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Perceptions of job instability and the prospects of parenthood. A comparison between Eastern and Western Germany

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Job Insecurity and the Timing of Parenthood

***Abstract**: This article contributes to the ongoing debate on the economic determinants of fertility behavior by addressing the role of job insecurity in couples' intentions concerning parenthood and its timing. It starts from the hypothesis that cultural values moderate individuals' reactions to job insecurity and the way in which it is related to family formation. With a systematic thematic content analysis of a set of semi-structured interviews with childless men and women around the age of thirty in eastern and western Germany, we are able to show that there are substantial differences in the consequences that job insecurity has on intentions to have a first child. These differences are mainly due to different expectations about the interaction between work and family careers and differences in the way in which priorities within a life course perspective are defined. In western Germany, a relatively secure job career is expected to precede family formation and this sequence of transitions is rather rigid, whereas in eastern Germany job security and family formation are thought of and practiced as parallel investments. We suggest that the lack of convergence in family formation patterns between eastern and western Germany after the unification of the country in 1990 is partially related to different attitudes towards job insecurity in the two contexts.*

Keywords: family formation, fertility, Germany, job insecurity, qualitative interviews, social change

1 Introduction

There are two noticeable aspects to the evolution of fertility patterns in eastern Germany following the unification of the country in 1990. The first is the very well known drop in fertility rates to levels below those of the old federal states (from 1.6 in 1989 to 0.8 in 1994; Adler 1997: 41); this steep drop of fertility is a characteristic pattern observed in almost all eastern European countries after the fall of the socialist regimes and has been attributed to the rapid social and economic changes, the economic crisis and the previously unknown high levels of unemployment[1] (Sobotka 2002). In this context the rapid decline in eastern German birth rates is not surprising. The second noticeable aspect of fertility development in the region is puzzling: Eastern Germans continue to become parents more often and do so at younger ages than their western counterparts. The relatively early parenthood of eastern Germans is particularly puzzling since microdata show that it is also true for individuals who face higher socio-economic insecurity and unemployment. They more often have children within non-marital unions, and women face higher risks of having children when they are unemployed (Kreyenfeld 2001; Konietzka & Kreyenfeld 2004).

Therefore, the interesting question is not why fertility is so low in eastern Germany, but why eastern Germans become parents earlier than their western counterparts despite facing worse labor market conditions. This question has a universal value since it calls for a thorough examination of how job insecurity is related to family formation.

The concept of job insecurity has been discussed at length in relevant literature: while there is evidence that job insecurity is related to job instability and employment precariousness (Elman and O'Rand 2002; Ahn and Mira 2002), there is general agreement that job insecurity is a multidimensional concept which refers mainly to the subjective perception of being at risk of losing one's own job or some of its features, or more restrictively the perceived stability and continuance of one's employment with an organization (Hartley et al. 1991; Klandermans & van Vuuren 1999; Sverke & Hellgren 2002; Sverke et al. 2002; 2006; Green 2003). Researchers studying the psychological consequences of job insecurity have focused on the quality of work, the workers' health, wages or the patterns of leaving home (Barling & Kelloway 1996; Probst and Brubaker 2001; Kausto et al. 2005; Becker et al. 2005a, 2005b; Anderson & Pontusson 2007; Green 2007). Despite the significant interrelation between fertility behavior and the two related factors of labor force participation and employment status (Engelhardt et al. 2004; Engelhardt & Prskawetz 2004), virtually no empirical research focuses on whether the perceived job insecurity affects fertility intentions and behavior. The relationship between the subjective definition of one's own employment perspective and fertility intentions are a fascinating area of research; they open a window on the way in which objective conditions are mediated by the subjective interpretations of them. It has been argued and shown that job expectations, feelings of security and stability, perceptions of job insecurity, and reactions to these feelings are all mediated by cultural values acquired through socialization (Hui 1990; Schwartz 1990; Probst and Lawler 2006). This is consistent with the cognitive anthropological wisdom predicting that all sorts of information are processed through cultural schemas (D'Andrade 1997) which influence the aspects of reality that are noticed and salient to the individual and the way in which they have to be evaluated.

We start from the hypothesis that cultures of work and family moderate individuals' reactions to job insecurity and the way in which this is related to family formation intentions. This hypothesis enables us to understand the persisting differences between eastern and western German timings of the transition to parenthood. In order to tackle this issue, we employ interpretative analyses of in-depth interviews with young adults in eastern and western Germany to investigate whether their perceptions of job insecurity and family formation are related to each other and in which ways. By comparing data from two case studies (one eastern German city and one western German city) we are able to highlight the different ways in which job insecurity is perceived and related to fertility intentions. Germany represents an unprecedented opportunity to enhance our understanding of the relationship between job insecurity and fertility intentions. Forty years of separation shaped the labor market opportunities and demographic patterns of the post-war generations before unification in the two regions in very different ways. Looking at labor market opportunities in western Germany, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, the combination of a market economy with a conservative welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1999) produced what has been termed "normal employment contractual conditions", characterized by the universality of permanent full-time contracts guaranteed by a strong social security system (Osterland 1990; Lutz 1984: 210 ff.). This situation traditionally favored the division of labor in the family, producing a highly gender-segregated labor market, with the majority of men employed in fixed full-time jobs and the majority of women experiencing labor-market exits or long interruptions after the transition to motherhood (Geissler 1998; Meyers et al. 1999; Sainsbury 1999). On the contrary, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) provided virtually full and stable employment and expected men and women to participate equally in the labor market. Families were supported by a well-functioning and almost universal system of health and childcare (Kohli 1994)[2], and family enlargement was encouraged by the provision of housing and financial benefits for couples with children. Employment opportunities changed gradually after the early 1970s in western Germany[3] due to the increase in the numbers of temporary contracts and of job mobility, and they changed abruptly soon after reunification in eastern Germany through restructuring processes, privatizations and unprecedented levels of unemployment. At the macro level, job instability became a permanent feature of the new federal states (Heinz 1996; Kurz et al. 2005).

Where changes in the institutional and socio-economic conditions were gradual, fertility also remained rather stable, but where the changes were rapid they were paralleled by correspondingly noticeable fertility dynamics. Whereas in the western states fertility levels have been low since the 1970s (TFR below 1.5) and have not changed significantly since 1990, in eastern Germany a sudden and strong decline to lowest low fertility levels was observed during the first years after reunification, reaching its lowest level of 0.8 in 1994 (Eberstadt 1994; Witte & Wagner 1995). Just six years later, in 2000, the two TFRs almost converged to the low levels typical for western Germany (Kreyenfeld 2003, 2004). Despite the apparent convergence in the quantum of fertility, significant divergences in the timing and forms of family formation persist and characterize the two regions. Figure 1 shows the divergent numbers of childless women from the cohorts 1970 to 1977, observed in 2005. We see that the differences between eastern and western Germany still persist even for the younger cohorts. Whereas by the age of 28 already 50 percent of eastern German women from the youngest cohorts have had a first birth, it is only 38 percent of western Germans.

(Figure 1 about here)

In addition eastern German mothers tend to stay in the labor market full-time and have preferences towards a gender-equal investment in their career and the family

(Kreyenfeld 2004; Marbach & Toelke 2005). They still are younger than western German women when they have their first child, but it has been noted that the birth interval between the first and a second child is longer and second birth rates are lower (Kreyenfeld 2001).

Anticipating here our conclusion, we will show that differences in the demographic and institutional regimes have produced two different attitudes concerning the relationship between job insecurity and the timing of the transition to parenthood. In one context job security should come before parenthood, in the other context job security and parenthood are to be pursued in parallel. Where the latter attitude is dominant, job insecurity is likely to play a lesser role in fertility timing.

In Section 2 we introduce the empirical and theoretical frame of our research project. Section 3 provides details of the project and the data. In Section 4 we display the main findings, and in the concluding Section 5 we discuss our findings.

2 Rationale: Job instability and the transition to parenthood

This section presents the current understanding of the relation between job instability and family formation as it is presented in the socio-demographic literature. We introduce the main assumptions and limitations in order to introduce the rationale behind our research design.

2.1 Job insecurity and fertility: two demographic narratives

Global competition and the associated reduction in the predictability of the economic course have led to an increase in temporary labor force recruitment. By the same token, it has led to a general reduction in contract duration and to a growing need for labor mobility. The consequences of these changes are referred to in the literature as “precarious” working conditions (European Foundation 1998; Bourdieu 1998; Castel 2000; Dörre 2005; Keller/Seifert 2006; Kraemer/Speidel 2005). These authors describe precariousness (job instability) as resulting in a widespread feeling of insecurity about careers (job insecurity), particularly for those workers with lower levels of employability. The related uncertainty about future prospects is likely to change the way in which people distribute and balance their investments between work and family spheres, and produce a delay in family formation or family enlargement.

There is substantial agreement in the socio-demographic literature that long-term commitments such as marriage and parenthood require some job stability or realistic future career prospects as well as some immediate economic security (Oppenheimer 1988; McDonald 2000; Blossfeld et al. 2005). Economic, job and residential insecurities related to job instabilities are seen to have an inevitable negative effect on fertility intentions and behavior (postponement or forgoing of fertility) because of the biographical uncertainty they entail (Kohler et al. 2002; Jackson 2002; Weston et al. 2004; Hobcraft 1996: 523; Chesnais 2000; Toelke and Diewald 2003; Toelke 2005; Kurz 2005).

Two partially overlapping scientific “narratives” are used in demography to describe the implications of individual job instability on the work-life balance and the consequences that job instability has on fertility intentions and behavior. For simplicity, we will label them the “insecurity narrative”, a narrative inspired by the theory of the new household economics of Gary Becker (1981), and the “uncertainty” narrative, a narrative inspired by the socio-psychological uncertainty reduction theoretical framework from Friedman and colleagues (1994).

The *insecurity narrative* is well-represented in the socio-demographic literature mentioned above. Most of demographic empirical studies on European populations that try to explain the relation between women's and men's careers and fertility use a home economics perspective as a starting point (e.g. Kreyenfeld 2004; Köppen 2006; Vikat 2004). According to this perspective, a rational response to an uncertain labor market is to work longer and harder to obtain a fixed, full-time contract in order to reduce job insecurity (Mills & Blossfeld 2005: 19). Childbearing intentions are subordinate to the goal of achieving job and economic security through the investment in job stability, at least for one member of the couple. The main line of argument is that *job instability equals economic insecurity* because the former brings in its wake fluctuating incomes arising from unstable unemployment episodes and rapid job changes. In addition, job insecurity often requires high residential mobility (given the growing demand for flexibility and mobility). The notion of job and economic insecurity is related to expectations about one's own living standard and living style. Since parenthood is a resource-intensive and long-term commitment, it is likely to be postponed or forgone when income and working conditions are not perceived to be stable or continuous.

The *uncertainty narrative* identifies biographical uncertainty rather than economic insecurity *per se* as the major consequence of job instability. The "un-structuring of the life course" (Hurrelmann 2003), which is a consequence of the growing demands for flexibility in the educational and vocational spheres, brings forth increasing biographical uncertainty in terms of which choices are to be faced and in terms of their timing. According to this narrative, life-course choices that reduce the level of uncertainty are particularly attractive. In this sense, parenthood is a way of producing biographical certainty (see among others Kohler & Kohler 2002: 255). Parenthood can thus be thought of as a force that works against the biographical uncertainty produced by precarious job situations – and can therefore be seen as something desirable.

The two narratives share some common ground. The first point of convergence is that both the insecurity and the uncertainty are deemed to be generally negative states that individuals will tend to avoid or reduce. In order to reduce or avoid them, individuals aim to *make their future more predictable* by increasing control over their circumstances (either by increasing investment in the working sphere or by entering the socially recognized status of parenthood). The second common aspect of the two narratives is that their supporters, with very few exceptions, base their empirical arguments on data that define both uncertainty and insecurity in relation to the socio-economic traits of individuals, rather than in relation to the subjective meaning individuals attach to them. The perspective that certainty and security are "intrinsic values" downplays the fact that individuals differ in the extent to which they perceive and tolerate insecurity and uncertainty (Weitz 1989; Heckhausen & Schulz 1995; Sverke & Hellgren 2002). These distinctions are relevant since they have different consequences for family formation behavior, which in turn are central to understanding differentials in fertility intentions and behaviors in different contexts. Job instability may or may not produce job insecurity, and the consequence of job insecurity may or may not affect other life domains, such as family formation. Yet, most socio-demographic empirical literature relating job instability to fertility intentions or behavior is based on models that consider job insecurity as merely objective instabilities in the employment history, rather than subjectively defined insecurities and the ways in which they are related to other life domains (an exception is Johnson-Hanks 2004). We show the limitations of such an approach, providing an empirical basis to widen the range of theoretical narratives relating job instability and family formation.

2.2 Job insecurity and fertility: limits of the current empirical literature

Only a few recent socio-demographic studies look at the relationship in the German context between fertility and job insecurity, or the more objective indicator of job instability (Kurz et al. 2005; Bernhard and Kurz 2007; Kreyenfeld 2005; Vondracek 2000). Kurz et al. (2005) observe that job instability (defined as any labor market position other than having a non-limited contract) does not have a negative impact on first birth for women, and only a partially negative impact on the transition to fatherhood. Their conclusion is that in Germany “it really matters whether a man is employed or not, but not what type of employment position he has” (Kurz et al. 2005: 77). Similar conclusions are reached for the birth of the second child: men who are employed with stable contracts are just as likely to have a second child as those with unstable contracts, whereas women with temporary contracts are less likely to become a mother for the second time if they are employed full time (Bernhard & Kurz 2007). Unfortunately, these results do not allow the reader to draw conclusions on East-West differences within Germany. In a qualitative longitudinal study on a western German sample, Kühn (2004) finds that strong career models shape women’s fertility intentions more intensely and earlier in life than they do men’s fertility choices. Job-related insecurities prevent women who have strong career ambitions from childbearing, whereas the effect of insecurity on men’s fertility choices is relatively situational and independent of their career orientations. In a study based on quantitative longitudinal data from western Germany, Kreyenfeld (2005) analyzes the role that the subjective perception of economic insecurity and general life satisfaction plays in first birth risks. She finds that the two factors have no linear effect on the transition to parenthood; it is only women with a relatively low level of education that have a higher risk of first birth and they only decide to have children if they perceive their economic situation as insecure or not satisfactory. Conversely, a similar perception of economic insecurity amongst highly-educated women leads to a reduced first birth risk.

Based on a correspondence analysis of two cross-sectional datasets collected respectively in an eastern and a western German city in 1991 and 1996, an explorative study by Vondracek (2000) complicates the picture by questioning whether the conflicting relation between high education and career investments and fertility predicted by economic models of fertility holds in both eastern and western Germany. The most relevant finding for our purpose is the trajectory of eastern German women who completed their academically oriented school paths in the year of unification (1990). A higher investment in education and a higher career orientation did not prevent eastern German women from having children earlier – this is contrary to the prediction of the economic model and to the attitudes of their vocationally oriented western German counterparts. As the author puts it: “backed by their better educational resources, they could afford to maintain the eastern habit of early family formation and parenthood” (Vondracek 2000: 457).

In general, empirical evidence on the relationship between job instability and fertility between eastern and western Germany is incomplete and ambiguous. In particular, the determinants and mechanisms of behavior are often unclear. This adds to the observation that the persisting divergence of fertility behavior is at odds with the expectations of many German family sociologists and demographers. The predicted slow but unequivocal convergence with the western model once a unified socio-political framework was in place has not yet happened (Witte & Wagner 1995; Beck-Gernsheim 1997). The divergence suggests that the differences are based on some other reason than that of formal institutions and opportunity structures.

Sociology and life-span psychology research address the importance of socialization in defining subjective orientations towards job and family. The baseline assumption of this literature is that the differences in the current behavior in re-unified Germany can be the result of past experiences with different economic, political, and labor market regimes. Due to socialization processes, the effects of these experiences continue to be observed in the generation who started their adult life after 1990. However, the results are ambiguous in this case, too.

On the one hand, in a study on mentalities – defined as "internalized schemas of classification that originate from a specific societal context" (Alheit et al. 2004: 14) – the authors conclude that everyday routines, behavioral patterns and biographical perspectives have rarely changed with the new circumstances. Instead, they have been transferred from the older to the younger generation, and the latter just reproduces them in a sort of intergenerationally transmitted *habitus* (Alheit et al. 2004: 337 ff.; Alheit 2005: 33). The authors go as far as terming this phenomenon a "resistance to modernization", a "barrier" to modernization, and a "backwardness" of mentalities.

On the other hand, the assumption of a rigid mentality in eastern Germany is not consistent with other empirical analyses that focus on eastern German attitudes and behavioral changes after unification (Heckhausen 1994; Struck 2003; Diewald 2000; Adler 1997; Forkel & Silbereisen 2001). Heckhausen (1994) finds little difference between the life course and family orientation of western and eastern German adults living in Berlin in the early 1990s, with the exception of a stronger attachment to short-term life goals and a greater urgency in pursuing their immediate life goals among eastern Germans. Struck (2003) emphasizes the highly pragmatic and instrumentalist framing with which eastern Germans struggled to be included in the new post-unification social structure despite having fewer resources. Along the same lines, Diewald (2000: 264 f.) states that occupational changes were considerably more frequent during the first three years of transformation than in western Germany or in Poland during the same period. According to the author, the occupational flexibility required of employees in the eastern region could and did draw on the considerable wealth of personal initiatives and occupational changes during GDR times. Taking a gender perspective, Adler (1997) interprets the fertility decline in eastern Germany as sort of an active "exit" – or a "refusal" – of eastern German women to have children. Rather than adapting to the western German model, this "exit" is a reaction of women who consider their employment opportunities in the new "western regime" and its accompanying economic independence to be limited. Forkel and Silbereisen (2001) focus on the consequences of economic hardship on children's well-being in both regions of unified Germany. Despite large differences in the predictors (with economic hardship being stronger in eastern Germany), the outcome shows no differential effects across the two regions. They suggest that the different psychological reaction to economic insecurity in eastern Germany could be due to the prolonged experience with economic scarcity. In addition, unemployment was normalized in eastern Germany to a larger extent than in western Germany because unemployment has been a common experience in the former GDR since reunification, triggered by outdated infrastructure more than by personal failure.

All the above mentioned socio-demographic and socio-psychological studies point in one direction: despite the continuing convergence of the economic and institutional settings regulating the family and labor market policies, there are some persisting differences in attitudes, family formation behavior, and family orientations between the old and new federal states in Germany. The resilience of informal institutions, such as cultural norms and expectations related to job and family, may still distinguish the two regions and explain the differences in family formation patterns. Social change has affected both eastern and western Germans, but reactions to it are not uniform.

We assume that the differences in fertility behavior are the result of past experiences with different economic, political, and labor market regimes and that because of socialization processes the effects of these experiences continue to be observed in the generation who started its reproductive life after 1990. Different biographical models that are "conventional models for conceptualizing people's life cycles" (Shore 1996:63) shape young people's life choices in eastern and western Germany in such ways that they produce different reactions to job insecurity – and the related prospects of economic insecurity – in the two contexts.

This assumption is the starting point for our exploration of the subjective perceptions of job instability, of job insecurity, economic insecurity and parenthood by means of two case studies, one in eastern and one in western Germany.

We address our data with the following research questions: Are unstable occupational careers a ground for job insecurity and economic insecurity? In what ways are job insecurity and economic insecurity related to prospects of family formation? Are there any differences, and if so what type, in the way eastern and western Germans think of family and occupational careers, their relative priority and their sequencing in a life course perspective?

3 Sample, data, and methods

We base our empirical analysis on the transcripts of semi-structured interviews with men and women living in two similarly-sized northern German cities: Lübeck in the former Federal Republic of Germany, and Rostock in the former German Democratic Republic (respectively with a population of 215,000 and 198,000 inhabitants in 2002). We interviewed individuals born in about the year 1975 who attended the same school and graduated from either a *Realschule* in 1991 or from a *Gymnasium* in 1994[4]. These are not population-representative samples of eastern and western Germany, of the two cities, nor of the schools themselves. However, choosing to select interviewees who were all former classmates from one school provided some control on unobserved early influences in adolescent years among subgroups of respondents, which is central to our argument on socialization. In addition, having comparable purposive samples (samples chosen according to the same criteria) in the two settings allowed us to focus on potential influences of socialization in different political, social and family systems.

At the time of the interview the respondents were about 30 years old; this is an age at which individuals enter a biographically dense stage in life, in which desires and aspirations related to job and family formation have to face reality and need to become more practical. The interview content and procedures are described at greater length elsewhere (see <reference deleted>). For the purposes of the current paper it is important to remind the reader that we conducted a problem-centered semi-structured interview (Witzel 1985, 2000) containing narrative information on life course development since leaving school in 1994 – in terms of education, employment and family biographies and prospects – and life course priorities. This information was complemented by a network chart and network grid (Antonucci 1986; Strauss 2002) and by a small socio-demographic and network questionnaire used to identify respondents' main characteristics and to map their social relational space.

In the following we mainly employ the narrative parts of the interviews belonging to a sub-sample of our respondents (26), namely all those that in the original sample were living together with a partner and were childless at the time of the interview. Despite the fact that there may be some selectivity in excluding individuals who are not in a relationship due to some endogeneity of union, employment and fertility processes, there are good reasons to limit ourselves to existing partnerships only. First, childbearing considerations are more salient and realistic when a partner is available and second, we can use the information related to two intertwined job histories (that of the respondent and of his/her partner)[5]. We target childless couples because we want to focus on their current or prospective view on parenthood, before the experience of having already had a first child and the ex post facto rationalization that this event may bring with it. Respondents are equally distributed with respect to gender, educational background, and region of origin (eastern and western Germany). We chose respondents with secondary education or more because both in eastern and western Germany it is the fertility behavior of the middle- and higher-educated which has changed most strongly in recent years, while that of the lower-educated has been relatively stable (Kreyenfeld 2001). The sub-sample covers a large range of occupational careers and statuses as well as perceptions of job security: Table 1 displays the characteristics of the interview sub-sample that resulted from this procedure. The eastern-western difference in the socio-economic characteristics of the sub-sample members, such as lower educational attainment and less institutionalized partnerships in the Rostock sample, are consistent with the findings of population-representative studies of the regions, which reassure us that our sampling is not excessively distorted in these respects. The categorization of our respondents into low or high job insecurity was done according to interpretative criteria and it deserves some words of explanation. We labeled as “low insecurity” respondents who a) were in a full-time, non-restricted job position and had no concerns about losing their job in the near future; b) held a time-restricted contract but did not worry about a prolongation or their successive employability; c) were still in education and either were already working with good prospects of keeping that job after finishing education or had a clear job perspective; d) were self-employed and have been running a successful business for several years. We labeled respondents as having a “high” job insecurity if they a) were in a full-time, non-restricted job position and nevertheless worried about their future because of announced re-structuring or downsizing processes; b) held a time-restricted job contract and were worried whether it would be extended; c) were still in education and had no clear future perspective or were worried about their employability; d) were in the process of becoming self-employed with very vague perspectives or highly risky plans[6].

(TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE)

We used an interpretative thematic coding procedure (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Flick 2002) to analyze the selected interviews. The creation of new codes and categories and the examination of the narratives followed a recursive process in which new interviews are added during the analyses and contribute to the development of new categories or to their definition. From the coded text passages (“open coding”) the analyst develops a system of categories that encompasses the information of the codes in condensed form and allows for a comparison between groups (“selective coding”). These categories constitute the thematic structures of the interviews. The process ended when we reached a level of theoretical saturation of our categories, that is a “state in which the researcher makes the subjective determination that new data will not provide any new information or insights for the developing categories" (Creswell 2002: 450; see also Moghaddam 2006). In a two-step selective coding procedure we first created a system of categories describing the meanings and attitudes related to employment and family formation abstracting codes from the individual cases. Then we identified typical patterns ("core categories") with which the previous categories could be related to each other. These core categories distinguished eastern and western respondents quite radically in terms of how employment and family were articulated in perspective. In the following section we present the result of the comparative analysis of the categories developed with respect to the eastern and western German cases. First, we look at the way in which the respondents in the two contexts describe and evaluate their occupational situation, what they consider desirable jobs, and the place of work in their life. Second, we look at the ways in which occupational situations and life priorities relate to union and parenthood perspectives.

4 Comparing eastern and western narratives on work and family

The outcomes of the last two steps of the analysis – the creation of the descriptive categories and the emerging patterns – are summarized in a schematic fashion in Table 2 and clarified in the following subsections. Eventually, two case-illustrative studies bring life to the arguments advanced in the paper and show the internal consistency of two different ways of approaching job instability and family formation for our eastern and western respondents.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

4.1 Perceptions of job and occupational (in)stability

The overarching pattern among young western Germans' views and expectations about their jobs is that of *predictability*. This pattern emerges from three thematic categories related to their narratives on educational and employment careers: (1) The positive value associated with *planning and a straight career path* per se, (2) the interdependence of job stability and *economic security*, and (3) the specific definition of an *adequate and satisfactory job*.

The first category, *planning and a straight career path,* is related to respondents' reports of their investments in education and employment. Careful planning and a clear orientation to pursue advancement in the working life are key elements here. According to the western German respondents, a "straight career path" starts with a good education and leads to a successful and well-paid job. In order to achieve this goal, a considerable degree of personal distress and burden is accepted, such as commuting on a weekly or daily basis for a job with good career perspectives at the expense of time available for the partnership.

The second category concerns the definition of *economic security* and job stability as the main criterion to evaluate employment situations or career perspectives by western Germans. It partially overlaps with the first category, but it contains valuable characteristics of the job career beyond continuity. Stable job prospects, that is, working conditions that are virtually unaffected by contingent economic cycles or political crises, are the main features of a desirable job in western Germany. Examples given by respondents are related to holding a full-time permanent contract, possibly as a civil servant – a very stable and well-protected employment position in Germany – or to being employed in a branch in which positions are considered to be stable. In this sense *job stability equals economic security*.

The third and last category is related to the perception of an *adequate* and *satisfactory job* situation in the western sample. Working life ideally should not be affected by difficult relations with colleagues, it should leave time and space for partnership, and where possible it should not include commuting over weekends. However, these factors seem to be “soft factors” in the sense that they are hardly reasons to quit a job if it is a secure one. Interestingly, women are particularly concerned and worried about unclear perspectives related to their partner’s job satisfaction. This is consistent with the fact that both men and women share the perception that it is mainly *his* job and *his* straight career path that counts and that *he* has to provide a secure basis for family formation.

A different view emerges from the narratives of our eastern German respondents. Here, the overarching pattern of young adults’ conceptions of a desirable job is that of a sound *balance* between security and agreeableness. This pattern mirrors an attitude in which satisfaction derived from the job and its compatibility with other aspects of life is of equal or even higher value than job security and stability. Contrary to what the western respondents said, job interruptions, retraining episodes, and short-term contracts are perceived as good opportunities for personal development. The salient conceptions associated with educational and working careers are described by three thematic categories: (1) The *correspondence of job, personal skills and fields of interests*, (2) *attempts to limit personal strains caused by job demands*, and (3) the *balance between job security, job pleasantness and leisure time*.

The first category describes how job stability can be traded off for its *positive appeal*. Young adults from our Rostock sample consider it to be crucial for the evaluation of their education and employment choices that a job position fits with their personal interests and skills. According to their experience and views, they prefer to quit a job position if it mismatches with their personal interests. They would rather direct their efforts to the search for a more adequate position. This search often includes options of self-employment and freelancing in order to create a job that is placed in a more or less difficult job context.

Negative aspects of education and employment careers constitute the content of the second category, *attempts to limit personal strains caused by job demands*. Intense reflections of the emotional burden produced in times of loss of orientation or motivation are recurrent. Similarly respondents often reflect on the difficulty produced by conflicting alternatives, involuntary breaks in the education and job careers, strenuous migration histories, bad experiences with working-teams, or mobbing. Young eastern Germans view these as major problems in the labor force. Although these reports partially coincide with the difficulties indicated by the western German sample, they are much more in the foreground in the eastern sample category and are rated as “hard factors” in judging one’s job position.

The last category, *balance of job security, job pleasantness and leisure time*, covers the main characteristic required of adequate employment conditions. For young eastern Germans, a desirable situation, a ‘good job’, is a job that is neither overly strenuous nor unpleasant nor unpredictable and that provides enough money to live on (“some money”). The actual income and the career status clearly play a more marginal role than in western Germany; the two elements are mentioned as some (modest) minimum requirement a job has to provide, but the respondents do not go into further detail when they speak about this topic. A sound “balance” between work and leisure time as well as between job demands and personal talents is more central here.

In sum, the system of categories describing young adults’ views of job and biographical instability revealed major differences between eastern and western Germans. The categories show how central the concept of stability is to the western German respondents. The concept is associated with a predictable career path ending in stable employment or a secure perspective of continuous employment and upward mobility at least for the male partner of a couple. Although some degree of predictability and stability is desired by the eastern respondents, too, the notion of employment security and a straight career path is not dominant and balances out with the exploration and orientation aspects of turbulent and insecure education and employment careers.

4.2 Frame of goals, aspirations, and priorities in life

The analysis of the interviews concerning the question of which goals, aspirations, and priorities young adults share revealed two systems of categories. The western German sample is characterized by a system of centrality of *success* in the life course, whereas the eastern German sample produces a more heterogeneous system – an amalgam of various orientations.

Having *vocational success*, that is, a *successful job career,* is a dominant orientation in the western German narratives on their life course in general. To our respondents, "success" means gaining a certain status, climbing up the career ladder, and earning "good money". Women set slightly different priorities and accord higher priority to the "fun" or the socializing aspects of their work. However, they put a strong emphasis on their male partners to have career success and clearly expect their men to achieve it. This echoes the male-breadwinner model, which is evidently still persistent in western Germany.

Material property – embodied by owning a car or, more importantly, a flat/house – is a major priority in the life course of western Germans. Other priorities in life are achieving *a spontaneous lifestyle* in social interaction and social life. A spontaneous lifestyle entails the desire for some degree of leisure-time planning (meeting friends, going out etc.). Women add personal freedom and independence to their concept of self-realization. Additionally, *family and children* are a life course priority in the sense that they are perceived as valuable goals. Provided that a stable job leads to a stable partnership, having children is the natural step to take next.

Young adults from our eastern German sample also differ from their western counterparts as far as life-course priorities are concerned. They are much more *diverse* than in the western sample. Notions of job stability and a good financial background are, albeit existing, less central to them. The idea of "life success through job career success" is missing. By contrast, they place a stronger emphasis on the value of leading a balanced life, which requires compromises to be made between different priorities to be pursued in parallel.

Finding an *adequate job*, that is, a job that balances work with leisure-time and with personal talents, is an important aspect of the life course priorities of men and women in eastern Germany. The primary quality of an adequate job is not so much its stability, but rather that it leaves sufficient space to pursue personal interests or that it truly reflects one's interests or talents (that is, the job is neither overburdening nor overly boring).

The next category, *leisure-time orientation*, contains all private priorities that are perceived as diametrically opposed to working life demands. These orientations at times lead people to refuse or terminate a job when it reduces the leisure time to an unacceptable minimum or when the job hinders balanced self-realization in terms of hobbies, further education, or alternative interests. A strong emphasis in this context is put on *personal relationships and commitments*. They are expressed in the desire to spend time with one's friends and family, and feeling committed to other people.

Finally, *having children* was an integral part of the life course for young eastern Germans. There was little understanding or appreciation for staying childless as a lifestyle choice.

Reflections about the “best” point in time to become a parent entered the narratives only marginally and they were superimposed by the preference for a rather spontaneous and “romantic” attitude towards having a family. “Too much planning” was seen and feared to be a cause of staying childless and therefore it was not pursued. Contrary to the system of categories from the western sample, there was no evidence of an order or ranking within the system in the eastern sample.

4.3 Interrelatedness of job careers and family-formation

The categories presented in this section deal with the question of whether or not and in which ways the perceptions of job instability and life course priorities are linked to the intentions of family-formation in the western and eastern sub-samples. Two distinct patterns emerge from the data: a *sequential* and a *parallel pattern*.

In the *sequential pattern*, i.e. the pattern prevalent in our western German sample, the prospects of parenthood are strongly related to the perceptions of job instability and biographical uncertainties. This pattern is summarized by two categorical perspectives: (1) the conception that *stability* in the vocational area, financial security, and a solid partnership are indispensable *prerequisites* to having children, and (2) the perception that *children are a potential risk or threat* to the personal lifestyle achieved.

In the western sub-sample, there were no considerations of having a family without having completed education first, being fully established in a job, or at least having clear job prospects. Respondents from western Germany do not regard the material and non-material foundations of childrearing as being sufficient until a reliable situation of *stability* (economic security, stability of career and partnership) has been achieved. However, the attitudes towards stability go even further: At times even a flourishing career can hinder childbearing if one partner (in particular the woman) is forced to accept residential mobility or daily/weekly commuting since these are considered too strenuous to be compatible with childrearing. Women strongly express the trade-offs between childrearing and demanding full-time employment: a job and children are often seen as competing options. They feel either forced to abandon their career options in favor of having a child or to pursue the job career by postponing/giving up motherhood.

Accordingly, children are described as a *risk to economic and biographical security*. Young adults from western Germany are afraid that having children would endanger their attained living standard and that their social status would suffer should they have children. Children also are seen as a threat to a spontaneous lifestyle and to self-realization because of the daily organizing and planning required to rear them responsibly. Moreover, young adults from western Germany see time dilemmas, such as those expressed by some men who want to be involved in taking care of their children ("*active fatherhood*"*)*, but fear risks to their career if they shift their time budget towards the family. Both sexes explicitly or implicitly assume a stronger male involvement and responsibility in providing the family income and a greater female orientation towards staying at home with a child ("*male-breadwinner model*").

In the *parallel pattern*, characteristic for the eastern German sample, job instability and the prospects of parenthood are interrelated in a less straightforward fashion. Here, the concepts of life course development and family-formation are much less centered on the notion of stability and economic certainty, but instead the concept of *balance* and of the *mutual reciprocity of two life spheres* is emphasized. This pattern is summarized by three categorical perspectives: (1) the dependency of family formation on a *balanced job situation* for both partners, (2) *prospects of* *parenthood also determine job choices,* and (3) the relative downplaying of any interdependence between family-plans and the claims of working life, i.e. the *acceptance of parallel events* in both fields.

In the eastern sample, the notion of the *balanced job situation* of both partners is crucial to guide family behavior as much as the notions of job and partnership stability are central in the western sample. A good balance is achieved when both partners participate in the labor force in one way or the other (dual-earner model), live in the same town, and have a moderate workload. By contrast, when the job situation is not balanced (that is, one partner is affected by work overload or there is only a single breadwinner), the prospects of becoming a parent diminish. There is little gender bias in the expression related to balance and imbalance – partners in Rostock seem to have exchangeable roles.

Typical of the eastern sample is that *prospects of parenthood also determine job choices*. For instance, most respondents refuse to meet demands for residential mobility in connection with labor force participation because they want to have a child, they choose professions compatible with future family plans, and they reduce their workload because of some incompatibilities with their partnership, or engage in retraining and change their job in order to meet the time demands of parenthood.

Contrary to what we learn from the western German narratives, in the eastern sample job instability and parenthood perspectives are seen as two independent or mutually interacting aspects of life that are pursued in *parallel ways*: the realization of family formation during the start of a new job or during the transition to self-employment. The feeling that having children does not require any special preconditions except having an appropriate partnership ("balanced") because it is a *natural part of life* may lead the eastern German respondents to enter parenthood even when job security is not given. In all narratives, there is an underlying discourse that indicates a less anxious approach to parenthood.

4.4 Cultural schemas at work: two case studies

As the analysis of the cultural differences between eastern and western Germany suggests, individuals with similar socio-economic characteristics and comparable labor market perspectives may have very different intentions concerning family formation. Different interpretations of the life situation in terms of its economic and occupational security, a short-term versus a long-term perspective, and a sequential versus a parallel vision of the development of the various life domains like work and family, they all contribute to shape fertility intentions together with socio-economic characteristics. We briefly illustrate this point by presenting two typical cases, one from each region. With “typical”, we mean a case which well embodies the analytical categories we developed from the analysis of the whole corpus of data – let us briefly illustrate this point. *Lars*[7] from Lübeck (interview code L07em0) and *Ralf* from Rostock (interview code R12em0) are both men in their early thirties, they hold a university degree, and their current life situation is to some extent comparable. They both describe themselves as being at the beginning of their job careers, are currently employed with non-full-time contracts and they both wish to have stable full-time employment. They both live “apart together” with their partners, bridging the distance involved in their residential situation by commuting on a weekly basis. Their partners have a similar temporary job arrangements (in the sense that they wish to change them), either as part-time employees or as self-employed. Without being a proof in the strict sense of the word, their cases show the effect of cultural schemas on individuals' real-life decision-making processes.

Lars (Lübeck): Although his employer is likely to renew his temporary contract, Lars is seeking a new job. The basis for his dissatisfaction with the current position is mainly related to the lack of a stable perspective and what he considers insufficient payment. He is actively seeking a new job "where you earn more and where you work on a non-temporary basis". Consistently with the dissatisfaction about his personal life, Lars repeatedly complains about the current economic condition in Germany as a whole, particularly because jobs become "more and more insecure, in most cases you have only time-restricted contracts". He describes his own situation as "dreadful" and this perception dominates his family formation intentions:

> "… if I assume the worst case, the economy will break down, unemployment figures will rise to five million, I lose my job, my parents get jobless, then I don't think that I want to have children. I know many children of unemployed people and I want to spare my children this fate."

Although Lars and his partner would like to have children in general, he feels too insecure economically to seriously consider having them at the moment. His way of talking about a prospective parenthood is very vague and resembles more a future possibility than a concrete intention or plan:

> "maybe in ten years, when I am 40 and secure in my professional life and when I am able to offer something to the child".

The need for security and stability for Lars is fundamental for both the economic and the socio-institutional spheres in his life. When considering the possibility that a pregnancy could "happen" without being planned, he would marry immediately because of the importance attributed to the marriage document:

> "If one lives together so loosely, then everything is just so loose and slack…, I don't know… that's too *insecure* for me".

If, and only if, the two sources of security, economic and institutional stability, are achieved, then, in a strict sequencing of life course phases, he can consider the possibility of becoming a father. The insecurity narrative fits this case well.

Ralf (Rostock): Ralf, like Lars, sees himself in a transitional stage of his job career and aspires to a better position. However, when prompted with the perspective of that change, he expresses deep concerns about the fact that a new job may be too time-intensive, career-promoting and absorbing, and he clearly wants to avoid such a strain. A job "has to be well-balanced (…) from the job and from the private perspective". He often points toward the negative consequences of job success: "Your private life suffers from this [overstress due to job success] and, secondly, it is physically very tiring". Similarly the commuting lifestyle he and his partner adopted is not satisfactory, though it has been necessary since she has her own business in another town. Because they want to have one or two children, she plans to sell her business soon and to move in with him in order to start a family. He says: "Within the next one or two years [we will start a family], I guess." He expects his partner to start some sort of new business as soon as the child(ren) can go to day care. The narratives of insecurity and uncertainty do not fit this case, while the dominant concept seems to be adaptability. Consistently, Ralf also mentions the possibility that the first child may arrive earlier: “Perhaps this will also be a spontaneous thing.” The spontaneity is related to the idea that Ralf and his partner feel emotionally ready to start a family already and they may not wait until all external conditions (job and money) are set to have their first child. Here the sequencing of events is much more flexible while, at the same time, the parallel development of career and family is also regarded as a reasonable alternative.

5 Discussion: One instability, different biographical models

The pivotal aim of this paper was to understand whether job insecurity has consequences for family formation and whether these consequences vary according to the socio-cultural context. A general starting observation from our interview study is that all of the young adults experience job instability, either personally, or more often indirectly amongst acquaintances and friends and/or as a perceived threat. Some perceive it to be the basis for their job and economic insecurity and talk about the way in which it affects their life course development, while others underline the importance of the job security they have achieved.

However, the significance of job and economic security for the prospects of parenthood varies according to the context. While job security is crucial to the western Germans’ idea of achievement and as a foundation for family formation in a sequential pattern, in eastern Germany job security is only one of the parallel paths in one’s life course and thus investments in the job and private life are conducted in parallel. As we have shown, our western German couples tend to focus on and streamline their job career when faced with job instability and job insecurity. This recalls the well-known ideal of “the integrated life”, which is “connected with a straight career path, […] with a lack of discontinuity between the stages of the life cycle, and so on" (Riesmann 1951, cited by Wohlrab-Sahr 1992: 218). This ideal is typically linked to the attitude of a rational, planning, and straightforward approach to life. It emerged as an ideal during the zenith of the "institutionalized life course" (Kohli 1985; other theorists term it the "Fordist life-course regime"), which was characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s in western Germany. The foundation of this ideal was the life-term inclusion of the male breadwinner in the labor force, and this notion is echoed in the range of patterns and categories we find in the western sub-sample of young adults today. To refer back to the life-course strategies discussed in Section 2.1, the western German respondents seem to apply the strategy of trying to increase *predictability* by a sequential approach. We suggest that the two main narratives currently employed in the socio-demographic literature – the economic and the uncertainty narrative – can be convincingly used to interpret rising childlessness in western Germany.

We can not reach the same conclusion for the eastern German respondents. Those who grew up in the former GDR handle the consequences of job instability in a more flexible way. Mainly, they pursue a "diversified portfolio" of priorities without strictly sequencing their achievements. The eastern respondents increase their chances to satisfy all of their life-course priorities by accounting for the unpredictability of their achievements in terms of timing and sequencing of events. Instead of framing educational and occupational interruptions as defeats or accidents, they talk about them in terms of opportunities**,** allowing affective as well as rational inputs to guide behavior (Zinn 2004). In the literature on job insecurity, the appraisal of the situation by workers plays an important role and it is well known that job instability and the feeling of job insecurity are not necessarily in a one-to-one relation (Van Vuuren et al. 1991). This alternative set of strategies, as it is typical for the eastern German respondents, provides for an alternative narrative, what we may term the *balancing narrative* yet to be told by socio-demographers. The *balancing narrative* to interpret the relationship between job insecurity and fertility is characterized by a reduction in the expectation that the life course would be predictable at reasonable personal costs. Therefore, respondents who apply this narrative share a high confidence of being able to cope with job market hazards and childbearing at the same time.

Our portrait of the way in which men and women with middle and high education from the graduation cohorts of 1991/1994 think of job insecurity and family formation in Rostock and Lübeck is based on a comparative sample, on rich narrative information, and systematic coding procedure. , Our findings suggest an empirically grounded interpretation of the non-convergence of eastern and western patterns of family formation.. We have shown that the exposure to uncertain job careers leads to a different individual responses in terms of family formation timing in specific contexts in two German regions. The difference between the sequential versus the parallel life course careers of employment and family, or between a predictability strategy versus a balancing strategy, is consistent both with the observed earlier transition to first birth in eastern German city and with the rising childlessness and the faster transition to second births in western German city. On the one hand, once our western Germans decide to become parents, they probably have settled most issues related to their working life in the best way available to them and overcome the feeling that their lifestyle may be threatened by children. With the exception of health and other biological limits there are no other unpredictable obstacles to have a second or third child, provided it is desired. The question, though, is whether or not they succeed in starting with family formation at all, given the emphasis on strict sequencing and high achievements. On the other hand, in our eastern German sample the more flexible attitudes to the timing of parenthood – attitudes that encourage first birth – may be a factor that delays successive childbearing because the desired balance between family and employment has to be re-established and re-evaluated before every successive childbearing decision.

Since our findings are based on two purposive samples we refrain from extrapolating them to different cohorts, social strata and regions; however they do represent a piece of evidence which illustrate cultural and social mechanisms useful to interpret regional differences in fertility behavior in these contexts and we argue that these mechanisms should be subject to further testing with population representative samples and included in the theoretical accounts of behavioral differences re-unified Germany.

We believe that our findings can be interpreted as the results of socialization into different social and political contexts. During the socialist regime, individual striving to pursue a successful job career was meaningless because admission to higher education was granted by the state authorities, who also controlled career paths. In socialist times, eastern Germans used to withdraw into the private and personal *niche* of close friends and relatives to search for social and personal support instead of seeking success in the vocational sphere. The low interdependence between job stability and biographical uncertainty seems to be consistent with the attitude to consider demands from the public sphere (e.g. the labor force) less significant than relationships and commitments related to the private sphere.

It is an open question to which extent the distinctive orientations in the two German contexts depend on the harder economic and employment condition in eastern Germany.
On the one hand, one could argue that individuals should double their efforts in trying to achieve economic security when the chances of achieving it attainment are lower.
Assuming this rationale, our eastern respondents' intentions and behavior concerning family formation would not be purposeful. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume

that western Germans make their investments in some sort of job stability – postponing or forgoing childbearing as they do so – with a greater expectation that these investments are likely to pay off. When chances of success are less realistic, as in the East, and not proportional to or dependent on the effort, a parallel investment in family realization may offer the better chance for pay off. The puzzling point here is that the narratives from western Germany recurrently mention economic insecurity and negativity of job instability – much more than those from their eastern German counterparts, whose dominant perception is that of a balance in various life domains to be pursued.

It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that the observed differences in discourse and strategies (predictability / adaptability) mirror the prevalence of a substantially different cultural model (or mentality) that has its roots in the fact that the eastern German respondents were socialized into a system where family and work were compatible and an unquestioned right and duty for all. However, far from supporting Alheit and colleagues quoted claim of a typically eastern German "resistance to modernization" (see Section 2.2), our findings and interpretations suggest provocatively that eastern Germans are enacting a new reactive model to job instability. The crucial difference between eastern and western Germans in our sample is constituted by the differential evaluation of life-course priorities. Whilst in the western German sample work orientations dominate, with the result that aims in the private sphere are postponed, in the eastern German sample a balance between work and private life is desired and actively pursued from the very early stages of the employment career. The eastern German aspirations of balancing work with private life or of achieving gender equal economic responsibilities for the family may be seen as a reason to renounce more secure employment situations. If there is any "resistance to modernization", it is not expressed in terms of "loyalty" to traditional expectations concerning childbearing. On the contrary, age at first birth is increasing in eastern Germany as well, like in west Germany, and the transition to parity higher than 1 has dramatically decreased. An alternative type of resistance is what has been labeled "resistance" as "exit option" (Hirschmann 1995): a conscious and often verbalized refusal by eastern Germans to give up their priorities related to self-realization in the private sphere – in this case through becoming parents. This would be an "exit" in relation to the model of rigid sequencing and structuring that the western strategy to cope with job instability would suggest. To be provocative, one could say that the eastern mode of living with uncertainty represents the emergence of a post-modern orientation.

It is another question, however, whether and for how long the differences in orientation are likely to continue into the following generations, assuming that their origin should be retraced to different socializations. This question deserves further empirical research with longitudinal representative population data which could test some of the hypotheses we have delineated. On the basis of our selected case studies, this would appear to be one of the most interesting comparative settings for analyzing the interrelations between family and employment careers.

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List of Tables

N	ID	name	city	sex	education	age in 2005	job	job insecurity	type of partnership	partner's education	partner's job
1	L12_0211fp0	Sylvia	HL	woman	PhD.	29	Post doctoral research	Low	Marriage	University diploma	Full-time employed
2	L16_2211ef0	Julia	HL	woman	University diploma	30	Full-time employed	Low	LAT	University diploma	Full-time employed
3	L13_0311ef0	Andrea	HL	woman	University diploma	30	Full-time employed	Low	Cohabitation	Higher secondary school	Student/Part-time employed
4	L18_2511ef0	Michaela	HL	woman	University diploma	31	Full-time employed	Low	Cohabitation	University diploma	Full-time employed
5	L51_2007ef0	Christine	HL	woman	University diploma	31	Civil servant	Low	Cohabitation	Higher secondary school	Full-time employed
6	L56_1108ef0	Monika	HL	woman	Higher secondary school	30	Student	Low	Cohabitation	Secondary school	Full-time employed
7	L54_0908ef0	Nadia	HL	woman	Higher secondary school	32	Full-time employed	Low	LAT	Higher secondary school	Apprentice/Self-employed
8	L03_0206ef0	Magda	HL	woman	Higher secondary school	32	Self-employed	Low	LAT	University diploma	Full-time employed
9	L55_1108ef0	Antje	HL	woman	Higher secondary school	33	Student	Low	Marriage	Higher secondary school	Student
10	L52_2707ef0	Anne	HL	woman	Secondary modern school	31	Full-time employed	Low	Marriage	Secondary school	Apprentice
11	L07_2807em0	Lars	HL	man	University diploma	31	Full-time employed	High	LAT	Ph.d.	Self-employed
12	L12_0111em0	Mchael	HL	man	University diploma	31	Full-time employed	Low	Marriage	Ph.d.	Post doctoral research
13	L18_1902mp0	Robert	HL	man	University diploma	34	Full-time employed	Low	Cohabitation	University diploma	Full-time employed
14	L55_1808mp0	Wolfgang	HL	man	Higher secondary school	30	Part-time employed	High	Marriage	Higher secondary school	Student
15	L51_2408mp0	Andreas	HL	man	Higher secondary school	32	Full-time employed	Low	Cohabitation	University diploma	Civil servant (part-time)
16	L14_0511em0	Heiko	HL	man	Higher secondary school	32	Student	High	Marriage	University diploma	Full-time employed
17	L61_0811em0	Helmut	HL	man	Secondary modern school	31	Full-time employed	Low	Marriage	Secondary modern school	Full-time employed
18	R02_2811ff0	Nadja	HRO	woman	University diploma	28	Doctoral student	High	LAT	Secondary modern school	Self-employed

19	R08_0211ef0	Kathleen	HRO	woman	University diploma	30	Self-employed	High	LAT	Secondary school	Self-employed
20	R03_ef0	Edelgard	HRO	woman	University diploma	30	Self-employed/Student	High	LAT	University diploma	PhD student
21	R38_0311ef0	Baerbel	HRO	woman	Secondary modern school	30	Full-time employed	Low	LAT	Secondary modern school	Full-time employed
22	R12_2401em0	Ralf	HRO	man	PhD.	29	Civil servant (candidate)	Low	LAT	Secondary modern school	Self-employed
23	R17_1703em0	Enrico	HRO	man	University diploma	30	Self-employed	Low	Marriage	University diploma	Full-time employed
24	R06_0604mf0	Marco	HRO	man	University diploma	34	Self-employed	High	LAT	Higher secondary school	Student
25	R39_2911em0	Matthias	HRO	man	Secondary modern school	30	Worker (full-time)	Low	Cohabitation	Secondary modern school	Jobless
26	R37_2311em0	Otto	HRO	man	Secondary modern school	31	Worker (full-time)	Low	LAT	Secondary modern school	Full-time employed

Higher secondary school (German: Gymnasium) = students completing after 12th/13th grade and are qualified to study on university

Secondary modern school (German: Realschule) = students completing after 10th grade and are qualified for vocational training

Secondary school (German: Hauptschule) = students completing after 9th grade and are qualified for vocational training

Post doctoral research (German Habilitation) = researchers in the academic track

LAT = Living apart together

HL = Luebeck; HRO = Rostock

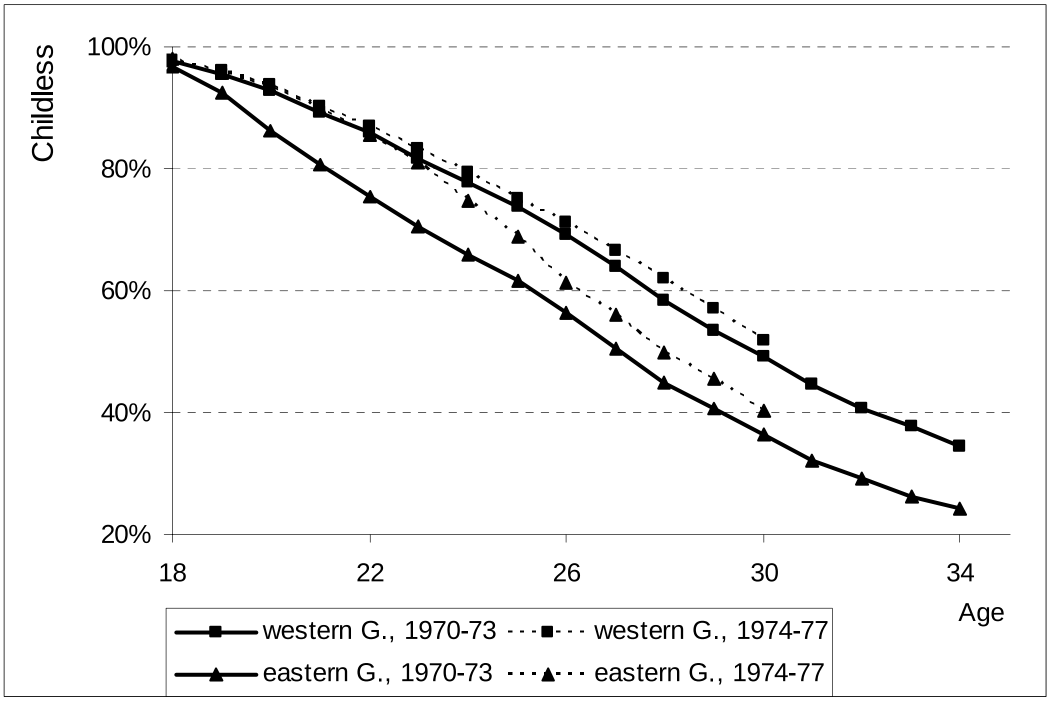
Table 2. Patterns and categories as they emerged from the sub-samples

	Typical for the western sample	Typical for the eastern sample
Perceptions of jobs and occupational (in)stability		
Pattern name	*Predictability*	*Balance*
Categories	• Planning and a straight career path • Job Stability equals Economic security • An adequate and satisfactory job	• Correspondence of job, personal skills and fields of interests • Balance between job security, job pleasantness and leisure time • Attempts to limit personal strains caused by job demands
Frame of goals, aspirations, and priorities in life		
Pattern name	*Success*	*Diversity*
Categories	• Vocational success • Material property • Spontaneity • Having a family and children	• An adequate job • Leisure time orientation • Personal relations and commitments • Having children
Pattern name	*Sequencing*	*Parallelism*
Categories	• Stability is a prerequisite for childbearing • Children are a potential threat	• A balanced job situation is prerequisite for childbearing • Prospects of parenthood also determine job choices • Acceptance of parallel events

List of Figures

Figure 1. Share of childless women by age and cohort. Cohorts 1970-1977 (Source: Kreyenfeld, 2006)

Figure 1. Share of childless women by age and cohort. Cohorts 1970-1977 (Source: Kreyenfeld 2006)



Endnotes

[1] In Eastern Germany the level of unemployment recorded 18.8% in 2005 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2005)

[2] The 1961 Constitution of the GDR emphasized men's and women's duty of and right to paid employment, expressing a dual aspect: labor force participation was seen as a moral duty and as a precondition to participate in civil society and to benefit from public services (Frerich & Frey 1993).

[3] Post war conditions faced major challenges from the 1970s on: The availability of apprenticeships became limited, the tendency to career interruptions and occupational changes grew, and a plurality of temporary and unstable employment forms emerged and rapidly multiplied, expressed in growing numbers of time-limited (Schreyer 2000; Puchert et al. 2005) contracts and rising self-employment (Mayer-Ahuja 2003; Bonß 2002). bringing about feelings of uncertainty and of an economic decline in western Germany (Zapf 1996). These changes brought about bringing about feelings of uncertainty and of an economic decline in western Germany (Zapf 1996)

[4] A Realschule is a German secondary modern school with students graduating after the 10th grade while a Gymnasium is equivalent to a *high school*, with students completing education after the 13th grade.

[5] We also interviewed the respondent's partner in all cases in which they were available and willing to participate. In these cases we also have information on their job security perception

[6] In this category we have two individuals in the eastern sample who – despite their self employment plans being risky – are rather optimistic about their future. These risk-prone individuals show the weaknesses of using the concept of "job insecure" as an individual variable when attitudes towards risk are not controlled for.

[7] Names and some biographical information are changed to ensure the anonymity of the respondent.