

RECONCEPTUALIZING GENDER IN POSTSOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION

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This article traces the gendered consequences of changes in the problem of combining work and family caused by the collapse of state socialism in former East Germany. The transition to capitalism made the trade-offs between work and family more extreme, amplified the experiential distance between work and family, and increased the perceived social value of work relative to family activities. These processes highlighted gender stratification: Women's labor power was devalued just as the value of paid employment increased, and women were increasingly excluded from work just as women's family roles seemed to lose value for society. This study suggests that feminists should conceptualize postsocialist transitions not only as changing labor market conditions and state policies but also as shaping gender relations through changing the meanings and experiences of work and family activities.

In 1990, West Germany incorporated the formerly state socialist East Germany into its Western, capitalist system, ending 40 years of separation and initiating a transformation of social, political, and economic organization in the former East Germany. Four years thereafter, while conducting fieldwork, I asked a class of unemployed women in East Berlin about their experiences in the new, capitalist job market. The women agreed emphatically that after unification, being a mother was a significant handicap when looking for a job. This experience of discrimination against mothers was then forcefully articulated as a global critique of the West German system. "In the West, the love of animals is actually stronger than the love of children," one woman offered. A classmate agreed bitterly, "It's best not to have children, buy yourself a dog."

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This discussion reflected changes in women's access to employment in postsocialist Eastern Europe that feminist observers have begun to document and theorize. A common theme in this literature is that women gained political rights through the collapse of state socialism but lost economic rights. Most often identified are the loss of guaranteed employment and subsidies for child care. Feminist observers feared these changes would force women back into traditional family structures and financial dependence on husbands. For the most part, however, the actual impact of postsocialist economic changes on gender relations has not been examined. In this article, I show how the collapse of state socialism affected a basic element of economic organization, the problem of combining work and family in former East Germany, and I trace the gendered consequences of this process.

I find that postsocialist transition affected gender relations by changing the perceived social value of work and family spheres. While previous scholarship mostly focuses on changes in men's and women's access to employment and state resources, I find that with the transition to capitalism, paid employment became more valuable and people perceived a decrease in the social value accorded to family activities. Thus, women confronted two kinds of losses—first, discrimination in the labor market, and second, a form of social devaluation due to their identification with demanding family roles. These interrelated processes began to reorganize gender categories and highlighted gender as a sorting mechanism in an increasingly stratified society. Simultaneously, gender ideologies developed in state socialist times contributed to a critical view of the West German system as lacking in support for human values.

WORK, FAMILY, AND GENDER IN THE TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM

Contemporary problems of balancing work and family are rooted in the development of industrial capitalism, during which "economic and familial activity grew increasingly separate and distinct" (Matthaei 1982, 10) and "women became more dependent on men economically" (Hartmann 1990, 158). This legacy has complex implications for gender relations today. Different arrangements for combining work and family cause variations in men's and women's access to paid employment and, thus, to the different benefits of work and family life. Equally important, as Nippert-Eng has argued, "'work' and 'home' symbolize contrasting ideas or meanings" (1995, 21). These concepts indicate separate social realms associated with different times and places, sets of activities, meanings, and emotions. As a result, conflicts about the boundaries between work and family and the roles men and women should have in each sphere are connected to struggles over social values.

As I will show below, German unification confronted East Germans with new expectations about how work and family were supposed to be connected—both in biographical sequence and in everyday life. This had consequences for respondents'

everyday lives but also for their evaluation of the social transition. While assuming the separation of work and family, and the association of men with work and women with family characteristic of industrial society, respondents often did not like how these spheres were supposed to be connected in the West German system. This attitude derived partly from conditions of postsocialism and partly from experiences combining work and family in East Germany before unification.

East German Conditions of Combining Work and Family

East European state socialism was characterized by very high work rates for both men and women. Although women still handled the bulk of child care and domestic work, they had gained some measure of financial independence from men through subsidized child care and guaranteed employment (Heinen 1990; Scott 1978). Even among East European countries, East German women's work rates were high, topped only by the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. In 1980, 84.3 percent of East German women worked outside the home, compared to 56.8 percent in West Germany and 64.6 percent in the United States (International Labour Office 1986, Table 2).

As East Germany developed economically after its founding in 1949, more and more women entered the paid workforce. By the 1970s, most East German women were expected to, and mostly did, hold full-time jobs continuously over the life course. Most East German women were also mothers. Thus, the East German method of combining work and family was simultaneous (Trappe 1994). This contrasts with the more common sequential pattern, in which women work before their children are born, leave the labor force for several years while children are young, and then return to paid employment.

In East Germany, women's high employment rates were coupled with the traditional gender division of labor in which women are responsible for child care and homemaking. Special benefits for mothers promoted women's freedom of reproductive choice and financial independence while simultaneously fostering women's primary responsibility for homemaking and child care. Thus, East German couples generally coordinated two jobs and relied on two incomes but otherwise maintained a traditional gender division of labor (Dölling 1989, 1994; Gysi 1990). East German women pursued work and family goals simultaneously, and according to survey evidence, were strongly subjectively oriented to both work and family (Gysi and Meyer 1993).

Nonetheless, concrete indicators such as below-replacement-level birthrates, the fact that women's desire for part-time work far exceeded its availability (Gysi and Meyer 1993), and the more than three hours of housework done by East German women per day (Nickel 1993) show how difficult it was for women to have male employment patterns and still manage family life like women. Rueschemeyer's (1982-1983) ethnography of three work collectives in East Germany also shows that work-family conflicts were a significant source of tensions.

Despite the strains, in East Germany, for the generations coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s, the feasibility of combining parenthood and continuous employment over the life course for both men and women was taken for granted (Gysi and Meyer 1993; Trappe 1994). This was due to a combination of economic, political, and social policy factors.¹ The demand for women's labor was sustained by the economics of shortage characteristic of East European state socialism (Kornai 1980). The supply of women's labor was sustained through political pressure on women to work full time, low wages, and social policies designed to maintain women's labor force attachment while promoting motherhood (Penrose 1990; Trappe 1994). These policies included generous maternity leave, a shortened workweek without loss of pay for mothers of two or more children, a paid day off each month available to most women for housework (the "housework day"), and provision of virtually free day care.

Postsocialist Conditions of Combining Work and Family

The transition to West German capitalism changed the conditions that had sustained both the demand for and the supply of women's labor. The currency union of July 1990 initiated rapid, massive collapse of East German industry. The unemployment rate for former East Germany rose from 1.6 percent in the first half of 1990 to 7.3 percent in the second half of 1990. In the first half of 1994, it was 15.7 percent (European Commission 1992, 1995). Job loss figures more accurately indicate the actual magnitude of economic dislocation. As of 1992, almost half of the jobs in former East Germany had been lost (Bosch and Knuth 1993).

Many of East Germany's policies designed to keep mothers in the labor force were abandoned. Benefits such as the year of paid maternity leave and the shortened workweek without loss of pay were replaced by less generous West German policies (Berghahn and Fritzsche 1991; Rosenberg 1991). Moreover, many West German policies were designed to encourage women to stay home, making them economically dependent on breadwinner husbands (Moeller 1993; Ostner 1994). Although feminist observers feared East Germany's extensive system of public child care facilities would be closed after unification, affordable day care remained available in many parts of former East Germany (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 1994).²

Changes in quantitative indicators of the relationship between gender, work, and family were extreme. For the first half of 1994, men's unemployment rate was 10.4 percent compared to women's rate of 21.3 percent (European Commission 1992, 1995). The birthrate fell by 46 percent between 1989 and 1991 and continued to drop, a phenomenon "unprecedented for an industrialized society in peacetime" (Eberstadt 1994, 138). Clearly, the consequences of German unification reached far beyond political structures and macroeconomic changes into the everyday sphere of problems of combining work and family. Feminist accounts of postsocialism focus on exactly these connections.

FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF POSTSOCIALIST TRANSITION

The connections between the transition from state socialism to capitalism and arrangements for combining work and family are central in feminist accounts of the impact of postsocialist economic changes on women. Three basic versions of what the transition is and how it is linked to gender relations inform this literature: theories of women in capitalism, theories of women and the state, and theories of women in state socialism. These are not competing explanations but perspectives appearing in various combinations throughout the literature. While theories of women and capitalism and theories of women and the state look forward to the conditions and constraints that would presumably develop in newly emerging capitalist societies, the third approach suggests that legacies of state socialism should profoundly shape gender relations in postsocialism.

Theories of women in capitalism see German unification as replacing a system of socialist redistribution with private property and a competitive labor market. In this framework, women are likely to lose economically because the new labor market is capitalist. Marxist-feminists see women's labor market marginalization as integral to the maintenance of gender hierarchy in capitalist societies, and the historic role of women as a reserve army of labor in capitalist economies also suggests that conditions of high unemployment would tend to force women into marginal employment.

This approach directs attention to developments in women's labor market positions. For example, Quack and Maier (1994) examine gendered consequences of economic restructuring in postunification Germany. Nickel's (1993, 1994) work links economic change to the construction of gendered notions of competence. Fodor's (1996) study of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia shows that attributes typical of some groups of women in state socialism, such as academic credentials and service sector experience, increased in economic value in the postsocialist transition.

Theories of women and the state see the postsocialist transition as a change in policy regime. The state is viewed as affecting gender relations through its redistributive actions and because state policies shape identity construction and cultural categories. For example, Duggan's (1993) comparison of the relative costs of child rearing borne by men, women, and the state in East and West Germany found that women pay more and men and the state pay less in the West German system. Haney's (1997) study of the Hungarian welfare state during and after the socialist period examines changes over time in state definitions of women's social welfare problems and remedies as well as the consequences of these changes for women's ability to pursue their own interests.

Both of these approaches predict that postsocialism should push women out of work and back into the home, making them more dependent than before on husbands' incomes. Economic restructuring would tend to marginalize women's position in the labor force and unification would replace East German policies attaching

women to the labor force with West German policies encouraging mothers to stay home supported by a husband. The combined impact of economic restructuring and withdrawal of state support would lead to changes in gender relations in the family. Christina Schenk, German feminist activist and member of parliament, warned, "men will once more be the 'breadwinners' and heads of the family, with women primarily assuming responsibility for reproduction" (Schenk 1993, 166).

Such changes in the division of labor would have consequences for gender hierarchy and gender identities. Men, presumably, would benefit as men, gaining an advantage in the labor market as well as the unpaid labor of wives in the home. Women, who had relied on conditions supporting both work and family orientations, would experience loss of autonomy, being forced home or forced to choose between work and family orientations.

The kinds of arguments I have designated theories of women in state socialism view that system as one in which the state and communist party controlled production and (re)distribution and largely orchestrated all public arenas. The specific set of relationships among party, state, economy, and society in state socialism resulted in an ideology and experience of family life as a refuge from the all-pervasive state and, therefore, a realm of freedom and individuality. Women supposedly idealized this realm of freedom and individuality and thus did not question gender inequality in the family. The public world of work, in contrast, was viewed relatively negatively.

Heinen (1995) argues that Polish women's professed desire to stay home during the late socialist period reflected a general stance critical of social and political developments. Haney (1994) shows that Hungarian women's discourse during state socialism divided the world into the public and the private and valued highly the location of women in the private, family world in opposition to the state's official discourse, which valued women as workers. In Einhorn's view,

the fact that the gendered domestic division of labour remained largely unchanged may therefore be explained in terms of the desire to maintain the family as a non-politicized sphere, in a form of passive resistance to what was perceived as a ubiquitous state presence. (1993, 51)

This approach suggests that East European women would be complicit in (re)constructing their own dependence on more traditional family structures. East European women's strong commitment to traditional family identities led feminists to fear East European women would willingly go "back to the home" after the collapse of state socialism removed the political pressure to work. More important, this approach directs attention to how particular political and economic arrangements shape the meanings of work and family activities and the construction of gender identities.

Each of these perspectives makes an indispensable contribution to our understanding of the impact of German unification on gender relations. However, my

findings suggest, paradoxically, that the backward-looking perspective of theories of women in state socialism provides the best clues to conceptualizing the connections between gender and postsocialist transitions. Theories of women and capitalism and women and the state direct attention to how economic organization and social policies structure men's and women's access to employment and resources, but my research shows that such changes are just the most visible indicators of changes in the meanings and experiences of work and family activities. My findings confirm the validity of focusing attention on how work and family activities and gender identities are defined in relation to key principles of social organization.

In what follows, I show that as the axes of social differentiation and power changed in former East Germany after unification, so did the meanings and experiences of work and family roles, with different consequences for men and women. These changes were driven by the intersection of two processes: rapid, visibly increasing social stratification and redrawing of the boundaries between work and family. These interrelated processes changed the character of work, making it more competitive, less friendly, and more strictly separated from family while simultaneously changing the relative value of the spheres of work and family in favor of work. These processes highlighted gender as a mechanism of stratification in an increasingly stratified society: Women's labor power was devalued while simultaneously the value of paid employment increased and, just as women were increasingly excluded from the public world of work, women's family roles seemed to lose social value.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE LIMITATIONS

The arguments in this article are based on in-depth interviews with former East Germans conducted between 1993 and 1995 (three to five years after unification). In-depth interviewing is one way to identify connections between subjective experiences and social change. For this article, interview transcripts were analyzed to uncover connections between the large-scale structural changes involved in postsocialist transformation and men's and women's everyday experiences of change in the problem of combining work and family. This article focuses on themes echoed throughout the interviews.³ It examines perceptions of changes in work and family lives and the relationship between work and family spheres, as well as men's and women's different positions with respect to these changes.

All respondents had already begun work lives and founded families under East German conditions, and most (97 percent) were between 19 and 41 years old at the time of unification. This particular generation provides exceptionally interesting perspectives on the social transformation because they experienced combining work and family under both East German and postsocialist conditions.

Respondents were recruited through social networks of friends and acquaintances of the author as well as through women's projects and a project for the

unemployed. Potential respondents were told that they would be asked to describe how their work and family lives had changed as a result of German unification.

A sample of 38 sets of East German parents was drawn from two large Eastern German cities and one small city. The sample contains 36 married and 2 unmarried heterosexual couples with children. Respondents' children ranged in age from not yet born to 17 years at the time of German unification and from 2 to 21 years (70 percent between 5 and 14 years) at the time of the interview. Forty-eight respondents had completed skilled work or semiprofessional training, 7 were master craftsmen, and 21 held university degrees.

In-depth, open-ended interviews conducted in German by the author covered job hunting and employment in the new, capitalist labor market; child care arrangements before and after unification; and financial and emotional dependency of partners. In most cases, husbands and wives were interviewed separately and then together. Interviews were completed in three to six hours in two separate meetings. Respondents were encouraged to speak freely about anything they felt was relevant to the topic of work and family in East Germany after German unification.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by native speakers of German and analyzed and coded by the author using a computer-based coding and retrieval system (Folio VIEWS). Codes were developed based on research questions and categories that emerged from the evidence. Coded transcripts were analyzed to discover common themes and gender differences. Quotations from interviews presented here are representative of general patterns discovered in the interview material.⁴

A specific caution applies to interpreting German interviews about German unification. Although East and West Germany were two states between 1949 and 1989, as Borneman argues, the two Germanys must be seen as separate parts of one whole. During the 40 years of state socialism, each part of Germany tried "to create its own cultural ideal in an intimate process of mirror-imaging and misrecognition" (1992, 5). I have tried to keep in mind Stöhring's warning that "the East-West problematic is a field blooming with projections" (1994, 51).

POSTSOCIALIST TRANSITION: INCREASING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND NEW BOUNDARIES BETWEEN FAMILY AND WORK

Under conditions of East German state socialism, having a job that paid the bills with money left over for living was a taken-for-granted part of everyday life for most East Germans. From the point of view of people trying to organize their work and family lives, unemployment did not exist. In postsocialist East Germany, economic downsizing and restructuring resulted in mass lay-offs and high unemployment; both getting and keeping a job became uncertain. It is impossible to overestimate the impact this had on the meanings and experiences of combining work and family.

Increasing Social Stratification and Postsocialist Anxieties

Throughout the interviews, respondents juxtaposed the inevitability of having a job in East Germany to the possibility of not having one after unification. For example, a young medical doctor commented on general changes in his life since unification:

Well, different things are important now in contrast to before [unification]. For example, how do I get a job? How can I pay my rent? Uhhh, how do I avoid going under in this society? Before, I could always pay my rent, I always had an apartment and a job. Before, a difficult problem was, how do I get a pair of jeans?

A middle-aged father discussing his idea of a good family life pointed out that in East Germany, the transition from school to an apprenticeship had been taken for granted.

Before [unification]—they [the kids] didn't have to worry about that; if they managed to finish 10th grade, then they managed to get an apprenticeship. It's not that way anymore, nowadays it actually matters how good they were in school.

In East Germany, the transition from an apprenticeship to a real job was also predictable because most East Germans were hired by the workplaces in which they were trained.⁵

In East Germany, unemployment was unusual. Instead, it was a challenge to avoid a full-time job. From the point of view of the state, to work less than full time was shirking your duty to society. In the 1977 employment law code (*Arbeitsgesetzbuch*), only pensioners (due to age or disability) had a right to part-time work; otherwise, part-time work was only allowed as a temporary solution for women with exceptional family responsibilities. Enterprises were supposed to pressure part-timers to work full time (Arbeitlang 1991, 74-8).

The coercive impact of these policies was clear in discussions of arrangements for balancing work and family in East German times. For example, a pharmacist proudly described how she had obtained special permission to work part time in the mid-1970s because her son had a mild disability. Another woman explained how unification made it possible for her to stay home with her children. In her view, before unification, her husband had earned enough money to support her and their baby. However, she did not take time off work after her year of legal maternity leave because this was viewed as undesirable by the state. She explained,

I was simply afraid . . . to do something which was totally unpopular and for which I would probably have had to endure very many "conversations" from the side of the state about why I want to do that.

In stark contrast to East German times, when it was difficult to avoid having a job, even this minimum requirement for labor market success became uncertain

after unification. Thus, confrontation with the capitalist labor market gave rise to what Germans call *Existenzangst* (existence anxieties), fears of falling below the minimum standards for existence. Respondents articulated such fears in connection with job search discussions and by way of trying to describe the most fundamental changes they experienced as a consequence of German unification.

For instance, Mrs. Strauss, assistant director of an art gallery, explained that only after German unification could she understand why certain East German communist politicians (in East Germany before unification) had held the “primitive” view that guaranteeing a job and an apartment for everyone was more important than absolutely anything else. She explained that her insight into this position grew out of her first experiences with existence anxieties. These arose after German unification,

when for the first time I really was afraid that—I mean without being old or sick, or whatever, uhm, that I could somehow end up sleeping under a bridge, I could really understand [those primitive East German, communist politicians].

Just as it became more difficult to get and keep a job, the potential rewards of working increased. Although employed people with semiprofessional and professional degrees were much happier with their incomes than were people in working-class jobs, most respondents felt that their work was better paid in unified Germany than before unification.⁶ Several respondents also mentioned as an advantage in the new system the chance to earn a lot if they worked a lot or worked very hard.

In contrast, the East German income distribution was rather flat and consumer goods shortages constrained chances to display income differences that did exist (Ebert 1993; Wilpert 1993). Because West German money buys access to Western consumer markets, postunification incomes have more buying power than the old, East German incomes did. The intersection of increasing income stratification and access to Western consumer markets in postunification Germany gave rise to status anxieties, fears of being left out or left behind in the emerging, consumption-based status system.

The differentiation of social classes based on increased income differences was described as a fundamental part of the unification experience. For example, Mrs. Frisch, a kindergarten assistant, felt that social relations had become less “human” after unification. When asked to describe how this was so, she offered,

Well, a “better-earner” has his nose immediately a little bit higher, so that people are divided into different classes. Well, you’re the lower strata, you’re just a social welfare recipient, and good, at least you have a job, I’ll still talk to you at least . . . I mean, not everyone is that way, but in general.

She conceded that there were social differences in East German times but emphasized how much less important this was.

Oh yeah, I think so [there were social differences] but that was barely anything, there were just two—the working class and then those who were politically active. But perhaps that just didn't carry as much weight because they lived completely isolated from us.

From the other side of the emerging divide, a young medical doctor explained how his work life had changed because of unification:

It is also . . . a difference, a big difference, in terms of the social respect that doctors get, that is . . . East Germany, at least it called itself the workers and farmers state and . . . a worker, a skilled worker, earned more than a doctor. . . . I do notice that now [after German unification], lawyers, doctors, this kind of thing, now they're the higher social strata in comparison to before, when, uhh, they sort of swam along in the middle.

Status anxieties were articulated in connection with the explosive expansion of consumer opportunities after unification. For example, the art gallery assistant director quoted above commented that at first she simply enjoyed the consumer cornucopia. However, the social differentiation arising from increased income stratification together with new consumption opportunities made her feel insecure; she emphasized that this was a new experience for her.

I've suddenly got complexes about my apartment . . . in front of Alexander [a friend], for example . . . because in the meantime he's got a totally wonderful condominium in a renovated building, furnished with only the best, and I know that not one of my pieces of furniture would ever make it into his apartment. . . . That's new.

The common experience of transition from a society with full employment to a competitive labor market underlies the differences in individual opportunity that existed among the respondents. In East German times, the pervasive and directly experienced result of labor shortage for most people was that "as soon as you were a little bit good, they wanted you."⁷ In contrast, in the competitive labor market, a lot of people apparently are not needed at all. Because of increased income stratification and access to Western consumer markets, the visible social cleavage between those who succeed at work and those who do not increased rapidly.

Experiences of rapidly, visibly increasing social stratification sharpened the conflict between work and family by introducing new existence and status anxieties into the trade-offs between work and family orientations. A family orientation potentially threatened one's social existence, whereas a work orientation could lead to limitless material success. Many people felt forced to make work an even higher priority than before unification, and others commented on the temptation to pursue income-maximizing strategies. Because of economic insecurity and the consumer cornucopia, there was a temptation to make as much money as possible, even if this meant neglecting other aspects of life.

Gendered Consequences of Increasing Social Stratification

The social transition gave old forms of female devaluation new meaning. As noted above, women are much more likely than men to be unemployed in former East Germany. However, discrimination against women in employment per se is not new; in East Germany, women were channeled into lower paying, lower status jobs (Nickel 1993; Sorenson and Trappe 1995). The difference is that in postunification Germany, women's family roles threatened to exclude them from jobs altogether. Although many mothers were still employed four years after unification, being a mother was widely perceived to be a fatal liability in the job market. For men, this implied a general unfriendliness toward families or children in the West German social system, whereas for women, it also could mean a devaluation of themselves as women. Most of the women in my sample referred to being a woman or being a mother as a disadvantage in the current labor market. They expressed a new experience of being disadvantaged because they are women.

The following exchange between a husband and wife illustrates men's and women's different perspectives on discrimination against women in the labor market. A young, self-employed environmental consultant argued that an employer sees a person with children as less "productive" and "deployable,"

and he always sees you with children as worse, worse as an employee than a person who doesn't have children.

His wife immediately interjected a gendered version of the problem:

As a rule, women are asked—it's one of the injustices that men are almost never asked—whether they have children or how they imagine dealing with the situation if the children get sick.

A related gender consequence of labor market discrimination against women is an emerging distinction between mothers and women without children. Although respondents usually assumed that women were mothers (as most East German women were), some women focused on the distinction between women and mothers. For example, Mrs. Klein, an unemployed chemist, explained that she had missed work a few times when her child was sick and concluded,

and the outcome was, as I said, that I was laid off by the firm, but I had colleagues the same age as me who didn't have children and, naturally, they didn't miss work because of their children, and one of these women kept her job and I had to go, although I'm sure we were equally good from a professional standpoint.

Women are more responsible than men for monitoring and resolving conflicts between work goals and family life; thus, the sharpened conflict between work and family had different consequences for men and women. While men and women shared new kinds of uncertainty and anxiety around work and family issues,

focusing on success at work did not conflict with notions of masculinity and men did not feel that being a man was a disadvantage in the labor market. In contrast, women felt devalued because they were women and some felt a growing divide between women with and without children. Thus, the transition initiated changes in gender categories that posed more difficult issues for women than for men.

Drawing New Boundaries between the Family and the Workplace

As the context of increasing stratification magnified the trade-offs between work and family orientations, changes in the labor market and the organization of work began to draw new boundaries between the social spheres of work and family. This helps explain why respondents often viewed the West German system as placing a low societal value on the family. Nippert-Eng's (1995) argument that work and family are not simply "spatio-temporal" and "social structural" but also "conceptual" categories is useful here. The social transformation that engulfed former East Germany implicated all of these dimensions. Thus, increased practical difficulties of balancing work and family were accompanied by an amplification of the experiential distance between family and work identities.

After unification, East German state policies such as the "housework day," which had forced workplaces to recognize and accommodate family roles, were abandoned. The character and focus of the workplace changed as well. Partly due to changes in the role of the workplace in society and partly due to economic restructuring, social relations at work became less friendly and more competitive and family responsibilities were posed as obstacles to success at work. In contrast to the increasingly competitive, unstable work situation, the family's significance as a stable set of relationships and a realm of solidarity was underscored.

With unification, many things that had been organized through the workplace were transferred to the state and private organizations. As Wilpert (1993) argues, in East Germany, the workplace was supposed to be the "center of life." East Germany was an exceptionally strong version of a society in which social integration is achieved through firm-centered, paid labor because of its extremely high work rates, pervasive ideological emphasis on the importance of work, and the fact that social programs were organized through workplaces (Kohli 1994). Functions of the work collectives in East German state socialist enterprises had included social activities and the advancement of women (Rueschemeyer 1982-1983).

After unification, the central integrating role played by the workplace was weakened because of high unemployment, increased subjective importance of consumption and free-time activities, and removal of responsibility for social programs from firms (Wilpert 1993). East German enterprises were replaced by capitalist businesses. Teams in profit-oriented firms were no longer responsible for helping women find child care or giving women paid leave for housework.

Furthermore, the competition to get and keep jobs after unification changed social relations at work. Before unification, respondents reported, social relations

at work were friendlier and less competitive.⁸ For example, an electrician working as a furniture deliverer explained the consequences of unification for his work life:

Well, now, first you have to keep in mind . . . that everyone's become afraid for their jobs for the first time, of being demoted or laid off. . . . Before, in East German times, it was relatively buddy-buddy; this is gone after the transition [i.e., unification] because everyone is afraid they might lose their job.

A tool-and-die maker working for a large, internationally recognized West German firm used an example to describe how relations among work colleagues had changed. For learning to set up and operate new, expensive machinery, he and a coworker had been promised extra pay for their increased skill, responsibility, and shift work. This did not materialize so they requested fulfillment of the promises. Instead, they were returned to their old departments and others took over the new machines. He explained,

It's completely irrational, we made the mistake, now, in retrospect, I can say it was a mistake . . . we taught other people what we'd learned . . . we brought them together and said, now pay attention, what if we have an accident or get sick or whatever. The machine can't stand idle. It costs 320DM an hour when it's idle. . . . And they're doing our work now. As a result, we hurt ourselves this way. It was our own mistake.⁹

He learned that in the current work environment, he should keep his skills and knowledge for himself.

In addition to inducing increased distrust and competitiveness among coworkers, long-standing workplace-centered social relations were disrupted through massive layoffs. This meant that people were less likely to have friends at work merely because old friends had gone and new friendships had not yet developed.

Yet, many employed respondents noted real advantages to working in postunification Germany, including improved work content, work organization, and access to resources needed to get a job done or do a job well. An architect explained that before unification she designed things she doubted would be built. After unification, she saw her designs materialize rapidly. This positive change in work content also contributed to an increased separation between work and family for some because it drew the focus of work time away from social relations toward work process.

The transfer of social programs out of the workplace, the newly competitive atmosphere, the decreased focus on social relations at work, and the disruption of preunification, workplace-centered social relations all amplified the experiential distance between work and family. Because work and family, as Nippert-Eng (1995, 21) has argued, are "defined inversely by the other within a conceptually closed system," radical economic restructuring foregrounded the significance of the family as a stable set of relationships and a realm of social solidarity.

East Germans confronted the competitive labor market predisposed to value family highly. East German state socialism placed a high social value on family

roles through policies that materially supported the nuclear family form and women's homemaking responsibilities. There were interest-free loans for married couples and the so-called housework day available to wives and mothers. Workplaces were expected to accommodate women's family roles by finding or providing child care and allowing mothers of two or more children to work fewer hours per week without loss of pay (Arbeitlang 1991; Trappe 1994, 1996).

In personal life, the family was also highly valued as a refuge from the pervasive presence of the state and a realm of self-affirmation. As the economy in East Germany deteriorated, work life became less satisfying and people looked to the family as a realm in which to find self-affirmation (Gysi 1990; Nickel 1993). Surveys after unification confirm the continuing high value placed by East Germans on family life. Störtzbach (1995, 132) reports a stronger orientation to family, parenthood, and children in the Eastern than in the Western part of Germany. For example, only 44 percent of respondents age 20 to 39 in the West agreed with the statement, "You cannot be really happy if you do not have children," whereas the percentage agreeing in the East was fully 70 percent.

Theories of women in state socialism suggested the family, which had hitherto been idealized as a refuge from the state, might be revealed as a locus of gender inequality as the state and party withdrew from orchestrating public life and civil society developed as a realm of individuality and freedom. However, my findings suggest that family has taken on a new idealized meaning—it represents a remaining realm of solidarity in a society characterized by competition.¹⁰

This is because unification rapidly transformed the public world of work into a highly competitive environment. However, family life appeared relatively stable and unchanged—it was where preunification solidarities and social networks were preserved.¹¹ As one respondent explained,

Family . . . that's actually the only thing that stays when everything else goes to hell, your personal relations with your relatives. . . . You could almost see that as the philosophical quintessence of the time surrounding unification . . . at least for our family.

Gendered Consequences of the New Boundaries between Work and Family

Changes in work organization and workplace culture began to redraw the boundaries between work and family in ways that affected men and women differently. Because women are more responsible for practical problems of child care and monitoring family well-being, changes in both formal and informal practices that tended to exclude family concerns from the workplace affected women more than men—both men and women recognized this.

Formal policies that structured the relationship between work and family for women in East German times were viewed as giving social support for women's family roles. For example, an unemployed hotel worker and her husband discussed combining work and family before and after unification.

Wife: Generally it's so, we had a job and a family. . . .

Husband: That's nothing extraordinary. I'm sure it's the same way in other places too.

Wife: Yeah, of course, but in many cases we still have that. The women work and have a family and do the laundry, the cooking, and God knows what else . . . which gets rather tiring in the long run and so it would be nice if you could work 6-hour days.¹²

Husband: Well yeah, that's what I said. Before [unification] that was recognized. Insofar as a woman got a housework day every month, women's special role was guaranteed.

Many respondents shared this man's view that after unification women's "special role" was no longer guaranteed.¹³

In East Germany, rather than being something to hide from one's colleagues because it might cause disadvantages, in some instances, motherhood could actually be used to bargain with supervisors. For example, a nurse requested a year of unpaid leave from her job during East German times because she did not want to put her one-year-old in day care. Her supervisor refused and the nurse bargained with the fact that she would be entitled to one and a half years of leave paid by her employer after the birth of a second child.

They said, you have to work for one more year, and so I presented them with the bill on that: . . . if you make me come back to work for another year now instead of giving me leave, I'll get pregnant again immediately and have my second child and then you can pay for another year and a half and you can pay a lot.

Formal policies that had forced workplaces to accommodate women's family roles in East German times were complemented by informal practices. Such practices were rooted in the shared understanding, backed up by the power of the state, that in certain instances mothers had the right to be away from work to care for children and that it was the responsibility of the work collectives to make up for these absences somehow.¹⁴

In sum, the postsocialist transition interacted with East German practices by assigning women the responsibility for monitoring and resolving work and family conflicts and posed the amplified conflict between work and family more sharply for women than for men. As feminist theories of gender and postsocialist transition suggested, restructuring tended to marginalize women's position in the labor force and magnify women's everyday problems of balancing work and family. Contrary to the assumptions implicit in many feminist accounts, however, this problem was shared by men and women.

The His and Hers of Postsocialist Transformation

Feminist observers often suggested that postsocialist transition would result in women's going back into the home and becoming more dependent on husbands' incomes. My findings show that this was true for some families but that, for the most part, neither men nor women viewed this as desirable. This is partly a legacy of state socialist practice and partly a result of new, postunification conditions.

East German men clearly accommodated very well to wives who earned full-time incomes yet managed family life like women—it is this model that male respondents found desirable, not the supposed advantages of a financially dependent, stay-at-home wife. Postunification conditions actually enhanced the attractiveness of this model.¹⁵ Increasing social stratification contributed to the desirability of having two incomes in a family to provide a buffer against unemployment and unpredictable expenses. In addition, the difference between one and two incomes was often the difference between just getting by and doing well. Thus, the fact that after unification women could no longer count on getting a job at all, let alone one compatible with homemaking and child-rearing responsibilities, was a problem for men.

Men clearly indicated interests in wives' incomes.¹⁶ Men often responded to my questions about the ideal financial arrangement within a marriage with something similar to the following:

Well [I'd like] both partners [to] earn a lot! Would you like me to name a specific sum? Well, let's see, I'd be satisfied . . . or I'd say ideal would be if we had 5,000DM a month together. That would be ideal.

Men did not necessarily value women's unpaid labor in the home over women's income earning. For example, a construction brigade foreman living at the construction site during the week because this increased his income expressed his resentment about this arrangement when asked whether unification had changed conditions of combining work and family for him personally. He responded emphatically,

Yes [they have changed]! My wife doesn't have a job! . . . And I have to make up the lost earnings. Then she has to see, I simply demand that of her, that living at the construction site is necessary so that the family can live, as we would if we both earned reasonable salaries.

Yet, while men lost some of the certainties about work and family arrangements that were normal in East German times, women experienced the social transformation as posing the conflict between work and family especially sharply for women and thus threatening their autonomy because they were women. For example, women often interpreted the question about ideal financial arrangements in a marriage as asking whether a wife should earn her own money. The wife of the respondent who felt it would be ideal to earn "5,000DM together" interpreted my question as follows:

Well, it really should be that the woman can earn her own keep, I think, so that she isn't dependent on her husband. That is, I think it's definitely better, the way it was generally in East Germany, that each partner was working and had an income somehow and could be responsible for his own keep and the children were, more or less, taken care of together.

She linked her fears of becoming financially dependent to the social transition after unification by next referring to West German marriages.

We also know families now, also families in the West, where the wife doesn't work, and that's somehow a little bit odd, I think. . . . These are acquaintances, we don't know them very well, but . . . it seems that the relationship is at least partly not that good, that the woman is after all more of a subordinate.

In this passage, she projects her fears of what not working could mean for her onto West German marriages, expressing her sense that becoming part of West Germany has threatened her autonomy in some ways because she is a woman.

CONCLUSION: GENDER IN POSTSOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION

This study compels reconceptualization of feminist notions of the connections between postsocialist economic changes and gender relations. While theories of women and capitalism and women and the state predicted that postsocialist transition would push women back into the home, this assumed that the meanings and experiences of work and family activities would remain the same despite state socialism's collapse. In contrast, I argue that the transition to capitalism changed how work and family activities connect men and women to resources and status. Thus, even if women's employment rate had not changed, continuing tasks of combining work and family would have been infused with new existence and status anxieties and women would have borne these costs more directly than men. While theories of women and state socialism predicted that East European women might see labor market freedom as a chance to leave paid employment and focus on family roles, my findings suggest that women quickly reconstructed their interests in relation to new economic realities.

Yet, my findings validate the perspective offered by theories of women and state socialism insofar as it directs attention to how work and family activities are embedded in broad political and economic configurations and linked to struggles over social values. In former East Germany, postsocialist transition did not simply change men's and women's access to paid employment but initiated changes in the relationship between work and family spheres that seemed to threaten the viability and social value of family activities. Among former East Germans, this contributed to a deeply critical evaluation of the West German system as lacking support for human values.

Both men and women agreed that the transition to capitalism sharpened conflicts between work goals and family life. This was partly because of discrimination against women in employment but also due to broader changes in the relationship between work and family. Rising unemployment and visibly increasing social stratification were identified as fundamental aspects of the social transition, and these

factors increased the value of paid employment. Competition to get and keep jobs, changes in social relations at work, and the changed role of the workplace in society all decreased the certainty of being able to both have a family life and get and keep a job. Thus, these factors posed family responsibilities as obstacles to success at work. These interrelated processes made the trade-offs between work and family orientations more extreme and amplified the experiential distance between work and family lives.

Both men and women disliked the disruption of established patterns of combining work and family. For the most part, men wanted to continue the practice of socialist times, relying on both their wives'/girlfriends' domestic labor and income. Similarly, women usually wanted to continue having both a job and a family. Moreover, new existence anxieties and consumer opportunities increased the desirability of having two incomes in a family. In the East German case, women did not willingly go back to the home and men did not usually want their wives to stay home. Thus, insofar as patriarchal families in capitalism are supposed to be partly based on men's interest in excluding women from paid employment, I did not find the return of such family types in former East Germany.

However, the consequences of the sharpened conflict between work and family were different for men and women. Focusing on success at work did not conflict with notions of masculinity and men did not feel that being a man was a disadvantage in the labor market. In contrast, women feared and experienced disadvantages in the labor market because they were women. Women experienced loss of autonomy as women because the transition threatened to force women to stay home or to choose between success at work and family life. Women experienced two forms of devaluation at once. Women's labor power was devalued while simultaneously the value of paid employment increased. In addition, because East Germans viewed the social transition as decreasing the social value accorded to family activities, women's family roles seemed to lose value.

This helps explain the harsh evaluation of the West German system, noted at the beginning of this article, as lacking support for human values. This global critique hinged on notions of family and gender, specifically the idea that both work and family lives are part of normal life for both men and women and that the workplace should accommodate employees' family lives. From this point of view, the importance of discrimination against mothers in the labor market as a symbol of something very wrong in the West German system is clear. Respondents seemed to be asking, "What kind of a society discriminates against its mothers in access to the basic requirements of a normal life (in this case, a job)?" The associations of women with the family and the family with positive, solidaristic values contribute to the power of the symbol: In it, economic competition takes precedence over nurturing and caretaking.

While gender ideologies provided ideals against which respondents evaluated the transition to capitalism, as discussed above, changes in the relationship between work and family had different consequences for men and women in real life. The perspective I have designated as "theories of women and state socialism" provides

the best framework for these findings because it directs attention to how economic and political structures shape the way individuals experience work and family activities in everyday life. As I have argued, the consequences of postsocialist economic changes for gender relations in former East Germany went beyond changes in relative access to employment to encompass the construction of new meanings for work and family activities as well as changes in women's sense of their place as women in society.

NOTES

1. This information has already been covered extensively. Relatively short discussions include Dölling (1989); Duggan (1993); Einhorn (1989, 1993); Ferree (1993); Helwig (1993); Mocker, Rüther, and Sauer (1990); Rosenberg (1991); and Trappe (1996). More comprehensive discussions of East German women and family policies include Arbeitlang (1991), Diemer (1994), Penrose (1990), and Trappe (1994).

2. Despite many facilities closing, this was true because the birthrate dropped so fast. In East Berlin in the mid-1990s, it was common to see kindergartens advertising room for more children.

3. Rudd (1999) analyzes differences among respondents.

4. Quotations and examples are from my own interview transcripts; names and details were changed to protect respondents' anonymity.

5. In both parts of Germany, most young people completed an apprenticeship.

6. It is impossible to simply compare reunification and postunification incomes because the relative cost of staple items such as food and rent increased substantially, whereas the relative prices of durable consumer goods, electronics, and travel decreased. This conclusion is based on extensive discussions with informants about the relative costs and values of things and money in the reunification and postunification periods.

7. The exceptions were people who fell outside the politically acceptable. While none of my respondents had been political dissidents, many described their awareness that one could easily transgress state-determined norms. Furthermore, there was a small percentage of people who could not (or did not want to) fit in who were labeled as "asocial."

8. Similarly, Bast-Haider's (1995) study of women workers in one clothing factory in former East Germany after unification found an "escalation of aggressiveness among individuals" due to the "reintroduction of hierarchy at all levels of work" (1995, 57).

9. He faulted the managers, not the workers doing "his" work.

10. Buschoff (1997) confirms the generalizability of this finding.

11. Many thanks to Alissa Shethar for pointing out this basis for what I initially saw as unreflective adherence to a vision of family as stable or as purely personal.

12. Earlier in the interview, she argued that women should get regular hours but work full time. Elsewhere (Rudd 1997), I show that as the interview progressed, she faltered in her defense of women's right to earn an independent income in the face of her husband's strong preference to have her home more.

13. Buschoff (1997) reports survey evidence confirming that former East Germans currently evaluate the abandoned East German regulations for combining work and family very positively.

14. One negative result was that women were considered less productive and channeled into positions considered lower priority by the state (Nickel 1993). Employers with more clout could selectively recruit men.

15. The two exceptions among my 38 cases are suggestive: In one case, the husband's income was very high, and in the other, the value of the wife's unpaid labor was much higher than her potential income.

16. This is reasonable given Holst and Schupp's (1996) finding that for most households in former East Germany, the percentage of household income accounted for by wives' earnings had increased since 1990.

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