



ドイツ日本研究所 German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

International Symposium

November 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at the Center for the Advancement of Working Women (CAWW)

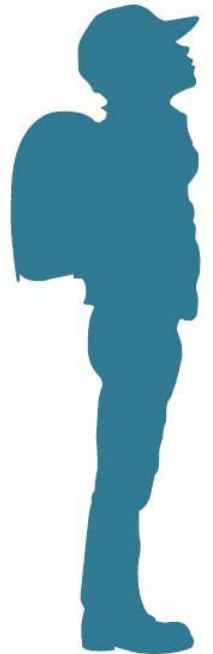
# ***Fertility and Social Stratification Germany and Japan in Comparison***

Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Section 5: Gender

## **“Age Stratification and Gender Roles in Germany’s Fertility Crisis”**

Paper by **Alexander Röhler** and  
**Heather Hofmeister**  
(both RWTH Aachen University)



If you use any information from this paper, please have the courtesy to properly cite this source. Thank you.

# Age Stratification and Gender Roles in Germany's Fertility Crisis

(PowerPoint Slide 1; Title)

I am very delighted that I've been given the opportunity to speak today here in front of you about some aspects of gender and social stratification in Germany. This talk I prepared together with Prof. Heather Hofmeister who is chair for Sociology and Gender Studies at RWTH Aachen University.

I will address the question how the changing age stratification of German society will affect the cohorts that are in their "fertility windows". How will the pressures that these generations face influence their decision to raise children or not? What does this mean for birth rates and the fertility crisis?

(PowerPoint Slide 2; Overview)

I will start with some figures about the population development, especially the changing age stratification. Then I develop an argument about some pressures the generations aged 20-40 ("fertility window") face.

The main thing about these pressures is about the gendered division of paid and unpaid labor in couples. I will introduce past and current models and present the puzzle how expectations and requirements from the fertility crisis can be reconciled with couples' labor division and the call for gender equity.

Then I consider the case of unpaid labor where I investigated in an own study the mechanisms of housework division in couples that function after the fade of gender norms and role behavior.

In the end we will see two scenarios about the future interplay of age stratification, gender and fertility in couples and finally a short summary.

(PowerPoint Slide 3; Table (Birg 2000: 29, Table 2))

As we can see from the following diagram (which is based on calculations by Prof. Herwig Birg)<sup>1</sup> the constantly going down of birth rates in Germany not only shrinks the entire population, it also changes the proportion of the population within each age cohort.

Especially the young generations will be diminished, the age group 20-40 years (which is red-colored), for example, from 25 Million to only 13 Million in 2050. The proportion of these age cohorts who are most likely to give birth to children and become parents, will shrink from roughly 30% to about 20% of the population by 2030 and remain stable then, whereas the age cohorts over 60 will grow from 20% to about 38% during the same time span and till 2050 they will even reach a share of 40% (These older cohorts are dark blue colored and grey for the people over 80ies). In 2040 the old-age dependency ratio will rise up to 55 in Germany (and Western Europe).

These processes are already well underway and cannot be changed in a short time frame, even with a presumed rise of fertility rate in the medium time span. Even under conditions of reasonable Migration into Germany and an (so far unlikely) increase of fertility rate to 2,1 would the shrinkage of the population proceed till 2080 accompanied by the here shown grave change in proportion of age cohorts (Birg 2000: 40).

As this situation is inevitable at least for the next decades it is worth thinking about what effects it will have on gender relations and how these might influence fertility decisions and thus feedback on the fertility crisis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Model Assumptions: low birth rate among Germans (1,25) and a going down of birth rates among Migrants (from 1,9 to 1,64); rise of living expectancy to 80,9 (men) and 86,9 (women), and an immigration surplus of 170.000 per year.

(PowerPoint Slide 4; Pressures for 20-40 ages (“fertility window”))

Under the conditions of a dramatic change in the proportion of older people to the younger fertile generation, increasingly, the generations entering in their fertility window in Germany (roughly aged 20-40) are facing multiple pressures. They have to support themselves, the not grown up generations *and* the growing older generations financially. But they also face societal pressure to decide to have children and to raise more children than is average now – to counteract the negative effects of demographic change: population shrinking and aging. This pressure on the fertile generations is built up in political, public and media discussion, for example through the constant scolding of the low fertility rate.

(PowerPoint Slide 5; Pressures within two Spheres)

These pressures are manifested within two spheres that are crucial for the gender relations: the labor market and the household. With their labor market participation men and women have to earn the money for their living and supply money and produce goods and services for the children and for elderly. In the household they supply care work for their own children and for older relatives (mostly their own parents), a situation that can be called “sandwich squeeze”.

This raises the question how the generations of men and women that are expected to meet all these tasks *and* raise even more children are prepared to this. What models do they have at hand to react to the described pressures and to reconcile the two spheres?

(PowerPoint Slide 6; Past models)

In Germany as in many countries we have a gendered segregation between paid and unpaid labor and two models applied so far to cope with this. Traditionally, for men being a good father was consistent with earning a living and the house and care work was almost entirely

done by women giving her a feeling of being a good mother. With the increasing entering of women into the workforce another model came up: childlessness of committed career women. Both options have no future because the women will be needed in the labor market instead of being housewives and the society needs children from as many women as possible thus there must be options to combine career and motherhood.

(PowerPoint Slide 7; Current models)

In the past the conflict of having babies *and* jobs was a conflict only for women.

1. Several studies could show that gender ideologies have changed during the last decades towards more egalitarian attitudes (Künzler). With changing gender ideologies women entered the labor market. The work around the house and childcare has become more and more left alone because women have less time resources to see to these tasks. The conflict of reconciling work and family needs is increasingly felt by men, who are under increasing pressure from their partners and their own feeling for equality to take over large portions of care work.

2. However, even though the labor market integration of women has been rising in Germany, the labor division in a couple traditionalizes at the point of time when the first child is born. This is true for housework and this is true for paid work as a recent study on basis of the SOEP could show (Reichart 2008). (That is why a lot of women in Germany who want to have a carrier decided against having children because they feared this traditionalization effect.)

3. Thus gendered division of labor in couples with children has remained quite stable over time, with women more responsible for housework and childcare and less integrated in the labor market.

The question is how new attitudes and couples' everyday life can come together?

(PowerPoint Slide 8; Age stratification, labor market demand...)

If we look at the interplay of age stratification, gender and fertility we get a picture like this: the future age stratification requires men's' and women's' labor market participation. Under traditional labor division in couples the generations between 20 and 40 will probably sustain a low fertility that might be even falling because especially women, who have to master job and family work, are overburdened. New divisions of labor could help to raise the fertility rate if they react to the pressures that couples will face. One new model could be an egalitarian labor division in the household and accordingly flexible and part time opportunities for both sexes in the labor market.

(PowerPoint Slide 9; Housework mechanisms)

At this point I will discuss results from an own qualitative interview study with married and unmarried couples in order to argue that the dynamic of change in couples' practice will not necessarily support egalitarian models and thus not adequately respond to the challenges of the fertility crisis.

After the decline of traditional gender roles the division of household labor has not become automatically more equal as feminist researchers in the 1970s and later hoped. Instead of a linear development towards greater equality, a more complex observation can be made: There is a new need for restructuring in pair relationships, because old role structures have been disappearing and new ones are not yet in place. Equal sharing of housework is only one possible outcome, but for different reasons, it is the most demanding possibility for a new housework structure.

Several mechanisms represented in our data work together in meeting the need for restructuring in pair relationships (Röhler 2006a: 284 ff.).

1) First are gender ideologies, specifically, normative models about what men and women are supposed to do or not to do. Gender ideologies can contain traditional role models, role

change models or egalitarian models. The egalitarian ones face grave problems in implementation, as several studies have shown (Koppetsch and Burkart 1999; Huinink and Röhler 2005).

2) Competencies of the partners are another possible criterion for deciding how to divide housework. As human capital and competencies differ between partners an efficient division of labor could be established based on these differences (Becker 1991). A competence-focused labor division, however, still leaves work for which neither partner is competent. This remainder could be given to the partner who is less reluctant to do it, could be shared equally, or could be substituted with purchases of personal services and market goods.

3) Another strategy is to take the preferences of the partners into account. Each partner only carries out tasks which he or she likes or at least does not mind doing. Again, the similar problem arises of how to share the activities both partners dislike.

4) Alternately, the lesser interest of one partner – a result of lower standards for order and cleanliness or a lower value placed on housework – can be a basis for the decision about dividing the household labor.

The partner with lower interest can profit from the housework done by the more strongly interested partner, and the more this partner pretends to be disinterested in this household good, the greater the partner's profit. If the lower interest is authentic, however, there is no profit at all for this partner. To make demands for equal sharing of work could be seen as unfair to the less interested partner. (So, different interests are a real problem in respect to couple's labor division.)

5) An additional mechanism works due to the transaction costs associated with changing the housework division in a couple. These costs can be considerable and are widely neglected in the research on housework so far. New skills and motivations must be learned. Time consuming discussions about standards, evaluations and fairness have to be

undertaken. To avoid forgetting the new arrangements, daily routines and habits have to be changed (Kaufmann 1999).

6) Lastly, “doing gender” strategies may be used by the individuals to stabilize their self-concept as man or woman (West and Zimmerman 1987). If masculine and feminine identities are related to housework, they tend to stabilize traditional patterns of housework, because domestic interactions offer images and behavioral routines for being a “real man” or “real woman” in the realm of the home. Less often, female or male identity can be constructed through nontraditional behavior, if modernized self-concepts are held by the individuals.

(An example for difference between preference and interest: I hate ironing but I have an interest in ironed clothes)

These six structuring mechanisms (gender ideologies, competences, preferences, interests, transaction costs and identity construction) interplay in a complex way in each relationship in the process of establishing and changing a certain labor division within the household.

(PowerPoint Slide 10; Effects of housework mechanisms)

What are the effects of these mechanisms? Besides the fading of gender roles we can see from our analysis that housework is deeply embedded in modernized romantic love relationships that function more and more on the basis of the full acknowledgement of the partner’s personality in all its aspects. This leads to highly individualized household arrangements instead of role taking.

However, the aim of an equal sharing the housework raises problems of identity construction, of efficiency and transaction costs. The mechanisms that replace traditional roles result in more differentiation in housework patterns. As individualistic components like preferences and interests become more important (through individualization) and role



behavior fades, it is very likely that the variety of household division within couples will increase.

Nevertheless, traditional patterns will not necessarily decline, because housework will fall to the partner who has more domestic competencies, more favorable and stronger preferences, a higher interest or lower transaction costs in household labor, or an identity that is linked more closely to household issues. This is true mostly for the female partner who is socialized to identify with the household and related activities and has often higher standards, competencies and interests in doing housework. Women's typically greater identification, interest, standards, competencies and housework management abilities lead to arrangements between the partners that maintain a traditional pattern of labor division. (This is not through old role behavior but through new mechanisms that can apply now).

In sum household division of labor is very unlikely to become more equal in the short run. Thus, inequality within the household will persist but rather on ground of gendered preferences, interests and competencies than on the basis of gender roles.

(PowerPoint Slide 11; Challenges)

What mean these results for the generation between 20 and 40 who is facing the decision to become parents or not and how many children they want and feel able to bring up.

We saw that attitudes have changed towards more egalitarian points of view. This is true for the household and care work and this is true for women's work force integration.

However, integration of woman in the labor market has been more progressing than the change of household labor division in couples that is hard to come about. We see more pressure on the women who have to combine paid work and house- and care work. This is a new inequality for women concerning housework not on the basis of gender roles but rather based on new structuring mechanisms in individualized household arrangements.

But we see more pressure on the men too because they want to be good fathers and women more and more demand them to be caring. Thus we see a new round of gender battle for reconciling paid and unpaid work but this time it cannot be solved within couples as the societal structures under the fertility crisis do not support the old gender models (meaning traditional labor division).

(PowerPoint Slide 12; Future Scenarios... Dystopia)

Two Scenarios – and with this I will come to the end of my talk – are imaginable:

A Dystopian view could imagine a rising inequality between age groups and rising pressures for the generations in their fertility window. This age fragmentation and cohort conflicts would reduce the willingness of this generations to invest in house and care work to a greater extend and they would have and bring up only very few children. As a result, the elderly would remain in self care, regardless of their actual ability (what would mean the very poor were in danger of dying). Many more immigration would be needed to come in and migration would take place with isolation. In the end, an overburdened social system would be in danger to collapse at a certain point.

(PowerPoint Slide 13; Future Scenarios... Utopia)

A different Utopian point of view will see another development: Expectations of men and women, mothers and fathers would become more realistic and attainable. A new study by Prof. Heather Hofmeister and Prof. Nina Baur shows, for example, a shift in women's expectations: They appreciate more caring abilities of their partners and the ideal of a man being purely the breadwinner is declining. This helps new models of labor division to develop.

There would be societal support (time, money, encouragement) for families through images, rewards, offers, and cooperative models. Employers would rethink the lock-step career path and built in individual and parents' needs. They would support parents and older workers. Immigration would take place with integration. As a result the fertility rate would increase or at least remain stable and social cohesion would sustain societal welfare of all age groups.

(PowerPoint Slide 14; Summary)

Given the need for high labor market participation in the future from both men and women:

The future fertility rate in Germany depends, in part, on the success of German couples and German society at developing new arrangements of paid and unpaid work.

What German society will need to master the fertility crisis is a prolonged change in attitudes and new institutional arrangements that can meet the coming up a great variety of personal living arrangements, especially making it for men and women in their fertility window equally possible to engage in parenting without being overburdened in the short run and facing disadvantages in their careers in the long run.

Thank You!