by Birgit Blättel-Mink, Caroline Kramer, Anina Mischau

Women in modern societies are simultaneously socialized in two life-spheres (“Doppelte Vergesellschaftung”), orientation towards family and employment co-exist more or less compatible over the life span of women (see Knapp 1990). In some phases of life the degree of women’s employment is higher than in others. Family life and employment are complementary (see Becker 1996). There are less and less women who give up their occupation completely even during the ‘infant phase’ of their children. Nevertheless the “life for others” often constitutes a setback in both income and career. “Claiming for a piece of one’s own life” (see Beck-Gernsheim 1983) causes in lots of women distinct experiences of ambivalence between the spheres of family and that of employment.

The analysis is guided by the following questions: How do women reconcile these two life spheres? How important is their family, their children, their employment to them? To what extent do they think it possible to reconcile family and employment and which are their goals in life?

Family and employment in women’s life

Women meanwhile have adapted their level of education to the level of men. In education we find courses of training as well as studies especially preferred by either women or men. This differentiation at first glance seems only segmental but turns into segregation, if one takes income and professional prestige into consideration. In addition to this, the fact remains that a great deal of women are part-time employed (see Statistisches Bundesamt 1997: 490). It is not surprising that female employment is often considered to be an additional source of income to the main male provider - especially during the “family phase”. Although family and children constitute a great importance in the lives of women and men, this life sphere is differently designed for both sexes. The responsibility of men is emphasized in the provision of material and that of women lies in the work of reproduction (see Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 1997). The number of male applicants for paid-leave for parenthood speaks for itself (s.a.). The question is, whether women - at least for some time - quit their employment because their chances in profession and career are less than those of men and because they are able to work part-time in their preferred jobs (see Geißler 1996: 275ff). This on the other hand may mean that they give up their career and out of persuasion take over childcare, because it is a woman’s chore (see e.g. Hausen 1978).
The reproduction of gender specific division of labour within and outside the family is often described as a consequence of interdependency of gender specific segregation on the job market on one hand and the “female working capability” on the other (see Ostner 1983). The latter is described by Ilona Ostner as an interaction of gender specific socialization and female life style. For instance, women tend more to social than to technical jobs, which in turn are paid less and are more suitable for part-time employment than other jobs.

On the whole, we must examine the extent of modernization in female life, i.e. to what extent do women dissociate themselves from traditional gender roles and what are the explaining variables for that. The importance of employment for women ranges from self-fulfilment and increase in competence, the wish of adding to the family income, the longing for social contacts at work up to ambivalent experiences with job demands on the one hand and reproduction work on the other (see Becker-Schmidt 1980). The importance of children reaches from the feeling of being needed above the extended horizons up to limitations in life and strain on the partnership. The compatibility between family and employment depends on individual resources (age, education, professional status, income), on the division of labour in the family, and on the individual idea of one’s own gender role. Do children suffer when mothers go to work? Is it the best solution in a family, if the man takes over the production and the woman the reproduction work or could it even be better for the children, if the mother has a career outside her home?

The perspective shown is that of the women and not that of the job market. The analysis reveals the relation between the social situation as an independent variable and the attitudes towards the compatibility of family and employment as dependent variable.¹

The following hypotheses guide the analysis:

1. The younger the women, the more modern their attitudes are towards the compatibility of family and employment, i.e. the more optimistic they become in reconciling these two life spheres: the increasing importance of employment, children and partnership; but also the persuasion that female employment doesn’t harm the development of children.

2. Mothers are less modern than women without children, i.e. children are more important than employment, and in this regard the compatibility of family and employment is quite often doubted. Mothers put more emphasis on “life for others”, while women without children exert more emphasis on “claiming for a piece of one’s own life”.

3. The higher the degree of employment, the more modern the attitudes towards gender roles, i.e. the higher the importance of employment, and the stronger the persuasion that motherhood and employment are compatible.

4. The smaller the social resources of women, the more traditional their attitudes are towards gender roles, i.e. the lower the level of education, and the lower the professional status, the more important are children (“Children give you the feeling of being needed”) and the less important is the employment and thereby the stronger the persuasion that children (especial-
cially younger children) undergo negligence due to the employment of mothers.

Some remarks on the method and the structure of this paper

The first step herewith, is to reveal those areas that are especially important in the life spheres of women. This points out directly to our question about the attitude of women towards the compatibility of family and employment. In this regard, specific conflicts of female lives are being investigated. The solution as seen by the women themselves is embedded in the division of labour between the partners, which lie more along the lines of partnership in all areas of reproduction (see Blättel-Mink/Kramer/Mischau 1998). However, this is their objective but presently not the reality of division of labour in the families. Subsequently, the meaning of the sphere of production for the women is questioned to show in a penultimate step that motherhood is to a large extent still responsible for the identity of a woman no matter what generation. Finally, women are asked again about their goals in life. Here also, the dominance of “life for others” is clearly shown in the female life, even though the “claim for a piece of one’s own life”, especially among younger women, acquires more importance. The article finishes up with a resume.

In the analysis the following variables are considered: age, motherhood, education, degree of employment, and the professional position. As a statistical testing criteria, the correlation coefficient “eta” is being used in indicating the intensity of the relation between the independent and the dependent variables.

In order to look at the whole issue from different perspectives, special groups were formed portraying in a special way the subject of “compatibility of family and employment”, “family women” (N=225), i.e. women with children, whose household includes children under 18 (could also be grandchildren, foster children, etc.) and who mainly take care of them and “profession women” (N= 100), i.e. women without children who are full time employed.
The importance of different spheres of life

The importance of different spheres of life is above all determined by the degree of employment (see Diagram 1). Other factors like age or motherhood do however play a role. On the whole, there are but a few meaningful connections. The higher the degree of employment, the more important employment as well as professional success, and the income. The lower the degree of employment, the higher the importance of the family. This result is intensified by comparing the “profession women” and the “family women”. The trainees behave similarly as the full-time employed women with exception of progress in job, which is not that important to them and leisure, which is clearly more important.

As a whole, family is more important than income and income is more important than work or employment. This means that women do have to reconcile family and employment over their life course. How they do it is a result of their attitude towards gender roles.

Compatibility of family (partnership) and employment

The results show age as the strongest determining factor, which is even stronger than the level of education with reference to modern attitudes and/or the adherence to traditional values (see Table 1). In general, the interrelations are much clearer than with the importance of different spheres of life, especially in those statements that show “strong” traditional values. The young women differ from the old women, and the more educated from the less educated. The younger the women, the more modern their attitudes are towards gender roles. The women younger than 20 however, show an inconsistency in their modern attitudes. They believe to a very high degree (77.3%) that younger children with a working mother will certainly suffer. Less than 20% of the women between 20 and 40 years agree that women should stay at home, if there are children to take care of, but even for women up to the age of 60 this percentage is under 50%. That a working mother, who does not concentrate on her household chores alone could even be of advantage to a child, is agreed upon mainly by women between 30 and 50 years of age. Only women older than 50 clearly show traditional attitudes although employment could be essential to them.

“Family women” and “profession women” distinctly present themselves as being more modern than the interviewed women on the whole. This is obviously a question of age of the women in these groups. Orientation towards employment is strong with family women, and the fact to work full-time with no children is not proven to be a progressive attitude.

More profession than family women agree to the statement that younger children would suffer if their mothers go to work. Concerning the compatibility between family and employment, both groups are equally ambivalent, just like the women in general.

Attitudes towards employment profession, and career

What does employment mean for the women interviewed? Are the reasons for employment material ones (money, pension insurance) or immaterial ones (status, self-realization)? To what extent does the family play a role in the decision-making process towards employment?
Table 1:
Attitudes towards the compatibility of family and employment by age
(Percentage of women who agreed fully or rather)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes towards the compatibility of family and employment</th>
<th>Less than 20 years</th>
<th>20-&lt;30 years</th>
<th>30-&lt;40 years</th>
<th>40-&lt;50 years</th>
<th>50-&lt;60 years</th>
<th>60-&lt;70 years</th>
<th>More than 70 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is more important for a (married) woman to further her husband’s or partner’s career than pursue her own</td>
<td>13,6</td>
<td>11,6</td>
<td>15,1</td>
<td>19,1</td>
<td>31,7</td>
<td>52,0</td>
<td>63,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A younger child with a working mother will certainly suffer</td>
<td>77,3</td>
<td>55,9</td>
<td>52,8</td>
<td>56,3</td>
<td>69,9</td>
<td>68,9</td>
<td>80,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For all concerned it is preferable if the man (husband) is working and the woman (wife) stays at home to take care of the household and the children</td>
<td>27,3</td>
<td>15,8</td>
<td>19,0</td>
<td>30,7</td>
<td>41,3</td>
<td>60,6</td>
<td>71,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (married) woman should give up working in case there are only a limited number of working places and in case her husband or partner can take care of the family</td>
<td>9,0</td>
<td>17,5</td>
<td>18,5</td>
<td>25,7</td>
<td>45,3</td>
<td>63,7</td>
<td>71,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A working mother who does not concentrate on her household chores alone could even be of advantage for a child</td>
<td>50,0</td>
<td>61,6</td>
<td>67,5</td>
<td>67,3</td>
<td>62,7</td>
<td>61,6</td>
<td>43,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A working mother can have just a warm and trusting relationship with her children as a non-working mother</td>
<td>90,9</td>
<td>83,3</td>
<td>83,2</td>
<td>85,5</td>
<td>80,8</td>
<td>87,0</td>
<td>80,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a profession proves to be the best means for a woman to be independent</td>
<td>90,9</td>
<td>83,3</td>
<td>85,5</td>
<td>86,3</td>
<td>89,7</td>
<td>84,4</td>
<td>89,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of women questioned: 22, 121, 179, 153, 126, 77, 73

Source: Own Survey

The professional position (see Table 2) plays a special role when trying to find out, which factors determine the attitudes towards paid work, i.e. employees often differ from independent business women, and civil servants and white-collar employees differ from blue-collar working women. Sometimes civil servants and independent business women form a “coalition” as done in the matter of compatibility of family and employment. These two groups are especially of the opinion that employment has to leave time for the family. On a relatively low level of approval the profession is rather the most important thing in the life of the civil servants and white-collar employees, whereas especially blue-collar working women are rather of the opinion that a job is only a means of earning money. This study could not prove that blue-collar working women put great emphasis on social contacts at their work place as Becker-Schmidt (1980) found out. On the contrary, here they show already the lowest percentage. For civil servants, career orientation proves to be less important than expected.

36,4% of the 225 family women are at least part-time employed (incl. trainees). 67,8% of the 143 non employed and/or less than 15 hours per week employed family women have the intention of starting work again within the next 3-4 years. 77,3% of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes towards employment, profession and career</th>
<th>never been employed</th>
<th>self-employed in farming and similar</th>
<th>self-employed advocate doctor and on</th>
<th>self-employed in trade and services</th>
<th>Civil servant</th>
<th>employee</th>
<th>Blue collar worker</th>
<th>assisting dependent</th>
<th>in training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would prefer to work, even if I did not need the money</td>
<td>33,3</td>
<td>71,4</td>
<td>86,6</td>
<td>69,4</td>
<td>82,9</td>
<td>69,1</td>
<td>38,0</td>
<td>41,1</td>
<td>84,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment is only the means to earn money, not more</td>
<td>11,1</td>
<td>28,6</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>6,1</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>10,8</td>
<td>36,7</td>
<td>11,8</td>
<td>15,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have/had to realize my ideas/to be committed</td>
<td>33,3</td>
<td>57,1</td>
<td>93,3</td>
<td>93,5</td>
<td>80,0</td>
<td>62,8</td>
<td>44,3</td>
<td>35,3</td>
<td>84,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me, the contact with other people at my working place is/was very important</td>
<td>33,3</td>
<td>85,8</td>
<td>80,0</td>
<td>87,3</td>
<td>94,3</td>
<td>81,8</td>
<td>76,0</td>
<td>64,7</td>
<td>92,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is/was very important for me to be able to advance in my job</td>
<td>11,1</td>
<td>28,6</td>
<td>40,0</td>
<td>44,9</td>
<td>27,1</td>
<td>33,6</td>
<td>31,7</td>
<td>23,5</td>
<td>38,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment has/had to leave time for my family</td>
<td>44,4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93,4</td>
<td>69,3</td>
<td>87,1</td>
<td>79,2</td>
<td>77,2</td>
<td>70,6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of women questioned</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>408</strong></td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own Survey
at least those family women working part time and those intending to work again (N=179), claim to have some time for their family besides their job. 87% of profession women are claiming it. Both are however, below average of the women questioned. 38,0% of the profession women are looking for a position offering a high income, while only 16,4% of the family women do the same. Contact with other people at their working place is at least important for 73,8% of the family women, and even for 94,0% of the profession women. The realization of their own ideas is at least important for 61,4% of the family women and for 90,9% of the profession women. Only 28,5% of the family women show a career orientation compared to twice the percentage of the profession women (56,0%). 64,0% of the family women and 89,0% of the profession women are aware of the importance of a job because of their own pension fund and/or social security.

Attitudes towards children

Employment and caring for children are often difficult to combine. Therefore, it is necessary to ask women for the value of having children, i.e. if they decide against having children, what do they think they would lose? Statements were listed for or against having children, approval could be given fully, rather or rather not or not at all. Just as in the question for compatibility between family and employment, we find significant age and/or cohort effects (see Table 3).

Table 3: Attitudes towards children by age
(Percentage of women who agreed fully or rather)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes towards children</th>
<th>Less than 20 years</th>
<th>20-30 years</th>
<th>30-40 years</th>
<th>40-50 years</th>
<th>50-60 years</th>
<th>60-70 years</th>
<th>More than 70 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With children, life is more intense and full</td>
<td>81,8</td>
<td>93,4</td>
<td>93,9</td>
<td>92,8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98,7</td>
<td>95,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With children, partners are drawing closer together</td>
<td>63,6</td>
<td>70,8</td>
<td>57,6</td>
<td>59,3</td>
<td>61,9</td>
<td>69,3</td>
<td>69,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children give you the feeling of being needed</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>93,3</td>
<td>93,3</td>
<td>91,4</td>
<td>89,7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For children it is worthwhile to live and work</td>
<td>81,7</td>
<td>87,3</td>
<td>86,6</td>
<td>90,9</td>
<td>96,8</td>
<td>98,7</td>
<td>95,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are more good reasons for children than against</td>
<td>86,4</td>
<td>82,7</td>
<td>85,0</td>
<td>84,3</td>
<td>96,1</td>
<td>94,7</td>
<td>91,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children put a strain on partnership since there is not much time left for each other</td>
<td>27,2</td>
<td>34,8</td>
<td>40,4</td>
<td>28,8</td>
<td>15,1</td>
<td>23,7</td>
<td>19,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With children, there is not much time for one’s own interests</td>
<td>63,6</td>
<td>56,7</td>
<td>61,4</td>
<td>46,4</td>
<td>41,2</td>
<td>50,0</td>
<td>54,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With children, there are worries and problems</td>
<td>68,4</td>
<td>78,3</td>
<td>79,4</td>
<td>70,6</td>
<td>78,5</td>
<td>80,3</td>
<td>87,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of women questioned | 22 | 121 | 179 | 153 | 126 | 77 | 73 |

Source: Own Survey

Above all, the positive aspects of having children, just as the feeling of being needed, are being accentuated by the very young and by the older women. Middle-aged women seem to have a more realistic approach, i.e. they do not glorify children, and they do see problems with children for a partnership. This mainly
speaks for the group of women between 30 and 40 years. Women between 20 and 30 years having younger children see a rather positive effect on the partnership. Especially women being right in the state of having children, feel the restrictions of their own interests. Even though they agree that there are more reasons for than against children.

Investigating the two groups “family women” and “profession women”, the following differences and/or common characteristics arise. More family women (98,2% and/or 93,8%) than profession women (90,0% and/or 80,0%) agree that life is more intense and complete with children and that children are worth living for. Family women have a more realistic view of what children can do in terms of strain on a partnership. Whereas only 28,0% of profession women approve of this statement, 37,3% of the family women agree. Otherwise, the two groups hardly differ. 92,0% of family women and 78,0% of profession women approve of the final result that there are more reasons for than against children.

The goals of women in life

“Every person has certain ideas about what could be attainable in life. Are the following goals for your own life very important, important, less important or unimportant?” This question once more grasps into the importance of certain spheres of life of women and, added to that, tries to investigate about the visions of women.

The strongest explanatory factor, when answering this question is motherhood, i.e. women with children significantly differ from women without children (see Diagram 2). Mothers appreciate their family more than women without children. Women with children put more emphasis on “life for others”, and therewith reducing their “claim for a piece of one’s own life”, especially with regard to things like time for oneself, vacation and travel and an exciting life.
This means that women try to combine family and employment, and are ready to
give up their own time.

In comparing “family women” and “profession women”, we notice that the above
mentioned differences are intensified. For example, for only 34.7% of the family
women it is important to have an exciting and diversifying life, the percentage in-
creases to 51.0% for the profession women. 12.0% of the family and 28.0% of the
profession women are pursuing executive positions.

Conclusion

The results clearly show that women have a strong wish to reconcile family and em-
ployment, whereby the family is of greater importance than the employment. This is
ture for all age groups. In fact, almost 3/4 of the women questioned have at least one
child and about 3/5 of the women are employed for at least a few hours per week. A
“successful” combination of family and employment is found with those women
employed between 15 and 34 hours weekly. These women show the least ambiva-
lence between these two life spheres. For these women the family as well as the job
have identity giving moments preventing the women from having specific conflicts,
such as a bad conscience because of the children. This, however, does not further
their careers. That is why for most women the immaterial aspects of a job, as social
contacts and the compatibility of employment conditions with the interests of a fam-
ily, are more important than material aspects. This is also true for women who are
full-time employed. The importance of independence, caused by employment, is
underlined by all women. The affiliation between money and paid work is especially
noted by older women who have their social security in mind. That does not mean,
however, that the employment as such did not play a role for older women. However,
it seemed to be more understood as a necessary addition to the household income
than as an identity giving participation in public work. The income (this implies the
household income) is more important for the women questioned than employment.
Almost 3/4 of the women questioned have the opinion that both partners should con-
tribute to the household income. Not even 1/3 of the women questioned has the opin-
ion that a women should give up her employment in favour of her husband and only
1/3 looks at women’s role on the job market in terms of a “function in reserve”. In
general, women - particularly the younger ones - said goodbye to the traditional role
clichés. Young women and pupils have a high orientation towards job and career
connected with a high orientation towards family. Concerning the role clichés, the
young women are the most modern. However, a rather great number of them is of the
opinion that small children suffer when mothers work. They believe however, that
the compatibility of both life spheres is possible. In a modified manner hypothe-
asis 1 has been confirmed that younger women have a more modern attitude towards
compatibility of family and employment than older women.

Above all, women with and women without child/ren differ in their attitudes. This
supports hypothesis 2 that mothers are less modern in their attitudes than non-
mothers. The latter emphasize the importance of their jobs, thereby increasingly
looking for professions with possibilities of advancement and realization of their
ideas. At the same time women with child/ren often possess a more “realistic” point
of view concerning the consequences that children face when their mothers are em-
ployed. This means that they are more in a position to weigh the positive and nega-
tive effects on the well being of children whose mothers are employed than women
without child/ren.
The smaller the degree of employment, the more convinced the women are of their specific responsibility towards their families. This confirms hypothesis 3. This however, is often accompanied by contradictions way back to the fact that, especially the non-employed women and those employed with few hours mostly try to legitimize the choice of their private mode of living. Although they show a high orientation towards employment, they underline the role of women in the family.

Education and the status of the job play an important role for the attitudes towards family and employment. The less educated the women, and the “lower” the status of their job, the more traditional the role model with at the same a time strong orientation towards employment. Therewith hypothesis 4 is also confirmed. In this category, women with an entrance exam for a technical college stand out. For them, the job, self-realization in the job, and also the social contact is very important, and they do not have such a positive attitude towards children as the other women. For blue-collar working women the financial aspect of employment is very important, and they mostly enjoy the feeling of being needed by their children. In this case the family is giving high identity.

On the whole, especially the women between 20 and 50 years of age could be classified as “modern” in their attitudes having a realistic view of life, even though the wish for an exciting and stimulating life varies in these age groups. We partly have the impression that reality of female life turned women from originally being hopeful and open towards family, partnership, and employment into women who have realized that they have to give up either family or career or leisure time. It seems that the last item is often the first to be sacrificed. An important step towards a solution is - and this is nothing new but cannot be demanded enough - a more just division of labour within the partnership in the production as well as in the reproduction sphere. This could lead to a situation, wherein boys should not solely be socialized for employment and girls for both life spheres, but wherein both sexes could include “life for others” and the “claim for a piece of one’s own life” in their life plan and accept it as identity giving mode of life.

Observing the men questioned, the readiness to participate more in household work is regarded as insufficient, although, in our sample, there is an extremely high percentage of men included who stay at home to keep the household. Men are more “traditional” than women concerning the stereotypes of gender roles, and hit the women’s nerves with their kind of attitude. Women have to liberate themselves, obviously.

References


Endnotes

1. We interviewed 760 women (and 79 men) in two regional districts of Baden-Württemberg, Germany. This was done to find out more about female life conditions in non-urban environments (see Blättel-Mink/Kramer/Mischau 1998).

2. The results of a group discussion on this topic, conducted by students of the University of Stuttgart in which three women from the survey took part, can be looked up in Dresel 1997.

3. This question does not consider women who are capable for earning their living, but are not employed at the moment and are not planning to acquire a job within three to four years. Retired persons are considered here.