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Reichart, Elisabeth; Chesley, Noelle; Moen, Phyllis

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Elisabeth Reichart, Noelle Chesley & Phyllis Moen¹

The end of the career mystique?

Policy and cultural frameworks that structure the work-family interface in the United States and Germany

Erwerbszentrierter Normallebenslauf am Ende? Die politische und kulturelle Strukturierung der Schnittstelle zwischen Beruf und Familie in den USA und Deutschland

Abstract

Both Germany and the United States endorse the culture of the “career mystique,” the belief that a lifetime of continuous hard work is the path to occupational and personal success. The career mystique was the mirror image of the feminine mystique in the 1950s, and both cultural templates together reified a gendered work-family divide epitomized in the breadwinner-homemaker family norm in the middle of the 20th century. Today men and women increasingly see continuous full-time paid work as “given,” with policies in Germany and the US reifying this pattern. However, very few employees – men or women – now have the luxury of a full-time

Zusammenfassung

In den USA und in Deutschland prägt ein falscher Karriereglaube die Vorstellung des Normallebenslaufs; der Glaube nämlich, dass lebenslange, kontinuierliche und aufstiegsorientierte Erwerbsarbeit der Schlüssel zu einem beruflich und privat erfolgreichen Leben sei. Dieser „Karrierewahn“ ist die Kehrseite des „Weiblichkeitswahns“ (Friedan 1963) der 1950er Jahre; beide kulturelle Leitbilder versinnbildlichten die Trennung der Sphären von Beruf und Familie nach Geschlecht und fanden ihren Ausdruck im Ernährermodell als Norm des Familienlebens. Im Arbeitsmarkt und im Modus der sozialen Absicherung ist die Erwartung lebenslanger Erwerbsarbeit rei-

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homemaker available to support the commitment necessary to sustain this lock-step career mystique path. Most notably, as workers become parents, the contradictions inherent in fulfilling the career mystique (absent reliable back-up on the domestic front) become obvious and problematic. Since couples frequently reconfigure both work and family roles with the arrival of children, we illustrate the significance of policy, institutional and cultural contexts in shaping the work/family choices these couples make. We highlight three case examples (the US, West and East Germany) to demonstrate how policy regimes and cultural schema combine to produce distinctive and gendered work patterns, thereby serving to reinforce and reproduce both gender and class disparities.

Key words: comparative welfare states research, dual-earner couples, family policy, gender inequality, transition to parenthood

fiziert, und Männer *und* Frauen streben heute eine kontinuierliche Vollzeitätigkeit an. So haben immer weniger Beschäftigte eine „Hausfrau“, die sie in ihrer Karriere unterstützt. Erst recht wenn Arbeitnehmer(innen) Eltern werden, brechen die Konflikte zwischen den Anforderungen der Erwerbsarbeit und der erhöhten Sorge- und Hausarbeit voll auf. Bei der Geburt von Kindern werden Berufs- und Familienrollen in der Partnerschaft neu konfiguriert; die Vereinbarkeitsmodelle, die Paare dann wählen, sind mit geprägt durch Gelegenheitsstrukturen des jeweiligen wohlfahrtsstaatlichen, institutionellen und kulturellen Kontexts. In diesem Beitrag richten wir den Fokus auf drei Fallbeispiele (die USA, West- und Ostdeutschland), um darzustellen, wie wohlfahrtsstaatliche Politik und kulturelle Schemata zusammenspielen, und dabei bestimmte, geschlechertypisierende Erwerbsmuster bei Elternpaaren und damit soziale Ungleichheiten hervorbringen und verstärken.

Schlagworte: Vergleichende Wohlfahrtsstaatsforschung, Doppelverdienerfamilien, Familienpolitik, Geschlechterungleichheit, Übergang zur Elternschaft

The 20th century witnessed a remarkable rise in dual-earner households, although the scope of this trend varies across industrialized countries. In the US and East Germany, for example, 64,5% and 64% (US and East Germany, respectively) of couples with children have both parents in the labor force, while just over half (54%) of couples with children are dual-earners in West Germany (Schulze Buschoff 2000; US Census Bureau 2006, Table 588).² The dual-earner trend has occurred in tandem with cultural changes in gender roles, the destabilization of family ties, and, more recently, growing risk and uncertainty in labor markets that are connected to the dominance of service economies and a global labor market (Klammer 1999; Moen & Roehling 2005). Dual earning is also linked to entrenched cultural norms that attach increasing importance and status to extensive involvement in paid work (Moen & Roehling 2005).

Despite a lack of support from policies by the state or employers, the dual-earner household is becoming the new family norm for raising the next generation of young children in both the US and Germany. This renders scholarship on *how* dual-earner parents manage work and family both theoretically important and policy relevant (Engstler & Menning 2003; US Census Bureau 2006). Few households in the United States and Germany now follow the traditional male breadwinner/female

2 The US figure documents families with children under 18 where both parents are in the labor force. The figures for West and East Germany refer to families with children under 16.

homemaker model, although there are important differences in details of dual-earner adoption across countries.

The “career mystique” refers to the belief that personal fulfillment and occupational success come from investing one's time, energy, and commitment in paid work on a continuous basis. Historically, the career mystique is linked to the lock-step life course that consists of education, continuous full-time employment, and retirement (Moen & Roehling 2005, see also Kohli 1985). Today, the career mystique is not only a false myth, it is one that is difficult for parents to fulfill. Attempting to do so may highlight gender inequalities, in particular, since cultural ideals about motherhood often result in mothers’ “scaling back” on their time and emotional investments in their jobs (c.f. Becker & Moen 1999) while cultural ideals about fatherhood reinforce breadwinning, encouraging some new fathers to increase their hours at work (Townsend 2002). In this way couples’ *joint* work and family patterns around the transition to parenthood serve to create, sustain, or amplify already existing within-couples gender inequalities (Padavic & Reskin 2002; Sweet & Moen 2006). Alternatively, couples may outsource household activities, including some childcare responsibilities, or else hire a “wife” (in the form of a nanny) so that both parents may continue to invest in their jobs. But this is an expensive strategy, and thus not available to all households raising children. In addition, changes in fatherhood norms encouraging fathers to spend more time with their children mean that fathers as well as mothers can suffer from policies embodying the career mystique of total commitment to paid work (Padavic & Reskin 2002).

The transition to parenthood is one of the most consequential life course transitions, often requiring fundamental adjustments in how individuals live and work (Moen & Roehling 2005). Dual-earner couples strategize about how to find adequate time and money resources to meet individual and family needs and goals, but their choices are constrained by the outmoded regime of employment policies and practices, as well as prevailing state and societal cultural scripts and structural arrangements – all predicated on the career mystique. We therefore view the transition to parenthood by dual-earner couples as a “strategic research site” (Merton 1959) in which to investigate the ways macro-level economic, cultural, and policy ecologies shape the adoption of particular work-family strategies that, in turn, often perpetuate distinctive and gendered life courses for men and women.

A pattern of comparably high fertility, high level of dual-earner couples and low level of policy interventions distinguishes the United States from most European countries, including West and East Germany. While the U.S. birth rate reflects a convergence of demographical trends (higher level of immigration, lower level of childlessness, more children per woman, lower age at first birth), there are also cultural considerations (such as a focus on the family), and a different labor market situation with lower unemployment that drive these patterns (Balter 2006, US Census Bureau 2005). In this paper, we concentrate on dual-earner couples with children and analyze how existing policy, economic, and cultural contexts in the United States and Germany (analyzing East and West separately) shape the transition into parenthood and the ways these couples combine jobs and family.

The US and Germany specifically represent distinctive structural and cultural contexts regarding paid work, unpaid care work, and gender—with the US offering

few supports to families yet positing gender equality at work as an important value. West and East Germany differ in important respects; although since German reunification in 1990 both now have the same legal framework, some policies, especially childcare, still differ. Labor market opportunities differ as well (worse in East Germany), and there remains a different culture regarding motherhood and female employment inspired by the former socialist state. Thus we offer three, not two, comparative case examples of alternative micro-level responses to the fundamental mismatch that exists between the expectations of and rules enforcing the lock-step career mystique of total investment in one's job and the needs and values of new parents and their families. These examples also point to the ways in which existing welfare state policies support or fail to support contemporary families with young children and how thereby different forms of inequality by gender and class are produced and reproduced around child bearing.

Theoretical Framework

Welfare states have been characterized as specific combinations of state, market, and family involvement that operate together to manage social risks (Esping-Andersen 1999). But what aspects of "state," "market," and "family" are relevant, and how do we define "social risks?" Transitions in individual life courses are directly structured or influenced by the state as a way of managing social risks (Leisering 2003; Mayer 2004). We argue that the transition to parenthood is risky because unpaid infant and child care work often conflicts with paid work. In other words, job expectations tend to be at odds with the care needs of young children. Importantly, we theorize that it is during times of micro-level transitions (such as new parenthood) that existing policy regimes and cultural scripts serve to create or reinforce macro-level gender and income inequalities.

Feminist scholars have argued that including care work in welfare state analysis – by documenting who provides it and who receives it – is crucial for uncovering built-in gender inequalities (Lewis & Ostner 1994). The models of "universal caregiving" (Fraser 1996), or the "dual earner/dual carer society" (Crompton 1999) have been discussed as the most gender-equitable models of gender relations. However, the existing regime of labor market rules and regulations emerged in the 1950s in tandem with the culture of the career mystique, a time when full-time homemakers provided back up and support to much of the skilled workforce. These outdated policies and practices of paid work ignore the reality of contemporary employees' unpaid care work. Thus families with young children lie at the nexus of policy, market, and family ecologies – all at odds with one another. We draw on the scholarship of different welfare state theorists to develop a framework for identifying policies relevant to the parenthood transition and for linking these policies to two important social outcomes: gender and income inequality.

Thenner (2000) classifies family policy measures into three categories: 1) those that directly or indirectly provide money (e.g., money transfers, tax credits), 2) those that directly provide time off from work (e.g. maternity leave, parental leave, part-time

hours), and 3) those that support a family-relevant infrastructure (such as public care resources). These resources are interchangeable: money can be used to opt out of employment for a while in order to provide care or to purchase care, and infrastructure (such as publicly available childcare) can support parents' employment. However, governments differ in their approach to providing these three types of support.

Scholars have shown that different mixes of publicly-provided family support (cash child allowances, family tax benefits, parental leaves, and child and elderly care provisions) and varying reliance on markets (where individuals must individually purchase family support services) are linked to different levels of gender and income inequality (Folbre 2001; Gornick & Meyers 2003; McFate, Lawson & Wilson 1995; Padavic & Reskin 2002) and thus offer different approaches to dealing with social risks. Several scholars have suggested that the US mix of few state-provided family supports in combination with a high reliance on market solutions is linked to gender inequality in paid work (Gornick & Meyers 2004) and high levels of class inequality, measured by the Gini-coefficient or poverty rates (Korpi 2000; Woods 2003). By contrast, Germany as a whole provides higher levels of public family support and relies on markets less, although differences between West and East suggest that even within Germany there are two different policy "mixes." In a recent classification of policy contexts for families with children, West and East Germany fall into different categories. In West Germany, policy interventions are mostly economic (providing money for families) while in East Germany, ecological interventions (such as public child care support) play a greater role in policies (Künzler, Schulze & van Hekken 1999, Künzler 1999; see also Kaufmann 1995). Thus, West Germany is known for a high level of gender inequality and a medium level of class inequality (Korpi 2000) and East Germany is rarely considered in such typologies. However, using similar measures (female labor force participation and Gini-coefficient), East Germany has lower levels of both gender and class inequality than West Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2004a).

Focusing on the case of two-parent families with young children in a comparative framework (United States, West and East Germany) can, we believe, lead to better understanding of the links between varying levels of government-provided family support and sources of both gender and income inequality. We highlight differences in formal policies, economic and labor market conditions, and culture between the US and Germany and within the two Germanys to show how these societies shape the options of two-parent families with young children, and in doing so both perpetuate particular work/family trajectories and reinforce the career mystique as a cultural ideal.

The Policy Context in the United States, West, and East Germany

The existence or absence of public policies, along with their corresponding family supporting structural ecologies, influence families' options at the micro-level. Individual couples strategically divide paid work and unpaid family care work in light of the opportunity structures provided by public monetary transfers for families,

leave policies, and available childcare options. In the following section, we compare US and German policies and discuss the ways in which these policies structure two-parent-families' access to two key resources: money and time.

United States

Monetary Transfers

Most American families bear the economic costs associated with having children. Apart from direct subsidies and grants directed at small numbers of low-income parents, financial supports for most American families with children come in the form of tax breaks (Kelly 2005). There are two central forms of tax relief. The first is a Federal income tax credit of US\$1000 per child available to married couple families with incomes less than US\$110,000 and to single-parent families with incomes less than US\$75,000. This credit does not depend on the work status of the parent(s). There is an additional credit for childcare expenses incurred to support paid work. In 2005, a maximum tax credit of US\$3000 for one child and US\$6000 for two or more children was possible. Figures from tax data collected in 2001 show that the average annual childcare credit received by families was US\$440³ (Committee on Ways and Means, Table 13-5). A second type of financial support comes in the form of a flexible spending account in which pre-tax income (up to US\$5000) is accrued in a personal account and used to reimburse eligible childcare expenses. Both the tax credit and the flexible spending account can be used simultaneously, although they cannot be used for the same expenses. Furthermore, the amount of financial assistance actually provided by these credits is highly dependent on individual families' tax situations. Additionally, individual states within the United States may also offer varying levels of tax relief for children and dependent care expenses, adding to the complexity of understanding how this system of transfers and monetary supports influences the distribution of money resources.

Parental Leave

Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). In the United States, there is no national policy to provide new parents with paid leave after the birth of a child. Eligible US employees are entitled to take up to twelve weeks of *unpaid* leave from work through the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Estimates suggest that approximately 60% of the US workforce can access FMLA benefits, although research also indicates that only half of US workers who are eligible for the leave actually use it. Survey data indicate that the unpaid nature of FMLA-provided leave is a serious deterrent to its use; among those who could have taken an unpaid leave but did not, money was the most frequently cited reason for not taking a leave (see review in Moen & Roehling 2005).

3 This estimate reflects credits provided for care of eligible children and adults since the credit can be used to offset expenses for either an eligible child under 13 or an elderly or disabled adult.

Temporary Disability Insurance. Use of temporary disability insurance is one way new mothers (but not fathers) can take a limited *paid* leave after a birth. Five states (California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island) and Puerto Rico require employers to provide this insurance; in the remaining 45 states, temporary disability insurance is an optional benefit provided by some, but not all, employers. Finally, for residents of California, eligible workers are allotted six weeks of leave paid at 55% of their normal wages (see Kelly 2005).

Given the unpaid nature of the Federal FMLA leave and wage and income disparities between men and women, in dual-earner households, it is the wives who are more likely to take a leave to care for a new child than are their husbands. Further, leave offered through temporary disability insurance is only available to new mothers, not new fathers. Taken together, evidence about leave-taking in the US suggests that the design of leave policies provides incentives that favor leave-taking for new mothers, but not new fathers (Kelly 2005), a pattern that may reinforce existing gender inequalities.

Public Childcare Provision

Government support for childcare in the United States is limited, relative to East and West Germany, and is largely indirect. State support rarely comes in the form of government-run centers or programs that are accessible to large numbers of families. Such centers and programs, when they exist, are typically designed for and targeted to children in low-income families to meet other policy goals, like school readiness (e.g., Head Start) or employment of poor mothers (e.g., TANF childcare programs). In 2000, a negligible number of American infants were in government-provided care, with only 6% of children aged one to two years in some form of publicly-funded care, and 53% of children three to five in a public care setting (Gornick & Meyers 2003).

Most American families who need non-family care turn to the private market to purchase care for their children (Moen and Roehling 2005). In 1999, 73% of children under five with employed parents were in non-parental care, and 46% of these children were in non-relative care (child care centers, family day care settings, or nannies – see Sonenstein et al. 2002). Furthermore, use of “patchwork” arrangements is common by working parents and their children (Gornick & Meyers 2003; Smith 2000); 46% of children under five regularly spend time in more than one childcare arrangement per week (Gornick & Meyers 2003). Availability (particularly for children with special needs or for care during non-standard work times), price, and quality of care can vary widely in the private market and government regulation of childcare providers is minimal (Gornick & Meyers 2003).

How much do working parents in the US spend on private care for their children? Data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) show that in 1999 employed mothers with children under five spent an average of \$78 per week if they worked part-time hours and \$99 per week if they worked full-time hours (US Census Bureau Spring 1999). Childcare spending is also dependent on family income. These same data show that the poorest families spent an average of \$68 per week on care while those with more income spent \$113 per week, on average (US

Census Bureau Spring 1999). More recent analyses indicate that childcare costs in the United States are growing fast, outstripping housing, food, and college education costs (Shellenbarger 2002). While annual childcare costs depend on geographic location, quality, and type of provider, private-sector survey data suggest that childcare centers average \$6,000 to \$9,000 per year, while family day care centers average \$3,600 to \$7,800 per year. US families typically pay about 8.7 percent of their income in childcare costs and poor families can expect to pay as much as 25% of their income to meet childcare expenses (Shellenbarger 2002).

In sum, relative to other industrialized countries, US government policy does little to provide time off from work around the birth of a child or to support the provision of childcare services needed to resume employment (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Many working parents must rely on the good will of employers to get time off (typically unpaid) and they turn to a complex and poorly regulated private market to access increasingly expensive childcare services. Existing research indicates that unpaid FMLA leave has a limited impact on women's labor market attachment, although paid leaves of several months to a year strengthen women's attachment to the labor force. High childcare costs depress maternal employment, particularly among lower-income mothers (see review in Gornick and Meyers 2003). Further, Folbre (2001) argues that the American private market approach to childcare provision constrains the educational opportunities of the poorest children, thus perpetuating income disparities.

Germany

Monetary Transfers for Families

In Germany, monetary transfers for families are designed to reduce the financial burden related to child-rearing and are therefore called "Familienlastenausgleich", *compensation for families' burdens*, a term common in policy debates. A child benefit of € 154 (approx. US\$195)⁴ per child per month⁵ is paid to the main caregiver in whose household the child lives. Higher income families can choose to use a yearly tax credit (€ 3,648 in 2005, approx. US\$4,620) instead if the gain from the tax credit exceeds the benefit. There is another tax credit for childcare and education of € 2,160 (2005, approx. US\$2,736) per year for each child under age 18, which is extended to age 27 (from 2007: age 25) as long as the child is in school or training (BMFSFJ 2004b).

Joint taxation for married couples is another source of tax relief for married couples with or without children. The two partners' incomes are combined and then split and taxed, resulting in a lower tax rate than would otherwise apply. The more the husband earns and the greater the difference between the husband's and the wife's income, the greater the tax relief. The net gains also rise with income. Other relevant policy meas-

4 Exchange rate for this and the following mentions of US currency as of 09/19/06, according to www.oanda.com

5 € 179 (approx. US\$227) for every fourth and further child.

ures include free health coverage of minor⁶ children and a non-employed spouse. These monetary benefits have been criticized for strengthening the role of one earner and lowering the opportunity costs of homemaking, thus reinforcing traditional breadwinner-homemaker gender roles. Furthermore, high-income families and couples without children are disproportionately advantaged by the split taxation. Low-income families and spouses with similar income levels have few gains from this measure (Dingeldey 2000, Schratzenstaller 2002). In sum, monetary transfers only partly alleviate the poverty risk that is connected with the transition to parenthood (Günther 2002).

Parental Leave

Employed mothers-to-be in Germany are entitled to a paid maternity leave of 14 weeks (6 weeks before and 8 weeks after birth) which is jointly paid by the health insurance and the employer and which allows for full wage replacement. In addition, both mothers and fathers are legally entitled to take a leave from their employment for up to three years, with the right to return to a "similar" workplace following this extended employment break. During this leave, a low, means-tested benefit is paid for part of the time (income limits are moderate for the first six months but quite low for the rest of the time).⁷ Instead of exclusively staying at home, a parent can work up to 30 hours per week. Moreover, since 2001 both mothers and fathers are entitled to simultaneously reduce their working time.

Despite the gender-neutral entitlement to parental leave, this leave is overwhelmingly taken by mothers. The percentage of German fathers who used parental leave by either staying at home for a period or working reduced hours while the child was under age two was 4,9% in 2003, according to a report by the Federal Ministry for Family, Elderly, Women, and Youth (BMFSFJ 2004a). Apart from the traditional notions of motherhood that require mothers and children to be together, one major reason for this outcome is that a man's income before birth is usually higher than a women's, and both women and men do not want to forego this income, given the low replacement benefit (Schneider & Rost 1998).

Thus, the design of the parental leave policy, in combination with existing income disparities between men and women, reinforces the traditional division of labor in both West and East Germany. Taking a "baby break" has become a standard, institutionally and normatively backed "time out" in the female life course (Gottschall & Bird 2003). There are, however, differences in the length of women's leave-taking, with higher qualified mothers tending to return earlier than the legal entitlement (Lauterbach 1994). In addition, East German women tend to return earlier than West German women, mainly because of economic needs and the general labor market insecurity in East Germany (Falk & Schaeper 2001).

6 Children under age 18, in certain conditions under age 25 or even higher.

7 The federal parental leave benefit is paid for up to two years and can amount to € 300 per month, or to € 450 per month, if paid for only one year. Some states pay an additional benefit for a longer period after the federal benefit (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Saxony, Thuringia) (BMFSFJ 2004 b).

Policies changed in 2007. Now, the parental leave benefit is limited to one year, but the payment replaces the net income earned before birth by 67%.⁸ Two additional months of parental leave under the same conditions are granted if the father takes them. Further research will show whether this wage-bound and gender-bound leave benefit will be able to substantially alter gender relations within new parent couples.

Public Childcare Provision

The availability of publicly provided childcare differs widely between West and East Germany, creating different opportunities for couples to pursue a dual-earner model of employment. In 2002, there was a spot in a public day-care site for only 2,7% of all 0- under 3 year-olds in West Germany (4,0% for 1- under 3-year olds), with places for 37,0% of children aged 0-3 and 54,9% of children aged 1-3 in East Germany⁹ (Statistisches Bundesamt 2003). In addition, some young children (about 3% of 0 - 3 year olds) are cared for by “day-mothers” who do not have to be licensed by state agencies (mothers with children of their own who care for additional – not more than three – children in their homes during the day). Day mothers are used more frequently in West Germany due to the lack of public care facilities as well as in larger cities (Dittrich, Peucker & Schneider 2002).

The situation is different for pre-school children. Since 1996, every child aged three and older is legally entitled to a spot in a kindergarten until he or she enters school (usually at age six or seven). However, this right typically refers to a half-day spot only, and research has shown that it is only full-day day care that enables mothers of pre-schoolers to be employed in West Germany (Büchel and Spieß 2002). In 2002, 88% of all West German children aged 3 to 6 1/2 had a spot in a kindergarten, and there was a surplus of spots (105%) for East German children.

The situation changes again for children of elementary school age (ages six to eleven). The school day (in most federal states, the first four years of school) is usually only in the morning; thus, additional care is often required in the afternoon, particularly for parents with non-standard shifts or with afternoon work schedules (Stöbe-Blossey 2004). After-school childcare has been neglected in West Germany, but was a regular service in East Germany. In 2002, there were spots in an after-school day care center for 7,3% of elementary school children in West Germany, but for 68,5% of elementary school children in East Germany (figures referring to children aged 6 1/2 to 10) (Statistisches Bundesamt 2003).

To summarize, East Germany has a higher provision of childcare, particularly full-time care, than West Germany (Hank and Tillmann 2001). East Germany thus provides a stronger childcare infrastructure that supports paid work by both mothers and fathers than West Germany. In all of Germany and in contrast to the US, market-based childcare plays a minor role due to license requirements for any childcare setting with more than three children. For many parents (especially in West Germany), relatives (mostly grandmothers), care regularly for about one quarter of all

⁸ Non-employed parents receive a flatrate benefit of € 300 per month.

⁹ Statistics cannot distinguish East or West Berlin. However, previous investigations (1998) suggest that there is no substantial difference in childcare availability in West, vs. East Berlin.

zero to six year-olds, (see Dittrich, Peucker & Schneider 2002), and provide much of the care that supports parents' employment.

Comparing the US, West, and East Germany

Table 1 shows how the United States, West, and East Germany compare in their provision of time and money support to families with young children. At first glance, the US scores low on most of the observed policy indicators. That means that US parents must depend on their own income to purchase private-market childcare services and on the goodwill of employers for suitable work hours, employment benefits and leave. Given this structure, new parents in the US tend to have the wife scale back on work hours or else exit the workforce if they cannot afford good child care, or else use relatives or lower-quality childcare services. Given the frequent trade-offs between income and family care, the US system of low-levels of (often unpaid) parental leave coupled with market-based care is likely to generate or reinforce existing income inequality (Folbre 2001) and reinforce a traditional division of labor which ultimately perpetuates unequal access to income and sources of social power (Moen & Roehling 2005).

Table 1 Comparison of Policies that Provide Money or Time to Families in the United States, West, and East Germany

Policy Area	United States	West Germany	East Germany
Direct Financial Support	Low (support is inconsistent and idiosyncratic)	Moderate (favors middle-class and one-earner families)	Moderate (favors middle-class and one-earner families)
Parental Leave	Low (leave is unpaid)	Moderate for Money, High for Time (universal maternity leave, ¹⁰ long parental leave with low, means-tested benefit)	Moderate for Money, High for Time (universal maternity leave, ¹¹ long parental leave with low, means-tested benefit)
Government Support for Childcare	Low (children < 3)	Low (children < 3)	Moderate (children < 3, mostly full-day services)
	Moderate (children > 3, indirect support)	Moderate (children > 3, mostly half-day services)	High (children > 3, mostly full-day services)

(Own compilation)

West Germany supports a traditional model but, by contrast to the US, also acknowledges the care work that is done by mothers, via the leave entitlement and the (however low) paid leave. There is, however, little support for dual earning, especially for parents of the youngest kids. This situation contributes to gender inequality in the labor market. East Germany shows a somewhat contradictory picture: the traditionalizing forces of financial support and leave policies encourage maternal

¹⁰ Applies only to employed mothers that receive full wage replacement during maternity leave (6 weeks before and 8 weeks after birth).

care, but they are counteracted by the quite comfortable provision of childcare, which again, is a prerequisite for dual earning.

In sum, policies in the US offer families little in the way of time or money, and, expect new parents to manage any work-family conflicts and overloads through individual, private solutions. In West Germany, families get time (for mothering, but not fathering) and some money, but little support for mothers' employment. In East Germany, families get time off, even as a strong childcare infrastructure tends to support both mothers' and fathers' employment.

The Employment Context in the United States, West and East Germany

Different labor market conditions and government regulations shape the employment context in the United States and Germany. In the United States, employment is key not just for income provision to individuals and families, but also as an access point for important benefits (retirement insurance, health insurance, and others) that shape couples' decisions about who will work for pay and for how much time (Singley & Hynes 2005). In Germany, employment is also the main source of income for families, and health and retirement benefits are typically obtained through employment. But, in contrast to the US, there are other ways in Germany to obtain statutory health insurance for non-employed persons. We focus next on hours spent in paid employment, as, logically, time on the job is not available for family, even as time spent in paid work is a critical source of family income and benefits.

The United States

Labor Market Trends

The US labor market is characterized by relatively low unemployment and is less-regulated and more flexible (for employers) than the German labor market. In recent years, the US has had one of the lowest jobless rates and one of the highest job creation rates of the G7 industrialized countries (US, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Italy and the UK – see Sorrentino & Moy 2002). Even so, America is a large country geographically with a racially and culturally diverse population, and unemployment rates can be high in particular areas of the country (inner cities, for example), and for particular sub-populations (such as youth and African-American men, see Wilson 1997).

The US workforce is also characterized as one of the hardest working in the world. Americans work longer hours than employees in other industrialized nations and they take fewer and shorter vacations (Gornick & Meyers 2003). And, as in many other countries, the American contingent workforce is growing, with greater numbers of temporary and contract employees without the traditional protections and benefits provided by US labor law (Marler 2004; Marler & Moen 2005).

In comparison to other industrialized countries, including Germany, US labor regulations most closely align with the myth of the career mystique, offering working parents few options for controlling or limiting their work hours (Kelly 2005; Kelly & Moen 2007; Moen & Kelly 2007; Moen & Roehling 2005). The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (FLSA), the central law regulating working time for American workers, does not cap working hours, although it does certify that *covered* (non-exempt from the FLSA) workers receive 1.5 times their normal wage for overtime hours (over 40 hours per week – see Kelly 2005). The growing numbers of workers classified as supervisors or managers (who are therefore *exempt* from FLSA) means that fewer US workers benefit from the overtime provisions provided by the law (Gornick & Meyers 2003). Most employees, then, must negotiate work schedules with individual employers and supervisors, doing so without benefit of extensive government protections relative to other industrialized nations, including Germany.

Trends in Work Hours for Mothers, Fathers, and Couples

Dual-earning may be the dominant form among US couples with young children, but research suggests that, following parenthood, couples tend to adopt a *neo-traditional* strategy, with one parent (typically the father) pursuing the career mystique as the other parent (typically the mother) works less, moves to a less demanding job, or moves in & out of employment (Becker & Moen 1999; Moen & Huang 2007; Moen & Sweet 2003; Moen & Roehling 2005). Thus, gender disparities in the US typically widen following parenthood, in that fathers typically remain in “good” jobs with health care and other benefits, while new mothers scale back. This happens because “good” jobs come prepackaged in ways that assume employees are without family responsibilities. In order to make it possible for new parents (fathers) to have such jobs, few mothers of young children work full-time in the US. However, the older the child, the higher the percentage of mothers in the labor force. A recent survey indicates that labor force participation among mothers whose youngest child is aged three to five years reached 67% in 2004, of which 47% were full-time workers, 16% were part-time employed and 4 % unemployed (US Census Bureau 2005, figure 3). Consequently, at the couple-level, having at least one parent – and often both – working long hours (well over 40 hours per week) is becoming the norm across income, occupational, and educational categories (Gornick & Meyers 2003, p. 32; Jacobs & Gerson 2004). Figures from the mid-1990s show that among US dual-earner couples with children, the majority jointly work two full-time jobs, with 54% of couples putting in 80 to 99 hours in paid work per week, on average, while 10 percent jointly work 100 or more hours (Gornick & Meyers 2003). Dual-(fulltime)-earning may both be a response to families’ enhanced income needs (children’s costs, housing, child care) and a necessity to gain adequate benefits, such as health insurance, for both partners.

*Part-time employment.*¹¹ National employment policies allow employers in the US to treat part-time workers differently from full-time workers, in contrast to the

¹¹ Part-time employment is defined by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics as working 1 to 34 hours per week.

situation in Germany. The general trend is that US part-time workers, many of whom are mothers, do not have access to a range of employee benefits (Kelly 2005), although possibilities of more “good” part-time jobs may be emerging (Barnett 2004). Other strategies to temporarily reduce work hours through use of vacation, sick leave, etc. largely rely on availability through individual employers and their use is generally less frequent in the US than in many other countries (Gornick & Meyers 2003).

West and East Germany

Labor Market Trends

In contrast to the US, unemployment in Germany is problematic, especially in East Germany. As a consequence of unification, unemployment rates in East Germany are very high. The average unemployment rate was 18,5% in 2003, as opposed to 8,4% in West Germany.¹² And, as in the US, the contingent workforce has also grown in Germany during the last decade. According to data from EUROSTAT (cited in Hoffmann & Walwei 2000), the percentage of West-German part-time, temporary, and self-employed workers has risen from 19,7% in 1988 to 27,0% in 1998. In East Germany, 22,0% of all workers had such non-standard contracts (1998).

Working time in Germany is, on average, shorter than in the United States, on a weekly as well as on a yearly basis. The collectively bargained average working time in Germany for a full-time position was 37.7 hours per week in 2000 (Gornick & Meyers 2003: 159). However, since not all businesses are subject to collective bargaining, and overtime expectations are quite common, the actual (full-time) working time tends to be 40 hours per week (Lehndorff 2003).

Trends in Work Hours for Mothers, Fathers, and Couples

Maternal employment varies with age and number of children, as well as between East and West Germany. In 2000, only 11% of the mothers of a youngest child aged 3-5 in West Germany were employed full time (36 or more hours) while 36% of East German mothers of 3-5 year olds were full time workers. Similarly, more (43%) West German mothers than East German mothers (27%) were employed part-time (less than 36 hours). More than two-fifths of West German mothers were not working for pay (7% registered as unemployed and 38% as not employed). Among East German mothers, three in ten were registered as unemployed (29%), with 8% non-employed (Engstler & Menning 2003: 111). Thus — more mothers of young children are employed, and employed full time, in East Germany. If high unemployment were not such a problem, the great majority of East German mothers of three- to five-year-old children would be working for pay. Due to the parental leave entitlement that extends to age three, the number of working mothers of infants and

12 According to tables from the Federal Statistical Office, <http://www.destatis.de/basis/d/erwerb/erwerbtab3.php>, and <http://www.destatis.de/basis/d/erwerb/erwerbtab4.php>.

toddlers is declining in West Germany, with a higher percentage working more hours in East Germany. The most recent numbers suggest the rate was 29% in West Germany (10% full-time, 19% part-time) and 40% in East Germany (25% full-time, 15% part-time) (2000, see Engstler & Menning 2003: 111).

Fathers' employment in East and West Germany does not depend on age or number of children, or on the mothers' employment status (Engstler & Menning 2003: 113), with full time employment the male norm. Fathers in East Germany tend to be somewhat more affected by unemployment than fathers in West Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2004b, Table 4). As in the United States, research shows that men's average hours of paid work often increase after the birth of a child (Notz 1991; Vaskovics & Rupp 1995). In 2003, 86,2% of fathers with a child three to five years old were employed full-time, & only 3,1% were employed part time (Statistisches Bundesamt 2004b, no differentiation between East and West German fathers).

Part-Time Employment

There are two types of part-time work in Germany – part-time work that is within the same legal and insurance framework as full-time work (with health insurance, social security, unemployment insurance) – and the so-called “marginal” part-time work with fewer hours and very limited benefits. About one-half of part-time employees (of the total German part-time working population) have a “marginal” working contract with few or no social insurance benefits (Wanger 2004: 2).

Part-time employment can be obtained in different ways. Mothers and fathers of a child under age three have a legal entitlement to reduce their working time through the parental leave law. Since 2001, all employees are legally entitled to ask for reduced working time (less than full-time) following at least six months of employment with the same employer.¹³ Further, there are some branches and businesses, mostly in the services sector, that typically offer mostly part-time positions that are usually filled with female workers (Engelbrech 2002). In 2004, 84% of all part-time employees were women; with more women working part-time in West than in East Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2004c).

Part-time work is one major strategy that is pursued by some German workers, usually mothers, to combine work and family. Although their income might not be high, mothers' employment raises the family income and still allows for parental (mostly maternal) time to be spent with the child. A disadvantage of this strategy is that (even in the better-secured form), it rarely offers career prospects, and is often less skilled, more encumbering, and poorly paid. The reasons for working part-time differ in West and East Germany: Asked about their personal motives for working part-time, 68% of West German women, but only 22% of East German women named personal or family reasons for their part-time employment, whereas, for 52% of East German women working part-time, the main reason was a lack of available full-time positions (West: 8%). (Statistisches Bundesamt 2004c). As can be seen,

¹³ The law is only applicable to businesses that regularly employ at least 15 employees.

part-time employment is considered an opportunity by some mothers, but seen as a restriction, basically of their earning capacity, by other mothers.

Given these patterns, one can assume that joint work hours for couples with children in Germany do not peak to the high levels observed in the US. There is no systematic compilation of joint working hours of parents at the couple level for West and East Germany. Looking at working times of mothers and fathers from two-parent families with children under age six separately, we see that men in both parts of Germany spent on average of 51.6 (West; East: 51.3) hours on employment, while women spent only 11.3 (West; East: 18.6) hours (Künzler, Wolfgang, Reichart, & Pfister 2001: 142f., all figures as of 2000). According to Gornick and Meyers (2003), (West) German dual-earner couples have an average joint working time of 69 hours per week, as opposed to 80 hours in the United States.

From what we know about East German mothers and fathers, we expect them to work longer joint hours than West German couples because more women work full-time, provided that both partners have a job. Even so, it is doubtful that there are as many East German couples as in the United States with long (more than 80) or very long (over 100) weekly joint hours, given high unemployment and a shorter full-time work week. However, as men in recent years fared better in the East German labor market than women, there is a better chance that the father is employed than the mother on a couple-level (Reichart 2007).

Comparing Employment Conditions in the US, West, and East Germany

Table 2 highlights the specific labor market features that shape parents' work patterns. In the United States and East Germany, many of these features appear linked to labor market attachment for both women and men. This is in spite of a striking difference in the amount and strength of regulations governing work hours (or otherwise regulating working conditions) between the US and Germany. Furthermore, more East German mothers are in the labor force than West German mothers, in spite of high unemployment rates in East Germany. Once they have employment, East German parents seem to benefit from a more regulated and protective labor market that offers full-time work for many parents, but does not require the long hours that dominate US employment.

Table 2 also makes another US/Germany difference more clear. Fathers tend to work full time or longer in the US while longer hours are not as prevalent among men in either West or East Germany. This is not surprising given that workers collectively set work hours in Germany while workers in the United States have little say in setting work hours (see Schor 2004). It seems that, once children reach age three, dual-earner constellations where both spouses work full-time are prevalent in both East Germany and the US, but that time pressures in East Germany are not as bad, given the greater German restrictions governing full-time work hours. However, the chances for dual-earning seem better in the United States, given the high unemployment that hinders a considerable number of East German couples from pursuing a dual-earner constellation. Note that, in spite of similar employment re-

gulations across Germany, West German mothers are much less likely to work full-time than are East German mothers. Clearly, forces other than these regulations shape mothers' and fathers' work patterns.

Table 2 Comparing Labor Market Contexts in the United States, West, and East Germany Using a Range of Indicators

Labor Market Feature	United States	West Germany	East Germany
Work Hours Regulations	Little regulation controlling work hours or access to benefits; reduced hours must be individually negotiated	Collective bargaining of work hours; reduced hours accessed through parental leave legislation, or through part-time law	Collective bargaining of work hours; reduced hours accessed through parental leave legislation, or through part-time law; high unemployment
Labor Force Participation Rates			
Mothers	High	Moderate	High
Fathers	High	High	High
Trends in Paid Work Hours			
Mothers	Most work full-time, except for mothers of infants	Most work part-time, if employed;	Full-time/some Part-Time, if not unemployed;
Fathers	full-time or long hours (40 or 40+ hours per week)	Full-time (40 hours per week);	Full-time (40 hours per week);
Couples	Majority of dual-earner couples with children work 80+ joint hours per week, on average.	Average joint work hours of couples 69 hours/week.	No data available.

(Own compilation)

Cultural Similarities and Differences in the United States and (West and East) Germany

Current cultural images about employment (what is an "ideal" worker), are rooted in the 1950s career mystique, while images of parenting (especially the "good" mother) provide working mothers with mixed messages (Moen & Roehling 2005). Even so, cultural images about good mothering and good fathering as well as what makes an "ideal" worker are changing, although at different rates in the US and West and East Germany. For example, survey questions designed to capture gender-role attitudes about parenting and work uncover substantially different beliefs about how best to care for children and gender roles in the US, West, and East Germany (see Table 3). In this section we describe the distinctive cultural conditions that may influence couples' work arrangements.

Table 3 Comparison of Cultural Attitudes Towards Work and Family in the United States, West and East Germany

% Agreement (fully agree, agree) (% all/men/women)	(%)	(%)	(%)
	all/men/women United States	all/men/women West Germany	all/men/women East Germany
"A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works"	42/48/37	71/73/69	34/37/30
"Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay"	56/54/58	48/48/48	20/19/21
"Both the woman and the man should contribute to the household income"	58/56/59	67/65/70	94/92/95

(Adopted and translated from Schäffgen & Spellerberg 1998, Table 1; Translation: E.R.)

The United States

Cultural Images of Work and Parenthood

A minority of Americans and East Germans (42% and 34% respectively) believe children suffer when their mothers work, yet many Americans and West Germans (56% and 48%, respectively) agree that homemaking is just as fulfilling as paid work. Americans are less likely than either West or East Germans to agree that both men and women should contribute to a household income. This captures Americans' ambivalence about women's roles.

What then, does it mean to be an "ideal" worker or parent in the United States today? Joan Williams (1999) argues that most employers organize work to require full-time, full-year commitment, expect that employees will consistently meet requests for overtime, and will limit time out of the workforce for caregiving or anything else. In other words, jobs and occupational paths and expectations follow the career mystique (Moen & Roehling 2005). As Williams (1999) and Moen and Roehling (2005) have shown, such expectations are often difficult to mesh with personal needs, particularly the needs of young children, and tend to disadvantage women (see also Schor 2004). The diminishing presence of a stay-at-home wife means that men, as well, have trouble adhering to the occupational commitments required by the career mystique (Moen & Roehling 2005).

American cultural images of "good" mothers and fathers are thus rooted in highly gendered notions about the provision of both material resources and family care. The development of these cultural ideals has a long and nuanced history (for a synopsis, see Lopata 1993). In brief, good fathers are good economic providers, and even very involved fathers are unlikely to consider reducing their work hours to take care of their children (Risman 1998). Good mothers, on the other hand, are physically and emotionally available, the keepers of family time, and, if they work for pay, may distance themselves from the notion of having a "career" (Garey 1999). Mothering, is or should be "intensive," requiring large emotional and time investments that are difficult to combine with other demands (Hays 1996).

Preferred Working Time for Parents

Research indicates that most dual-earner couples prefer to spend fewer hours on the job (Clarkberg & Moen 2001). Mothers with young children are the most likely to act on this preference (Moen & Sweet 2004). The forces that drive this gap between actual and preferred hours are linked to the prevalence in the US of long-hour jobs, the paucity of “good” (with benefits) part-time jobs, and the gendered division of labor among married couples (Schor 2004).

West and East Germany

Cultural Images of Work and Parenthood

West and East Germany differ widely with respect to cultural images of work and parenthood (see Table 3). Attitudes towards motherhood and attitudes towards mothers' employment are strongly connected: while most West Germans see work and family as mutually exclusive for women (Oechsle 1998), East Germans believe that they can be combined (Dölling 1998). Scholars argue that these beliefs are deeply rooted in socialization, and probably will endure for quite some time (Trappe 1995). In West Germany, motherhood is culturally strongly connected with the notion of a childhood at home (Pfau-Effinger 1999; Pfau-Effinger 2000). Accordingly, a high percentage (71%) of West Germans state that a preschool child is likely to suffer when his or her mother works, although less than half agree that being a housewife is as fulfilling as working for pay (48%). In practice, the so-called “three-phase-model” of motherhood and employment, with a break from employment after birth and return to work as the children grow older, has been – and still is – the dominant model of work and family for women (Textor 2004). In recent years, however, the notion that both partners should work for pay and contribute to the household income has gained importance (67% in agreement).

East German women have traditionally maintained a strong orientation towards employment, even more than a decade after unification (Kreckel & Schenk 2001). As many as 94% of the East Germans agree that both the woman and the man should contribute to the household income, few (20%) see homemaking as fulfilling as paid work, and only a third (34%) of East Germans agree that “a preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.” East Germans widely accept public care facilities and believe that attending them does not harm the child (Schenk & Schlegel 1993: 380f.).

Father's career commitment has never been truly questioned; it is still a widely held cultural norm that fathers' contribution to childrearing is providing money through paid employment, and that being able to sustain a family is considered a precondition for fatherhood (Kurz 2005, Tölke 2005). However, in recent years, there has been a cultural shift towards a “new fatherhood.” In a representative study about fatherhood, 71% of the men viewed themselves mainly as “educators” of their children, whereas only 29% set a priority on breadwinning as their main contribution to raising children (“providers”) (Fthenakis & Minsel 2001). These attitudes, however, are not yet translating into changes in fathers' paid work commitments.

The widespread norm of “responsible parenting” (Kaufmann 1995) describes the expectations that German parents face. While it used to be okay for parents to provide the basics, it is now expected that parents will provide more for their children, usually in the form of a good education. This is a money- and time-consuming task, as it involves paying for enrichment activities, helping children with their homework, or driving them around to different activity sites for leisure time and education.

Preferred Working Time for Parents

Asked about their preferred working time constellation for parents with children up to age nine, about two-thirds of West and East German mothers prefer that one partner works full-time, and one partner works part-time. About one-fifth of the East German mothers still prefer the full-time/full-time constellation that was the rule in the German Democratic Republic (preferred by only 6% of West German mothers), and about 14% of the West German mothers prefer a one-full-time-earner (single breadwinner) constellation (which is very rarely even mentioned by East German mothers) (Engelbrech & Jungkunst 2001).

Comparing Cultural Conditions in the US, West, and East Germany

In all three contexts, there is a gender divide in ascribed parenthood responsibilities that is mainly borne by mothers, although this divide seems weakest in East Germany. Culturally, East Germans appear to have a strong preference for a dual-earner model supported by public childcare, whereas West Germans favor a maternal caregiver who is not mainly committed to employment. As a consequence, West German couples are more likely to enact a traditional breadwinner model, given policies and labor markets that enable and favor such a constellation. In contrast, East Germans’ modern gender attitudes might be able to buffer traditionalizing forces in policies. Attitudes in the US seem more agnostic and contradictory. Homemaking is an accepted alternative to paid work, yet non-parental care is not generally considered harmful. Being in the labor force requires full availability for the job, as rooted in the career mystique. While work constellations among parent couples may seem at first sight to be contingent on individual preferences, it is crucial to uncover discrepancies between attitudes and contexts by analyzing how far policies enable (or constrain) the different options.

Work and Family Configurations and the Transition to Parenthood

Given the specific policy, labor market, and cultural conditions in the US and West and East Germany, what do actual “outcomes” look like? How do couples specifically combine work and family after the birth of a child? Furthermore, are couple’s

different employment constellations linked to varying levels of social inequality? We draw on existing data and our own research to document couple-level configurations that prevail in the United States, West, and East Germany. We also outline which combinations allow parents access to sufficient time and money to meet family needs.

The United States

Parents' Employment

Several studies of US populations indicate that the transition to parenthood is a key factor shaping subsequent labor force behavior, particularly for women (Hynes & Clarkberg 2005; Moen & Sweet 2003; Raley, Mattingly & Bianchi 2006). For example, Hynes and Clarkberg (2005) examine how first and second births influence the employment trajectories of a nationally representative group of US women. They use a group-based trajectory method to analyze data from female respondents in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) who have experienced one or two births during the study time period. They find great variation in mother's employment patterns. Only 37% of women remain continuously employed after a first birth (this drops to 32% after a second birth). The remaining women exit the labor force, exit and re-enter, or experience various forms of intermittent employment (Hynes & Clarkberg 2005). Moen and Huang (2007) find women in middle-class dual-earner households in the Ecology of Careers study often exit the workforce within the two years between interviews because of motherhood, pregnancy, or else in order to become pregnant.

Moen and Sweet (2003) use cross-sectional, couple-level data and show that the most common couple-level work arrangements among dual-earners with young children are "neo-traditionalists," where a husband works 45+ hours per week and a wife works less. In their sample of dual-earner couples living in upstate New York, almost 40% of couples with preschool-age children follow a neo-traditionalist work strategy. Indeed couples with children have the greatest discrepancy in husbands' and wives' work hours because wives' "scale back" to accommodate family care needs. While the results from this study suggest that women in couples adopting a neo-traditionalist strategy are more likely to have higher levels of life quality throughout the life course, they also point to findings that show that privileging husbands' careers can reinforce existing gender inequalities (Moen & Sweet 2003). More recent analyses of Current Population Survey data from 1970 to 2001 show that presence and age of children continues to be a major factor shaping couple-level work patterns (Raley, Mattingly & Bianchi 2006).

While few studies have focused specifically on couple-level career trajectories, results from existing studies of individuals are suggestive. Multiple longitudinal studies suggest that there is more variability in women's career pathways than in men's pathways (Han & Moen 1999; Williams & Han 2003b) and that family demands contribute to career volatility (Williams & Han 2003a). At the couple-level, then, it is differences in women's employment trajectories that define differences in

couple's work/family patterns in the US in terms of major changes in hours, and US fathers are unlikely to exit the workforce following parenthood. Instead, US fathers follow the career mystique path of continuous full time (or more) employment. Second, the Hynes and Clarkberg (2005) analysis shows that while the transition to parenthood is an important factor shaping US women's labor force behavior, bearing children will not always have consistent effects on women's employment decisions over time, since they find that women's employment patterns can differ around a second versus a first birth. Further, we do not know enough about variability in fathers work patterns.

Work/Family Constellations and Inequality

Variation in US couples' work configurations, namely whether and how much both parents work, is linked to family income and time constraints. Not surprisingly, household income varies substantially depending on whether or not both parents are in the labor force. In 2003, for example, dual-earner households with children earned a median income of \$78,000 while breadwinner-homemaker households earned \$53,000 (US Census Bureau 2006).

Work hours for dual-earner parents also vary. Gornick and Meyers (2003) show, for example, that average weekly work hours for mothers with children under six range from 16 to 27 hours per week while weekly hours for fathers range from 39 to 47. Parents in lower income families or with less formal education tend to work fewer hours, on average, than parents with more education and income (Gornick & Meyers 2003). In spite of the trend to work less than full-time among new mothers in dual-earner households, significant numbers of working American families suffer from a time-squeeze (see also section on work hours). Many economic factors favor dual-earning in the United States, including inflation rates (only two-earner couples have been consistently beating inflation) and the increasing costs of housing and education.

The situation of dual-earner couples in the US illustrates the potential to trade-off one form of inequality for another. While dual-earner families may be more economically secure than some other family constellations, these families are also facing serious time pressures.

West and East Germany

Parents' Employment

Longitudinal research shows that German couples adopt a more traditional division of labor, including a decreasing attachment of the mother to the labor market at the transition to first parenthood (Notz 1991; Rosenkranz, Rost & Vaskovics 1998; Vaskovics & Rupp 1995). In a longitudinal study with panel data, Reichart (2007) observed the employment constellations of parent couples for a period of six months before birth and five years after birth of the first child. She found that in 68.8% of the couples studied ($N = 309$), both partners were employed six months before their first child was born. After birth, these couples follow six different pathways (identi-

fied by means of sequence analysis). Table 4 indicates the relative frequency of the types among West and East German couples.

Table 4 Employment Constellations among Young Parents after Birth of a First Child in West and East Germany, 1990-2002 (N=302); no data available for the United States)

Type	<i>One-Earner-Couples</i>		<i>Dual-Earner-Couples</i>			
	Traditional one-earner couples (Man full-time/ Woman home-maker)	New one-earner couples (Man full-time/ woman on leave)	Dis-continuous one-and-a-half-earner couples (Man full-time/woman intermittent part-time)	Continuous one-and-a-half-earner couples (Man full-time/ woman part-time)	Dual-full-time-earner couples (Both full-time)	Hindered dual-earner couples (Discontinuous careers of both partners)
% of West German couples	25.8	18.1	29.4	12.5	8.1	3.6
% of East German couples	0.0	14.8	13.1	6.6	36.1	27.9

Data source: German Socio-Economic Panel Study, waves F-T; for details see Reichart (2007)

West German couples are more frequently in groups with steady or intermittent part-time employment of the women (with the male partner continuously full-time employed) after a period of parental leave taken by the mother. There are also groups of couples that seem to rely mostly on one earner – in one dominant pattern, the woman opts out of the labor market and becomes a homemaker, in the other, the couples have more children, resulting in continuous leave-taking by the mother, a pattern supported by the long leave entitlement. Unemployment plays a minor role among West German couples' employment histories. The records documenting publicly provided day-care for the child (crèche, kindergarten or childminder) show a low level of enrollment– consistent with the low coverage level that is supported formally in West Germany.

By contrast, the majority of East German couples, exhibit a pattern of (mostly continuous) full-time employment of both parents, or of parents that frequently experience unemployment, resulting in both partners having somewhat discontinuous careers. Both groups seem to be more in favor of full-time employment (as it is consistent with attitude surveys), and the prevalence of use of publicly provided childcare appears to support this option, though there is less use of childcare among the group of (sometimes unemployed) parents.

The difference in employment constellations between West and East Germany holds also for parents with somewhat older children. In 1996, there were more dual-earner couples with children aged 3-10 years in East Germany (58,4%) than in West Germany (49,0%), among all cohabiting couples. Furthermore, in nearly half of the East German couples, both partners worked more than 30 hours a week (48,2%), whereas in West Germany, mostly one partner worked less than 30 hours (39,1%) (Ludwig et al. 2002).

Work/Family Constellations and Inequality

In general, the average income level in East Germany is lower than in West Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2004a: 351ff.). Thus, East and West Germany clearly differ with regard to the *need* for a (full-time) dual-earner constellation. Of the households of couple parents with children aged 3-10 with above-average income, in nearly three-quarters of the East German couples both partners work both more than 30 hours/week. Yet, 87,5% of West German couples with above-average income have one main earner, with the other partner neither non-employed or employed less than 30 hours per week (Ludwig et al. 2002).

Research has consistently shown that the risk of poverty for families with children is clearly reduced if the female partner is at least regularly part-time employed. This is even more true for East Germany (Becker 2002). Similarly, Joos and Nauck (1998) find that the strongest predictor of poverty among children (measured as an income of less than 50% of the median equivalent income) is the family constellation, including the employment constellation of the child(ren)'s parents, and again the effect is stronger in East than in West Germany. It has also become clear that the opportunity for parents to have a two-fulltime-earner constellation is connected with other inequalities, especially educational qualifications. Mothers and fathers with better educational credentials are also more likely to both be employed (Bauer 2000; Joos & Nauck 1998; Schenk 2000).

Another source of inequality is the issue of time, as time pressures strongly influence families' quality of life. Compared to American parents' time budgets, German parents appear to be somewhat less squeezed for time, probably because so many German mothers have substantially cut back their employment (see also section on work hours). The price, however, is a traditional division of labor at home and gender inequality in the labor market, with the mother not only doing more care work, but also substantially more housework than the father (Huinink & Reichart, forthcoming). Mothers who do work full time (as it is quite common in East Germany) usually have a second shift of carework on the home front. In a qualitative study with full-time employed mothers (at least one child between three and ten), close to all German mothers reported to be "chronically pressed for time" (Ludwig et al. 2002: 117).

Discussion and Conclusions

Pursuing the "career mystique" of continuous full-time (or more) time commitments to one's job has historically relied on the presence of a full-time homemaker (Friedan 1963; Moen & Roehling 2005). Today, few men or women have full-time homemakers but are still expected to follow the career mystique regime, producing time pressures and overloads for working families raising children. How are contemporary working parents managing? Research shows that 1) most work-family accommodations are made by mothers, placing them on the periphery of the labor market; and 2) having a child is a key event influencing women's employment tra-

jectories and couples' work/family configurations. Our comparisons of family policies, labor market conditions, and cultural factors in the United States, West, and East Germany suggest that work-behavior adaptations following the transition to parenthood differ in patterned ways across these three cultural and economic environments, with corresponding implications for gender and income inequality. Table 5 visualizes the data and information that we presented in the previous sections and provides an intuitive ranking of our three case examples along the three dimensions of public policies, labor market conditions and culture regarding motherhood and employment. We conclude by summarizing the potential for these combined environmental forces to alleviate or reinforce both gender and income inequality in the United States (US), West (WG) and East Germany (EG), and discuss potential policy implications.

Table 5 Ranking the United States (US), West Germany (WG), and East Germany (EG) along Three Important Context Variables

Public support: childcare supply	high	EG	WG	US	low
Gender equality in the labor market	high	US	EG	WG	low
Culture regarding motherhood and employment	modern	EG	US liberal	WG	traditional

(Own compilation)

In the US the focus on the market as a source of income, healthcare, and other childcare implies that parents who are more marketable (e.g. strong educational credentials or “hot” technical skills) both fare well in employment and can afford to pay for quality childcare. These parents also profit most from the tax credits offered to families with children, but often “pay” with a time squeeze. US families with less education and fewer marketable skills often have lower incomes (particularly if only one parent works for pay). Having fewer wage resources plays out in varying ways in terms of mothers’ decisions about remaining in employment. On the one hand, families may need the extra income, a need that may “push” some mothers of infants back into the labor force quickly. On the other hand, they also need but may not be able to afford childcare, a force that may “pull” some new mothers (but not fathers) from employment. Although gender inequality seems comparatively low given the percentage of mothers in the labor market in the US relative to Germany, the US policy mix associated with couples’ joint work and family configurations is also associated with high levels of class inequality across households raising children. Furthermore, it is not clear whether mothers with young children who are employed full time are doing so because they want to or because of a combination of income needs and the absence of supports—the lack of paid leave options as a case in point. The deeply embedded US cultural contradictions between a career mystique work ethic and a parenting ethic of time with children is borne primarily by American women. The degree to which this gender inequality can be evened out varies strongly by class.

In West Germany, the strong impact of policies – especially leave policies – can be observed by analyzing work/family configurations of parents with children under age three. The great majority of women take a “baby break” after birth of their child, and many do not return to the labor market before the end of the three-year-entitlement for leave, or even later. These configurations go hand-in-hand with cultural images about a childhood at home, and contribute to a traditional division of labor in most couples, with a clear cut-back in women’s employment that often goes beyond that supported by paid leave. Together with breadwinner wages that are still available to many West German men, the monetary transfers that support the breadwinner family produce only a moderate level of class inequality across families, but a high level of gender inequality. Mothers (but not fathers) have the time essential for the care of their children, but compromise their future employment. Moreover, there is still a considerable level of poverty in two-parent-families, and research suggests having both parents employed tends to alleviate the poverty risk of having children.

Childcare policies and a culture that is supportive of women’s employment in East Germany favor a higher prevalence of dual-earner families than in West Germany, at a level comparable to that observed in the US. Although East German mothers take parental leave after childbirth, many of them do not fully utilize the three-year entitlement, but take up work full-time again, an employment pattern facilitated by the public childcare infrastructure in the former East Germany. As a result, there is a much lower degree of gender inequality in the labor market than in West Germany, even with the higher unemployment in the East. However, even the most modern gender role attitudes cannot be put into practice absent sufficient jobs in the labor market. There, East Germany is similar to the US, as labor market chances basically depend on the worker’s resources, giving higher-qualified workers better chances. However, despite higher unemployment, there are more two-parent couples with both young children and two full-time jobs in East Germany than in the US. There is also a higher degree of labor market regulation in Germany that constrains escalating joint work hours as observed for many US couples. Together with welfare state policies that alleviate workers’ dependence on the market (unemployment benefits, childcare services), class inequality in East Germany seems considerably lower than in the US. However, in all of these three case studies mother’s double shifts (i.e. paid work and housework) remain entrenched.

What policy lessons can be drawn from this comparison of the parenthood transition in different cultural, economic and policy contexts? First, the career mystique privileging full-time continuous employment remains the expected “good worker” norm in all three contexts. Yet the degree it can be put into practice varies considerably by gender, class, and the surrounding policy, labor market, and cultural contexts. Even in dual-earner couples where both partners are highly committed to their jobs, gender plays a crucial role in reinforcing within-couple inequality (Behnke & Meuser 2003, Solga & Wimbauer 2005). In couples with young children, entrenched employment practices predicated on the career mystique, together with supportive or non-supportive family policies, strongly reinforce gender disparities on the job and at home (see also Schor 2004), as relatively few mothers can simultaneously pursue full-time careers and parenthood.

Our comparative analysis shows that available and affordable childcare is an absolute precondition towards moving beyond the career mystique. Even more radical is our conclusion of the necessity of rethinking existing clockworks of career paths and working time – the social organization of work weeks, work years and work lives. This reorganization would recognize that both women and men have non-work as well as paid work interests, goals, and obligations. Different social clockworks would support more gender equality in the labor market and a more equitable income distribution. It would also relieve fathers from their burden of being the main breadwinners in the household and allow them to step into more care responsibility for their children. Thus we need “time policies” that widen flexible work hour and career path options in all jobs, that legitimate affordable “time outs” for fathers and mothers as needed for family care, and that don’t damage long-term occupational prospects (see also BMFSFJ 2006). In this way, policies would recognize that life courses in the 21st century are not in lockstep any more (Moen & Roehling 2005). Such policies will come about only when the costs of the status quo outweigh the costs of change. We believe that both the United States and Germany are approaching that point. Couples in both countries often “manage” by delaying parenthood, forgoing it altogether, or else have fewer children (Balter, 2006).

The existing (career-mystique based) social organization of paid work and career paths is a cultural relic making it difficult if not impossible to succeed at both family and employment. The contradictions between the career mystique and the value of caring for children and family are strongly linked with gender inequalities, since women mostly “balance” these contradictions. They do so by either scaling back their job aspirations or else enduring chronic time pressures and strains that also affect their families’ quality of life. The three contexts we have studied favor different patterns of adaptation none of which is ideal for promoting both gender equality and family life quality. While caring for a new generation is an important value, present policies mostly work against its fulfillment by both parents. The career mystique is indeed a false myth, a cultural invention that, like the feminine mystique, *can* and should be discarded. “All” that is required is the imagination and the will to rethink policies constraining the ways men and women fit together the pieces of their lives.

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Addresses of the authors/Anschriften der Autorinnen:

Dr. rer. pol. Elisabeth Reichart
(corresponding author/Korrespondenzautorin)

Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung –
German Institute for Adult Education
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 38
D-53111 Bonn
Germany

E-mail: reichart@die-bonn.de

Noelle Chesley Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor of Sociology
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
752 Bolton Hall
Milwaukee, WI 53201
United States of America

E-mail: chesley@uwm.edu

Phyllis Moen Ph.D.,
Professor, McKnight Presidential Chair in Sociology
Department of Sociology
University of Minnesota
267 19th Avenue South #909
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
United States of America

E-mail: phylmoen@umn.edu