ever Married	Percentage Child(ren)
East Germany		
Survey 1996/97	28.5	38.8
Survey 1996/97 – only	29.3	36.4
Panel Respondents (Panel 2005)	57.1	73.4
West Germany		
Survey 1998	45.4	33.8
Survey 1998 – only	52.2	38.8
Panel Respondents (Panel 2005)	72.3	66.0

Source: German Life History Study – Kaplan Meier Estimates. The estimates for the 2005 Panel include the data for all respondents in the 1998 survey.

These cohort comparisons underscore the extraordinary position of the 1971 cohort in regard to delayed family formation. While age at first union entry remained constant in West Germany and only moderately rose in East Germany, age at marriage increased in both parts of Germany, and dramatically so in the East. Thus, in both parts of Germany, delays in childbearing cannot be due to delays in union formation per se. As a consequence, at about age 27 (the time point of our first interview), 45 percent of the West German women had married and 34 percent had children; at about the same age, 29 percent of the East German women were married and 39 percent had a child. At about age 34, at the time of our second interview in 2005, 72 percent of the West German women had married and 66 percent of them had at least one child, while 57 percent of the East German women had married and 73 percent had at least one child.

So why is it that women in both East and West Germany are delaying family formation for so long and why is it that East German women, despite all the disruption resulting from unification, still have children earlier? These are the extraordinary phenomena we want to understand.

A first clue can be found in the distribution of age at first birth according to education (Kreyenfeld 2006). In West Germany, the difference between women with Volksschule and women with higher education rose for median age at first birth by almost ten years between the cohorts born around 1920 and the cohorts born around 1959. It then decreased slightly and stayed fairly stable with a difference of about eight years (Figure 1). In contrast, in East Germany for the cohorts born between 1930 and 1960, the differences between women of low and high education in the median age at first birth decreased by about six years and almost evaporated. It is only for the 1971 cohort that educational differences had a major impact on age at first birth. This difference for our most recent cohort shot up by

almost 12 years (Figure 2). Kreyenfeld (2006) showed that already for the 1962 to 1965, and even more so for the 1966-1969 cohorts, the educational differential age at first birth in East Germany had already increased, i.e. those with Abitur had already delayed motherhood before and immediately with the Wende.

Figure 1: Difference in median ages for the birth of 1st child between lowest and highest educational category, West Germany



Figure 2: Difference in median ages for the birth of 1st child between lowest and highest educational category, East Germany



As Cox-models (Appendix Table 1 and 2) show, the changes in educational composition account for almost all of the cohort differences in age at first birth for West German women born between around 1940 and 1964, while only the youngest cohort experienced a further delay in childbearing not accounted for by increasing educational attainment. In contrast, none of the changes in age at first birth in East Germany can be explained by educational composition and its change over time.

6. Multiple constraints, ambivalence and resignation: why women delay or abandon family formation in West Germany

In the theory section above, we elaborated major reasons why women might delay or abandon family formation: the lengthening and increasing complexity of education, training and career entry, the uncertainties of employment and occupational trajectories, prior value commitments, problems of combining family and work, and the life circumstances/preferences of spouses.

In this section, we present three cases of West German women who are still childless at age 34 in order to probe which of the above conditions are manifest and predominant in their articulated vocabulary of motives, and how, in their own view, such motives changed over time. Then we will present a case of earlier childbearing to assess whether and to which extent such delaying factors were absent. Frau Abach, Frau Dr. Grawitz, and Frau Poldinger are examples for the delay of having children due to prolonged periods of training, complex work trajectories and partner difficulties resulting in a reduced or relinquished wish to have a child. Frau Kretschmann is an example for lower level of training, relatively early marriage and childbearing, but similar problems in combining work and family. Frau Abach and Frau Poldinger come from upper-middle class families. Frau Dr. Grawitz comes from a middle-middle class family and Frau Kretschmann from a working class family. Frau Grawitz and Frau Poldinger have secured upper middle class positions by means of their own professional status, but at least for Frau Grawitz, it is unclear whether her household class position would match her social class of origin (given the class position of her partner). Frau Abach has been sliding on the social scale, since with her own occupational status she cannot maintain the social class position of her parents.

“Moving in together was already too much for him.”

Alexandra Abach: Abitur; qualified clerical employee; no career; no current partner; no children.

Frau Abach grew up as the youngest of three children in the South of Germany. Her father was an engineer in a large electric corporation. Her mother worked as a bank clerk, but was at home during her childhood. Her older sister trained as translator; her older brother studied geography and electrical engineering at university, but dropped out of both courses of study. He now works as an employee in a bank. Both siblings are married and have children. After Abitur she had no clear idea of what she wanted to do. She trained for 3 years as a translator, and then switched to a 2-year apprenticeship as a fashion hat designer, after which she studied English, but suspended that after a year. At age 26, she moved out of the parental home into her own apartment. From 1997 to 1999 she worked as a

clerk in the health sector, from 1999 to 2000 as a receptionist, and from 2000 to 2002 as managerial assistant and editor in the media sector. She then moved to North Germany for a similar position from 2002 to 2003, followed by her current position as a paralegal upon returning to South Germany where she currently earns 1700 Euro net per month. Frau Abach has had several relationships, two of which lasted two years and the last one 6 years. In her last partnership, she lived more than 600 km apart from her partner, but he did not want to move – shortly after she moved to his city, they ended the relationship. She never cohabited with her partner(s). In her response to the standardized panel interview she answered that she did not want to have children, but the narrative interview revealed a much more ambivalent attitude. In 1997 she judged her job perspectives to be quite good, though less so in 2004. Marriage for her is not important, except if one is having children. But at the same time “having a good marriage or partnership” ranks very high among her life goals.⁹

“We saw each other and in an instance fell for each other. And he said to his mother who was also there, this girl I would marry on the spot. If he had only done it (laughing)! But then he became afraid. When it got more serious I told him, ‘I will move to your city.’ But when I got this job I did not want to leave and asked him to join with me. But he did not.”

Eventually she moved to the city where her boyfriend lived, but into her own apartment.

“Marrying is not so important for me. I did not ask him whether he wanted to marry me. Moving in together would have been the next step. And that he did not want. That was already too much for him. My goodness, I thought. He dodged the issue and asked whether moving in together would really be good for us, whether we would not get on each others nerves, and so on [...] as if it would have been the worst [...] No, my boyfriend did not want a family. That would have been a responsibility. He is a free spirit, he did not want to commit and he did not want to have children. That was a horrible idea to him [...] Although he is very good with children and all children love him, he was a hit with my nieces and nephews, but there is nothing I can do if he does not want to have children himself [...] at the moment I am quite, I am quite happy as it is now. It would be nice if a great man would come along, I would like that. But I am not actively searching either and where should I search? It should just happen again by itself.

To have children is not the greatest of my wishes, and it is not the end of the world if I do not have children within the two next years. But I am sure I could handle it and I am sure I would enjoy being a mother. But if it does not happen, it does not happen. I have many single girl friends who also do not rush after it. So I am not alone in this [...] Maybe we women must make the decision for ourselves. But I do not want to be a single mom. It is easy to get pregnant, no problem, But I do not want to do it on my own. I want to have such a wonderful family as I had myself. It should happen before I get to be 36. Otherwise the age distance is getting too big. One probably does not see that well anymore what children need and how they tick. I see this already with my nephews. I have no clue what they are after. Embarrassing!”

This long citation expresses Frau Abach’s ambivalence well. She loved her boyfriend. She would like a child and is confident she would be a good mother and also enjoy it. But her partner also had to agree. Half resigned, she says that she does not need to have a child immediately. But on the

⁹ Response to attitude item in the quantitative study.

other hand, she does not want to be too old. Comparing herself with her peers, she concludes that it is not so bad, because her girl friends do not rush into parenthood either. And in final resignation, "If it does not happen, it does not happen," which refers to finding a partner who wants a child and to get pregnant.

Thus, for Frau Abach, it is neither a strong career commitment, nor a desire to spend her money and time on leisure or consumption which keep her from having children. The fact that she passed through a sequence of three periods of post-school qualification may have delayed the onset of family formation. It is also noteworthy that she left the parental home when she was 26 years old and always lived alone. Also, her residential move from South to North Germany and back may have pushed off settling down. She is furthermore somewhat exceptional in not valuing either marriage or children very highly, while at the same time cherishing her own family and childhood as a high standard to be achieved. While all these aspects might have contributed to a delay, the most obvious reason seems to lie in her relationships. It was her former 6-year-long partner who did not even want to cohabit, much less marry and have children. But the reluctance of her partner(s) to commit themselves has a certain counterpart in Frau Abach's own reluctance to settle on a certain occupation and a certain job. Starting a family may also be made difficult by the lofty family ideals for which her own family provided the exemplar.

How has education and social class affected the onset of childbearing in Frau Abach's case? The resources of the parental family allowed her to live at home for a longer time than usual and to engage in three different episodes of vocational and professional training.

"As a woman in this society one constantly faces hurdles, if one is to advance in a profession."

Dr. Claudia Grawitz: medical doctor in specialty training; lives with an unemployed partner.

Frau Dr. Grawitz was born and raised in (West-) Berlin. Her mother was born in Czechoslovakia, studied languages, worked as a teacher, and now works as a clerical worker in public administration. Her father died when she was 4 and was also a medical doctor. She has a younger brother who only finished Mittlere Reife, and received an apprenticeship as an electronics worker in a big electronics firm. He then worked for a big electronics firm, but became unemployed when the firm closed down. He now works as a temp worker in his old occupation. Dr. Grawitz studied medicine and is training as a specialist in a hospital. She lived with her mother until age 31. Her partner of 9 years is qualified as a metal worker but worked in a semiskilled job and is currently unemployed. They cohabit but keep two apartments, since he would lose his unemployment assistance otherwise. In early 2005, she told us that she wanted to have two children and the first one of them within 3 years. Some months later, in the biographical interview, she was more resigned and only wanted one child. This ambivalence already manifested itself in the standardized interviews where first she said she wanted 2 children, but later fully agreed with the statement, "My occupational future is too uncertain." She also agrees with the items "Marriage as an institution is obsolete" and "I do not need a piece of paper to have a stable relationship."

“First I want to finish my residency. The hospital where I am working now is ok, but everything is bigger and more anonymous. But I have no choice, because I want to finish my residency as quickly as possible. Also in regard to family planning, I am not getting any younger. I will be 35 then, and must decide what I want to do [...] I would not want to be 40 when I become a mother [...] either it is too late or one still has a chance [...] but under no circumstances do I want to interrupt my training now. [...] I do not have children yet, but it is still on the table. But it is difficult. I think as a woman in this society who wants to have a career, you get only stones thrown into your path. I see this with my girlfriends and acquaintances, who are also professionals, who often can't return to their job the way they would have liked to. One really has to think hard whether one can combine family and a career [...] Originally I wanted to have two children. In the meantime, I think one would be enough. That has changed and it's very sad. But that's just how it is, and it is not right. A friend of mine has a one year old daughter. For her it is a bit different because she is a civil servant and has a secure job and she can also work half time if she wants to. But even she is always running into difficulties with finding child care. I think this situation is impossible. It is no surprise that, as I heard on the radio, Berlin women on average do not even want one child. Clearly the basics are somehow wrong [...] I see my male colleagues, they all go up the ladder, almost none [of the upper hospital ranks] are women. The women just can't manage both [...] And the men rush ahead and you have no chance to catch up. Or the family suffers. Then I can forget a family [...] To open a private practice is too risky I would not want to go into debt for that. I want to become an anesthetist and this is pretty difficult. [...] Another possibility would be to go abroad where conditions for child care are better [...] especially in the Scandinavian countries where hospitals offer child care. One could not dream of that here. This is totally utopian [...] I have given up on planning anything, because anyhow one does not know what will come. [...] Today it is really not possible anymore to make definite plans. It used to be that at age 30 one knew that one has a permanent position in a hospital. Now I have just a 2 year contract, and then everything is open again [...] You cannot plan anything. My last contract was for three years and that was not bad. I was lucky then. Others had only one year contracts. In effect, one cannot make plans for the future. You cannot buy real estate, one cannot settle down in a city, that does not work. It is the same for many, I am not the only one. I will just have to see [...] For me it was always clear, that I first want to pursue my occupational goals. But even when I was 20, I also wanted to have two children. This has changed. Now I do not think that the absolute way to live a happy life is to raise children. I see this differently now. But I would still somehow like to achieve that. It would be a great experience, even if it is only one child. It is important that one can convey one's experiences to the next generation [...] I see how wonderful that can be among our friends.

My partner has a positive attitude towards children, but [...] he of course first wants to have a job [...] And I am lucky that my partner wants to share in parenting. For some time, one could stay at home and then the other. But I think for the first year, when one wants to enjoy everything, I would want that. But it is a full year and in medicine one can hardly afford it [...] At the moment, it is up in the air whether we will have children at all. At the moment I don't know. I think I would like to have a child – one might miss something otherwise when one gets older. But I do not see it the same way as ten years ago, that it is a must. That it is necessary for full happiness. I do not see it like that any more. Then I could not imagine a future without children. But it was clear that I wanted to pursue my career first. It would be nice to have children, and my partner has the same view, but it does not have to happen at all costs [...]

Nowadays even 42 year olds can become mothers. That is not a problem any more. But, no, for me I would not want that. But I see no problem in having a child in my mid-thirties. Of course the clock is ticking, but this is no problem for me [...] just let it tick. One cannot plan everything. If one then wants a child, it might not happen, that's just it. Somehow one will have to live with it.

One cannot take it for granted, like when I am 35 years old, I will have my specialty, then we try to have a child and a month later it shall happen, maybe it does not happen. One will have to see. [...] I don't put myself under stress. That is not how it is with me."

Frau Dr. Grawitz' delay of motherhood reflects the demands and uncertainties of her professional career. She studied medicine and wants to finish her advanced training as quickly as possible. She chose her medical specialty with consideration of its compatibility with child raising, i.e. the possibility of working half time. After finishing her five year specialty she wants to start a family, which she cannot do while she is in training due to shift work and long hours. Originally, she wanted to have two children, but has become increasingly pessimistic about it. Now she sees at best the possibility for having one child. And she already anticipates that having this child will hurt her chances of promotion. Her partner supports her wish for a child, but his long unemployment also has negative consequences for their plans, because she anticipates that they will not have enough money to live once she reduces her work hours. Although the demands and uncertainties of her medical career are clearly an important factor for her, two other aspects come into play. On the one hand, she still upholds the norm that she wants to reduce her working time to care for a small child and cannot see alternatives to that. On the other hand, she does not openly consider the option that her partner could stay at home to care for the child, although he is currently unemployed. Frau Dr. Grawitz wants to combine a professional career and a family, but sees many obstacles in realizing that goal due to the demands and/or uncertainties in her own and her partner's careers. She has already reduced her family goal from two children to one child and anticipates that even that goal might be unrealistic.

How do social class and education enter as factors in the family formation process for Frau Dr. Grawitz? The class situation of her parents is ambivalent. It is, on one hand, characterized by the high professional status of her medical doctor father. On other hand, since he died early, the economic situation of social origin does not match that status level which defined her professional aspirations. Since she has to work to be able to afford her medical studies, she is more under pressure than her peers might be. A similar class ambivalence is apparent in her choice of partner, who is an unemployed skilled worker. Her experience appears to be a case of upward mobility, aiming to attain her father's social class. Family formation and having children are delayed for that goal, which assumes priority.

One "demographic" cause for the difficulties of women like Frau Dr. Grawitz may lie in the fact that men with a strong family orientation have already married and become fathers at the time when her career allows her to start a family. Thus the potential partners left might be those with a weaker family orientation. Another constraint derives from the social norm that professional men can marry less educated women, but not the other way around. To break this norm and to have a lower status partner with more time for parenting might be one option for professional women.

"Well, my last boyfriend was totally afraid to have children and to commit to a relationship [...]"

Frau Poldinger: Abitur and Law Degree; works as a lawyer with a big insurance company; strong career orientation; no current partner.

Frau Poldinger was born and grew up in a South German city as the oldest of three children. Her family is part of a left-liberal milieu and she sees herself as part of the 1968-generation. Her paternal grandfather was an architect and civil servant. Her maternal grandmother was a tailor whose partner left her alone with two small children. Both parents are architects. Her father worked in several architectural firms before he took a civil servant position in a public planning group. Her mother worked part-time in an architectural office and later as a freelancer. After the second child, her mother stopped working. Her younger sister is a landscape architect and has one child. Her younger brother achieved Abitur, and studied painting at the academy. He dropped out after a few semesters and works in a supermarket.

School and university came easily for Frau Poldinger. After the Abitur she worked as an au pair in the United States for half a year in a French family and half a year in an American family. The prospects for law graduates were not promising when she entered university, and therefore she took an international law specialty course in addition to the normal curriculum. She excelled in both areas in her exams which allowed her to pick her first career step, a U.S. law firm specializing in corporate law where she worked for three and half years. After some years she felt completely overworked and burnt out. Also, in order to make the prospect of having a family more realistic, she switched to work as a lawyer in a large insurance company where family related reduction to half time is possible. Thus, she anticipated the difficulties of combining work and having small children, and planned her career accordingly.

“I very much would like to have a family, and sooner rather than later, because now I am way into my thirties and I think it is about time. But it just did not happen until now [...] Otherwise I would have wanted a child some years ago [...] For instance, when I changed my job [between a law firm and an insurance company] one reason in the back of my mind was that I could switch to a half time job in the new firm when I have a family. But I don't have a family. This is due to the fact that I have not found a partner with whom I could have a child [...] I did have a number of relationships in recent years, but they only lasted for one or two years, and then we split up again. And in the times in between I was alone [...] like now [...] I would very, very much like very soon to have a child or two – we will see how many. Of course, one does not know how it would develop, but I truly would like to have a family. And I also would like to have a man again. But it does not come by itself. Well, my last boyfriend was totally afraid of having children and to commit to a relationship [...] And before I was of course also younger. So, until 30, nobody thinks of having children. Some of my girlfriends became mothers before 30, but they were all in long term relationships [...] And I had a partner who was 30, but having a child was a long term goal then [...] and this relationship did not last [...] if I started a relationship now, then starting a family would not be a distant goal any more [...] But, as I already also know from my girlfriends, all men are pretty afraid of having children [...] One must pressure them quite heavily to convince them [...] Once they are almost 40, a little bit less so [...] But even then if a women gets pregnant they panic that they would have to become the breadwinners [...] At any rate, when men are younger they say they want children, but just not right now. My hunch is the reasons are economic, but also that they are afraid of losing their freedom [...] Though they say this less openly and might be less conscious of it, in contrast to material reasons.”

Frau Poldinger is an example of a successful career woman who would like to have a family in her mid-thirties, but could not (yet) attain this wish because her partners procrastinated or were openly negative about parenting. Now she is looking for a partner with whom she can start a family.

Although her career commitment is high and she can see herself moving up to management ranks, she is prepared to reduce her workload in order to have small children and has even strategically changed her employer accordingly. To have a child without a partner, like one of our East German interviewees, is not something she can imagine. She wants a “real family”. Thus, despite a long training period and heavy early career investments, neither life course contingencies nor biographical uncertainties appear to be the most salient conditions in her case. Her strong value commitments for both career and family are not undermined by how her career unfolds. It is the lack of a partner willing to become a father which produces the observed outcome, although her absorption in work at her first job and that “parenting was not an issue before age 30” might have also influenced the partner malaise. Beyond that, like in the case of Frau Abach and Frau Grawitz, it is a certain ideal of having a family with a close partner relationship, and time intensive devotion to the child which makes the realization of this goal difficult.

Frau Poldinger pursues an upper-middleclass position. She wants a top career, a husband of similar professional status and children. Although she has been advancing rapidly in her career and has channeled it in a manner which should make it easier to combine family and career, the main stumbling block is finding the right partner to consolidate the class position.

“We did not really plan a child. It was more like, when it happens, it happens.”

Frau Kretschmann: married; one son; saleswoman in a food chain.

Frau Kretschmann was born in an East German town and grew up in a small town in the northern part of West Germany. Her mother worked as an unskilled worker taking care of animals. She died due to alcoholism when Frau Kretschmann was 5 years old. Her father worked in a slaughterhouse and as an employed sales driver working in open markets. At age 9, he married her stepmother, who worked as a saleswoman. She has an older sister who works as a saleswoman and with whom she lived for a while after the death of her mother, and a younger stepsister. Frau Kretschmann finished *Realschule* and had an apprenticeship as a sales assistant. Her husband is a metalworker. She moved in with him (and his parents) because of trouble with her stepmother when she was 18. At age 19 they moved into their own apartment. She refused to marry until he got himself out of trouble and had finished an apprenticeship (as a scaffold worker). She married at age 25 “for love”¹⁰ and “because she always wanted to marry”¹¹ and had a son at age 27. In the first interview in 1998 she said she was unhappy because she has no children, and in the second interview she admitted that they did not plan the timing of the child. The child has a genetic defect resulting in partial disability. She is afraid that another child would not be healthy either, and therefore does not want any more children (this is also due to the additional financial burden). She does all of the housework and child care. Frau Kretschmann likes her job and is highly respected in it. She declined an offer to become a store manager, because it would take away time from her family.

¹⁰ Very high agreement with item in attitude scale.

¹¹ Medium agreement with item on attitude scale.

“He [her boyfriend and now husband] was quite often unemployed. I had to earn the money for both of us [...] He did not work much. Then he asked me whether I would marry him. I said no way, if you go on like that, I won't marry you [...] I said if you learn a trade and get your driver's license, then we can talk about it again [...] Half a year before he finished his apprenticeship, we married [...] And I am glad. Now we have been together nine and half years. Our son is now five years old. By now our marriage has endured for so long.”

“We did not really plan a child, no. We said, when it happens, it happens. [...] We had him when I was 27, it was about time. It was ok then. Before we did not want a child, because I saw to it that my husband should first finish his training and all, that everything should be a bit more secure. But then we told ourselves, ok, now we have everything as far as that, now we can have a child. But one is enough [...] He [the son] has a muscular [disability]. And then it might be that the next child would have it also, maybe even worse. This risk is too big for me. So for now, I think, it is most important that I can spend a lot of time with him. Because if I have no time for it, why bring a child into the world [...] We try to do everything for our child, that he should not have any disadvantages. But I say we are happy. Sometimes we are sitting together here and we tell ourselves how well we are doing. What more do we want? And as long as a family is a family, then we can rely on it. Family I find important.”

Frau Kretschmann grew up in difficult circumstances, and worked hard not only for her own qualifications, but also for her husband's. She is fully employed and takes care of a disabled child. Marriage and children are taken for granted, but must also be carefully managed. She delayed marrying but only until her partner (who was unemployed when she met him and a troublemaker) was close to finishing his training. She is clearly the active partner who thinks that it is up to her to make the family work. Family ranks very high in things which are important in life, but work comes almost as high.

Frau Kretschmann comes from a lower class background, below that of secure working class, but attained a middle level of education. She is good at her job and could advance to a supervisory position. But she declined that opportunity in order to be able to work part time and take care of her chronically ill child. She could have started childbearing earlier given her training and employment trajectory, but the marginal position of her husband-to-be delayed not only cohabitation, but marriage and parenthood by about five years.

The women in West Germany born 1971 were, at the time of our interviews, a few years away from the age they considered too late for having a first child. Marriage and parenthood for almost all of them were part of their initial life plans, but these women faced many obstacles in attaining these goals. Those women who had not yet started a family especially see the possibility of fulfilling those wishes as dependent on their actual or potential partners and also on perceived difficulties of combining careers and parenting. An important delaying factor seems to be that the actual or former partners tend to shy away from commitments to marriage or children. West German men appear to be the more difficult partners in family formation.¹² It is noteworthy that even those women who have resigned them-

¹² The emphasis on male partner reluctance in regard to the delay of family formation raises of course the issue of how reliable women's information about the motives of their partners is. On the one hand they are corroborated by the cohabitation histories, on the other hand we find independent corroboration in the case studies of men (Mayer/Schulze forthcoming: ch. 4).

selves to not finding a suitable partner and – as a consequence – do not have a strong wish for children, planned their careers very consciously for the eventuality of motherhood (e.g. in regard to part-time options). All the women in our case histories, whether or not they have children, find it difficult to combine work and motherhood. Extended careers and their uncertainties impose additional constraints for professional women.

In general, we can put forward the hypothesis that West German women are subject to an involuntary ambivalence: they want a family and children but they are negatively constrained by partners and/or careers. Thus, it appears as if it is only partially up to them whether they can realize their goals of family formation. Education and training are crucial determinants for fertility outcomes. Long duration in education and training and associated investments in careers do not only seem to delay childbearing, but also – and as a further condition of the former – make it difficult to find a partner who is committed to starting a family. Social class of parents may help as much as hinder family formation. High parental social class tends to prolong education and training and appears to set high standards for partners. Women's own social class position does not seem to accelerate family formation, rather the opposite (to the extent that it involves heavy investments in education, training, and the early career and to the extent that it is not matched by the class position of the partner).

7. Family formation during the transformation in East Germany – some early, some late, but for all it is taken for granted

Family formation for East German women born in 1971 could have been influenced by the norms and behavior patterns in the GDR, the immediate repercussions of the transformation and the opportunities and constraints of the new society. Our aim in presenting and interpreting the East German case material is to search for manifestations of all three of these sources of influence. In the traditional GDR pattern, having children was unquestionably taken for granted. In fact, it was a widespread norm to have children in one's early twenties (Kreyenfeld 2006). Two out of the eight East German women in our qualitative sample still followed the pattern of early motherhood. Another characteristic of both the GDR and post-unification East Germany is the high proportion of unmarried mothers which does not necessarily imply living without a partner. This positive orientation toward parenthood seems to be, in contrast to West Germany, widely shared by East German men (Mayer/Schulze forthcoming: ch. 4.). The impact of the transformation is manifest in occupational reorientation, residential mobility, as well as job shifts and changes in occupation (see Table 2 above). Finally, West German norms, behavior patterns and institutional (family policy) provisions could have influenced the family formation of our cohort.

Two of the four following case studies will show the influence of the "Wende" or reunification, one woman having moved to West Germany for six years, the other living there permanently. Two of our cases show the continuity of former GDR patterns and norms. First, we will present two women with

an unbroken GDR mentality, Frau Müller and Frau Pawlak, followed by two women, Frau Magatsch and Frau Mügge, who partially adapted to or are influenced by West German models of female lives.

Frau Pawlak comes from an upper middle class, bourgeois family and attained a high level education and training as well as a very high level occupational position. Frau Mügge comes from a middle class family, but due to unification did not reach the training levels she aspired to. Frau Müller has a working class background, and is stable in social mobility terms by her own training and the occupation of her former husband and now partner. Frau Magatsch has a middle class background due to the professional position of her mother. She herself attained a high educational level and a top professional position.

“I was never especially keen about children. It was just normal to have them [...]”

Frau Müller: POS (intermediate) schooling; trained nurse; real estate manager.

Frau Müller grew up in two big cities in the North and South of East Germany. She does not know her father, and her mother worked in an accounting office. Her stepfather was a master electrician, and post-unification works as a production manager in a large printing firm. She has one stepbrother who is 9 years younger. He started studying computer science, but dropped out. He is now training to become a teacher. She finished school at the intermediate level (POS), trained as a nurse and worked after her training as an ambulant nurse. Before the end of her apprenticeship she had her first son and moved in with the father without marrying him. Her second child, also a boy, was born 5 years later. Shortly after the birth of her second child she and her partner separated. She blames her first partner for only thinking of himself, improving his qualifications and leaving them alone while training as a “Master”. In 1999, she retrained for two years as an office clerk because she was looking for work which would allow her to easily combine employment and family. Since then she has worked in a small company as a facility manager. Also, since 1999, she has lived with her new partner, a lower level civil servant. They do not want to marry or have children of their own. The older boy has a disability and is enrolled in a special school.

“I was never especially keen about children. It was just normal to have them [...] It was a mentality during the times of the GDR. Really, it was the first child at age 18 and the second shortly after. We just talked today about what might have been the reasons. Maybe one just had more advantages with children [...] I don’t know. Many of my apprenticeship group had the same idea, finishing training [at age 19], then I’ll have my first child. There were many who shared this view [...]”

Frau Müller is an example of early childbearing and how it was part and parcel of the concept of life in the GDR. Having a child early was taken for granted. Frau Müller is also an example of the relative readiness in the GDR and now in East Germany to have children and a partner without marrying. Having children is not a hurdle for either separating or finding a new partner. Frau Müller combines work and family and takes responsibility for her children, although she does not feel very close emotional ties with her older son – which she decries. In the question about life goals she ranks “work that I enjoy” and “a happy partnership” equally very high. For Frau Müller, having children early was neither af-

fected by her education and training nor the class position of her parents or her own. It was something which was normal and expected of women her age and cohort.

“So sorry for the father of the child, but the next man had to be the father.”

Susanne Pawlak: Career and a child; no partner; executive engineer; living abroad.

Frau Pawlak grew up in or around a large East German town. Her mother completed Abitur and worked as a medical-technical assistant. Her father grew up in the Middle East and migrated to the GDR. He has a university degree and is working as a self-employed media producer. Her maternal grandfather was a high military, her grandmother a home maker. Her paternal grandfather died before her birth and was a well-known academic who escaped his home country after a death sentence. She has no siblings. She completed the Abitur (EOS) and had no definite idea what she wanted to do as an occupation. Her first field of study, business administration, was not her choice, but was assigned to her. From 1990 to 1996 she studied business administration at a technical university and then added an advanced engineering degree in 2000. At age 24 she moved out of the parental home and lived alone in an apartment. She started her career in a permanent job as a sales manager for a year, after which she worked for another year with a temporary contract in the financial sector. She now works as a top utilities manager abroad. At the first interview, in 1997, she said that without unification she might already have a child, but would not necessarily be married. She had two partners for a shorter time. Her only child was born in 2003 and has private day care. Marriage is an obsolete institution for her.¹³

“Well, for me it was more a kind of rational decision, I was 30 and told myself, what do you really want? You have a top job, you have seen a lot of the world, you have had a great time at university, you danced till dawn, and fully enjoyed life, that now the moment has come when it would be good to have a child. So sorry for the father of the child, but the next man had to be the father, so to speak. It was really the kind of decision: why should I wait? I did not really want to wait till my dream man appears with whom I want to be together for the rest of my life, and I might be 40 then. And for me it was clear that it would be easy to have a child in this country [...] My mother said since she was an only child and I was an only child, might it not be nice, if one in the family would succeed in having more than one child. Well (laughs) it will not be my fault. [...] Of course one does not have to overdo it and have one child after the other, but for me it is clear that my child should not remain an only child. [...] I told myself it would be stupid not to use the opportunities here [of easy child care] and wait till I return to Germany, and then I would have the problems [of combining work and family] they all have...No, no [...]”

Frau Pawlak is an example of a single mother who first advanced her professional training and career and then very purposefully became a mother. She did her first and second university degree in effective time and had no problems entering the labor market. However, she did not immediately find the right job and made two firm shifts up to her present upper managerial position. At age 30 she decided that she might soon be too old to have a child and so she planned her pregnancy. It was no problem

¹³ Strong agreement with an attitude scale item.

for her that at the beginning of her pregnancy she knew that the father of the child was not going to stay. The optimal conditions of child care (private day care) and her proactive way of combining her job and her duties as a mother (she would bring the baby along to meetings), seems to imply a very positive context for her decision. And she can imagine having a second child under similar circumstances. Living abroad, she has good opportunities to hire affordable child care. Frau Pawlak is pursuing her goal of motherhood irrespective of a demanding career, living abroad and not living in a union. She takes it for granted that she will have at least two children, but she also realizes that this is made easier by living in a country with low wage child care. In comparing her exceptional situation with that of other women in Germany, she sees her situation as ideal and plans to have a second child while she is still abroad. She values marriage very little, but would like to combine having a family with a good partnership. However, this was not a necessary condition, so having a child was a priority for her. Frau Pawlak represents the older GDR mentality which embodied parenthood as a “natural” part in one’s biographical self-conception. What is new is that this mentality now is not supported anymore by institutional supports of comprehensive child care and targeted family policies.

Frau Pawlak is influenced by two traditions pushing towards motherhood: the early fertility norms of the former GDR and likely the strong family norms of the home country of her father and of the country where she now lives. Her high economic resources allow her to have a child, and probably soon two, without a family, because she can afford personalized child care.

“[...] already in planning, the project is in the making.”

Sonja Mügge: textile merchandiser; lower secondary education (POS); apprenticeship as shop decorator; lives with partner in their own house; no child.

Frau Mügge grew up in an East German industry town near the Polish border. Her mother was a chemical engineer, her father a Master craftsman. She had a younger brother who died early. Her occupational aspirations were to train as an advertising decorator and then to get further training in advertising. With unification, the latter option was closed off and she moved to the West to work as a shop decorator in a department store. That move was easier because her then-boyfriend had already moved to the West as well. She could not stay in the firm where she had worked in the East, because most workers were laid off. During her time in the West she obtained further training at an evening trade school in marketing and communication. After 6 ½ years in the West, she returned to the East, moved through several jobs and now works currently as a sales promotion manager. For 4 years she lived with a West German, but broke off the relationship, because she couldn’t stand the West German type of male role playing. She first was impressed by his polished manners, but after a while she found him too superficial and apt to brag. Her current East German partner is a construction engineer and they have rebuilt the small house he inherited. She would marry “if he would ask her”, and is trying to get pregnant.

Frau Mügge was all set for the typical very early East German family formation, but the transformation complicated her training aspirations and job trajectory, and induced residential mobility and related

changes in her partnerships. She retained her aspirations to have a family and children and to continue working, but external conditions delayed that process.

“Without unification my life would have evolved quite differently. Not necessarily better [...] but much less spectacular. I would already be married, maybe already divorced again would have had two children, after some time we would have gotten an apartment and about now we would have gotten the car I applied for when I was 18. We would have a small garden somewhere and go to the Baltic Sea or the Harz for vacations. And most likely I would be still in the same firm where I had started to work; it was unusual to change firms. But I would not have been happier [...] Unification came at the right time for me and for me it could have been even earlier. Because then I would have completed my Abitur and gone on to study and would have had a more normal career.

My girlfriends are now all having children. And frankly before age 30, that was not an issue for me [...]. My clear idea was that I would only become a mother when and if the right partner would be there, and one has to have some financial security first. And one first has to have good training [...] and I feel good that I did the jobs I wanted to do, whatever I wanted [...] so one does not feel sorry if one puts less into one's career for a while. I would never want to stay at home all day, but I would suspend work for a year and work half time for a while after that. But of course one does not know beforehand whether that is a possibility or not [...] And I do not think I can do my present job half time. But that is not the important thing, if one has a child, when one has to pick up the child and when my partner does not have normal working hours [...]

It is not that I don't care about marriage, but it is not a high priority. But I wasn't asked yet. I would not ask myself, or ask a man [...] like women do nowadays [...] No, no, but I do want to marry sometime in my life, but it does not matter whether it is now or in a year, but I would not do things like giving the child the name of the father if one is not married, I would never do that. Better to marry then and have the father's name, or the child has my name. Some of my friends did that to have less trouble with changing the names when they marry. But what reason does one still have to marry? And of course many women have children and are not married; I find no problem in that either [...] I just find it better if the child has the same name as both parents when it enrolls into school. One feels more like a family. I think it is also nicer for a couple, if one is married and one can say “my husband” and not “my friend”. It is more of a commitment. But it is not absolutely necessary [...] and I am not somebody who says I am leaving you, if you do not marry me. [How about children?] That is already in planning, just in the making.”

Frau Mügge is the example of the East German woman for whom the “Wende” had considerable impact on her work and family trajectory. She lost her job in 1991 and immediately moved to West Germany. She continued to work in her trained occupation, but since the advanced training she had planned was more complicated, she enrolled in a private evening vocational college. After returning from West Germany after 6 years she did some job searching without finding a job she liked. After 3½ years as a shop decorator, she switched to a firm where she did some internal training and is working as a merchandiser. Unification also had quite an impact on her private life. Her then-partner moved to West Germany, and she followed him. One and a half years later they split up and she started a relationship with a West German man. After more than six years she separated from him and returned to East Germany. She returned to East Germany and found an East German partner. Quite in contrast to her can-do mentality otherwise, she romantically wants to be asked to get married, and has an am-

bivalent attitude towards the connection of children and marriage. More in line with West German models, she anticipates interrupting her employment and after that reducing her working hours, but also predicts problems of doing so in her current job.

Thus, despite all the disruption in her life course and some uncertainties of the future, having children – with or without marriage – is taken for granted. Frau Mügge retains her GDR family ideals, but delays – together with her friends – for a few years. Receiving advanced training and launching a career in the transformation pushed her to start a family later, but the economic position of her partner actually allows her to plan that actively now.

“[...] here in the West [...] one always has to decide between a job or children.”

Julia Magatsch: Abitur in the East; studied journalism and works as a television editor in a large Northern West German city; has a partner; does not cohabit.

Frau Magatsch grew up as a single child in a large city in Northern East Germany. Her mother works as a biology and chemistry teacher and divorced her father when she was 2 years old. Due to her very good grades she could enter the EOS, although this was not unproblematic because her mother was not in the SED, intelligentsia, and not working class.

Since the time she was 14 years old she wanted to become a journalist (which also made access to the EOS difficult) and knew she could do that only as a party loyal. But even then, this would have been unrealistic in East Germany, because only 20 students per year were allowed to study journalism. After unification she was able realize her career goal and studied journalism at a Bavarian university. She did not like her university time much and found the West German students lacking in knowledge and ambition. After finishing her university degree, she went back to her home town to run a city magazine. Then she applied for work as host of a television show in West Germany. After two years she felt burnt out and abhorred the way talk show guests were being publicly exposed. She quit her job and found work as a television journalist in a private production company doing a show about private life styles. She was recently promoted to chief editor of the show.

Frau Magatsch left her partner, a West German, after five years because she felt herself too young for a permanent relationship. Her current partner is from her old home town in East Germany and works as a production planning engineer. He is much more eager to start a family than she is. She sees enormous problems combining her job and having children. He dreams of a house, but she does not want to get into mortgage debt and would be happy just living together.

“[...] after 5 years I fell in love with somebody else. That was a pity. But I think I just got to know him too early. He would have been the perfect family father. A cool type, knew everything, was tender and loving, very attentive. I got to know him when I was 20 or 21 years old. And then I thought, there has got to be somebody else. Therefore I don't understand people who marry early, or I understand that they separate again soon afterwards. Today one is free to look around. Perhaps one does not always make use of this freedom. What our grandparents did, 50 years of marriage, golden, silver, diamond wedding, that is all gone. It is easy to go separate

ways. Or the women are really too independent – and that is good. I would not want to have to stay with a man for the whole life just because of the money. Somehow I have the feeling that the current family policies keep women quite a bit in a state of dependency. That is really a step backwards which I feel is quite bad.”

“My current boyfriend is more eager to have children and to build a house than I am. We are of the same age. I think he wants many children and that is something we still have to talk about [...] and he comes from a small village and is used to living in his own house. I am not so sure about it [...] I have moved around too often, somehow. I don’t know whether I want to be tied down. And not even that, but I don’t want to get into so much debt. We don’t even live together yet. I was together with my former boyfriend five years, then we moved together, but after 4 weeks I moved out. I don’t think I am unable to cohabit, we spend each day together either in his or my apartment. But I just cherish the feeling that I could withdraw if I wanted to [...] Maybe it is egoistic, I have no idea. But if one has lived alone for such a long time, then one is busy with oneself and has one’s own rhythm. And at the time I worked for the talk show I was so exhausted when I got home and I wouldn’t want to talk to anybody [...] I could not have been nice to somebody else [...] Now I am not so stressed out, and find it ok to talk about work, but I cherish putting my feet up and having no obligations, even the obligations to act nice [...] As to family policy, then the town here is special [...] you can hardly find a place in a Kindergarten [...] they pretend to be child friendly, but actually it is a catastrophe.”

“[...] here in the West you have to apologize, if you bring your small child to a day nursery and if you do not stay at home for 3, 5 or 7 years. [...] My girlfriends in the East make fun of the West German women who have their first child at age 39. But here it is very, very hard to have children [...].when I am seeing how badly other women want children, well I don’t to be alone when I am old. I would like if somebody visited me, and put my feet up and brought me a blanket, or whatever [...] It is rather that here one has to make a decision. And I have a hard time deciding against my job. One always has to decide between job or children. One gets immediately branded as a career woman, while one just loves to work. I really enjoy my job and I am simply afraid that if I stay at home for a while that I won’t get my foot back into the door. [...]”

“[...] the family model here in the West is really archaic: [...] the man goes to work, earns the money, builds a house, buys his wife a second car and brings in the money for the children, and the wife is at home and is happy and thinks she is the greatest, and is happy that she is at home. I find this awful. And the worst is they have a good education before. At university I met many women who saw it basically as a marriage market and the self-respect of women in the West is so low, it’s really ghastly [...]”

Frau Magatsch is acutely aware of the problems of combining family and career. On the one hand, she was socialized in the GDR where the norm was for mothers to be employed. Working mothers received a lot of support and the combination of work and family was not a big issue. On the other hand, Frau Magatsch now works in a big West German city and sees the problems women in her environment have as especially critical. She openly criticizes this pressure to decide between a career and children. Her own consequence is to delay having children, because she does not want to give up her job. This brings her into conflict with her East German partner who is very keen to start a family. Thus, Frau Magatsch is really caught between East and West. She upholds the GDR norms of combining family and work, but sees no way to put this into practice in the West. Thus, Frau Magatsch is a good example for a very strong career orientation which brings her into a real dilemma over child-bearing.

On the one hand she has the East German orientation that a child is a normal part of one's life, but she is caught in the dilemma of having one under the conditions career women in West Germany find themselves. She is as purposive in her professional life as she is cautious in regard to family formation and childbearing

The women born in 1971 in East Germany were, at the time of our interviews, even closer than West German women to the latest age at which they think they should have a child, because the norm of early pregnancy was still very strong in the East. Having children is taken for granted, even more so than marriage. The opportunities which opened up after unification for obtaining new qualifications and reorienting occupational pathways have partly delayed having children, but it is almost never an either/or. The uncertainties and turbulences of the labor market make family life more complicated and sometimes result in divorce and separation, but do not generally deter family formation. The male partners similarly support such a pattern. Never did we hear that a partner did not want to become a father or would not take his parenting role seriously even after a split-up. After 1989 educational levels strongly differentiate the onset of childbearing (Kreyenfeld 2006). Women with apprenticeships in service vocations either follow the early childbearing pattern of the old GDR or delay, but stick to the goal. Women with academic careers either give up or delay childbearing or have children even without having a partner.

8. Summary and Conclusions

In this paper we attempted to understand the mechanisms underlying the delay of family formation among East and West German women. In particular, we focused on the birth cohort born in 1971 which faced the turbulences of post-unification transformation in the East, but also problems entering the labor market in the West. Our contribution is methodologically innovative, because we were able to draw on both quantitative and qualitative data for identical respondents from the German Life History Study.

The starting point of our investigation was a series of Kaplan-Meier estimates for the transition to cohabitation, marriage and first births. In a lengthy historical comparison, the 1971 birth cohorts in both East and West show particularly high median ages of first births. West German women on average were 28.3 years old when they first married and 30.8 years old when they had their first child, while East German women were 32.8 years old when they first married and 27.6 years old when they had their first child. West German women differ in the onset of child bearing by 8-10 years and the overall delay in childbearing can be explained by the changing educational composition, except for the even further delay for the most recent cohort. In contrast, East German women showed a trend of ever smaller differences in age of first child until a rapidly increasing differential for the most recent cohort. The analysis of the development of West and East German educational differentials provides a longer term addition to the study by Kreyenfeld (2006) which concentrated on the 1960s and 1970s cohorts.

We focused on five alleged causes of the delay in family formation for women: a) consequences of the lengthening of the education and training period, b) labor market and economic insecurity, c) value orientations in regard to marriage and parenting, d) problems of compatibility between careers and raising children, and e) conditions pertaining to a partner or spouse. We used the case studies reconstructed from both the standardized responses and the narrative interviews to ascertain the presence or absence of these conditions for each case and to assess their intra-individual weight. Thus, the purpose of this analysis is not to establish causal weights in the overall population, but rather to reconstruct the definition of the situation, the vocabulary of motives and the action logic which these women articulate in order to see themselves in the process of family formation.

Our combination of standardized and qualitative material provides evidence for mechanisms in the delay of family formation which turn out to be in part quite different between West and East German women. For both East and West German women, combining work and family is difficult, but this is more of a deterrent for West German women as far as having children. Likewise, early relationships with partners and early non-marital unions rarely lead to permanent partnerships in both parts of Germany, but again such complications keep East German women from having children less frequently than West German women. Not being married or even not having a partner at all does not prevent East German women from becoming mothers.

For West German women, the delay in family formation appears to be almost over-determined, because a number of sufficient conditions are simultaneously present in making it quite difficult to establish a family. For almost all women, living with a partner and having children are important life goals. Thus, it is clearly not the absence of family value orientations which prevent women from having children or cause them to have children very late. The phase prior to integration into the labor market with a relatively stable job is prolonged, due to both choice and constraints. This is less due to the fact that more women reach Abitur than to the fact that more women on almost all educational levels have more than one training period, e.g. by changing subjects at university or adding further training after an initial apprenticeship. Especially for highly qualified women, uncertainties of employment play an important role. In addition, the practical problems of combining work and having small children are seen as almost insurmountable. Within this context, West German women actively plan their careers to make them compatible with having a child by anticipating family leave and a reduction in working hours. However, probably the strongest reason for the delay in family formation seems to be the reluctance of male partners to commit themselves as fathers and/or problems of employment security and career uncertainties of the male partners. Facing these problems of male ambivalence and lack of support in the work sphere, West German women delay first birth, reduce the number of children they would like to have from two to one or resign their motherhood goals altogether. Interestingly enough,

West German women do not want to rely on men as full breadwinners but anticipate that they will contribute a large share to the family budget.¹⁴

As socio-demographic data show, East German women born in 1971 on average not only have their first child earlier and marry later than West German women, but also have a much higher occurrence of single motherhood. As to the mechanisms underlying these processes of delaying family formation, we need to answer two questions: First, do these mechanisms differ between East and West German women? And second, to the extent that the mechanisms are similar, do they have the same meaning and impact in the East in comparison to the West? As to value orientations, we see not only very clear differences, but also differences in the way they operate. While for West German women a conscious and fairly positive evaluation of having children seems to be a prerequisite for the decision to become a mother, no such value enactment seems to be necessary in the East. Having children and having children early was taken for granted in the former GDR and was still very influential for our cohort. One does not need to like children especially to have children. Although quite a few of our West German women do not see marriage as an absolute must, they still see being married as a desirable goal, and ideally a precondition for having children. For East German women, marriage is clearly not a precondition to the same extent. Also important in the value sphere is the strong emphasis East German women place on being fully employed, while West German women all want to suspend and reduce working hours to be a good mother. However, they also see this as less of a hindrance to motherhood than West German women.

Given the turbulences in their occupational trajectories resulting from the destruction and rebuilding of the GDR economy, East German women should have been much more affected by these mechanisms. East German women of this cohort were ready earlier for family formation, because they finished their apprenticeships earlier and were much less often enrolled in upper secondary and higher education. But the dead ends for qualification trajectories and initial stable employment brought about by the "Wende" by far outweighed this earlier potential onset for family formation. Less than a quarter of East German women followed the former pattern of early motherhood/marriage and then had to work through marital relationships/parenthood under these difficult circumstances. The majority engaged in time consuming re-qualification, job and residential changes and delayed having their first child. In either case, they still took childbearing for granted as a part of their life irrespective of job changes and employment insecurity.

Our East German women also ideally want to have children with a partner, but the idea of changing partners or being a single mother is much less a deterrent for them. They cannot imagine being financially dependent on their partner. But the major difference for the West German women is that they are not subject to widespread male resistance to fatherhood. This is all the more noteworthy, since the occupational lives of these partners are not less, but more turbulent than that of their West German

¹⁴ Bernardi and Keim come to different conclusions. The West German women interviewed by them espouse a traditional family ideal. These women assumed a strong breadwinner role of their partners (Bernardi/Keim 2007: 331)

counterparts. Their problems on the labor market make family life more complicated and sometimes result in divorce and separation, but do not generally deter from family formation.

Finally, we want to draw a balance from our experiences in combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Obviously we were fortunate in being able to draw our qualitative sample in a fairly random stratified way from our overall sample of realized interviews of respondents who had also agreed to be re-contacted. Thus, in contrast to the design of most qualitative studies, our sample was not flawed by selection on the dependent variable, e.g. by only picking women without a child. Also, it is the timing of first birth and of prior union formation rather than childlessness or the long delays which are the proper focus of understanding and explanation. In this paper, for space reasons, we primarily looked at six cases with delays and two counter examples, but ideally one would look at the whole range. On the basis of a qualitative sample alone, one could easily run the risk of misleading conclusions both on the distribution of the dependent variable as well as on the distributions of the independent variables. In contrast, relying exclusively on the quantitative material we would not have seen or sufficiently appreciated the particular role of men in the family formation process and the major differences in which the identical mechanisms play in the East in contrast to the West. But the standardized month-by-month event histories also allowed us to reconstruct qualification and employment trajectories better.¹⁵ The qualitative accounts were clearly superior both in reflecting the ambivalence of attitudes toward children and of changes in preferences over time. But at this stage of our work it would be precocious to make a final assessment on the deficits of either method and the advantages of triangulation.

¹⁵ One reason we did not probe a lot of details of training and work trajectories was that we knew we had the information in the quantitative surveys. But apart from that there is little doubt that the full reconstruction of training and job histories requires standardized questioning.

9. References

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10. Appendix

Table A1: Transitions Into Parenthood – Cox Proportional Hazard Models for the Birth of the First Child – West Germany, Women

	Model 1 Exb(B)	Sig.	Model 2 Exb(B)	Sig.
Birth Cohort				
1929-31		0.000		0.000
1939-41	1.182	0.035	1.262	0.003
1949-51	0.969	0.702	1.135	0.122
1954-56	0.697	0.000	0.928	0.338
1959-61	0.607	0.000	0.855	0.070
1964	0.631	0.000	0.919	0.259
1971	0.441	0.000	0.702	0.000
Education				
No degree, Hauptschule				0.000
Realschule, Mittlere Reife			0.689	0.000
Abitur, Hochschulreife			0.340	0.000

Table A2: Transitions Into Parenthood – Cox Proportional Hazard Models for the Birth of the First Child – East Germany, Women

	Model 1 Exb(B)	Sig.	Model 2 Exb(B)	Sig.
Birth Cohort				
1929-31	<i>ref.</i>	0.000	<i>ref.</i>	0.000
1939-41	1.203	0.102	1.226	0.072
1951-53	1.350	0.008	1.386	0.011
1959-61	1.494	0.000	1.518	0.002
1971	0.475	0.000	0.507	0.000
Education				
No degree, Hauptschule			<i>ref.</i>	0.000
Realschule, Mittlere Reife			1.053	0.612
Abitur, Hochschulreife			0.663	0.002