

The Changing Family in the Federal Republic of Germany*

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Recent developments in the family include changes of behavior and structures as well as changes in meanings. Also, the concept of the family contains evaluative references insofar as the family itself is often considered as a social "value." Consequently, writings on the family may be prematurely judged as supportive or skeptical of the institution. At the same time, this evaluative component invites a critical view of the data selected and the methods by which they are collected, particularly demographic information.

To account for these implications, we proceed from the following definition: The concept of family shall be used to refer to life-forms (Lebensformen) based primarily upon the organization of parent-child relations, which enjoy a special status of societal recognition. This definition directs our attention not only to patterns of behavior but also to the process of legitimization, which may lead to acceptance or refusal of certain forms of parent-child relations. The intertwinement between behavioral patterns and institutional acceptance has long been neglected in family analysis. Tolerable as long as the institutional component remained stable, such an approach is not appropriate in the present situation.

In the following presentation, we take the demographic data as our point of departure. They may first be interpreted as indications of family behavior. Consequently, we then continue with an overview of the main institutional forces, law, and family policy. In our presentation we recall the interpretation of both components. Thus we

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also refer to the organizational aspects of demography, not the least of them being the monopoly of collection by the Statistical Office. In turn, family policy, and even legislation, depend heavily upon demographic information that is erroneously considered "objective."

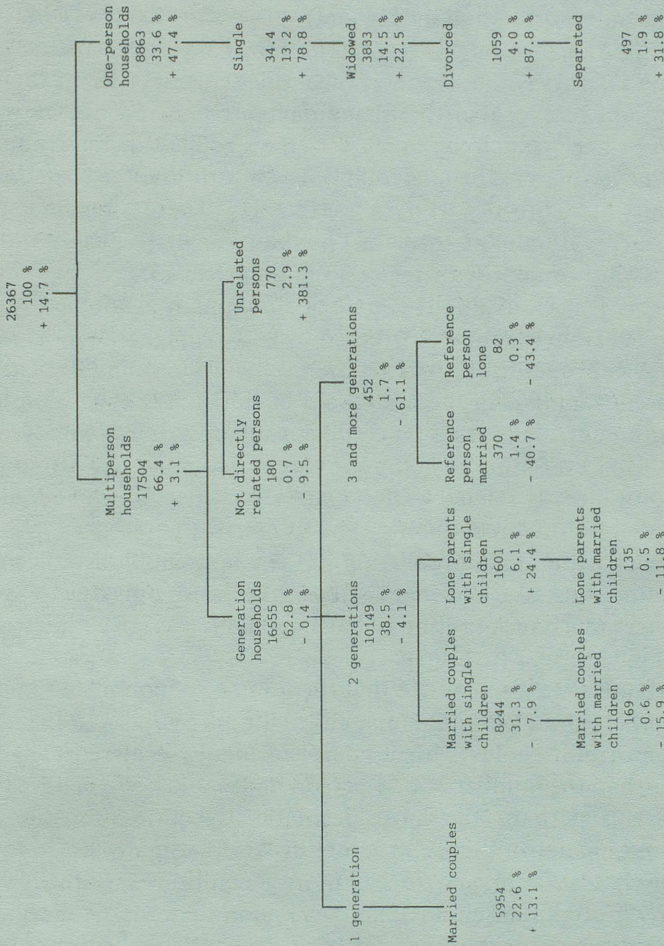
ON THE DEMOGRAPHY OF FAMILIES

Contrary to many popular beliefs, the German family was at no time as extended and as large as expected. Already at the beginning of the German Reich in 1871, the census indicated an average household size of 4.63 with a low percentage of one-person households of 6.2. In 1950, the average household size was already down to 2.99, while 19.4% of all households accommodated just one person. This high incidence of living alone was mainly due to the adverse effects of World War II (widows, refugees) but also to the beginning demographic aging. Both trends—shrinking household size, and increasing share of one-person households—have continued. In addition to aging plus not-yet-disappeared war effects, there is a new determinant of more one-person households: young people living alone. The latest data, from 1985, reveal an international record of one-third of all households containing just one person and a very low average household size of 2.31.

Though there has been a slight population decline in West Germany since 1974 (the resident population decreased from 62 million in 1974 to 61 million in 1986), the number of households is still growing. Household projections show that this increase will continue up to the mid-1990s and will then reverse into a shrinking number of households.

The increase of number of households between 1972 and 1985 (Figure 1) by 14.7% is mainly the consequence of a rapidly growing number of one-person households. While all one-person households increased by 47.4%, those of divorced persons (plus 87.8%) and of never-married persons (plus 78.8%) rose even more. The number of multiperson households more or less stagnated (plus 3.1%) in the same periods. The most spectacular increase of 381.3% concerns households whose members are not related by blood, marriage, or adoption. Though there is no direct question in the German microcensus, one may assume that unmarried cohabitation is the

Private households



a. As of June 1985; in 1,000s, percentage of total.

Figure 1: Changes in Private Households Since 1972 (in percentages)

living arrangement to be classified in this household type. The estimates of the number of consensual unions vary between 600,000 and 1.25 million couples, with the lower number indirectly derived from the microcensus and the higher from a sample survey (BMJFG, 1985). The data on unmarried cohabitation are far from satisfactory; it is only safe to say that the incidence still seems to be lower than in France, not to speak of the Scandinavian countries, but that the pattern by age is much the same, with the strongest increase among young, never-married people, followed by mostly divorced persons in their thirties and forties who do not remarry. There is no change in the formerly dominant form of cohabitation of (typically older) widows who would lose their pension upon remarriage.

There is also a fairly high increase of monoparental families. From 1972 to 1985, their number increased by 24.4%. Higher divorce rates and a lower propensity to remarry are the main determinants of more one-parent families. In the household of this family type we might find an unmarried partner who statistically does not belong to the family. However, only 8% of monoparental families declare to live with a not directly related (sister, cousin, etc.) person who could be (again there is no direct question) an unmarried partner.

Couples without children living in their household have become more numerous, too. The increase by 13.1% is not only due to aging and longer marriage duration but also to an increase in childlessness and a higher age at first birth.

In Figure 1 we also can see that the number of complete families (two parents and a least one single child) shrank by 7.9%. In 1985, the number of households with a complete family is already slightly smaller than the number of one-person households. We believe that this fact is perhaps the most dramatic aspect to illustrate the enormous change of family structure in West Germany.

Households comprising three or more generations are already very rare (1.7% of all households), and very soon they will be marginal. One should not forget, however, that the statistical rules require coresidence and one common kitchen. Even if three generations live under the same roof but have two kitchens they will not be enumerated as a three-generation household. Also the coresidence of married children (without own children) with their parents has become the exception and is on the decline too. It is worth noting that a lone parent would relatively more frequently accommodate his or her married child with spouse than would couples in their post-parental phase.

TABLE 2
Indicators of Fertility: 1950-1986

Year	Crude rate	Total fertility rate per 1000 women	rate marriages	Mean age at birth all	first legitimate	Net reproduction rate	Illegitimate birth per 100 live births
1950	16.2	2100	2121	...	...	0.933	9.7
1960	17.4	2366	2290	27.7	24.9	1.098	6.3
1965	17.7	2507	2093	27.7	24.9	1.177	4.7
1970	13.4	2016	1692	27.4	24.3	0.948	5.5
1975	9.7	1451	1368	27.0	24.8	0.680	6.1
1980	10.1	1445	1609	27.0	25.2	0.679	7.6
1983	9.7	1331	1545	27.3	25.7	0.625	8.8
1984	9.5	1291	...	27.5	26.0	0.606	9.1
1985	9.6	1279	...	27.7	26.2	0.604	9.4
1986	10.3	1349 ¹	...				

1. Estimated by Calot method.

At the same time the total divorce rate is still rising. In the mid-1960s, every eighth marriage would have ended in divorce, in the mid-1970s (before the reform of divorce laws) every fourth, and in the mid-1980s every third. This increase in divorce is accompanied by a growing reluctance to remarry. In the mid-1960s, 79% of divorced men and 75% of divorced women were expected to remarry; in the early eighties these percentages fell to less than two-thirds.

Marriage therefore has become an embattled institution. In West Germany there are fewer marriages contracted than marriage dissolutions either by bereavement or divorce since 1972. Particularly, the stock of young marriages is melting. This cannot continue without repercussions on fertility, especially in view of the low illegitimacy ratio in West Germany (see Table 2). It has been estimated that 40% of the fertility decline between 1966 and 1976 can be explained by the lower number of young married couples (Schwarz and Höhn, 1985).

In 1945, fertility was extremely low. The estimated net reproduction rate of 0.5 was never surpassed before or after. Then, West Germany had a postwar baby boom, too. But it started slowly, and, in comparison to many other countries in the West, was never very remarkable. The net reproduction rate did not climb higher than 1.18 (1965), and, on a cohort basis, there is no significant increase at all.¹

West Germany joined the fall in fertility that started in most

TABLE 1
Indicators of Nuptiality: 1950-1985

Year	Crude marriage rate per 1000	Total first marriage rate per 1000		Mean age at first marriage in years		Total divorce rate per 1000	Total remarriage rate of divorced per 1000	
		men	women	men	women		men	women
1950	10.7	1350	1120	28.1	25.4	...	...	...
1955	8.8	1060	1050	27.0	24.4	...	...	...
1960	9.4	1060	1060	25.9	23.7	...	...	...
1965	8.3	910	1100	26.0	23.7	121	790	750
1970	7.3	900	970	25.6	23.0	159	680	710
1975	6.3	730	760	25.3	22.7	234	600	630
1980	5.9	640	660	26.1	23.4	227	690	710
1983	6.0	600	610	26.9	24.1	298	640	650
1984	5.9	600	610	27.0	24.4	305	...	...
1985	6.0	580	590	27.2	24.6	302	...	...

This brief overview of changing household and family structures needs to be supported by some more detailed information on the trends in nuptiality and fertility.

The indicators of nuptiality we have compiled for the period 1950 to 1985 show three phases (Table 1). In the immediate postwar years many marriages were contracted after having been postponed because of involuntary separation. Consequently, age at marriage was quite high, particularly for men. At the same time many marriages that had collapsed during war and postwar time were dissolved. In the fifties, nuptiality patterns stabilized and normalized. The marriage boom around 1960 occurred when it became fashionable to marry at a younger age. This is a change in attitude that in the early sixties was not accompanied by a change in the propensity to marry. While the timing of first marriage remained stable during two decades, as the data on age at first marriage show, the quantum, the propensity to marry, became lower. The total first-marriage rates started to fall in the mid-1960s. Since the mid-1970s also the timing component of behavior changed. Men and women marry later, if they marry at all. The total first marriage rate has dropped to 600 per 1000, indicating that, if such patterns of behavior continued, 40% of a generation would never marry. Such cross-sectional indicators, of course, tend to exaggerate the cohort results. Out of the generation born in 1955, 25% of the men and 15% of the women might never marry.

TABLE 4
Families by Number of Single Children and Family Status
of the Reference Person: June 1985

Family type	All Families		without children		With single children ^a all ages under 18				
		in 1000s	Percent	in 1000s	Percent	in 1000s	Percent	in 1000s	Percent
<u>Married Couples</u>	b	14 799	63.9	6 164	26.6	8 635	37.3	6 397	27.6
	c		100		41.7		58.3		43.2
<u>Sole men</u>	a	2 043	8.8	1 769	7.6	274	1.2	138	0.6
	b		100		86.6		13.4		6.8
<u>Sole women</u>	a	6 311	27.3	4 825	20.8	1 486	6.4	803	3.5
	b		100		76.5		23.5		12.7
<u>Total</u>		23 153	100	12 758	55.1	10 395	44.9	7 338	31.7

a. Living in the household.

b. Number; percentage of all families (grand total).

c. Percentage of this family type. (Single persons without children are, by definition, not a family.)

incidence of illegitimate births. The level of 1950 has not yet been reached, but the ratio has doubled from a minimum of 4.7 in 1965. Cohabiting couples, it seems, choose this form of union because they do not wish to have children. The old rule: "If children, then in marriage" still holds true. The percentage of brides who are pregnant, interestingly, has risen again. Because of these different attitudes toward marital and extramarital fertility, the gap between the total marital fertility rate and the total general one is substantial. A quarter of younger German women are likely to remain childless.

But childlessness also has a tradition within marriage, as Table 3 demonstrates. The first important birth decline in Germany took place between 1900 and 1925. Marriages contracted in the years 1900 to 1904 had, on average, 4 children, half of them had 4 and more children, and 9% remained childless. Those marriages contracted barely two decades later in 1922 to 1925 had on average 2.2 children, a number just sufficient for the replacement of generations. Of these "modern" marriages of the Roaring Twenties, 18% remained childless and only 20% had 4 and more children. We dare to hypothesize that childlessness became socially acceptable in Germany at a very early time. Today there is already a tradition up to the generations of grandmothers and great-grandmothers that some of their sibs would not have children. There is not much pressure from kin or from neighbors and peers to have children. But if children are desired, then

TABLE 3
Completed Family Size of Marriages Begun in 1900 to 1977

Marriage cohort	no children	% of 100 marriages that have:				Average number of children per 100 marriages
		1 child	2 children	3 children	4+ children	
1900-1904	9	12	16	15	47	393
1905-1909	10	15	20	17	38	335
1910-1912	12	17	22	17	32	294
1913-1918	14	20	24	17	25	252
1919-1921	16	23	24	15	21	234
1922-1925	18	24	24	15	20	222
1926-1930	17	23	25	15	20	223
1931-1935	16	22	27	17	18	218
1936-1940	14	25	31	17	14	205
1941-1945	13	25	31	17	14	205
1946-1950	13	26	30	17	14	207
1951-1955	13	25	31	17	14	205
1958-1962	13	22	36	19	10	200
1961-1965	14	24	40	16	6	180
1965-1969	16	29	40	12	3	159
1970-1974	19	29	40	10	2	148

Western industrialized countries around 1965. By 1972, the total fertility rate had reached 1.5 births per woman. Since then, fertility has been at the lowest observed level in the world. In the seventies fertility stagnated and slowly fell to 1.4. The lowest total fertility rate of 1.279 was observed in 1985. In 1986, a modest increase to 1.35 followed. At this point we should mention that all data in Table 2 refer to the total population, including foreigners. It should be noted that all foreign nationals now have a fertility level very close to and sometimes even lower than German women with the exception of the Turks. The Turks constitute one-quarter of the foreign population in West Germany. But Turkish women, too, reduce their fertility at a remarkably quick pace.

There has been virtually no change in the general average age at maternity. The age at first (legitimate) birth is, however, rising slowly but persistently. The increase amounts to one and a half years within a period of 25 years.

West Germany still belongs to the countries with a very low

TABLE 5
Proportion of German Population in One-Person
Households by Age: 1972-1985

Year	all	Age					
		<25	25-35	35-45	45-55	55-65	65+
<u>Men</u>							
1972	4.9	1.8	7.5	3.9	3.9	6.4	13.2
1975	5.7	2.1	9.2	5.3	4.1	6.0	15.1
1980	7.5	3.4	13.5	7.9	5.7	6.1	15.2
1982	8.2	3.7	15.4	9.1	6.5	6.4	15.5
1985	10.4	5.0	18.3	12.0	8.7	8.2	17.2
<u>women</u>							
1972	13.6	2.0	4.5	3.7	10.3	27.2	44.7
1975	15.1	2.7	5.5	3.5	10.1	27.9	48.8
1980	16.9	4.2	9.1	4.6	8.7	23.8	51.6
1982	17.8	4.8	10.6	5.1	8.4	23.7	53.1
1985	18.8	6.0	13.1	6.8	8.6	22.8	53.7

remarkable trend is the increase in one-person households. We therefore would like to finish our demographic overview with a few remarks on living alone. For this purpose, look at Table 5, where the percentage of the German population in one-person households is given by sex and age from 1972 to 1985. Relatively more women than men are living alone. The increase is, however, much more pronounced for men than for women. For all men together, the percentage rose from 4.9 to 10.4; for women, from 13.6 to 18.8. In 1985, more than half of elderly women (53.7%) lived in a one-person household but only 17.2% of older men did. Women are more likely to become widowed because they have a longer life expectancy and they tend to marry older men.

The fading influence of the Second World War is visible when looking at the percentages of women 55-65 living alone. This percentage went down from 27.2% to 22.8% because the female cohort most afflicted by the unbalanced marriage market—due to war casualties—is moving out of this age bracket into the next higher one.

The new trend to live alone as a "single" is well documented both for men and women under 35 years old. A total of 18.3% of men aged 25 to 35 are living alone in 1985, while it was just 7.5% in 1972. For women the level is somewhat lower, but the trend is very similar.

In the age group 35 to 45, we will find not only bachelors and spinsters but also the divorced. The rising trend in divorce explains

they are to be placed within marriage. There are some more important and ill-known messages contained in Table 3. The first is that the Nazi population policy has had no long-term pronatalist effect; the second that the postwar baby boom was only due to timing effects. People married earlier in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and they shortened their birth intervals. Such voluntary changes in timing patterns have the same effect on period measures as pronatalist measures: They inflate the period total fertility rate. But only a change in desired family size—in quantum, as demographers say—influences cohort data. There have not been any increases in cohort fertility during 1920 and 1965 in Germany.

Those marriages contracted between 1963 and 1967 initiated the second fertility decline that, irreversibly as it seems, transfers family size to subreplacement level.

Such change both in fertility and in nuptiality cannot be seen immediately in family statistics. The number and structure of families have a certain inertia, like population itself, because of the duration of family life.

If however, the definition of families includes more or less everybody except one-person households of singles, as is the case in West Germany, it is even more difficult to realize change. The German official definition of a statistical family, indeed, includes all married couples and all widowed and divorced persons with and *without* children in their households. Unfortunately, it is unknown if older couples and widowed or divorced persons ever have had children. With this normative definition, 55.1% of all "families" are living without children (Table 4). A total of 41.7% of married couples have not yet had or want no more children in their households. A total of 86.8% of all single, ever-married men and 76.5% of single, ever-married women plus never-married mothers are living without children. If there are children, these are counted as belonging to a monoparental family.

It is not surprising that 41.1% of divorced women, but only 14% of widows, are living with children. If the age of children is limited to 18 years, the age of majority, then only 3.3% of widows and 30% of divorced women have a minor child in their household. One should bear in mind that the majority of widows are too old to have minor children and that half of all divorces occur in childless marriages.

As we already remarked in connection with Figure 1, in 1985 there were more one-person households than complete families. The most

The following are also relevant: article 2, concerning the rights of liberty and the right of free development; article 3, equality before the law; and article 13, inviolability of the home.

However, neither article 6 nor any other article explicitly defines the family, thus the Basic Law is open to a plurality of family types, explicitly acknowledging single mother families in article 6 (4). All commentaries take the view that the constitution should be open for future developments, without neglecting the traditional ties as expressed by the close connection between family and marriage.

In accordance with the practice at the time of its formulation and traditional norms, the Basic Law departs from an almost complete identity between family and marriage (Zeidler, 1983, p. 592); each marriage being considered potentially as a family (Ramm, 1986, p. 164). This view also underlies the official statistical definitions. However, even since World War I (and except for the special situation in the 50s and 60s), this concept has not been confirmed by the data. Since about 1970, the societal definition of the family has become a public issue, especially in the case of unmarried couples with children.

However, the original perspective of the Basic Law has important structural consequences because article 6 is considered as "subjective right, institutional guarantee, and value-setting principle." Consequently, the special protection of family and marriage had to become concrete, or at least taken into account, in many fields of legislation, foremost in "Private Law" (which contains the laws concerning marriage, parent-child relations, and kinship), "Social Welfare Law," and "Labor Law." The protection of family and marriage must also to be observed in jurisdiction.

A peculiarity of the German system is the status of the Constitutional Court. It has ruled on some decisions concerning article 6 with long-ranging consequences, such as the decision 5/10/1957 that forced the introduction of a new system of taxation called "splitting": The income taxes collected from married couples must always be less than those of two individuals living as an unmarried couple in one household, having the same annual gross income. This decision, then widely applauded, privileges married couples in all situations where one partner earns income or where there are at least considerable differences between their two incomes. Fully integrated in a highly differentiated system of taxation, this decision became, sociologically

the increase of the percentages living alone at that age. The fact that divorced women very often have custody over children illustrates the lower percentage of women than men living in one-person households.

We should be cautious about labeling persons in one-person households as isolated. Many of the younger or middle-aged "singles" might have a living-apart-together relation or extensive networks of friends. Among the seniors living alone, we certainly will find very many who have close contacts to their family members. Though many people choose not to coreside, this does not imply that there are not valuable informal support systems both toward the older generation in case of illness and toward children and grandchildren with baby-sitting. The older family members do not only provide financial and emotional help but they also serve as granny for children of their economically active daughters. There must be such links between the generations even if they are not well documented by official household and family statistics or by special surveys. The most recent family report deals with such informal networks.

THE INSTITUTIONAL DEFINITION OF THE FAMILY THROUGH LEGISLATION AND FAMILY POLICY

The most general and explicit societal recognition of the special status of family and marriage is expressed in the "Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany" of 1949, article 6:

- (1) Marriage and family shall enjoy the special protection of the state.
- (2) The care and upbringing of the children are a natural right of, and a duty primarily incumbent on, the parents. The national community shall watch over their endeavors in this respect.
- (3) Children may not be separated from their families against the will of the persons entitled to bring them up, except pursuant to a law, if those so entitled fail or the children are otherwise threatened with neglect.
- (4) Every mother shall be entitled to the protection and care of the community.
- (5) Illegitimate children shall be provided by legislation with the same opportunities for their physical and spiritual development and their place in society as are enjoyed by legitimate children.

speaking, a major component in the institutional recognition of marriage over other forms of partnership, and changes in the near future seem unlikely. Another consequence, that married mothers are encouraged to refrain from work outside their home, is more and more of lesser importance. But a recently introduced "educational allowance" ("Erziehungsgeld") provides at least a certain financial support to families where the mother or the father stays at home during the first six months after the birth of a child regardless of their income, and for an additional six months for lower-income classes. The "tax splitting" refers to marital status and not to family, hence the relevance for the latter is diffuse. Critics complain a "loss" of public funds of about DM23 billion, twice as much as the sum spent for children's allowances, which could be raised if the means would be more appropriately assigned (see Ruhland, 1986, p. 169).

The example of tax splitting illustrates the overarching relevance of the Basic Law not only for the institutional definition (or "construction") of the family through legislation but also because it brings *family policy* into the picture. It includes activities of the central government, the federal states ("Bundesländer"), and the communities, and also of private or semiprivate agencies such as organizations related to churches, political associations, and local initiatives, many of them being subsidized by public funds, which in turn may exercise control over the activities or the qualifications of the personnel. Thus family policy in the Federal Republic of Germany is nowadays a considerable part of social and, even societal, politics in general. In accordance with the circumscription of the family given above we may propose the following general *definition*: The term *family policy* refers to public activities, measures, and organizations that attempt to recognize, support, complement, and thus influence or even enforce specifically or generally defined achievements of the family; in this way, and with reference to general political concepts, family policy circumscribes the social forms to be recognized as "family."

The historical roots of family policy date back to the caritative commitment of the churches and philanthropic organizations, to attempts aimed toward efforts that, in the present, belong to such fields as (preschool) education and preventive medicine. A modern view of family policy, including the introduction of this term, can be observed after 1920. During the period of the Nazi regime, family

policy was subjugated to a population policy that not only aimed to enforce—quantitatively—population growth but also—qualitatively—to a selection by racial prejudices.

Given this background, family policy had to be almost completely reconstructed after World War II. At first, the allied forces even forbade child allowances. However, in 1954 it was possible to introduce a new law in this matter, providing subsidies for the third and each additional child. The basic idea was the concept of "equalization of burdens for families" ("Familienlastenausgleich"), which had a long tradition, and its justification was self-evident for large families. Child allowances were conceptually linked to other measures in the interconnection between social welfare, family policy, and social policy, such as subsidies to families of prisoners of war, free meals for pupils, students, and others. Important, too, was the experience of the family as a last resort of solidarity during and immediately after the war; later, family sociologists such as Schelsky (1967) and Wurzbacher (1958) intensively analyzed this phenomenon. During the years following armistice, many important initiatives were taken by the states ("Länder"), the communities, and voluntary organizations. They later opened crèches and kindergartens, offered parental education and auxiliary services for those with special needs and—to give a very concrete illustration—a city like Freiburg even had a program where the municipal welfare office distributed "rental" baby carriages.

Evidently, the family obligations were taken into account by the tax system. They were also a factor in the salaries of civil servants; its significance reaches much beyond these categories of employees because, traditionally, their privileges are a point of reference and a source of ameliorations for the working conditions in many other occupational groups. These phenomena can also be observed in other countries and are well known in the history of social policy.

To complete our overview of initiatives for the family, we should furthermore mention activities in the field of parental education and family counseling. There is also a large spectrum of measures for the benefit of families within health insurance: There, regular contributions have to be paid only by the main wage earner (predominantly, the father), but all members of the family may benefit from the services and substantial contributions to medical expenditures. A field of activities of foremost relevance was and still is housing. The policies include constructing activities of public agen-

call it—of monetary allocations. On one hand, they require clear criteria circumscribing the categories of recipients and allow for a high degree of differentiation among them, depending on such variables as size of the family, age of children, participation in labor force, and so on. Thus different types of families may be acknowledged. On the other hand, the way the money is received or saved (through tax exemption) cannot be influenced whatsoever.

The question also arises whether differences in income or property should be taken into account proportionally or progressively or whether a distinction should be made only between families and nonfamilies on each level of economic status. The overall development of monetary allocations lies in the trend to acknowledge a progressive plurality of family forms.

A similar development can be observed in policies concerning housing. They shifted from an *object-oriented* to a *subject-oriented* promotion (see Wissenschaftlicher Beirat, 1975). These terms refer to programs that subsidize large housing projects, combined with the formulation of minimal standards or to monetary allocations to individual families and to a legislation that protects tenants. Again, tendencies toward individualization are apparent.

Other aspects of the same tendencies are visible in the rising popularity of educational programs for parents and of counseling services. They refer to the family as "problematic," be it from the parents themselves because they judge family situations as demanding and stressful. Ultimately, the activities in these fields may be interpreted as systematic to a general body of professional knowledge on families that, in turn, recognizes their plurality and even "individualization." The social sciences, especially in their application through professional services, become a force in the process of legitimization of family forms as mentioned in our definitions.

In the German case, this is also illustrated by series of "Family Reports" ("Familienberichte") published in 1968, 1975, 1979, and 1986. With the exception of the first (which originated within the administration), these reports were written by a group of social scientists, and then they were submitted to the government, which added a commentary, whereupon the two parts became the topic of a parliamentary debate on the status of the family. Further examples of the social sciences' growing importance are the activities of a permanent Scientific Advisory Board to the Ministry of Family Affairs, which has published a series of "expert opinions" on topics

cies, a large system of subsidies, including the formulation of minimal standards for family apartments and direct or indirect contributions to encourage the purchase of a home.

The developments since 1950 have not been unilinear, but they led to the emergence of a comprehensive and highly differentiated "system" of family policy. But its transparency and cohesion is rather low, as is the coordination among the branches of public administrations involved and between them and the many semiprivate agencies.

Sociologically, the vast field with its many activities, also with its contradictions, stands for a societal view of family. Seen in this way, it confirms under institutional aspects the demographic analysis both in view of the plurality and a fast-paced change of the family. Our previous definition refers to the connection between different kinds of activities and the basic tasks of families. It also suggests that the measures may recognize, support, or complement the behavior of the family members; they may even compensate for deficiencies. By way of summarizing this part, we would like to mention some inherent features of the developments in the period under consideration.

Traditionally, financial measures are at the core of family policy; their origins are very close to social welfare. But over the last decades we can observe a shift in rhetoric from arguments that refer to "helping" or "supporting" the family to statements that refer to the accomplishments or achievements of families, to their contribution to the general welfare of society. These arguments are nourished by a rising popularity of insights into the connection between the falling birth rate and the foreseeable bottlenecks in the financing of an old-age insurance based upon the established system of apportionment (by which pensions are paid simultaneously out of the contributions collected from the active population).

From the perspective of the individual family, the argumentation contains an element of public acknowledgement of the commitment of parents (and their economic sacrifices). But on the aggregate level, family policy may be connected with population policy; this in turn raises strong opposition, easily understood given the background of the 1930s and 1940s. Also, the analysis of the consequences of pronatalistic policies in several countries shows very limited effects (see the review by Höhn and Schubnell, 1986). Among politicians this reinforced the skepticism against pronatalistic legitimizations.

These findings remind us of the "diffuse specificity"—as we may

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France

Demographic Change and Family Policy Since World War II*

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The demographic history of France is unique in comparison with other countries of Western Europe. Whereas most countries experienced very rapid demographic growth in the nineteenth century (England, for example, went from a population of 10 to 40 million), France had to be content with a relatively modest 40% increase.¹ It thus lost its long-held demographic supremacy in a century when the weight of population still greatly influenced military power and economic wealth.

World War I confirmed this decline. To be sure, other countries took part in this conflict, but France and Germany were the hardest hit. Shortly after the war, the law of 1920 on abortion and contraception gave expression to the great anxiety of the political authorities and demonstrated their resolve to prevent the population gap from widening.

In 1939, the imminence of World War II led to the adoption of a Family Statute containing measures meant to stimulate greater fertility. The defeat of 1940 was in part imputed to France's relative demographic weakness in relation to Germany. Be it true or false, this idea was to leave its imprint on French opinion and to influence opinions, if not behavior, in a lasting way. And yet it would be excessive to say that the demographic leap of the following two decades was due to this awakening. In fact, all of Europe, belligerent or not, victorious or vanquished, experienced a "revival of ideas on the family" (Prigent, 1953) and an actual reversal of trends. That was

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situations that let family life appear highly demanding and even stressful, yet the expectations and ideals seem higher than ever before. Not surprisingly, once again the family is seen as being on a status of profound crises. In West Germany, the declining birth rate often serves as an especially alarming sign that even threatens the future of the nation.

We doubt, whether this is an appropriate diagnosis because it tends to separate family from the general developments of society. We prefer to see the ambivalent situation of the family as an expression of societal transition that may be characterized by the concept of "postmodernity." It originated in the most sensitive parts of cultural developments: arts, literature, and architecture. But it may be useful for sociological analysis as well (see Lüscher, Schultheis, and Wehrspaun, 1988). In substance, the concept refers to the emergence of strong and widespread skepticism toward ideas and ideals long seen as the core of modernity. On the structural level they are societal differentiation, division of labor, and technological interpretation of everyday life; in view of personal development the key concepts are emancipation and independence. The concept of "post-modernity" implies furthermore that a simple revival or restoration of traditional values may not be appropriate. Too obvious are the disadvantages and even discriminations women, and partially also children, had suffered in the past. Also, the interrelations between men and their social or natural environments have changed drastically. The concept suggests new approaches to the analysis of the basic tasks to organize and to institutionalize the relations between generations and gender.

NOTE

1. A net reproduction rate of 1.0 indicates that a generation will just reproduce itself. A rate below 1.0 indicates declining population size; a rate above 1.0 indicates an increasing population size.

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such as housing, family economy, families with young children, family and work, and the further differentiation of allowances for families (see Wissenschaftlicher Beirat, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1984).

The very existence of a Ministry of Family Affairs, although together with "Youth" and "Health," created in 1953, is a significant indicator of a rising public concern for the family; of equal significance is the recent (1986) expansion of this Ministry to include a section on "Women's Affairs." Whatever the effects may be (and administrations in Germany, as elsewhere, have their own pace), this change of the name to "Ministry of Youth, Family, Women, and Health" reflects the strong impact of the change of women's role on social and family policy in particular. It results in a series of measures to facilitate the simultaneous pursuit of family and occupational careers (with further references to the situation of men in this regard), and attempts to account for the time women spent within their families in the system of old-age insurance.

PROSPECTS: THE POSTMODERN FAMILY

Our analysis of demographic and institutional data, although on a general level of aggregation, indicated a rising plurality of family forms. It would be still higher, if we could include descriptions of the behavior in everyday life, even though they are also influenced by forces that favor a certain conformity, for example, the use of mass media and patterns of consumption. But even here many people may express, at least subjectively, a marked degree of plurality. Ultimately, it is based on a strong notion of individuality, which appears to be the most salient feature of Western cultures—both in its popular (everyday) expressions and in its artistic and literary manifestations.

But we also observe a growth of ambivalent assessments. Although the liberties of individual life-styles are highly praised, people also experience a loss of attachment and spontaneous solidarity. Men and women, the latter even more strongly, are confronted with contradictions and are forced into personal decisions for which previous generations could rely on customs, traditions, and institutions taken for granted, for instance, in view of marriage, children, divorce, and mutual care. The requirements of modern life and the convincing exposure to a wealth of information in the media, often in no way related to concrete daily needs, tasks, or wishes, often created