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Sylvia Keim

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Introduction

Sociological analyses of contemporary Western societies often stress the relevance of individualization processes. As ambiguous as the term "individualization" is, it contains a clear underlying proposition. With the emergence of welfare states and market systems, familial bonds that formerly served as organizational principles have ceased to be relevant. Individual autonomy has increasingly corresponded to the well-known proverb that "every man is the architect of his own fortune". Accordingly, some sociological theories have set out to focus on the individual, on his/her behavior, and treat social institutions and structures as external effects. These rational choice theories are well established, and have been successfully applied in various research fields, but they are also occasionally criticized as representing a rather "naive" concept of individual decision-making, especially when they presume that individuals act only based on their attitudes and interests, and neglect the impact of social structures (e.g., Burkart, 1994).

This criticism is not new, given that the relationship between structure and agency is one of the major theoretical discussions in the discipline of sociology: Do individuals act autonomously, or are their actions determined by structural constraints? While some scholars clearly emphasize either structure or agency, various attempts have also been made to integrate the concepts. One very promising approach for integration is the social network approach. Social networks are social structures composed of actors and the relationships between them (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 20). The relational constructivist strand of network research (White, 1992; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Emirbayer, 1997) stresses the interdependence of individual actions and social structures: social networks shape individual identities, and therefore affect individual behavior; but, at the same time, individuals actively build their networks, and thereby form and change the structures they live in. Social networks occupy an intermediary position, bridging the macro level of societal institutions and the micro level of individual action. The concept of social networks has gained prominence in recent years, and not just in the area of social research (see, for example: Castells, 1996; Stegbauer, 2008): the Internet provides the technological means for making global connections, and Internet communities, including social networking websites, such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, or StudiVZ, are used extensively.

StudiVZ, a social networking platform for students mostly used in German-speaking countries, currently has, for example, over 12 million users (StudiVZ, 2009). Business organizations strive for networks instead of hierarchies, and social movements benefit from operating as networks. Individuals are urged to "network" in business, as well as in their private lives, in order to gain and maintain access to helpful and supportive persons. Although networks and networking are often evaluated positively, they can also be linked to insider relationships, cronyism, and corruption. In any case, it seems well established that an individual's personal relationships have a considerable effect on their lives, on the resources they have available, and the opportunities and constraints they face; and thereby influence their attitudes, intentions and behavior.

My thesis focuses on a type of individual behavior which has been very prominent in public debate in recent years: fertility behavior. Scientific and public discourse feature contentious discussions of demographic change, fertility decline, increasing childlessness, and their causes and consequences. Not a month goes by when media do not address the topic. The headlines in January 2009, for example, include: "*Frankreichs Erfolgsgeheimnis gegen Bevölkerungsschwund: alte Mütter*" (Die Welt online, 15.01.2009), "*Später Kindersegen? Nicht in Deutschland*" (TAZ, 13.01.2009); "*Europa versinkt im ‚Geburtentief'*" (Handelsblatt, 12.01.2009), "*Europäer bleiben babymüde"* (Spiegel online, 11.01.2009).

Fertility behavior is not only of interest for my study because of its societal relevance; it is also a challenging research topic for exploring the interplay of structure and agency with a social network approach. On the structural side, fertility is often researched in connection with social policies, labor market conditions, social norms, and values. However, the transition to parenthood is also considered to be a private and personal decision of the couple, and researchers stress the relevance of individual agency: given the widespread use of modern contraceptives in Western societies, having a child is not inevitable, but is, rather, an event that can be directed and planned. Whether and when to have a child is therefore a *decision* individual actors can make, and the transition to parenthood is often modeled as a rather autonomous decision within a rational choice frame. Researchers often blame individualization processes and value changes not only for an increase in individual agency, but also for declining and below-replacement birth rates in Western societies (e.g., Lesthaeghe, 1983; Beck-Gernsheim, 1989; Inglehart, 1990). The individualization hypothesis stresses that individuals are increasingly set free from traditional bonds (that is, kin relationships and rural communities), and that their lives are less structured by, for example, religion, gender, or social class (Beck, 1986). However, this does not imply a demise of relevance of social structure in general. Beck (1986)

stresses that, in the process of individualization, there is always a process of "standardization" involved. For example, one way to deal with the negative effects of being set free from traditional bonds to kin is to search for and to engage in new bonds, such as friendship ties (Beck-Gernsheim, 2006). A very promising field of research is, therefore, to take a closer look at the type of bonds individuals are embedded in, and at how these bonds affect their fertility intentions. This helps to shed light on how individualization processes affect fertility behavior, and allows us to analyze how, even though individual behavior is enabled and constrained by social structures, social structures can nonetheless be built by individual behavior.

Although several studies can show the relevance of personal relations for fertility intentions and behavior, research that explicitly uses social network approaches, focusing on the structure and patterns of personal relations and their impact on fertility, is comparatively rare. In fertility research, most studies on social networks and fertility deal with developing and post-socialist countries (e.g., Valente, 1995; Bühler & Fratczak, 2007) and to our knowledge there is relatively little research on Western countries (e.g., on cohabitation in Japan). The present study therefore breaks new grounds by analyzing the interplay of social networks, personal relationships, and fertility-related attitudes and intentions in a Western context. A unique feature of this exploratory research is a mixed-methods design, combining a strong focus on qualitative research elements with a more standardized collection of network data. This approach allows us to explore and include the cultural meanings, as in the tradition of a relational constructivist approach to network research.

The first two chapters set the stage for the subsequent methodological and analytical chapters by presenting the theoretical and empirical background of the study. In the **first chapter**, I will introduce the social network approach and its main concepts, emphasizing the interrelatedness of human behavior. A special focus shall be placed on what is known about social network structures and mechanisms of social influence. The **second chapter** on fertility and family formation is divided into four major parts. The first section presents what we know about fertility and family formation in Western countries, and the changes that have been observed in the last decades. Here, I will present in detail the situation in Germany, the country at the center of my research. The second part describes how social sciences try to explain fertility decline, and shows how social network research can contribute to this research field. The current trends in research on personal relations, social networks, and fertility shall be reviewed in the third section. Finally, in the fourth part, I will identify the challenges involved in researching social networks and fertility in a Western context, and formulate the research questions guiding the present study.

The **third chapter** is devoted to the methodological basis of my study, and presents the research design, the instruments of data collection, the sampling procedure, and the analysis strategy.

The results of the study are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The **fourth chapter** focuses on the qualitative analyses of the interviews, and explores the subjective framework of meanings and relevance concerning the transition to parenthood and family extension. What are young adults' ideas, wishes, expectations, and attitudes regarding their life-course in general, and family formation in particular? What factors are relevant in their thinking about the transition to parenthood? What roles do personal relationships and social networks play in this process? This chapter culminates in a typology of fertility intentions.

The **fifth chapter** deals with the analysis of the structural network properties and the processes of social influence. In the first section, I present the structural characteristics and the composition of the social networks my respondents are embedded in. The second section is devoted to the mechanisms and channels of social influence. The third section brings together fertility intentions, processes of social influence, and network dynamics with network characteristics for developing a typology of fertility-relevant networks.

The **sixth chapter** discusses the findings on how young adults make decisions about parenthood, and the types of fertility-relevant networks that form the basis of the hypothesis of societal individualization processes. The first section focuses on the network structures, and confronts "traditional" and "individualized" networks. The second section discusses the dual relationship between individuals and the social networks they are embedded in: processes of social influence and selection. Finally, the last section reflects on how social networks can advance our knowledge of fertility behavior, and suggests some hypotheses regarding the future development of fertility rates.

This work ends with a **summary**, recapitulating the aims of the present study and its central findings.

1 The Social Network Perspective

Social network research has gained popularity in recent decades, and has entered many fields of sociological enquiry (Freeman, 2004). The network perspective is applied in research on migration, organizations, urban studies, etc. Accordingly, the research topics are very diverse: networks of communication, social movements, locale power elites, personal networks, informal networks within organizations, virtual networks, terror networks, and many more (Stegbauer, 2008). The popularity of the concept of social networks in the scientific context coincides with the popularity of the term "network" in public discourse. Individuals ought to be "networking" in order to improve their chances on the labor market; organizations build organizational networks for better outreach; and, of course, people "network" via the Internet. In this chapter, I will shed light on the social network approach and its main concepts, stressing the peculiarities of the approach and its orientation on the interrelatedness of human behavior.

1.1 A Social Network Perspective to Individual Behavior

Although social network research is a relatively new research strand, it builds on classic works by sociologists such as Georg Simmel and Max Weber, who were, in their time, dealing with the interrelation of individual and society and the question of social order. Simmel stresses the primacy of social relations, social interactions, and social influence for the formation of a society:

> A collection of human beings does not become a society because each of them has an objectively determined or subjectively impelling life-content. It becomes a society only when the vitality of these contents attains the form of reciprocal influence; only when one individual has an effect, immediate or mediate, upon another, is mere spatial aggregation or temporal succession transformed into society (Simmel, 1971: 24-25).

He proposes the concept of "intersecting social circles" ("*soziale Verkehrskreise"*), and sheds light on individualization processes by describing individuals as living at "the intersection of countless social threads" ("*am*

S. Keim, *Social Networks and Family Formation Processes,*
DOI 10.1007/978-3-531-93173-9_1,

Kreuzungspunkt unzähliger sozialer Fäden") (Simmel, 1992: 467). Simmel thus stresses the relevance of social interactions for sociological research, and the need to view individuals as context-bound.

Equally fundamental is Max Weber's classic definition of social action and social relations:

> Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course. (…) The term "social relationship" will be used to denote the behavior of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms (Weber, 1978: 4, 26).

Weber places social action as the central interest of sociology. His definition of social action includes the directedness of individual action to the "behavior of others" as a fundamental component. His definition of social relations stresses that individuals anticipate other people's behavior, and include this awareness into their own reasoning and actions. These early sociologists (also Leopold von Wiese (1954) is often named) were not the initiators of social network research, but in recent years many network researchers have come back to their work. Historically, the social network perspective developed from three main research traditions (for a more detailed description of the historic development of social network analysis see for example Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Freeman, 2004; Scott, 2006): The first research tradition is a sociometric analysis developed in the 1930s by Moreno (1934), Lewin (1936), and others. Sociometric analysis draws on psychological "gestalt" theory and investigates "group dynamics". The second research tradition builds on the work of the "Harvard structuralists" of the 1930s. Using the work of the British social anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown as a starting point, they studied informal interpersonal relations in factories and communities (e.g., Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939 on the Hawthorn Studies, Warner & Lunt, 1942). The third tradition goes back to the "Manchester anthropologists", who were also in the tradition of Radcliffe-Brown, and analyzed African tribal societies as well as rural areas and small towns in Britain (e.g., Barnes, 1954[1], Bott, 1957; Mitchell, 1969). In the 1960s and 1970s, Harrison White and his associates at Harvard brought these traditions together, and social network analysis in its contemporary form was developed (e.g., White, 1963; Granovetter, 1974).

The social network approach builds on other research perspectives, such as group sociology, socialization, and role theory. Network researchers often refer to group sociology and social psychology pointing at findings on processes of

[1] Often the first use of the term "social network" is attributed to John Barnes and his work.

group pressure which can lead to conformity in attitudes and behavior (e.g., referring to Asch, 1951 and Milgram, 1961). But they also stress that, while groups consist of a definable and bounded number of persons, the social integration of individuals in everyday life is rather complex, and that individuals are usually not involved in only one bounded group of persons. The concept of social networks therefore avoids drawing boundaries between certain groups: "structural analysts try to avoid imposing assumptions about the boundaries of aggregates" (Wellman, 1988: 37), concentrating instead on researching the contacts and interactions actually taking place. Groups and organizations are not seen as coteries; they all have various connections to persons and organizations exterior to them (Wellman, 1988: 37). Network researchers also often refer to the concept of socialization. Socialization theories attempt to explain how individuals are integrated into society, how they internalize social norms, and how they form their identities. Parents, teachers, and other persons are agents of socialization: they (try to) shape the child's personality, interests, and behavior by education; and they introduce the child to life in a specific society and culture. Through interactions with other people, the child learns about the world she lives in and her own place in it. Primary socialization as a young child occurs in the family of origin, while secondary socialization involves the school, and the third stage of socialization takes place in adult life (e.g., Mortimer and Simmons 1978; Berger & Luckmann, 2004). In addition to the family, peer groups are central agents in the socialization process. Peer groups consist of people of the same age who encounter each other in a certain setting, such as in a school class or university. Although network researchers support the focus on social relations for analyzing individual integration into society, they contend that socialization theories adopt an "over socialized" concept of people, focusing too much on fixed role relations, while failing to take into account the individual's present/specific relationships (Granovetter, 1985). From a network perspective, one would argue that peers are not influential per se, but can become important if they are engaged in frequent contact, build cohesive networks of high density, transmit information quickly, and produce homogenous evaluations and normative pressures (Friedkin, 1982; Coleman, 1990).

1.2 Basic Concepts in Network Research

The fundamental theoretical proposition is that network research explains social actions not on the basis of individual attributes but in the context of social relations (Wellman, 1988: 31). Social relations are the primary focus of study (Degenne & Forsé, 1999: 3) and "the unit of analysis in network analysis is not the

individual, but an entity consisting of a collection of individuals and the linkages among them" (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 5). Accordingly, the definition of the term social network stresses the relationships between actors:

> A social network consists of a finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them. The presence of relational information is a critical and defining feature of a social network (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 20).

Not the actor per se, but his social relationships, or his integration into a social structure is at the center of interest. Actors and their actions are viewed as interdependent (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 5). Social relations (or ties) in network research are defined as linkages between units. These units may be individuals, married couples, families or corporations (Degenne & Forsé, 1999: 3) and are generally referred to as actors, which does not necessarily imply "that these entities have volition or the ability to 'act'" (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 17). Social relationships may be of various sorts, such as economic, political, and affective; and relational ties between actors are channels for the transfer of material or immaterial resources (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 3).

Social relations form regular patterns, which are referred to as network structures (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 3), and social phenomena are explained in terms of the form or structure of the network ("structural analysis", Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988). This goes back to the basic proposition of structural thinking that the whole is more than the sum of its parts: i.e., network relations cannot be analyzed separately, but must be considered in the context of the network structure as a whole.

Commonly measured network characteristics are (for details see for example Diaz-Bone, 1997, Degenne & Forsé, 1999):

- size: the number of units (e.g., persons) included in the network;
- density: the proportion of realized relationships to the maximum number of possible relationships between the network partners;
- diversity/heterogeneity: the measurement of differences between network-partners for nominal/metric data;
- multiplexity: the measurement of the existence of multiple ties between nodes, e.g., ties that transact several different kinds of exchanges.

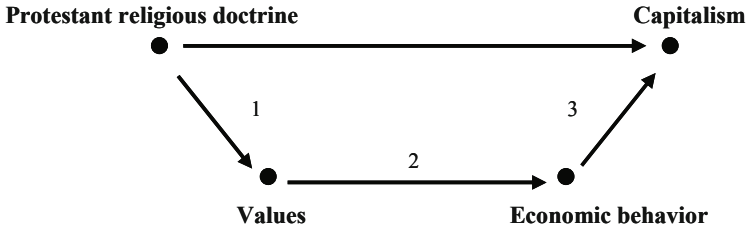
The composition of social networks can be presented by focusing on a large variety of network partners' characteristics, such as age, sex, education, social status, and ethnicity (Marsden, 1987). The share of kin and non-kin can, for example, also be analyzed. The choice of relevant characteristics depends on the

research question, and on the theoretical assumptions and hypotheses of the researcher.

Mitchell (1969) distinguishes between total and partial networks. The total network of a society is composed of "the general ever-ramifying, ever-reticulating set of linkages that stretches within and beyond the confines of any community or organization" (Mitchell, 1969: 12). In actual research however, Mitchell argues, it is necessary to select particular aspects of total networks, which can be done by focusing on ego-centered networks around particular individuals, or on whole networks concerned with a particular aspect of social activity, such as work relations or political activities (Mitchell, 1969). While whole networks comprise all relationships – e.g., within a firm, an organization, or a classroom – ego-centered networks consist of "relations from the orientation of a particular person" (Breiger, 2004: 509). The analysis focuses on ego and ego's relationships to other persons, termed alter, as well as on the ties among those alters (Wasserman & Faust, 1994: 42).

Social network research can be seen as one approach to dealing with a central problem in social theory, which is to capture the relationship between the individual and society. While micro-sociological approaches seek to explain individual behavior but cannot explain macro-level outcomes, macro-sociological approaches can explain the development of societies, but cannot relate this development to individual actions, and to how individuals explain their actions. This problem was trenchantly formulated by Coleman (1986), who illustrated the issue with an example from Max Weber: the relationship between religious beliefs and the emergence of a capitalist economic system (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Coleman's macro- and micro-level propositions



Source: Coleman, 1990: 8

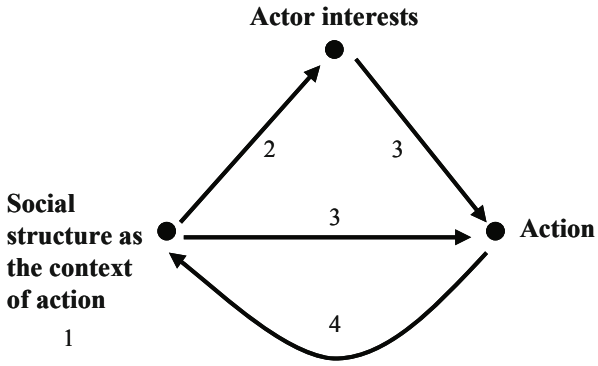
The proposition regarding the macro level of a relationship between Protestant religious doctrine and capitalism is broken into three propositions: first Protestant religious doctrine affects the values individuals hold (1), second individuals

holding certain values adopt certain kinds of orientations to economic behavior (2), and third certain orientations to economic behavior bring about capitalism (3) (Coleman, 1986).

In an effort to integrate the micro and macro perspectives, Burt formulated a "structural theory of action" (Burt, 1982). According to this theory, social actors depend on their structural embedment, but are at the same time capable of changing the structures in which they are embedded (see Figure 2). Social structures influence the interests and values as well as the behavior of social actors by providing or restraining resources:

> Actions eventually taken are therefore a joint function of actors pursuing their interests to the limit of their ability where both interests and ability are patterned by social structure (Burt, 1982: 9).

Figure 2: Burt's components in a structural theory of action



Source: Burt, 1982: 9

In this model, social structure builds the context of action (1). Social structure can designate the social structure of a society, but also of an organization. This social structure can, for example, be captured by ego-centered networks, but also by other types of networks. Social structure affects actors' action directly because it "constrains actors in their ability to take actions" (Burt, 1982: 9) and indirectly via the interests actors hold (3). Social structure shapes actors' interests (2), by affecting how individuals perceive "the advantages to be had by taking each of several alternative actions" (Burt, 1982: 9). At the same time, the actions actors take can reproduce or modify social structure (4). This scheme highlights why it is important that individuals not be seen as atomistic units, nor

as fully determined by societal structures. Instead, the embedment of individuals should be viewed in "ongoing systems of social relations" (Granovetter, 1985: 487):

> Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them by the particular intersection of social categories that they happen to occupy. Their attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations (Granovetter, 1985: 487).

The concept of social capital also helps to bridge the micro-macro gap. Social capital is one aspect of social structures that facilitates actions for the individual actor embedded in this structure (Coleman, 1988: S98). Social capital can arise from information available in social networks (e.g., Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981; De Graaf & Flap, 1988), but also refer to structural opportunities and constraints for social action, arising from the actor's position in the network (e.g., Burt, 1992). This concept includes an actor as well as a structural perspective: on the one hand, the individual actor can strategically use and accumulate social capital; while on the other hand, the social structures she/he is embedded in are to a large extent not changeable, and restrain individual action (Jansen, 2003: 275).

As a consequence, network researchers demand that individual behavior should be interpreted in light of the structural opportunities and constraints for this behavior – i.e., by looking at more than just inner drives, internalized norms, or aims (Wellman, 1988: 20). The social structure of a society is, in turn, not the sum of individual characteristics (such as the distribution of income or the distribution of educational attainment), but comes into existence via the social relations between real actors (Jansen, 2003: 18). This close connection of societal structure and the structure of concrete relations between actors thus encourages researchers to seek to learn more about the current society through an analysis of social networks. For example, processes such as modernization and individualization can be directly linked to changes in network structure. Indeed, modernization is often seen as a development which on the one hand profits from a weakening of "traditional" ties (e.g., Beck-Gernsheim, 2006), and on the other hand puts the *lien social*, or the social bond between individuals, at risk (Berger, 1988).

One example of network research that focuses on modernization processes is Wellman's (1979) study on the community question, which asks about the consequences of socially differentiated structures on the macro level on social ties, and relationships between individuals on the micro level (p. 1201). Consistent with network theoretical thinking, Wellman understands social integration to be the realized integration by specific structures of social ties – and not integration via a feeling of solidarity, social norms, or spatial proximity. Grounded

on theoretical and empirical insights into modernization processes in the field of urban studies going back to Tönnies (1955), Wellman has formulated three hypotheses on the consequences of modernization processes on social relations/personal networks. The first hypothesis blames modernization processes for weakening or destroying solidarity in communities, which leads to social isolation, a lack of social support, and the dissolution of traditional living arrangements, such as family and neighborhood. According to this hypothesis, personal networks are typically sparsely knit; that is, the network partners of one actor often do not know each other. Ties are weak and mostly uniplex. These structures provide little support (Wellman, 1979: 1204). Wellman termed this hypothesis *community lost*. The second hypothesis counter-argues that solidarity in communities and kinship continues to be relevant. Accordingly, personal networks tend to be dense, based on ties to kin and neighbors, and are supportive. The ties are close and multiplex (Wellman, 1979: 1205). This hypothesis is termed *community saved*. The third hypothesis suggests that communities are changing structurally, but continue to exist. Personal networks are sparse and spatially dispersed; they include strong as well as weak ties, and are prevalent sources of support. Ties are multiplex. The network structure and its supportive function largely depend on the ability of the individual to engage in and to cultivate supportive ties (Wellman, 1979: 1206). Wellman termed this *community liberated*. In Wellman's empirical study on East York, an inner suburb of Toronto, only very few networks support the hypothesis of community lost. Most networks could be considered rather as community saved or liberated. However, most networks cannot be clearly subsumed under either of these categories, but contain elements of both.

Two studies have tried to look at the community question in the German context, focusing on the modernization process of the institution of family. Diaz-Bone (1997) in his research on persons living with children (under 18) in the same household, based on data from the German Youth Institute's family survey from 1988, finds evidence that couples and single persons living with children are rather disintegrated, and sustain few relationships beyond their household (p. 214). Hennig (2006: 145), however, argues that the network generators used in the family survey used by Diaz-Bone do not adequately cover the supportive relationships families with children have, and she therefore developed additional name generators for a study she conducted in three German cities in 2003. Her analysis of the social networks of families living in the same household shows that these families are not isolated, and can rely on various forms of social support. Their networks contain elements from the community saved, as well as the community liberated hypotheses, but cannot clearly be subsumed under either one of them (Hennig, 2006: 196).

As mentioned before, the relationship between individual and network is twofold: on the one hand, the network influences individual behavior; on the other hand, the individuals actively choose and cultivate certain relationships (Pfennig, 1995). From a life-course perspective, network dynamics are especially interesting: networks change with certain life events (moving out of the parental home, becoming a parent, retiring from a job, losing a partner). In turn, they provide the context in which certain life events are more or less likely to happen. For a long time, network research has lacked the instruments to measure the causality in network dynamics, and it is only slowly progressing in this field (Jansen, 2003: 275).

Beyond the shortcomings in dealing with network dynamics, criticism of the network perspective points out a lack of reflection on the "interrelations between social structure, culture and human agency" (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994: 1425). Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) point out that some traditions in network research, such as *structuralist determinism,* neglect "the potential causal role of actors' beliefs, values, and normative commitments" while *structuralist constructionism* "pays insufficient attention to the structuring influences of cultural and political discourses upon historical actors" (p. 1425). Thus a stronger focus should be placed on the dialectic relationship between subjective meanings, concrete interactions, and institutionalized norms (Jansen, 1999: 258), which is one major concern of the *relational constructivist* strand of social network research (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994).

1.3 Processes and Mechanisms of Social Influence

One central concept of social network analysis is that personal relations provide opportunities for, and constraints on, individual action (Burt, 1982; Degenne & Forsé, 1999). Social networks not only have an impact on behavior, but also "influence our values, attitudes and decisions" (Fischer, 1977: 19).

The complexity of the social influence process is based in the dualistic perspective on actors and networks: on the one hand, *individuals select their network partners* according to their interests and needs; while on the other hand, some parts of the network structure cannot easily be changed, and tend to influence the individual's attitudes and behavior. Conformity between attitudes and behavior of network partners and ego can therefore be caused by selection effects, as well as by social influence, and both are difficult to disentangle. Adding to the complexity is the fact that, from the perspective of the individual, social influence can be *intended*, or it can be *unintentional*: i.e., an individual may intend to influence another person (e.g., persuasion), but social influence can

also take place without being intended (Marsden & Friedkin, 1994: 4), or have a different effect than intended (Zimmerling, 2005: 130). The influenced person may in turn seek to be influenced (e.g., by asking for advice), or be influenced without wanting to be. On the side of the receiver, social influence can be *effective or rejected*: influence is not necessarily effective or successful; the individual may not take up the new attitudes or behavior (Zimmerling, 2005: 130). Additionally, social influence can be perceived by those involved or not: neither the person influencing nor the person being influenced needs to be aware of the influence happening (Zimmerling, 2005: 144).

Although "influence" is such a central term in network research and finds its ways into many publication titles (e.g., Marsden & Friedkin, 1994; Montgomery & Casterline, 1996; Friedkin, 1998; Leenders, 2002; Mason, Conrey, & Smith, 2007), it is rarely defined thoroughly. Most authors rely on a "common sense" understanding (Zimmerling, 2005). One example is Friedkin's (1998) work on "a structural theory of social influence". Friedkin states the general nature of social influence ("a causal effect (direct and unmediated) of one actor on another," p. 56), but does not specify what kind of "causal effect" the term "influence" refers to, and how exactly this effect comes into being. Instead of defining properly what social influence comprises, Friedkin, as along with other authors, indicate what social influence "encompasses" (Marsden & Friedkin, 1994: 4). They refer to socio-psychological research and theories, such as social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). These theories often draw on experimental settings in laboratories, and are criticized for their lack of applicability to contemporary problems (Moscovici, 2001). Thus, Butera and Mugny (2001) promote social influence research designed to understand "social reality", and stress that "the nature of the domain (…) with respect to which the social influence situation takes place" has to be taken into account, because it "determines the meaning individuals give to influence relations" (p. 1).

In support of this statement, my presentation strongly draws on approaches used by researchers in the field of family and fertility research – the area I have chosen for my case study – to conceptualize and analyze processes of social influence, while also incorporating insights from other research areas. Previous work on social networks and fertility mainly define three mechanisms for how personal relations and social networks affect fertility intentions and behavior: social learning, social influence, and social support.

Social learning takes place when an individual provides information (or could be asked for information) that shapes another actor's views and expectations. It may also take place impersonally, for example via mass media (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996: 153). Bongaarts and Watkins (1996) add the relevance of evaluation processes that go beyond sharing information: the

meaning of certain pieces of information are transmitted and negotiated in conversations. The concept of social learning draws on psychological research that shows that learning can occur vicariously by observing other people's behavior and its consequences for them, and that stresses the relevance of models for learning new patterns of behavior: "[B]y observing others, one forms rules of behavior, and on future occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. Because people can learn approximately what to do through modeling before they perform any behavior, they are spared the costs and pain of faulty effort" (Bandura, 1986: 47). Nevertheless, learning new behavior does not necessarily mean applying this behavior (Bandura, 1986). Via social learning, individuals acquire information about the costs and benefits involved in having children, and base their decision on this information (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996). The concept of social learning has been used to explain the diffusion, acceptance, and use of modern contraceptives in developing countries (Kohler & Bühler, 2001); but is also regarded as appropriate for analyzing low fertility countries (Kohler, Billari, & Ortega, 2002). However, "little is known about learning mechanisms and the formation of perceptions in respect to demographic behavior" (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996: 159). This statement, made in 1996, still holds up today.

Social influence contains processes that derive from the dynamics in social groups: individuals seek to avoid conflict within social groups (Moscovici, 1985) and therefore induce and are open to social influence (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996). This includes being subject to "social pressure", or punishments that "force" an actor to comply; as well as to "social obligations", or situations in which actors do not necessarily feel "forced" to act in a certain way, but act in a conformist way in order to please other people (Barber, 2000: 322). Some qualitative studies register the existence of normative pressure on childbearing decisions by relevant others (Busfield & Paddon, 1977; Campbell, 1985; Gerson, 1985; McAllister & Clarke, 1998). Social pressure and obligations are also found to be relevant for fertility behavior in a qualitative study on personal relations in Italy (Bernardi, 2003).

The concept of social support highlights that individuals are influenced in their behavior and attitudes by the resources they have access to (Granovetter, 1973; Freeman, 1979; Lin, 2001; Flap, 2002, 2004). Studies on social support and fertility mainly deal with two forms of social support: support in childcare and economic support, mainly in non-Western societies. For traditional societies, some empirical studies support the thesis that social support in childcare can foster family formation (e.g., Bereczkei, 1998; Crognier, Baali, & Hilali, 2001). In modern societies, there is little research on the effect of social support on fertility decisions. One exception is the study by Hank and Kreyenfeld (2003),

which found that access to childcare by kin fosters the transition to the first child in western Germany. Studies in Eastern Europe show that receiving support that ameliorates the economic situation of the household fosters fertility (e.g., Bühler & Philipov, 2005), but little is known about how economic support can foster childbirth in Western countries.

These mechanisms of influence are related to the characteristics of social networks in certain ways:

Social learning: In large and sparse networks, new pieces of information can diffuse quickly; weak ties often have a bridging function and can provide access to new pieces of information. In small and dense networks, the information exchanged is redundant (Burt, 1983; Mieneke & Midden, 1991).

Social influence: In small and dense networks, norms and rules are reproduced and network partners can collectively enforce these rules and expel nonconformists (Burt, 1983; Marsden, 1987; Coleman, 1988).

Social support: Here the picture is not so clear. On the one hand, many authors state that the larger and the more heterogeneous (and, generally, the less dense) a network, the better the individual's access to social support (Marsden, 1987; Flap, 2002). On the other hand, researchers have found that strong ties can transfer more valuable goods than weak ties, and that more intense support can be provided in dense networks (Kohler & Bühler, 2001).

Before showing in greater detail how the network perspective has been used in family and fertility research and why this research area is especially interesting for using a network approach, I shall first introduce the research field in the following chapter.

2 Fertility and Family Formation

In recent decades, we have witnessed considerable changes in individual fertility behavior in almost all Western industrialized countries. Characteristic of these changes are an increase in the age of women at first birth (Sobotka, 2004; Frejka & Sardon, 2007), a higher age at higher order births (Bongaarts, 2001), and a decline in births (Kohler et al., 2002; Frejka & Sobotka, 2008). Nevertheless, the pace and strength of these changes varies across countries.[2]

The most common measure for describing the development of fertility is the Period Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which provides the estimated number of children a woman bears during her lifetime. Currently all of Europe's population live in countries with TFR at or below the replacement level of 2.1 (Eurostat, 2009). There is a considerable divergence of fertility levels, ranging from "lowest-low fertility" (Kohler et al., 2002), with a TFR below 1.3, to fertility rates closer to the replacement level. In 2006, for example, Slovakia had the lowest TFR at 1.2, and France and Iceland the highest TFRs, at 2.0 and 2.1, respectively (Eurostat, 2009). Additionally, a pattern of early childbearing has subsequently changed to a late pattern. In many European countries, women currently become mothers at an average age of 28-29, while in the 1970s women were mostly in their early and mid-twenties when they entered parenthood (Frejka & Sobotka, 2008). Fertility postponement contributes to a decline of the TFR unless the delayed births are recuperated. However, higher order births have decreased, and in almost all European countries, more adults stay permanently childless than 20 or 30 years ago (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2007: 11).[3] In the countries of the European Union, the two-child family is the most frequently named ideal, followed

[2] I will focus my report here on Europe, and refer to variations within Europe, but neglect other industrialized countries, which, despite having many similarities, also display characteristic differences. For example, the US fertility patterns also show fertility decline and rising age at first birth. However, after a fertility decline in the 1960s and early 1970s to below the replacement level, the TFR rose in the 1980s, and, since the 1990s, has again been at or close to 2.1 (Frejka & Sobotka, 2008). Also fertility postponement and childlessness are less pronounced, and there is a comparatively high rate of teenage pregnancies (Frejka, 2004; Lesthaeghe & Neidert, 2006; Frejka & Sobotka, 2008).

[3] Note though, that in Germany, as well as in Europe, a rate of childless women of around 20% is not a new phenomenon when looking at the last 400 years, which in the past was often explained by phases of wars and economic crisis (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2007: 13)

S. Keim, *Social Networks and Family Formation Processes,*
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by families with three children, the one-child family, and a family without children (Testa, 2006: 9). Based on the observation that the desire for children has remained rather stable in many European countries, and that most women continuously intend to have around two children over their lives, researchers have argued that, on the micro level, low fertility rates suggest that individuals are *not able* to realize their desired family size. This is interpreted as an assignment for political actors to improve conditions for having children (e.g., Chesnais, 1996, 2000). However, there is recent evidence of changes not only in behavior, but also in preferences: in 2004, women from Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Spain were found to prefer a family size of below two children (Frejka & Sobotka, 2008), and women in Germany were shown to desire on average 1.73 (western Germany) or 1.78 (eastern Germany) children. Meanwhile, German men's wish for children was found to be even lower, at 1.59 in western Germany and 1.46 in eastern Germany in 2004 (Dorbritz, 2008). As a consequence, researchers assume that the decline in fertility intentions limits the potential of family policies to foster births, and that the actual TFR may decline even further, or at least fail to increase in the long term (Goldstein, Lutz, & Testa, 2003; Dorbritz, 2008).

Together with these changes in fertility patterns many researchers describe other societal developments that lead to changes in family life, e.g., changes in gender roles or changes in living arrangements. These changes have occurred in Europe at different paces and to different degrees. Yet despite exceptions, some scholars stress that these changes form in sum a universal trend. Looking at attitudes on gender roles, an increasing rejection of traditional gender roles has been found (e.g., Scott, 2006). Again, there is strong variation among the European countries: while, for example, only 2% of young women (aged 15-39) from Denmark agree to the sentence that "ideally, the woman should stay at home to look after the children", among young Hungarian women of the same age group, 44% agree (Testa, 2006: 60).

Changes in living arrangements are mainly related to a decrease in marriages since the 1960s in the countries of the European Union (Peuckert, 2008). Instead, new living arrangements have gained relevance: cohabitation, single living, living apart together (LAT) with the partner (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 2002). Cohabitation is, for example, very common in the Nordic countries (in Sweden in 2002/2003, 43% of women aged 26 to 30 lived in cohabiting unions) and rather rare in Southern and Eastern European countries (9%-12% of women aged 26 to 30 were cohabiting in Italy, Spain, and Poland in 2002/2003) (Huinink & Konietzka, 2007). In addition, the link between marriage and fertility has weakened; the number of lone parents and the share of childbirths out of wedlock have increased. Data from the Eurobarometer, for example,

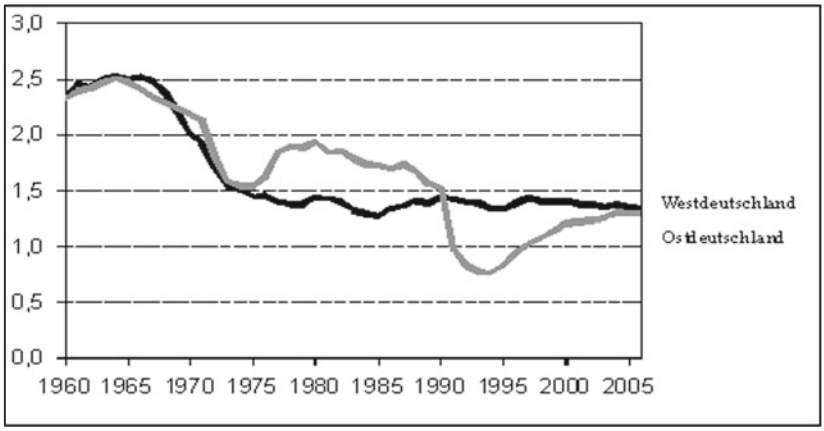
shows that, in 1960, the vast majority (14 out of 16) European countries had low levels of extramarital births, but by 1990, only three of these 16 countries could still be said to have low levels, while an increasing number reached higher levels of above 20% of all live births (Torremocha, 2002). In 2008, births out of wedlock were highest among the EU member states in Estonia, with 59.1% of all live births, and lowest in Greece, with 6.5% (Marcu, 2009). In addition, so-called patchwork families have increasingly formed from divorced or separated parents, their new partners, and their children and stepchildren (Huinink & Konietzka, 2007).

Like many other European countries, Germany shows a rising age at first birth, increasing rates of childlessness, and growth in new living arrangements. Why western Germany in particular is an interesting area for research on social networks and fertility will be explained in Section 3.4.1, which provides details about the sampling. The following section gives an overview on family formation in Germany, highlighting the differences between eastern and western Germany, and thereby setting the thematic stage for this study.

2.1 Fertility and Family Formation: the Situation in Germany

In both parts of Germany, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) started to decline in the mid-1960s. But while a rather stable level of between 1.3 and 1.4 has been established in western Germany *("Westdeutschland")* since the mid-1970s, eastern Germany (*"Ostdeutschland"*) has experienced more changes (see Figure 3). In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the TFR increased starting in the mid-1970s. This uptick is commonly explained by the introduction of social policies which were designed to foster childbirth (e.g., the supply of inexpensive child care and special support to single mothers) (Schneider, 1994; Trappe, 1995). However, in the 1980s the TFR resumed its slow decline. By the time of unification, the eastern German TFR was only slightly higher than the western German rate. After unification in 1990, the eastern German TFR dropped sharply, with lowest level of 0.77 in 1994. Since then, the TFR has slowly increased, and currently the TFR of eastern and western Germany are largely similar, at 1.3 in eastern Germany and 1.34 in western Germany (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008).

Figure 3: TFR in eastern and western Germany



Source: Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008: 125

The TFR is sensitive to tempo effects, i.e., the number of births per women is only estimated correctly if the age at first and higher order birth remains stable. However, we have witnessed an increasing postponement of first births. Looking at the Cohort Fertility Rate (CFR) yields further insights. This measure only considers children born by women of a certain cohort – and can therefore only be given for cohorts that have finished their reproductive period. Although the TFR suggests a rather stable fertility level for western Germany since the mid-1970s, the cohort fertility rate for western German women has been decreasing steadily. While the cohort of women born in 1950 had 1.7 children per woman, the cohort of women born in 1961 only had 1.58. However, for eastern German women cohort fertility has not only remained rather stable, but is also considerably higher than among western German women, at 1.76 for the cohort of 1961 (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008: 126).

2.1.1 Age at First Birth, Childlessness, and Parity

In both parts of Germany, the demographic change is characterized by an increase in the ages of mothers at first birth. Western German mothers are considerably older than eastern German mothers. For the western German cohort of 1950, the median age at first birth was 25.9, while the median age for the 1972 cohort was 29.6. In eastern Germany, the median age at first birth was, until recently, in the early twenties: e.g., 23.4 for the 1965 cohort. However, since

unification, the median age at first birth has been increasing rapidly in eastern Germany: e.g., the 1972 cohort became mothers at a median age of 27.5 (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008).

Compared to other Western countries, western Germany has a comparably high and growing percentage of the population who remain permanently childless (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2007). The rise of childlessness began in Germany much earlier than in other European countries, from the 1935 cohort onwards, and the levels of childlessness among the youngest cohorts who have concluded their fertile periods seem to be among the highest in Europe (Dorbritz & Ruckdeschel, 2007: 56). For the cohorts born in 1965 and later, estimates of childlessness rates vary from 23% in the lowest variant, to 33% in the highest (Dorbritz & Ruckdeschel, 2007: 50).[4] The situation in eastern Germany is totally different. Whereas in western Germany the rate of childlessness increased from 12% in the cohort born in 1940, to 23% in the 1958 cohort; in the GDR it declined from 12% to 8% for the same cohorts (Kreyenfeld, 2001: 93). Additionally, childlessness in western Germany seems to be more desired and planned than in other countries: the percentage of childless persons aged 20 to 49 who indicate that they do not want to have any children is 35% in western Germany. This is the highest rate of voluntary childlessness found in a comparison of 13 European countries (Dorbritz & Ruckdeschel, 2007: 68). Nevertheless, little is known about the reasons for childlessness.

We can observe that, in recent decades, women were older when they had children; they also had fewer children, especially in western Germany, as can be seen in the cohort fertility rate trends described above. In western Germany, this decrease in the number of children is due to two processes: a rising number of childless women, and fewer families with more than two children. However, the share of women with two children has remained high and largely stable (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008). Most western German women with one child give birth to their second child within four years after the first birth (Huinink, 1989; Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008). In eastern Germany, the lower number of children is mainly due to a shrinking number of third and further births until the 1955 cohort. However, studies dealing with changes since unification point out, that eastern German women have a comparably lower risk of having a second or further child (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008).

[4] The currently available data on childlessness in Germany is unsatisfactory: the official population statistics and the *Microzensus* do not provide reliable data on the extent of childlessness, and the empirical studies at hand are often incomplete. The *Family and Fertility Survey,* for example, only includes women up to age 39, while the reproductive phase of women lasts at least up to age 45 (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2007). Several authors tried to estimate the level of childlessness based on the available data and give projections of the share of childlessness in cohorts that have not concluded their reproductive phase (see overview in Dorbritz & Ruckdeschel, 2007).

2.1.2 Changes in Living Arrangements

In western Germany, childbearing is still closely linked to formal marriage: in 2006 only 24% of all births were out of wedlock. However, the share of extramarital births has been rising in western Germany in recent decades. In eastern Germany, rates of extramarital birth have risen strongly since the late 1970s, to 60% in 2006 (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008: 132). In the recent decades, living arrangements without children have been increasing, while those with children have been declining. Eastern Germany has witnessed considerable growth in the number of single mothers, while the increase in single motherhood in western Germany has been rather modest (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008: 133). Living arrangements without children include singles as well as cohabiting or married couples, or couples who are living apart together (LAT). "New" family forms include step-families and patchwork families formed after divorce. The risk of divorce has risen since the 1960s: based on the total divorce rate in 2000, an estimated 37% of marriages will end in divorce (west: 38.5%; east: 32.3%), on average after 12.9 years of marriage (Engstler & Menning, 2003: 81). Among 30- to 34-year-old women in western Germany in 2000, 51.2% were married with children, 14% lived alone, 11.7% were married without children, 7.5% were cohabiting without children, and 7.4% were lone mothers. In eastern Germany in 2000, a majority (53.1%) of women in this age group was married with children, but many others were lone mothers (14.2%), cohabiting with children (13.2%), or living alone (7.6%) (Engstler & Menning, 2003: 23).

2.1.3 Education and Participation in the Labor Market

Being enrolled in education or being unemployed strongly lowers the risk of childbearing in western Germany, but much less so in eastern Germany (Kreyenfeld, 2001).

In 2004, 16% of western German mothers (with children aged 1-15) worked full-time, 23% worked part-time, and 32% were not employed; by contrast, 48% of eastern German mothers worked full-time, 10% worked part-time, and 12% were not employed (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008: 134). Western German mothers are not only less likely than eastern German mothers to be in full-time employment, they also have been shown to evaluate "working mothers" more negatively than their eastern German counterparts (Kreyenfeld, 2004). An analysis I conducted together with Laura Bernardi using the data of the Rostock-Lübeck project also shows considerable east-west differences (Bernardi & Keim, 2006). In a case study, we contrasted eastern and western German women with

similar characteristics and life conditions (childless women in partnerships who are working full-time and have higher education). We were able to show, for example, that women in both contexts adopt very different family models (e.g., male-breadwinner model in the west; dual-earner model in the east).

2.1.4 Childcare

Institutionalized childcare in Germany is also characterized by considerable east-west differences. In western Germany, the supply of institutionalized childcare is much lower than in eastern Germany, especially for children under age three and for school-age children who may need childcare arrangements for the afternoon. In 2002, only 3% of children under age three were in childcare in western Germany, compared to 37% in eastern Germany. Similarly only 5% of children above age six were cared for in childcare institutions after school in western Germany, compared to 41% in eastern Germany. Institutionalized childcare for children aged three to six is available to a much larger extent (88% in western Germany, 105% in eastern Germany). However, whereas in eastern Germany the institutions are open for the full day, in western Germany kindergartens often take children only for several hours (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2004).

2.1.5 Two Fertility Regimes?

The presented indicators show that there are considerable differences in family and fertility behavior in western and eastern Germany. Some of these differences date back to the time before 1989, when Germany was divided into two states – the former FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) and GDR (German Democratic Republic). Both states had fundamentally different political and economic systems, including different social and family policies. Social policies in the GDR were designed to favor women's labor force participation. They were geared to minimize job interruptions after childbirth by supplying inexpensive childcare. Thus, it is not surprising that women's labor force participation in 1989 was 82% in the GDR – mostly full-time jobs – compared to 56% in the FRG (Hülser, 1996: 47). In the FRG, however, state support for parents was oriented towards an "employment-motherhood sequence", with mothers who had small children experiencing long interruptions, and being employed part-time, if at all. With the unification of Germany, two states with populations who had been following fundamentally different models and patterns of family formation and extension were brought together (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2008). The unification process

itself had different consequences in eastern and western Germany. For the eastern Germans, the sudden and fundamental system change from a socialist to a market-driven economy has changed the basic parameters in their lives, and has resulted in job losses and high unemployment rates. Meanwhile, life in western Germany has not changed substantially or suddenly in recent years. Thus the impact of the unification process on fertility behavior has been different in the different parts of the country. While the western German TFR remained largely undisturbed, eastern German TFR declined sharply shortly after unification.

In light of these historical and ongoing differences between the two parts of Germany, I argue that, if we want to learn more about fertility and family in Germany, we must consider both parts of Germany separately, either in a comparative perspective, or by focusing on only one part. Because I am mainly interested in social networks and their effects – and not in different fertility regimes – I have chosen to focus on one local setting only, thereby reducing variations among respondents based on the region where they live. The reasons why western Germany is of special interest shall be discussed in Section 3.4.1. But first, I will look at some current explanations for fertility decline, and explain why network research can contribute to this field of research.

2.2 Explanations for Fertility Decline

Various attempts have been made to explain the phenomena of fertility decline, fertility postponement, and changes in living arrangements. In order to show how social network research can contribute to this research field, I shall compare two major research strands: one with an economic, and the other with a cultural perspective.

The economic perspective models the transition to a child as rational decision-making process, following the tradition of Gary Becker's "New Home Economics" (NHE) (Becker, 1960, 1981), and stresses the effects of parents' income, and the costs and benefits of rearing children on childbearing. According to this perspective, the number of children will decline as the costs associated with raising children increase, and the benefits associated with having children diminish. The NHE perspective largely attributes the fertility decline in Western countries in recent decades to changes in the labor market and the education system, especially to the better options for women to engage in paid employment, which entails higher opportunity costs for women who stop working to give birth and raise children (Becker, 1981: 251).[5] In looking at the costs of rear-

[5] Of course, the economic perspective has developed further since Gary Becker's formulation of the NHE and has tried to react to the criticism brought forward. But this is not the place to discuss the

ing children, researchers often also deal with institutional systems, such as family policies or the provision of childcare institutions, and the extent to which they enable mothers to work (e.g., Chesnais, 1996; Sainsbury, 1996; McDonald, 2000). Presently, economic insecurities are also considered to be one reason for fertility postponement or childlessness (Tölke & Diewald, 2003; Mills & Blossfeld, 2003, 2005; Schmitt & Winkelmann, 2005; Bernardi, Klärner, & von der Lippe, 2008).

By contrast, cultural approaches explain fertility changes as mainly to the result of shifts in values and norms infused by processes of societal modernization and individualization. Figuring very prominently in this approach is the concept of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), which posits that rising education and employment opportunities for women, together with shifts towards more egalitarian values (e.g., gender equality) and post-materialist orientations (referring to Inglehart, 1977; 1990) foster new living arrangements and the postponement of parenthood (van de Kaa, 2001). According to the SDT, these developments lead to a decrease in fertility rates, which will, over the long-term, fall below the replacement level (Lesthaeghe & Neidert, 2006). Because individuals do not need to follow traditional life paths, norms and values anymore, but rather gain the opportunity to choose among a variety of alternative options, these changes lead to a pluralization of family and living arrangements (Zapf et al., 1987) including short-time relationships, unmarried parents, couples without children, couples living apart together, single parents as well as various stepfamily constellations. The extent to which the "normal" model of family has lost its orienting function is highly disputed. Some researchers stress the continuities arguing that despite all changes still most persons want to become parents in their lives and most children grow up in a family with two (married) parents. Others emphasize that having children is no longer self-evident, that the transition to parenthood is no longer a "natural" status passage in the life course, but a choice individuals (resp. couples) can take or not. Additionally, having children competes with other life goals, which individuals often consider or experience as being incompatible with being parents (Huinink, 1995). It is argued that the large number of alternatives individuals have to choose from can lead to postponement, because the decision is difficult to make, and because the social acceptance of life paths that exclude (at least for some time) having children lead to postponement and voluntary childlessness (Kaufmann, 1995; Huinink, 1995). Researchers have found that countries in which so-called "post-materialistic values"

development of this theoretical strand, rather I would like to stress that, despite the many variations and nuances at hand, the economic perspective is by and large characterized by taking an individualistic approach to human behavior, modeling the fertility decision-making mainly as rational choice process, and looking at how the costs and gains of having children are balanced.

have gained importance have experienced the most significant fertility declines (Lesthaeghe & Meekers, 1986; Klein, 1990). People who value self-realization and personal freedom often do not want children as much as people who do not stress these values (Beck-Gernsheim, 1989; Schneewind & Vascovic, 1996; Ruckdeschel, 2004). Some researchers state that the "post-modern" family has experienced the dethronement of the "king child" (Ariès, 1980). For (western) Germany, some scholars argue that there is a culture especially impeding family formation. While Burkart (2007) talks about the advancement of a "culture of doubt", which strains individuals' willingness to take long-term-binding decisions – as that to become parents, Dorbritz (2008) perceives a "culture of childlessness" which has spread and leads to a declining desire for children.

The economic and the cultural perspectives have been criticized and challenged on various points for the theoretical premises they make as well as by empirical results standing against their hypotheses, but it would lead to far to present these discussions here in detail. I shall focus on one common point that is criticized in the economic as well as in the cultural perspective on social phenomena in general: they focus on either individual behavior on the micro level, or on social structures on the macro level, while neglecting the linkages between them. Whereas the economic perspective takes a more "undersocialized" view of the individual as a rational and atomized actor pursuing his self-interest and maximizing his/her benefits, the cultural perspective rather takes an "oversocialized" conception of man as obedient to social norms and values, internalized through socialization (see Granovetter, 1985). Network researchers therefore agree that individual behavior should instead be studied in its relational context. Individuals are neither fully independent from other persons, nor do they blindly follow societal norms. By regarding individuals as being embedded in networks of interpersonal relations network, researchers attempt to combine the micro level of individual behavior with the macro level of social structures, thereby allowing for human agency as well as structural influences. This new perspective on social phenomena can contribute to their better understanding.

2.3 The Social Network Perspective in Family and Fertility Research

In recent decades, the relevance of personal relationships and social interactions has been increasingly acknowledged in explanations for fertility decline (Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996; Kohler & Bühler, 2001; Behrman, Kohler, & Watkins, 2002; Bühler & Fratczak, 2007). Empirical research has, for example, shown that the diffusion of new values along channels of communication and interaction was a driving force behind the First and Second Demographic Transition (Wat-

kins, 1986; Cleland & Wilson, 1987; Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996; Nazio & Blossfeld, 2003).

A very prominent field of research on social interaction effects is the diffusion of contraceptive use in developing countries (Montgomery & Casterline, 1993, 1996; Entwisle, Rindfuss, Guilkey, Chamratrithirong, & Sawangdee, 1996; Valente, Watkins, Jato, van der Straten, & Tsitsol, 1997; Kohler, 1997, 2000; Palloni, 2001; Bühler & Kohler, 2004). This research stresses the role of communication networks for the diffusion of new behavior: actors exchange information and evaluations on the use of contraceptives, as well as on the outcome (having fewer children) in informal networks. Individuals who are in contact with many persons who practice family planning successfully have better access to positive information on contraceptive methods, and are therefore more likely to adopt these methods themselves (Kincaid, 1994; Valente, 1995).

Another strand of research dealing with social interactions is centered on the concept of social capital (Bühler & Philipov, 2005; Philipov, Spéder, & Billari, 2006; Bühler & Fratczak, 2007). This research focuses on material resources and various forms of social support exchanged in social networks, showing that supportive networks facilitate the realization of fertility intentions (Bühler, 2007). However, these studies have been conducted exclusively in countries in transition (Central and Eastern Europe), countries in which the public social system is weak, and which have a strong tradition of interpersonal support.

Studies focusing on social interactions in order to explain current fertility changes, such as late childbearing and growing childlessness, are rare in Western countries. However, it has been argued that, even for developed countries, an individualistic perspective on fertility is not sufficient (Kohler, 2000), and including social effects can offer new insights into fertility behavior (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996: 162). Research on intergenerational support in Western countries (Aquilino, 2005; Mandemakers & Dykstra, 2008) indicates the existence and relevance of various forms of reciprocal support between parents and children. Research on intergenerational transfer of fertility patterns and the transmission of family values and ideals in the US and other Western countries show positive correlations across generations and among siblings (Axinn, Clarkberg, & Thornton, 1994; Murphy & Wang, 2001; Steenhof & Liefbroer, 2008). Research on the influence of parental behaviors during childhood on children's behavior as adults shows, for example, that daughters of working mothers work more hours than daughters of mothers were homemakers (van Putten, Dykstra & Schippers, 2008). In addition to relatives, other relationships, such as those with peers, are important factors of secondary socialization affecting fertility, as research on teenage pregnancies has shown (Billy & Udry, 1985; Arai, 2007). However, this research considers specific relationships, and does not take an

explicit network perspective, which usually stresses the relevance of a variety of relationships for an actor and focuses on the *patterns of relationships* which provide or constrain opportunities for individual action (Wasserman & Faust, 1999). One important step towards analyzing network effects on fertility behavior in Western countries was taken by Bernardi (2003) in her qualitative research on Italian couples. Analyzing the influence of personal relationships on fertility decisions, she identified influential relationships (stressing the relevance of parents and siblings as well as peers and acquaintances) and four mechanisms of social influence: social learning, social pressure, social contagion, and subjective obligation. However, also this study does not confront network structure with fertility related attitudes and behavior.

In sum, research on social networks and fertility in a Western context, though often thought to be promising, has rarely been conducted. This study therefore covers new ground by analyzing social networks and fertility in a Western country, namely western Germany.

2.4 Challenges of Research on Social Networks and Fertility in a Western Context and Research Questions

Although there is reason to believe that personal relationships, and maybe also social network structures, are relevant factors when individuals think about family formation (given the results from research on intergenerational transmission of fertility patterns, on intergenerational support, and on peer influences on teenagers in Western countries presented previously), there are also indicators that personal relations may – especially in a Western context – play a minor role. Given the high prevalence of mass media, the access to the Internet as well as to public and private consulting services in developed countries, one could assume that communication networks are not very relevant for distributing information. Additionally, in countries with well-functioning market economies and public welfare services, social support networks may not be too relevant for individual behavior. Thus, in conducting research in western Germany, I run the risk of finding that social networks are not very influential on individual fertility decision-making. However, we know for example from the discussion on the "crowding in"/"crowding out" hypotheses, that the relationship between the welfare state and social support is rather complex. While some economists have suggested that public services may "crowd out" private support within families (e.g., Roberts, 1984), family researchers have challenged this approach, stressing that welfare expansion can also encourage private support ("crowding in"-hypothesis, Künemund & Rein, 1999). Empirical research has shown, for exam-

ple, that social support for the elderly is stronger in countries which provide a strong infrastructure of public services (Motel-Klingebiel, Tesch-Roemer, & von Kondratowitz, 2005). Concerning our topic, the question arises of how "crowding in" or "crowding out" functions in the case of childcare: if public kindergartens and private babysitters are easily available, do they replace social support provided by personal ties, and as a consequence, does social support in childcare become unnecessary? Or do they rather encourage social support, because knowing that they will not have to take care of the child regularly for many hours, network partners may be more willing (and also able) to offer their support? We therefore need to explore the meaning individuals assign to support in childcare, and the access they have to this form of support.

The question of the role of social support shows how little we know about social interactions and fertility in Western contexts. Apart from Bernardi's study on Italy, little is known about the mechanisms of social influence on the micro level. The existing studies on social influences on fertility behavior often stay at the macro level, analyzing the diffusion of certain fertility outcomes over time and space (e.g., Montgomery & Casterline, 1993). The hypotheses concerning the underlying mechanisms of social influence are often rather simplistic (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996; Chattoe, 2003). For example, for the mechanism of social learning, nothing is said about the content of information exchanged, about how respondents evaluate the information, and about the effect of within-network variation, or having network partners who convey different or even contradictory information. In addition to learning through *talking* about fertility, social learning also includes learning by *observing* the fertility behavior of others – a process that cannot be captured by studying only communication networks. Bernardi's (2003) Italian study sheds light on various forms, contents, and evaluations involved in the process of social learning. For example, she indicates that certain conversational topics are limited: discussions of childlessness are often considered out of bounds, usually because childlessness is regarded either as caused by a medical problem, or by personal selfishness. As a consequence, neither childless couples nor their network partners wish to raise the topic in conversation in order not to be exposed to criticism for selfishness, or to embarrassment in case the couple is infertile. Therefore, the opportunities for learning about voluntary childlessness are limited, and the diffusion of this "new" behavior via processes of social learning is inefficient in this cultural setting. For western Germany, we will have to see if talking about childlessness is similarly avoided.

Just as the mechanisms at work are poorly understood, relatively little is known about the "relevant others". Studies on social interactions and fertility mainly ask about the people with whom ego talks about fertility, and assume that

they are the fertility-relevant network partners. This tends to emphasize the role of (a simplistic view of) the mechanism of social learning. Persons who might be relevant for the effect of other mechanisms of social influence are not included in the networks collected.

In sum, there is some evidence that social influences can be at work, but these influences have rarely been explored in detail and or analyzed in a Western context – and if they have been, the focus was mainly on one mechanism and one "relevant other", not on looking at the issue from a network perspective, trying to analyze a full range of influences, and thereby also exploring the relative importance of each. By identifying the people relevant in fertility decision-making, and by locating them in the network of social relationships, this study therefore breaks new ground. The identification of individuals who comprise the relevant social network for each individual person is a challenging endeavor, especially since individuals in developed countries have a large variety of formal and informal contacts (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996), not limited to their local communities, and fostered by inexpensive and easily accessible means of transportation and communication – not to mention the impact of mass media. Indeed, the correct identification of relevant network partners is the most delicate issue in social network research (Hollstein, 2006) and should be based on well-grounded hypotheses. Acknowledging that the potential relevance of network partners can only be identified if one knows more about the mechanisms of social influence, the persons involved, and the effects of these mechanisms on individual behavior, this study seeks to explore the role of young adults' personal relationships and social networks as they think about having children, and make choices about parenthood.

Additionally, this study covers new ground by collecting structured network data and relating it to respondents' accounts of fertility-related attitudes and behavior, as well as their social interactions and personal relations. This calls for a specific research design, which allows for combining features of an explorative study focusing on subjective perspectives with the standardized collection of social network data, as we will discuss in Chapter 3.

From the main research interest, the following subtopics and questions emerge, and shall be addressed in subsequent chapters, starting with Chapter 4:

1. The subjective framework of meanings and relevance concerning the transition into parenthood and family extension: What are young adults' ideas, wishes, expectations, plans, and attitudes regarding their life-courses in general, and on family formation in particular? What factors are relevant in their conversations about family formation? What do they think about childlessness? (Chapter 4)

2. Social Relations: What personal relationships do young adults have, and what is the quality and intensity of these relationships? What does their social network look like? (Chapter 5.1)
3. Processes of social influence: How is social influence exerted? What are the mechanisms of social influence? What persons are influential? What are the roles of selection effects and network dynamics? (Chapter 5.2)
4. Social Influence and Network Structure: What is the relationship between social networks, processes of social influence, and fertility intentions? (Chapter 5.3)
5. How does social network research advance our knowledge on modernization processes and fertility decline in Western countries? (Chapter 6)

3 Methodological Approach and Research Design

The present study is part of a research project on social networks and fertility in northern Germany led by Laura Bernardi (Bernardi, Keim, & von der Lippe, 2006; Bernardi et al., 2008). This research project has been designed to compare social networks and fertility-related attitudes and intentions in two settings: in one city in eastern Germany (Rostock), and in one highly comparable city in western Germany (Lübeck). I have been working on this comparative project from the beginning in 2004. I was involved in designing the study and constructing the guideline, I carried out the field work in Lübeck, and analyzed the data – partly together with my colleagues, when comparing the two settings (Bernardi & Keim, 2007; Bernardi, Keim, & von der Lippe, 2007), and partly alone when concentrating on the Lübeck data only. The language in this chapter (using "the research team" and "we") reflects the fact that the methodological approach and research design have been developed and discussed within the research team. From this work, two methodological papers have evolved (Bernardi et al., 2006, 2007). When I discuss experiences from my fieldwork, my evaluations, and my analysis of the Lübeck data only, I return to the first person. Team research is not without challenges, as it involves bringing together the ideas and perspectives of different researchers. Nevertheless, this present study benefited considerably from being embedded in a comparative research project, and from the discussions and reflections in the research team.

When selecting a research design, it is essential to choose a design which is both suitable for the research interest and research questions, and practical in the specific research setting (Maxwell, 1996). Central to the Rostock-Lübeck project is the question of how social network structures influence individual fertility choices. Researching this issue requires an exploration of the subjective framework of meanings and relevance concerning the transition into parenthood and family extension, the role personal relationships play in this transition, the ways in which social influence is exerted. All of these questions call for qualitative research methods that allow us to explore a phenomenon about which little is known, and which stresses the actor's perspective. In contrast, researching respondents' personal relationships, their social networks, and the role of network structure for processes of social influence, calls for quantitative research methods that allow us to collect comparable data on network structures in a standardized

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way. In the Rostock-Lübeck project, my colleagues and I have, therefore, selected a mixed-methods research design which combines qualitative and standardized instruments of data collection (Bernardi et al., 2007).

The mixed-methods approach and its methodological basis shall be explained and presented in the first part of this chapter. The second part then deals with the instruments of data collection. In the third section, a special characteristic of the research design is introduced and explained: the collection of data from both egos and alters in order to obtain different perspectives on the same issue. In the fourth section, I discuss the sampling strategy and selection of respondents. Finally, I will introduce the strategy of data analysis.

3.1 A Mixed-Method Approach

Although mixed-methods approaches have been used in various fields of research, only a few empirical mixed-methods studies deal with fertility-related topics (e.g., Short, Chen, Entwisle, & Fengying, 2002). A focus on personal relations and fertility is extremely rare. One recent exception is a study on the impact of different life trajectories – such as entry into the labor market, geographical mobility, and family formation – on the size and composition of personal networks in France (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005), while we are interested in the inverted effect of social network influences on family formation. Our research therefore broke new ground with the design of this study.

A mixed-method approach combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches within one study, while also answering research questions one methodology alone could not address (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). As presented before, our research aims at:

- analyzing late births and childlessness from a social networks perspective;
- exploring how personal relations affect individual attitudes, plans, and intentions regarding having children, and what kinds of relationships are relevant in a Western European setting in which fertility decisions are usually seen as a "private" decision of the couple;
- stressing the combination of structural and actor-centered perspectives possible in network research, which entails a) analyzing and comparing the network structure, and b) including the actors' perspectives, or the meanings individuals give to their personal relations and interactions; and
- identifying social influences, which also includes addressing the issue of selection effects and of how and why networks change (network dynamics).

Some of these aims clearly demand qualitative research methods. Because little is known about social influences on fertility-related attitudes, fertility intentions, and behavior in Western countries, the study should have an explorative character. Qualitative research instruments are especially suitable for exploratory research, as qualitative research follows the guiding principles of openness to the subject, consideration of the subjective perspectives of the persons involved and their multidimensionality, and gaining an understanding of the subjective meanings individuals give to their action (Flick, 2002). Research instruments that follow these principles allow us to explore a topic and give a "thick description" (Geertz, 1983) – in the case of our research interest – of the personal relationships and processes of social influence involved in the process of thinking about family formation. In social network research, qualitative research elements are suitable for understanding the *formation* and *dynamics* of networks, because collecting network data with a qualitative research approach allows the respondents to retrospectively indicate network changes and to explain how – from their perspective – these changes came about, and what the changes in their personal relationships mean to them (Hollstein, 2006).

However, other research aims call for quantitative research methods. We want to learn more about network structures and their impact on individual's fertility; therefore we need to collect an adequate amount of comparable network data. This requires a sample size which is not too small, and a standardized instrument for the collection of network data. For this reason, we apply a mixed-methods research strategy that combines open and standardized procedures of data collection, and aims for a (for qualitative projects) rather large sample size, which will produce qualitative insights into individual perceptions and meanings, as well as standardized measures.

The practical realization of a mixed-methods procedure is demanding. From a theoretical point of view, it can be difficult due to the different epistemological positions and different research cultures the qualitative and quantitative methods are based on (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). However, many authors stress that "there are more overlaps than differences" between both research approaches (Brannen, 2005: 175) and argue for a pragmatic way of dealing with mixed-methods research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Researchers have developed various practical approaches to the design of mixed-method studies, and distinguish between a combination of both methods at the level of data collection, as well as at the level of data analysis (e.g., Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Since I will discuss the strategy of data analysis in Section 3.5, I shall here focus only on the process of data collection. In considering our strategy, the research team faced three main questions:

1. How can we sample a sufficient number of respondents to provide us with enough cases for quantitative analysis, but not so many that in-depth exploration of each case becomes impossible?
2. How shall we combine the qualitative part of data collection with the strongly structured instruments for collecting network data?
3. How can we deal with the fact that mixing two methods makes data collection time intensive?

The first issue, the sampling of respondents, required an initial compromise: while qualitative sampling is intended to be representative or "typical" for a phenomenon, quantitative sampling is intended to be representative for a population. While the former usually comprises a smaller sample size and a circular process of collecting and analyzing data, the latter usually demands a larger sample size and a linear process of first collecting and then analyzing all data. We found a feasible compromise for combining the different sampling logics in setting a minimum number of respondents who should have certain characteristics (e.g., residence in eastern or western Germany, level of education, gender; see Section 3.4). Thus, the sample is large enough to provide an adequate basis for statistical analyses distinguishing subgroups, but small enough so we could conduct extensive qualitative interviews with each respondent. Additionally, we limited the population under study by restricting our sample to respondents with medium or higher education, excluding respondents from lower social strata. Our sampling procedure is adequate for answering our research questions on the relationship between networks structures and composition and for example the attitudes towards childbearing, but it does not allow for a generalization of the results of the quantitative data, e.g., the distribution of network types in a population, because the respondents were not selected randomly.

In answering the second question regarding how qualitative and quantitative parts should be combined, we had to choose the combination and sequencing of the research tools (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), while also considering the possible influence the two different kinds of instruments might have on each other. From a qualitative research standpoint, interviewer questions should be open and allow the respondent to present his/her own perspective of the issue. It is crucial for the interviewer to encourage the respondents to answer at length and in detail about their experiences, ideas, plans. etc.; while closed questions, such as those that allow only a yes/no answer, have to be avoided. Including structured instruments for collecting network data may disturb the flow of the interview and hinder the respondents in presenting their views openly. Two alternatives would be conceivable. 1) A single interview session could be divided into two parts, one for the qualitative interview and one for the standardized

collection of network data. Then, both methods would hold equal status (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). 2) The collection of network data could be embedded in the qualitative interview; i.e., the qualitative method would be allowed to dominate (Johnson et al., 2007). We have decided in favor of the second alternative, both because we wanted to use the instruments for collecting network data, and because we wanted to induce narrations on social relations. In order not to disturb the narrative flow of the interview, we placed the more structured tools in the second half of the interview. Our research experiences showed that this strategy of combining the instruments functioned well and was extremely effective. The respondents started narrating in detail about their past experiences, current situations, and future plans Most respondents maintained this narrative style when the network tool was introduced, and, when filling in the network chart (see Section 3.2.2), they provided rich accounts of the persons identified, including their characteristics and the nature of their relationships. However, some respondents had to think more about how to fill in the chart, and for them, the flow of the interview indeed lost momentum. But, after finishing the network chart, they could be encouraged to take up the narrative style again.

From our experience, using a network chart as a research tool within a qualitative interview was beneficial for respondents, as well as for interviewers. For the respondent, the use of the network chart provided cognitive assistance as they tried to recall and describe their personal relationships in the interview. Particularly respondents with large networks easily were able to keep track of the people they have already mentioned. The network chart also supported interviewers in collecting network data in a systematic way, and helped them in answering specific questions about each network partner mentioned, e.g., about how they feel about having children. However, from a research standpoint that focuses on standardization and comparability, letting the respondents talk while filling in the chart may have lead to interferences. Concerning the network size, for example, two hypotheses are conceivable: those who talk more may 1) more easily "forget" certain network partners because they focus so much on talking about the others; or 2) they may indicate even more network partners, because while talking extensively about certain people, they remember other people with whom they are in contact. Indeed, those respondents who talked a lot while filling out the chart also tended to be the ones who indicated a large number of network partners. Certainly, this relationship can also be based on the fact that certain psychological characteristics (e.g., extrovertedness) are connected positively with both talkativeness in an interview, and with the size of the network. Thus, for the purposes of our analysis we must keep in mind that there may be interferences with network size. However, we have no reason to presume that there are interferences concerning other network measures, such as density or tie

strength. Moreover, regarding the network composition, there should not have been much interference because we employed standardized probes for potentially relevant network partners; thus, even if the respondents talked a lot and became distracted in their narrations, each respondent was probed for certain groups of persons.

The third challenge of a mixed methods design is a problem any research design faces: how to combine an almost unlimited research interest with limited resources. However, mixing methods to allow for the application of two different research instruments in one study is especially time intense. Given our large sample (due to the network approach, combining ego and alter interviews) we did not want to use more than one interview session per interviewee. Additionally, each interview was not to take more than 90 to 120 minutes, in part to allow for the time constraints the respondents may face. After the initial interviews, we realized that both the first narrative part and the more standardized network part each took easily more than an hour. Although in most cases the respondents did not mind if the interview took longer than 90 minutes, as they had kept the whole afternoon/evening free for the interview, there were also respondents with limited time available. In these cases, the second part of the interview was in danger of being marginalized. In response to these problems, we cut after the first four interview questions on personal relationships in the first part of the interview, and posed these questions in a more specific way in the second part of the interview. This made it possible to reduce interview time if necessary to 90 minutes. However, most of my interviews took around two hours.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In this study, our research team has applied a combination of four research instruments: a semi-structured interview, a network chart, a network grid, and a socio-demographic questionnaire (Bernardi et al., 2006). They shall be presented in detail in this section.

3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview

The research questions require an instrument of data collection that allows for a degree of openness, but also maintains the focus on the research topic. Our research team found this combination in semi-structured interviews as the problem-centered interview (Witzel, 1982, 1985, 2000) – a tool with which the researchers had previous experiences (Keim, 2003; von der Lippe, 2004). The

problem-centered interview is based in the traditions of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999), and many authors describe it as adequate method for combining deductive (i.e., theoretically pre-structured) and inductive (i.e., open) elements (Mey, 1999: 145). It draws on the method of the narrative interview developed by Fritz Schütze (1977). This form of interview seeks to collect the respondents' subjective perspectives by using narrative incentives. The respondents are asked to report in detail about a certain issue. The resulting longer narrations allow for deeper insights into the respondents' experiences, perceptions, and the meanings they assign to certain issues. Narrative incentives are also helpful in discouraging social desirability and short answers on a superficial level (Schütze, 1977). In contrast to the narrative interview, which has a special structure containing one very general narrative incentive and further follow-up questions, and is therefore very well suited to areas such as biographical research (Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 1997), the problem-centered interview allows for a greater focus on a special research topic, such as, in my case, family formation and personal relations. While employing narrative incentives, the problem-centered interview combines these incentives with questions on the research topic that are asked of each respondent regardless of what the respondents have been talking about so far, and regardless of the meanings they attach to certain issues. Thus it can also ensure that the respondents do not stray too far from the main research issue when talking about their experiences and views (Witzel, 1982). The more topic-centered questions in the guideline were, for example, questions about the desire for children, which were asked of respondents who did not come to speak about the issue on their own when presenting their past experiences and future plans. Additionally, we have included questions that were designed specifically to help us learn more about personal relationships and processes of social influence. The interview guideline consists of the following thematic parts:

- the life-course since leaving school;
- professional development and future plans;
- the partnership;
- family formation and having children, or childlessness;
- personal relationships, social influences, and the social network; and
- general values and life goals.

The interview starts with a very broad and open narrative incentive, which asks about the evolution of the respondent's life after leaving school:

> *Our study mainly focuses on how young adults arrange and form their lives. We conduct these interviews to find out how the lives of our interview partners have developed since leaving school. What have they done, what experiences have they had, what form does their life currently take, and how do they see their future… Therefore, I would now like to ask you to tell me how your life has developed since, for example, leaving school. You can take your time and elaborate in detail on the individual life stages and their sequence.*

Then it is up to the respondents to decide whether they want to talk more about their educational and professional development, or if they also want to integrate narrations of partnership and family formation. They have much room to present what they feel has been important in their lives, and how they evaluate different spheres of life. Often with this incentive, the respondents produced a rather long narration about their life, which provided clues for asking further questions. These questions were arranged in the guideline according to their main topics (i.e., profession, partnership, family formation, personal relationships, values, and life goals), but the order of the questions in the interview did not have to follow this model. Rather, the interviewer chooses when to ask a question and in what way to ask a question based on how the respondents present their views and experiences during the interview. This helps to ensure a narrative flow which mostly follows the logic of the interviewee, but does not necessarily correspond to the logic of the guideline.

In order to learn more about processes of social influence, the guideline employs a strategy of direct and indirect questions on social influences, as well as probes that help to identify intended and unintended influences, or influences that the respondent may or may not be aware of.

The guideline was used in three versions: one for childless respondents (ego and alter), which focuses on having the first child and childlessness; one for respondents with children (ego and alter), which focuses on their experiences with having their first child, and any plans they may have for an additional child; and one for respondents from the older generation with adult children (mostly egos' parents), which asks them about their past experiences with family formation, how they view their children's situation today, and what advice they would give the younger generation.

3.2.2 Network Chart

This research seeks to collect comparable network data and determine the structures of the social networks. It is therefore insufficient to simply talk about personal relationships in the qualitative interview; rather, we need a more struc-

tural and systematic approach for collecting network data. Otherwise, we would not know if certain people were not mentioned in the interview because they do not exist (e.g., a cousin, if ego's aunt is childless), because the respondent is not in (frequent) contact with them (anymore) (e.g., a cousin who lives far away), or because a respondent has simply forgotten to mention this person in the flow of the interview. A structured approach for collecting network data also helps to ensure that questions on network partners' and relational characteristics are asked for each person mentioned in the network.

In the Rostock-Lübeck project, we were interested in ego-centered network data, which focuses on the relationships ego is embedded in. A structured method for collecting such network data is the name generator/ interpreter-approach, a two-step procedure that elicits network partners, as well as their characteristics. In a first step, relevant network partners are elicited by one or more name generating question, then so-called name-interpreting questions are used to collect the network partners' characteristics. These can include questions on socio-demographic characteristics of alter (e.g., age, education) and characteristics of the relationship (e.g., type and quality of relationship, frequency of contact). Graphical approaches have also been used, such as creating a network chart of concentric circles (e.g., Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Straus 2002). The center of the circles designates ego (which may, for example, be indicated as "you", as in Kahn & Antonucci, 1980) and the respondents are asked to place their network partners into the chart.

Our research team opted for a graphic approach because it can be easily applied within a qualitative interview (see Section 3.1). We assumed that, unlike the rather monotonous question-answer routine of the generator/interpreter approach, the use of a network chart would not disturb the interview flow, and would allow the respondents to continue talking freely about their perspectives. This is vital for us because, due to the explorative character of our research, we need to collect a large variety of network partners, and we are interested in various characteristics of these networks partners and their relationship to ego. Thus a generator/interpreter approach of first eliciting a large number of network partners, and then asking a large number of routine interpreter questions about each of them (e.g., about the network partners' characteristics, such as educational level, marital status, and number of children; as well as about the relational characteristics, such as frequency and duration of contact, closeness, and role relation) can become a very monotonous, tiring, and also time-consuming procedure.

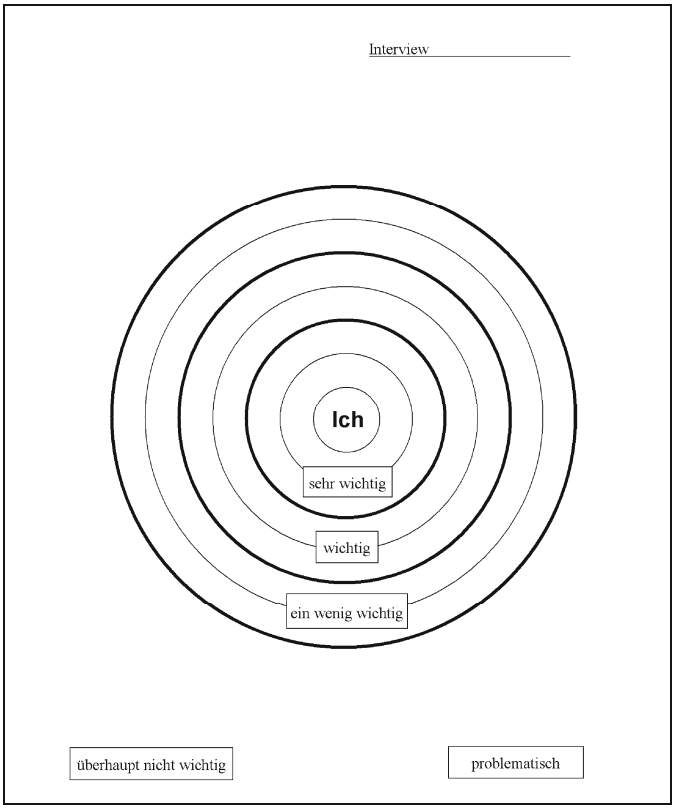
The most substantial decision that has to be made when collecting network data is how to define the relations that are to be included in the network:

> It is important that network researchers consciously and clearly specify what they need to know about networks and what they mean by 'relation'. The findings of network research can be strongly influenced by the measures of 'relation' used to define the network. Therefore, researchers should pay as much attention to the methods they use to identify network memberships as they do to the analysis of data describing those networks (McCallister & Fischer, 1978: 146).

For the purpose of this study, since little is known about relations that could be relevant concerning family formation, a network generator is needed which elicits a large variety of persons. Then we would try to find out in the course of research if and how these persons are relevant. We also need to elicit rather large networks in order to learn how network characteristics, such as density or the existence of cliques, are relevant when young adults think about having children. Classic name generators used in network research, such as the Burt and Fischer generators, elicit on average 2.6 (Burt generator) or 7.8 (Fischer generator) network partners (Pfenning & Pfenning, 1987). While the Burt-generator asks only for persons with whom one has been talking about important matters over the last six months, the Fischer generator consists of a series of 10 name-generating questions that can be used to collect network partners from different social contexts (e.g., asking for certain supportive relations, for certain topics of conversation, or for social and recreational activities). In the graphic approach presented by Antonucci (1986), the respondents are asked to enter into the diagram "people who are important in your life right now" (p. 10), and the three concentric circles are labeled "those people to whom you feel so close that it is hard to imagine life without them" (the innermost circle), "people to whom you may not feel quite that close but who are still important to you" (the middle circle), and "people whom you haven't already mentioned but who are close enough and important enough to your life that they should be placed in your personal network" (the outer circle) (Antonucci, 1986: 10).

Our research team has adapted this procedure for our purposes, and we have developed a network chart consisting of three graded concentric circles around a center containing a word representing ego (*Ich*) (see Figure 4). Each circle represents different levels of the perceived relevance of the network partner. The innermost circle is labeled "very important" (*sehr wichtig*); the medium circle, "important" (*wichtig*); and the outer circle, "of little importance" (*ein wenig wichtig*). In order to make it clearer to the respondent that in each of the rather large three circles persons may be positioned as more or less "important" to ego, we introduced another three circles subdividing the larger categories. So, finally, we used a diagram of six concentric circles.

Figure 4: The network chart



During our trial interviews we learned about the relevance of negative ties for family formation, and that some of our respondents find it difficult to insert these ties in the given categories because they did not want to see them side-by-side with their network partners who are important in a positive way – some placed them outside the circles, while others did not want to see their names on the paper at all. For these negative ties, we inserted two additional labels into the space outside the chart. The lower left corner is labeled "not important" (*überhaupt nicht wichtig*), and the lower right corner is reserved for persons perceived as "problematic" (*problematisch*). The distinction between "not important" and "problematic" is necessary because some respondents feel that certain ties were problematic in the past, but, in order to solve the problem, they have stopped the contact; therefore, they would not say that these ties are problematic currently,

but have, rather, become "not important at all". These persons are often role-relations the respondents believe should normally have an important position in an individual's life (such as fathers), or that others might expect would be relevant (such as aunts, uncles, and other kin).

The respondents were free to define "a relevant relationship". The interviewer asked them to indicate the first name of their network partners on colored and sticking markers, and to place them onto the network chart. The chart was introduced by a name-generating question which was read to each respondent:

> *This is a network chart, in which you can display your personal relationships. You are in the middle, and in the circles around you can place the persons you know and indicate how important they are currently to you. The two innermost circles should include persons who are very important to you, the following two circles persons who are important to you, and the two outer circles persons who are a little important to you. Outside the circles you can place persons who are currently not important or who are problematic.*

We have decided to use this rather vague stimulus on "importance" and give the respondents space to explain what this means to them. We used the open stimulus as a first step for exploring the variety of dimensions of relevance, and for assessing the kind of relationships relevant to fertility decision-making. While the respondents filled in the chart, we asked them to explain their choices in their own words, such as why a specific person was included, and why they placed them in a given circle. With this think-aloud technique, we also asked the respondents to specify how they interpreted the term "importance" each time. For further exploration, several questions were asked during the interview about each network partner's age, profession, residence, partnership status, parity, and attitudes towards having children; as well as about the frequency of contact and duration and quality of the relationship with the network partner.

To ensure comparability, the interviewers read the network-generating question to all respondents in the same wording. Probes on certain relationships are used systematically for kin, colleagues, neighbors, or persons related to leisure time activities if the respondents had not previously included them in the chart.

The network chart allows us to measure the network size, and indicates the composition of the network. It illustrates the relationships between our respondents (ego) and their network partners (alter); this is called the *first order star*. The relations between these network partners (the first order zone) are not included. Therefore, we have added as third instrument of data collection a network grid (see Section 3.2.3).

3.2.3 Challenges, Limitations, and Experiences with Generating Social Networks

One major challenge in network research is how to identify network partners (Hollstein, 2001). At the start of our project, we decided to collect three different networks: the first and main one using a very broad generator which asks for "important" persons, and two additional ones which focus on two types of ties that have been named as influential in fertility research (see Chapter 1). These are close ties, which are generated via a question similar to that used in the Burt generator, as well as supportive ties, generated via a generator which asks about persons ego would expect to be supportive if ego had a child, or who are currently supportive if ego is already a parent.

In the first network, the network generator is very broad and should generate a large number of ties. However, it is difficult to judge if all respondents have the same understanding of the term important, and, as a consequence, the comparability of the network chart would be limited. We have addressed this issue by embedding the network chart into the qualitative interview. Narrative incentives, questions about the relationships, as well as more direct questions about how the respondents define, for example, the term important, allow us to explore the meanings the respondents attach to their relationships. This provides us with a very extensive and nuanced view of respondents' social networks. The exploration of the term important showed that, for a large number of network partners, "importance" is equated with emotional closeness (e.g., to a partner, children, parents, or close friends), while it was less often used to indicate functional importance, such as professional contacts (e.g., an associate).

The two additional networks represent a more focused way of collecting network data, and should ensure better comparability focusing on one very specific relationship characteristic. However, employing three different network charts was very time consuming, and for persons who indicated a large number of network partners in the first chart, it was nearly impossible to produce in detail two more charts. After the first few interviews, we analyzed and compared the three charts. This comparison also showed that, in many cases, importance is strongly linked with closeness as well as with support: network partners labeled as very close were in most cases also those labeled as very important, while for supportive ties this was not necessarily the case (e.g., mothers with children who help each other out in childcare, but do not have to be close friends). The two specific charts in most cases did not provide new network partners who had not been indicated in the "importance" chart. As a consequence, we found that the additional value of these two specific charts was much less than the costs (in terms of time consumed). We thus decided to stick to the "importance" chart,

since it did not generate as many diverging persons as we had suspected. Therefore, we removed the two specific charts and included the two dimensions in the form of qualitative questions asking for close and supportive ties.

To sum up, the benefit of the "importance" network chart was that it allowed for the generation of a large number of network partners in a very broad way, which made it possible to explore relevant as well as less-relevant network partners, and to grasp structural peculiarities as the formation of cliques. Nevertheless, the comparability of the charts is still a difficult issue, and I will come back to this in the section on the data analysis, because here I had to take into account certain limitations of the approach.

3.2.4 Network Grid

The network grid allows us to ascertain in a standardized way to what extent the network partners are in contact among each other. Given that it is very time consuming to collect the ties among all network partners, especially in large networks, we use a network grid that focuses only on the 10 most important network partners, as indicated in the chart. The 10 most highly rated persons from the chart were therefore entered into a classic grid (see Figure 5). The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each person mentioned was acquainted or befriended with any other in the grid, ranked on a five-grade scale ranging from zero (*kennen sich gar nicht – do not know at all*) to four (*haben engen Kontakt/sind enge Freunde – are in close contact*). This scale allows us to establish the frequency of contact and the level of closeness. It becomes problematic for persons that are close but do not meet often, or for persons who know each other well, but currently are in conflict and have therefore stopped seeing each other. Here the data collection profited from being embedded in a qualitative interview in which doubts could be easily expressed and discussed.

Figure 5: The network grid

Netzwerk-partner	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1.										
2.										
3.										
4.										
5.										
6.										
7.										
8.										
9.										
10.										

0	1	2	3	4
kennen sich gar nicht	haben sich ein- oder zweimal getroffen	sehen sich von Zeit zu Zeit mal	kennen sich gut	haben engen Kontakt/sind enge Freunde

The network grid allows us to measure the tie strength between the 10 most important alters, as well as the network density, which will be explained in detail in Section 3.5 on the analyzing procedure.

3.2.5 Socio-Demographic Questionnaire

At the end of the interview, a short questionnaire collected systematic data on:

- ego's socio-demographic characteristics: age, residence, educational status, occupation, income, working hours per week, number and ages of children, religion;
- the socio-demographic characteristics of ego's current partner: e.g. age, educational status, occupation, number and ages of children;
- important characteristics of the partnership: duration of the relationship, duration of cohabitation, division of tasks in the partnership;
- socio-demographic characteristics of ego's parents, siblings and four closest friends: age, residence, duration of friendship, educational status, marital status, number and ages of children.

Since the information on alters is only collected from ego's perspective, the question arises of how reliable ego's statements on alter are. While ego's accounts on alter's socio-demographic characteristics seem to be valid (Laumann, 1969), ego's accounts on alter's attitudes are less valid (Pappi & Wolf, 1984). We therefore have decided to not only interview single respondents, but also several persons who are in close contact with each other. This allows us to gain deeper insights into social relations and the processes of social influence.

3.3 Ego and Alter Interviews

One special characteristic of this study's research design is the combination of ego and alter interviews: we not only asked certain individuals about their social relations, but included (if possible) some of our respondents' network partners into the sampling. Therefore, we have collected interviews with one main respondent (termed ego), and up to three of her/his most relevant network partners (termed alters).

Each main respondent was asked if his or her three most important network partners (alters) would agree to be interviewed. Contrasting ego and alter interviews promises several advantages. First, we learn from each respondent directly what they think about family formation, and how they view their network partner's situation. Second, ego and alter both describe their relationship and interactions, so that the analysis can draw on information from and the perspectives of both persons involved. Third, we can receive information from alter on ego that ego could not give, did not want to give, or forgot. This can be the case with potentially difficult and painful topics, such as disease, abortion, or artificial reproduction. Collecting ego and alter interviews and analyzing dyadic relations allows us to gain deeper insights into the exchanges between network partners and the meanings they assign to certain issues, and it allows us to study the various mechanisms of social influences and preconditions for the effectiveness of social influence. There are, however, a number of drawbacks associated with using such a design. (1) Interviewing ego and several alters quickly adds up to a very large number of respondents, which is an issue given the constraints in resources and time research projects are normally subject to. (2) Motivating alters to take part in the research is not always easy, and it can turn out that certain alter interviews cannot be arranged. (3) Issues of research ethics can be challenging for the researcher, and may demand reflection. For example, the interviewer must not pass on any information she/he received from ego to alter. This means that a question such as, "your partner/friend/son told us that....", must not be posed. However, the interviewer knows and should keep in the back of her head

what each respondent said in order to identify contradictions in both interviewees" accounts, and must then be prepared to formulate and pose a follow-up question in a neutral way. The management of the interview thus poses a challenge for the interviewer which goes beyond the normally required "double attention" (Wengraf, 2001). Rather, the interviewer needs to have "multiple attention": focusing not only on (1) listening carefully to the respondents and (2) managing the interview, or thinking about what questions to ask and in what depth (Wengraf, 2001); but also (3) remembering what ego and other interviewed alters have talked about in order to ask pointed questions, while (4) not revealing to alter in the formulation of the question what these persons have said for research ethic reasons.

Our experience was that the benefits outweigh the difficulties of the ego-alter design: alter often gave us information that ego did not want to/could not reveal, e.g., that someone underwent artificial insemination. It also helped us in interpreting certain passages to include the alters' perspective, especially of how they perceive and describe ego. Additionally, it allowed us to gain insights into the negotiations within a partnership, e.g., if one partner wanted to have a(nother) child soon, but the other did not (Bernardi et al., 2006).

3.4 Sampling

For the sampling of the respondents, the research team has developed a two-step procedure that could be applied in both research settings: first, we chose the main respondents (egos); then, in a second step after having conducted the interview with ego, we tried to establish contact with three of ego's most important network partners (alters). To meet the criteria of the mixed methods approach, the number of interviews had to be large enough to allow us to collect an adequate amount of comparable network data; on the other hand it had to be small enough to allow us to conduct in-depth interviews with each respondent. Additionally, the interviews should cover a variety of different family forms and network types, which would imply the need for a rather large ego sample. However, the need to include up to three alter-interviews in a project that is limited in time and resources called for a reduced number of egos. As a compromise, we aimed at 32 ego interviews in each setting, containing 16 men and 16 women, which would lead to a maximum of 96 alter-interviews. However, we assumed that many alters might not be willing to participate in the study. In the following, I describe how egos and alters were selected and contacted. Additionally, I provide insights into their willingness to participate in the research.

3.4.1 Sampling of Egos and Their Willingness to Participate

In qualitative research, respondents are rarely chosen based on a random sampling procedure; instead, the sampling focuses on a certain purpose (*purposive sampling*) (Maxwell, 1996: 70). Given the nature of our research question, four criteria were relevant: location, age, educational attainment, as well as partnership and parity.

The Location: the City of Lübeck

In Germany we find strong regional differences in fertility behavior and attitudes. One major dividing line can be found along the former border between to two German states. Almost two decades after the unification, we still find major differences in fertility behavior and attitudes towards having children in eastern and western Germany. As described above, the present study is part of a research project on social networks and fertility in northern Germany, which has been designed to compare two settings in eastern and western Germany (cf. Bernardi et al., 2006). The research group therefore selected two highly comparable cities from the north of Germany on the shores of the Baltic Sea: Rostock (eastern) and Lübeck (western). Both cities are comparable in the size of their resident population (around 200,000), their relatively high unemployment rate (13.8% in Lübeck compared with 7.6% in western Germany, and 18.2% in Rostock compared to 17.7% in eastern Germany in the year 2002), and because they shared the same religious, historic, and economic background, at least until after the Second World War. However, during the 40 years of post-war separation, the two parts of the country developed different fertility regimes that continue today (see Chapter 1).

Because my main interest in this study is in social networks and their effects, and not in different fertility regimes, I have chosen to focus on one local setting only in order to reduce variations between respondents based on the regions where they live. I have chosen to focus on the city of Lübeck. A western German city is especially interesting for three reasons:

- Compared to other western countries, western Germany has a comparatively high and growing percentage of the population who are remaining permanently childless (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2007: 11). Additionally, childlessness in western Germany seems to be to a higher degree desired and planned than in other countries: the share of childless persons aged 20 to 49 who indicate that they do not want to have any children is at 35% in western

Germany (Dorbritz & Ruckdeschel, 2007: 68). Therefore, especially in this context of rising voluntary childlessness, a historically rather "new" behavior, it will be interesting to study the role of social networks in diffusing this behavior: How do network partners perceive and deal with childlessness, and how is the social norm of having a child during the course of a person's life discussed and challenged within social networks?

- At the same time, however, there are also rather durable aspects of western German fertility: a) children are still mostly born by married couples or to parents marry shortly after the birth; b) if women choose to have children they usually have two children, and c) the division of tasks in the partnership follows mostly the traditional or a slightly modernized form of the male-breadwinner model, while dual-earner parents are rare. It will be interesting to study these holdovers in contrast to the ongoing changes with the network approach.
- Western German women are still older than eastern German women when they have their first child. Fertility postponement is especially pronounced in western Germany. With a median age at first birth of 29, Lübeck women are in line with western German average. One focus of our research will be to study how personal relations encourage or discourage childbirth, and therefore foster or hamper fertility postponement.

Certainly, focusing the sampling on only one city provides a very specific sample, and the respondent's characteristics, networks, attitudes and behaviors may differ from those of other western German respondents, which would make it difficult to generalize our results for a "western German" population. However, we can show that persons living in Lübeck are not very different from other western Germans in terms of their fertility behavior (e.g., in 2002, married mothers in Lübeck. as well as across Germany had their first child at an average age of 29).[6] Also, when I compare my qualitative results on family formation with results from other studies focusing on western Germany, I find that they are very well in line (see Chapter 4).

The Age-Range: Young Adults around Age 29

Since we are interested in the transition to parenthood, the respondents should belong to a cohort for which family formation is likely to be a salient issue. As a point of reference, we have chosen the median age of married women at the birth

[6] The Lübeck data is based on information from the Lübeck statistical office, the data on Germany stems from the *Statistisches Bundesamt* (Sozialpolitik Aktuell, 2009).

of their first child.[7] According to information from the Lübeck statistical office, the median age at first birth in 2002 was 29. I therefore chose age 29 as an orientation point for the age of the Lübeck main respondents (egos).[8]

The Educational Attainment: Medium and Higher Levels

Our research team has decided to focus on persons with medium education (*Realschul* degree), who left school after 10 years of schooling, and higher education (*(Fach-)Abitur*), who left school after 13 years of schooling and have with their degree acquired the right to study at university. Therefore, we sought out an ego sample which would include 32 persons for each city: 16 persons with medium education, and 16 persons with higher education.

Excluding persons with lower educational levels certainly limits the transferability of our study.[9] However, a complex design including ego and alter interviews which is subject to certain limitations in resources and time must find some ways to cut complexity in order to guarantee an in-depth analysis. At this point, I merely want to acknowledge that by omitting persons with lower educational attainment, this means that, for the western German sample, we are not including the group of women who are least likely to remain childless (Kreyenfeld, 2004). Our research team was discussing two main options: limiting the research to those with medium and higher education, or to those with lower and higher education, in order to include the most extreme groups. In the end, we decided against the second option because we wanted to put a thematic focus on fertility postponement and voluntary childlessness. These two issues are connected to persons with higher education (e.g., the discussions on childless academics) and longer terms of education. In the German educational system, especially those with medium or higher levels of education should be prone to extent their educational periods, and to therefore postpone childbearing. In this respect, our sampling strongly reflects our research interest.

We used a special strategy for recruiting our respondents that is connected to their education: in a first step, we did not sample for single persons, but for

[7] It is a peculiarity of German statistical data on births that the birth order can only be indicated for married women. In western Germany, most babies are born in wedlock, 81.4% of the newborns have married parents (Engstler & Menning, 2003: 76).

[8] Because in eastern Germany the median age at first birth was at 27, the age range was adapted for the eastern sample to around age 27 (Bernardi, Keim and von der Lippe, 2006).

[9] Almost one third of the 25-35 year-old population in Schleswig-Holstein, the federal state the city of Lübeck is located in, hold lower educational levels (*Hauptschul* degree) in 2002. A *Realschul* degree is held by 34% and a *(Fach-)Abitur* by 29% (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2009).

school classes. We sought out a) members of a school class from a *Realschule* who had a medium level of education (*Realschul* degree), had left school after 10 years of schooling in 1991, and were around age 29 at the time of the interview; and b) a members of a school class from a *Gymnasium* who had a higher level of education (*(Fach-)Abitur*), had left school after 13 years of schooling in 1994, and were also around age 29 at the time of the interview. We used this "school class approach" in order to ensure that the respondents grew up in a similar social environment and had experienced their formative period of adolescence together. We also assumed it would allow us to maximize personal relations among the respondents, because at least some old school friends would have kept contact with each other over the years (see the experiences of Townsend, 2002, with a similar sampling procedure in the US).

The plan was to establish contact to one or more persons from each school class via the schools, which have the addresses of the parents of their former pupils, or via schools' alumni clubs, and then to collect the contact details of other former classmates via snowball sampling. The sample of the main respondents (egos) was planned to include eight men and eight women from one *Gymnasium* class, and the same numbers from one *Realschule* class, which adds up to 32 persons in each city.

In the Lübeck study, I could only use the school-class approach for respondents from the *Gymnasium*. I chose a school which is located in a central part of Lübeck; the pupils are drawn from different areas of the city (some more, others not so well off). The teacher who hosts the school's web page brought me into contact with persons from a school class whose members graduated in 1994, and who were mostly between ages 29 and 30 at the time of the interview. The school class was just about to celebrate their decennial anniversary when I contacted them. The organizer of the party had established contact to most of the former classmates; that is, to 54 of 64 original classmates. On my behalf, he sent e-mails to all of them that explained my study and asked for their co-operation. Additionally, I briefly dropped by their class reunion to explain the project, take questions, and recruit some further interviewees. At the class reunion I also distributed a very short questionnaire, containing only three questions, asking for their current place of residence, partnership, status, and parity. If they were willing to be interviewed, they could provide their contact address. In this way, I collected background data on 45 class members. For practical reasons, I did not interview those who live abroad or in the south of Germany (eight persons), but chose persons who live in Lübeck or other northern German cities (also including Berlin). None of the graduates currently lives in eastern Germany. Relying on this background data and the willingness of 45 persons from this class to be interviewed, I was able to choose graduates in order to gain a broad variety in

characteristics as partnership status and parity. In the end, I was able to conduct 18 interviews with persons from this school class, two more than in the initial sampling plan, in order to make up for those respondents for whom I could not interview any alter.

The respondents were especially attracted to the study design because it focused on their school class. This motivated them to take part. In addition, many respondents were motivated to agree to an interview because their friends and acquaintances had already done so. Building on their friends' experiences, they felt they could trust that the study is scientific and not a promotional gag. Group pressure may have also played a role: they could expect that those who had participated in an interview would keep asking and encouraging them to take part in the study. Therefore, we were able to recruit many respondents who normally would not agree to be interviewed, (e.g.: *"I am a rather shy person. Normally I would not participate in an interview."*). We can therefore assume that, to some extent, our sample does not only consist of very open and sociable persons – which is an issue when one wants to analyze personal relationships.

For the respondents who had been enrolled in a school providing a medium level of education (*Realschule*) it was – despite an intense contacting phase – not possible to recruit persons from only one school class. The schools I contacted indicated that it is impossible for them to help me to contact their former students. One school principal directed me to an alumni web service on the Internet. Via this service, I contacted some persons from schools that were also located in the center of Lübeck, in rather middle class areas, who fit into the sampling scheme and who left school in 1991. I asked them if they a) would be willing to participate in the study, and b) are in contact with other former classmates. The response was discouraging. Most persons who answered indicated that they had little contact to former classmates and would not even meet them by chance in town. Another phase of contacting more persons using this alumni service led to a similar result: the persons who replied in most cases did not have any contacts to former classmates. Therefore, I picked a school class from which three persons had agreed to be interviewed, and one of them wrote that he/she could try to establish contacts to other former classmates. This finally led to five ego interviews with persons who graduated from the same school class in 1990 and were at the time of the interview between 30 and 33 years old. Additionally, I added three persons from the same school who graduated one to three years later, and were between 27 and 31 years old; as well as 10 respondents in a similar age range but from six different schools. Finally, I was able to conduct 17 interviews with persons who had been enrolled in seven different *Realschulen*, finishing school between 1984 and 1994. At the time of the interview, most were between

28 and 33 years old, but there were also few outliers, the youngest being age 27, and the oldest age 37.

Respondents who left school with a degree after 10 or 13 years of schooling did not necessarily end their educational careers at this point. Some of the Lübeck *Gymnasium* graduates took up university studies, while – to my surprise – many of the respondents who graduated from a *Realschule* went not only to a *Gymnasium* afterwards, but also pursued university education. Table 1 shows the number of main respondents recruited from each type of school class and the educational level they had reached at the time of the interview.

Table 1: Egos' former school class and current educational attainment

EGOS	**Lübeck**		**Total**
	Women	**Men**	
School class			
Realschule (medium level of education)	8	9	17
Gymnasium (higher level of education)	12	6	18
Current educational attainment			
Medium educational degree (*Realschulabschluss*)	4	5	9
High-school degree (*(Fach)-Abitur*)	5	3	8
University degree	9	3	12
Enrolled in education	2	4	6
Total	**20**	**15**	**35**

Certainly, focusing the sampling on only one (or few) school classes provides the basis for selective distortions. The school class approach may lead to very specific respondents (depending on the type of school), and may hinder a sampling for "different" cases. I addressed this by making sure that the schools were not "special" ("elite school" or "deprived area school"), but rather included students from different social backgrounds. In the case of the respondents with higher education, I was able to sample for a broad variety of respondents out of one classroom (e.g., concerning partnership situation and parity), because I had some general information on most of the school class members. For respondents with medium education, I had to rely on persons from different schools and classes, so that for them the challenge of selective distortion that could arise from choosing only one school class can be excluded.

Partnership and Parity

The egos were engaged in different types of partnerships at the time of the interview, and had varying numbers of children. I interviewed singles and persons who were living apart together with their partners (LAT), people who were cohabiting or married, as well as childless persons and parents with one or more children. Some respondents were recruited because I learned that they were voluntarily childless, or were long-term postponers. In the research team, we did not set a quota for partnership status or parity, but we tried to make sure that we would cover a variety of different partnership types and parities if available. Similarly, we sought to collect half of the interviews with men and half with women, which did not always work out, given a lower participation of men in Lübeck, see Table 2.

Table 2: Egos' partnership status and parity

EGOS	**Lübeck**		**Total**
	Women	**Men**	
Parity			
Childless	13	11	24
One child	6	3	9
Two and more children	1	1	2
Partnership status			
Married	8	7	15
Cohabiting	5	1	6
LAT	4	2	6
Single	3	5	8
Total	**20**	**15**	**35**

3.4.2 Selection of Alters and Their Willingness to Participate

For each main respondent (ego), our research team attempted to interview three network-partners (alters). Alters were selected during the interview with ego. The three persons ego placed closest to the inner circle into the network chart were chosen. At the end of the interview, the interviewer explained to ego that we would like to conduct interviews with the persons who are most relevant for her/him, and ego was asked to establish the contact to these persons. In most

cases, the alters were: one of ego's parents, the current partner, and a close friend.

In the Lübeck sample, some respondents agreed to this procedure and quickly established contact between their alters and the interviewer, while others indicated immediately that it would not be possible to interview their network partners.[10] Still others stated that they would ask their network partners, and reported a few days later that they had refused to be interviewed. The reasons or explanations for refusals given by ego were often that these persons would never agree to an interview, or would never agree to talk about this topic (e.g., "*she wouldn't do something like this,"* "*they don't like talking too much about themselves,"* or *"he does not like talking about these issues"*). Other reasons were that the network partners have little time for professional or private reasons, or that they are currently in a very difficult situation (for example, due to a serious health problem). It was especially difficult to find parents who would agree to an interview. They were often among the three most important persons, but only 10 out of 35 mothers agreed to be interviewed, and fathers could not be reached at all. All respondents involved in a relationship indicated their current partner among the three most important persons. From 28 existing partnerships, 11 partners could be recruited. Interviewing friends was much easier due to the study design, which focused on school classes. We were therefore able to establish various friendship-dyads, and recruited an additional four friends not from the school class as alters. The structure of the alter sample is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Sample structure of the alter sample

ALTERS	**Lübeck**		**Total**
	Women	**Men**	
Parents	9	0	9
Partners	4	7	11
Friends	4	0	4
Sibling	1	0	1
Total	**18**	**7**	**25**

The school class approach proved to be helpful because several of the main respondents interviewed are close friends; therefore, in addition to friendships between ego and alter, we also have friendship relations between two egos (sometimes also between two alters, if, for example, ego's partners are be-

[10] For a summary of the sampling experiences in the Rostock sample, see Bernardi et al., 2006.

friended with each other). The following table (Table 4) shows how many network partners were interviewed per ego in the Lübeck sample.

Table 4: Number of interviewed alters per ego

		Number of interviewed alters	
Ego only, no alter	12		
Ego and alter	23	One alter	3
		Two alters	6
		Three alters	14

Finally, in Lübeck, I was able to establish a sufficient number of relationships between egos and alters. These were mainly 32 friendship dyads, 11 partnership dyads and 10 parent-child dyads. Additionally, I have collected a few interviews from sibling-dyads and dyads composed of mother-in-law and son-in-law.

The data collection in Lübeck took place between May 2004 and February 2006. In total, I conducted 35 interviews with main respondents and 25 interviews with their alters, which adds up to 60 interviews. The structure of the realized sample, including characteristics of ego and the interviewed alters, is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Egos and young alters	**50**
Age range	25-37, Median: 30
Gender	
Men	22
Women	28
Current educational attainment	
Medium educational degree (*Realschulabschluss*)	13
High-school degree *((Fach-) Abitur*)	11
University degree	18
Enrolled in education	8
Parity	
Childless	31
One child	16
Two and more children	3
Partnership status	
Married	25
Cohabiting	8
Single	11
LAT	6
Older alters	**10**
Age range	43-62, Median: 58
Gender	
Women	10
Parity	
One child	1
Two children	7
Three and more children	2
Partnership status	
Married	7
Divorced	3
Total Interviews	**60**

3.5 Analysis

The analysis strategy of mixed-methods research studies is as complex as the study design regarding the combination of research instruments. Several authors have proposed models for data analysis (e.g., Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003), which vary greatly depending on the research aims, as well as on the design of the study. As I am unable to provide in this context a complete overview of all the models and decisions involved, I will cite only three major decisions the researcher has to face when designing the study to illustrate the complexity and broad range of analytic possibilities. The researcher has to decide if 1) data analysis should proceed *sequentially* (that is, first performing the qualitative analysis and after it is finished performing the quantitative analysis or vice versa), or *concurrently*, that is both at the same time; 2) if qualitative results should be quantified and/or vice versa, and then be brought together; and 3) if both data should be consolidated into "new" variables (see, Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003).

Given the exploratory character of the research presented in this thesis, I made most of these decisions during the analyzing process, in order to allow them to be informed by the results at hand. Therefore, coming back to the first point, the data analysis was meant to proceed *concurrently*, but also to include phases in which I concentrated on only one type of analysis. This analysis strategy enabled me, for example, to analyze certain network characteristics in the quantitative part which had come up in the analysis of the qualitative interviews. Regarding the second issue, the transformation of data into qualitative or quantitative information, I also did not predefine the procedure, but rather chose to transform the data if doing turned out to be useful during the process of analysis. Thus, for example, information on social support collected from the interviews and coded into certain categories was transformed into a quantitative scale in order to include this factor in the analysis of the networks. The third point, if data should be consolidated, was also not determined beforehand, but was only considered during the analysis process. For example, I compared qualitative accounts on social relations and the network measures, and found that they coincide in most cases; however, in some cases the network measures were slightly misleading. At some step of my analysis I have grouped networks according to their size into three groups: small, medium and large. When the grouping according to the quantitative data contradicted the qualitative accounts (e.g., the network was of medium size, but in the accounts it turned out that the respondent was very isolated), both data was consolidated into a "new" variable, designating the network as small. In this case, the qualitative data was considered to be more instructive for two reasons: a) the respondent explained during the interview that,

apart from very few close contacts, most of his network partners are persons that had been important in the past, but he has not talked to them for a year, while the other respondents hardly included any persons in their networks they have not talked to in the last twelve months, but rather produced a chart of persons they regularly and currently interact with; b) being dissatisfied with his currently little social contacts and being confronted with an instrument that, given its size and shape, asks for the inclusion of several persons, I assume that he produced his desired network, rather than his present one.

The phase of data analysis began with a *concurrent* analysis for each respondent of the interview data and of the network data, and a combining of both sets of information in a written summary of the case. This enabled me also to see if both data sets would produce contradictory results on the level of each case (see excursus in Section 5.1.1). For clarity, however, I shall divide the presentation of the analysis procedure into three sections: one focusing on the qualitative data (see Section 3.5.1), one on the quantitative data (see Section 3.5.2), and one on the combination of both (see Section 3.5.3).

3.5.1 Analysis of the Interviews

All interviews were transcribed verbally, including comments on pauses, body language, laughter, etc. The interviews were analyzed based on the open coding procedure developed in Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This enabled me to explore in detail how the respondents talk about family formation, their personal relationships, how their relations affect their views and behavior, and how and why their relationships have changed over the years.

The dominant principle of analysis in Grounded Theory is the idea of constant comparisons (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Strauss, 1987; Glaser, 1992). I used a three-step procedure of comparisons similar to the one proposed by Boeije (2002: 395): first, comparison within an interview, second, comparisons between interviews, and third, comparisons of ego and alter interviews. For the coding I used the software QSR NVivo 2.

The first step of comparisons took place during the coding of each interview. Accounts that were coded with the same code were reviewed for their consistencies and differences; other passages were reviewed to determine if a given code would apply to them. In addition, contradictory accounts were identified. The aim of this comparison was to develop categories, to formulate the core theme of the interview, and to interpret the parts of the interview in the context of the entire story presented. This process resulted in a code tree and in written

portraits of the respondents that illustrated the thematic structure of the interview, and summarized their educational, professional and partnership careers, their fertility intentions, and their general values.

The second step also took place during the coding of the interviews because each new code included a revision of formerly coded interviews: if a new code came up, formerly coded interviews had to be checked to determine if this code would apply to them too. Similarly, also via a comparison between interviews, the consistency of each code had to be reviewed constantly. During this process, axial and selective coding took place, that is, codes were combined until three major concepts and a core category emerged. Additionally, these kinds of comparisons were made during the phase of group comparisons, in which certain groups (based, for example, on educational background, gender, intentions, or network characteristics) were formed and compared.

In the third step (comparing ego and alter), I compared the accounts each respondent gave about the other and their relationship, the processes of influence they describe, as well as their descriptions of their life-courses, future plans, and attitudes towards family formation. In some cases, not only were similar arguments for a certain attitude given, but these statements even resembled each other in the wording or in certain details (e.g., four members in a dense clique of friends stated that individuals now tend to be rather old when they have their first child, and they all indicated that, to their knowledge, the average age at childbirth is around 36/37 in Germany). The comparison of ego and alter interviews helped me to gain a better understanding of the interactions and influences between these two persons, which enriched the analyses of influence mechanisms and influential persons.

The interviews were conducted in German, they were transcribed in German, and I performed the coding in German. The translation of categories, codes, and quotes into English took place only as very last step when writing this thesis. I invested much time in translating the quotes carefully in order to capture the meaning of certain expressions; nevertheless a translation always loses some of the original flavor.[11] Therefore, I have indicated some special german expressionns and included comments on the translation in the results section.

[11] Some expressions I found rather difficult to translate, such as *Spießerleben*, *sich durchwurschteln, karrieregeil,* or the connotations when a female interviewee stated (explicitly in quotation marks) *ich bring das Geld nach Hause*. Especially difficult are constructions that do not exist in the dictionary but are loaded with meaning, such as *Lebenshauptwohnsitz*, composed of a bureaucratic term that means "principal residence", and applying it to the stable living situation the couple wants to achieve over their entire lives. This newly composed term indicates the tension between highly mobile life styles and living arrangements that seek for stability.

Example for the Analyzing Process: Moving from Text to a Code Tree

To better clarify how I proceeded in coding the interviews, I want to present an example. This is a passage taken from an interview transcript:

> *Even if my partner says that he'd take care of the child, this means also that he will be there for the child. This means that he doesn't have as much time for me as he did earlier. And I don't want to give up on this commodity, the partnership. Well, because the constellation would have to change inevitably. And this is, I think, a point I don't feel up to. (L51ef, female, 31, cohabiting, childless)*

I coded this passage as "prioritizing the partnership". Some passages from other interviews have also been designated with this code.

After the process of open coding, it turned out that there were various codes designating different life goals, and referring to how one goal may be balanced against the other. The things the respondents wanted to accomplish in their lives or felt that they are very important in their lives were, for example, independence and freedom, job and career, house and garden, and children and family. Therefore, I combined all these codes under the heading of "life goals". Other codes dealt with how the respondents perceive the compatibility of different life goals ("compatibility of life goals"), while still others centered on whether the respondents have decided on their priorities, or if they felt ambivalent ("decision on priority"). During the process of axial coding, it became clearer that some of these codes were related to the individual, others were connected to the couple, and still others referred to social relations. Therefore, I distinguished three different levels: the level of the individual, the level of the couple, and the level of the social network, and distributed the codes accordingly. All these codes were then placed as sub-codes under the general heading of *priority*, which is one of the three major concepts that emerged in the process of axial coding, designating one major factor when deciding about family formation.

The code tree for the category *priority* is displayed in Figure 6. For a better overview, the figure shows only some of the sub-codes on the level of the individual (on life goals and the decision on priority); but, certainly, each code comprises several sub-codes on various levels. Similar code trees also exist for the categories *security* and *maturity*, the two other major concepts that emerged in the process of open coding. The major codes distributed under each category are represented in Table 6 in Chapter 4.

Figure 6: Extract of the code tree on the category *priority*

Priority
- o **Level of the individual**
  - Life goals
    - Personal independence
    - Job and career
    - House and garden
    - Travelling, buying things
    - Partnership
    - Family
    - Self-realization
  - Decision on priority
    - Priority on family
    - Priority on other life goals
    - Ambivalent, uncertain about priorities
  - Compatibility of life goals
    - …
- o **Level of the couple**
- o **Level of the social network**

A separate code tree was developed that focused especially on personal relations and social interactions, and on their characteristics and meanings; on incidents of social influence; on perceived or expected changes in the network; and on many more related issues (see, Figure 7). This code tree included codes that were also grouped in the code tree on *security*, *maturity*, or *priority* (on the network level of each category); but arranging them together in a new tree that focused on social interactions helped us to analyze social relations and interactions in a better focused and more detailed way.

Figure 7: Extract of the code tree on personal relations/social interactions and the social network

Personal relations
- Relationship characteristics
  - …
- Evaluation of relationship
  - …

Social interactions
- Type of interaction
  - Conversation
  - Observation
- Mechanism of influence
  - Social learning
  - Social pressure
  - Social contagion
  - Social support
- Channel of influence
  - …

Evaluation of the network
- …

Network dynamics
- …

The coding procedure finally led to five results:

1. three major concepts and one selective core category representing how individuals decide about having children (see Chapter 4),
2. a typology of fertility intentions (see Section 4.5),
3. an overview of the mechanisms of social influence and influential persons the respondents indicated (see Section 5.2),
4. the meaning of personal relations and network characteristics (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3) and
5. retrospective and prospective information on network dynamics (see Sections 5.2 and 5.3).

3.5.2 Analysis of Quantitative Network Data

In Lübeck, I applied the network chart in all interviews, but the grid was introduced only after the fourth interview. Thus, I produced 60 network charts and 56 network grids.

I have analyzed the charts and grids of the main respondents and their young alters, leaving out the networks of their older alters born between 1942 and 1961 (these were mainly their mothers). The networks of the older alters differ considerably from the networks of the younger respondents, even at first glance (they are smaller and include more kin). Because I am interested in network influences on fertility intentions of our young respondents, the networks of the older alters are not matter of investigation here. Therefore, the analysis is based on 50 network charts and 46 grids.

The analysis of the networks proceeded in several steps that were interlinked with the analysis of the qualitative interviews.

First, I analyzed those network characteristics that are often used in network research, and have been linked to the mechanisms of social influence described in Chapter 1. This includes the network size, comprising the number of all persons that were indicated in the network chart, as well as the network density. The density measure designates the number of realized relationships over the number of possible ones between ego's network partners. I divided the information from the grid (alter-alter relations ranging from 0 = do not know each other to 4 = are in close contact) into two dimensions (0 = do not know each other, 1 = know each other), by recoding the values 0 and 1 as 0, and the values 2 to 4 as 1. Then I used the classic density formula:

$$\Delta = \frac{L}{g(g-1)/2}$$

Where L designates the number of realized relationships (ties recoded to 1), g designates the number of persons included in the density matrix (see, Wasserman & Faust, 1999: 101). Density values range form 0 to 1; 0 means that none of the indicated network partners is in contact with any of the others, and 1 indicates that all network partners are in contact with each other.

The composition of networks can be presented by focusing on a large variety of network-partners' characteristics (Marsden, 1987). For a first overview, I focused on role relations. I also analyzed who is included in the network, and the position of the network partners (more or less important or problematic). Some of the results from these analyses are presented in Section 5.1.

Drawing upon the qualitative results (see below), I successively analyzed additional network characteristics, such as supportive ties, share of kin, duration of relationships included, or the formation of cliques.

3.5.3 Bringing Together Fertility Intentions and Network Structure

As described previously, the analysis proceeded concurrently. In the first step of the analysis, the information on family formation and personal relations from the interview and the network data were brought together in a portrait of each case. In most cases, the information from the network chart and grid complemented the information from the interviews. However, as mentioned before, the integration of qualitative and quantitative data was made more difficult by one issue: the network size. In a few cases, the network size did not fit the accounts given in the qualitative interview. Therefore, in these cases a "new" variable for network size was built. This new variable designates the network as small, medium, or large and is built by combining the qualitative and quantitative information available (see also the Excursus in section 5.1.1).

In the second step of the analysis, I focused more on one or the other procedure, applying the coding strategy of Grounded Theory to the qualitative data, and comparing distributions and cross tables with the quantitative data. However, both processes continuously informed each other. Moreover, in the process of analyzing the qualitative accounts on how social influences occur, the kinds of network characteristics that should be considered became clearer. For example, when many respondents said that seeing network partners have children also motivated them to try, I started calculating the number of persons with young children in each network. Similarly, when many respondents mentioned the relevance of parental support in childcare, I assessed to what extent each respondent would have access to regular parental support in childcare, and added a variable on this in the network data set.

In the third step, the qualitative and quantitative data were brought together more explicitly, and went beyond the level of the individual respondent. This was done in four ways:

1. by contrasting mechanisms of influence drawn from the interviews with quantitative network characteristics (see 5.2),
2. by analyzing the position of influential network partners (gained from the interviews) within the collected social network (see 5.2),

3. by contrasting narrations on network dynamics[12] with quantitative network characteristics (see 5.2),
4. by contrasting the fertility intentions the respondents expressed in the interview with quantitative network characteristics (size, density, share of kin, number of network partners with children under age five; see 5.3).

This process was useful in identifying certain network characteristics that play important roles as individuals think about family formation. At the end of these comparisons, I developed a typology of fertility-relevant networks (see Section 5.3).

Practically, I brought the data together in an Excel file, which was created to accompany the interviews my second data set. This file contains structural network variables, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, and variables that were transformed from the qualitative interviews (e.g., on fertility intentions, support, etc.).

[12] I have analyzed accounts of the way networks have changed: e.g. the loss of former friends, the gain of new contacts as well as how the respondents explained these changes, and what these changes meant to them.

4 Making Decisions about Parenthood

The present literature on social networks in general, as well as on personal relations and fertility behavior, leads me to assume that social interactions play an important role in the process of making decisions about family formation – although, to the best of my knowledge, social networks and the transition to parenthood have not been researched in the German context, and there are only few studies in other Western countries (see Chapter 1). To avoid imposing on the data my impression that personal relations matter greatly when individuals think about having children, I have started my analysis with a procedure based on the Grounded Theory approach: I analyzed the data in-depth and condensed it to few main categories, including the most relevant factors in the process of individuals' thinking about family formation. This procedure allows us to consider the impact of personal relations together with other factors relevant for fertility behavior.

Certainly, I am aware that, in some cases, the transition to parenthood has not been planned, and the couple has not actively decided to have a child; rather, they did not use contraceptives carefully or they experienced a contraceptive failure (but even in these cases they usually decided to keep the child). Nevertheless, in this study I do not deal with unintended childbearing, but instead focus on active decision-making about entering parenthood, which also can include the phenomena of postponing, making a decision for or against having children, or feeling presently unable to make a decision.[13]

In the coding process, I have identified three main categories that are relevant as individuals make decisions about family formation: *security*, *maturity*, and *priority*. Each of them contains several factors which can be grouped according to three distinct levels: the level of the individual, the level of the couple, and the level of the social network (see Table 6). This chapter presents an analysis of

[13] I have analyzed interviews from childless respondents, as well as those from respondents who already have children and report on the transition to parenthood retrospectively. I have not analyzed here the factors relevant for the transition to the second or third child. Retrospective information has to be handled carefully because it may tell more about the respondents' current situations and perspectives than about their past experiences, and can be subject to problems in remembering certain things. To address this problem, I first developed the categories from the childless respondents. In a second step, I added the reports of those who already have children, and found that they fit the scheme very well and provide additional insights.

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these factors, stressing their mutual dependencies and interconnections, as well as (in some cases) the conflicts between them.

Table 6: Relevant factors in the family formation decision-making process

	Security	**Maturity**	**Priority**
Level of the individual	• completed education • adequate job position (men: stable, and well-paid; women: part-time)	• personal maturation/ feeling ready • responsibility • sacrifice	• life goals • compatibility of life goals • decision on priority
Level of the couple	• the "right" partner • future-oriented partnership • division of tasks in the partnership • agreeable living arrangement	• mature partnership • duration and reliability of partnership • agreement with partner on family formation	• agreement with partner on life goals • alternative life goal: focus on partnership
Level of the social network	• social support • orientation via behavioral models • orientation via access to information	• social support • orientation via behavioral models • orientation via access to information • mutual reinforcement	• social support • orientation via behavioral models/ access to information • mutual reinforcement

When respondents talk about their ideas and intentions concerning family formation, they mostly refer to all three levels. On the level of the individual, the respondents interviewed state what they personally feel, think, and plan; while on the level of the couple, they place a collective "we" in the center, presenting the attitudes and plans of both partners combined – including, in some cases, disagreements between the partners. On the level of the social network, social relations, or contacts with friends and relatives, play prominent roles in explaining fertility intentions. Certainly, not all respondents consciously argue that their social relations are highly relevant in their personal decision-making about fertility. Asked directly to name the individuals who influence their fertility intentions, most respondents indicate that they feel family formation is a private decision of the couple, and that other people should not be involved. Some do not feel influenced at all, others "remember" influences only after several concrete questions, and still others can clearly give examples of influences. Nevertheless, within the lengthy narrations they present during the interviews, all the

interviewees provide rich accounts of social influences, explaining how other people have contributed to shaping their views and have influenced their behavior. In their declarations about the private character of family formation decisions, and their assertions that there should be no outside influence, they reveal that this attitude is itself based on a social norm. Many respondents describe the sanctions for not following this norm: if they did what other told them to do, they would be regarded as not having their own opinion, and as not being in charge of their own lives. Interestingly, the very fact that they insist on the private character of the decision to have a child demonstrates that the respondents are following a norm, and are listening to what other people think they should do.

4.1 Security

In discussing their ideas about family formation, all respondents refer to the need to establish a "secure" situation before having children, as in the case of this female respondent:

> *Basically I would like to have children. But the social security and the preconditions need to be right, for me personally. Then I will have children – a whole stable full (laughing). (L52ef, female, 31, married, childless)*[14]

This general focus on "security" can be found in interviews with men and women irrespective of their educational status and parity. The German term *Sicherheit* includes more dimensions than the English term security captures. Bauman proposes three terms, stating:

> In the case of *Sicherheit* the German language is uncharacteristically frugal; it manages to squeeze into a single term complex phenomena for which English needs at least three terms – security, certainty and safety – to convey (Bauman, 1999: 17).

One dimension of *Sicherheit* our respondents refer to is security in the sense of stability, steadiness, and reliability. Bauman notes that having a stable job is among the factors that contribute to a feeling of security (Bauman, 1999: 19), which is also stressed by our respondents. Our respondents also talk about certainty, the second dimension mentioned by Bauman, who stresses the relevance of certainty for the choices individuals have to make (Bauman, 1999: 17). Bauman's third dimension, safety, refers to being shielded from dangers to

[14] The first combination of letters and figures indicates the respondents' ID (e.g. L52ef).

"one's body and its extensions, that is one's property, home and neighborhood" (Bauman, 1999: 17). The relevance of property, as well as of personal contacts, in providing a feeling of personal safety is also mentioned by our respondents. In the following sections, I will explore in greater detail the forms of security, certainty, and safety that need to be established before our respondents are ready to have their first child, and how they are dealt with on the three different levels.

4.1.1 The Level of the Individual

Financial security is, for all respondents, a fundamental precondition for having a child. They feel that people should not decide to have children until they are able to provide for them financially, and have established a degree of safety through the acquisition of material possessions. One precondition for having children is, therefore, a *completed education.* A typical expression of the sequencing of events in the life course by respondents with university degree is as follows:

> *First, school degree, then university, and then, when you are earning money, then you can have children. (L08ef, female, 29, married, 1 child: age 2.5)*

For respondents with medium or higher education, the sequencing of life events follows the same lines: they need to complete their education, finish their vocational training, and get established in a job before they can think about having children. This sequencing idea is shared by men and women, by childless respondents, and by respondents with children alike. Most respondents report that, while they were in education (vocational training or university education), they were supported financially by their parents and/or lived together with them in the same household, and therefore did not have to spend money on rent and food. This changed when they got their first job. For the first time in their lives they were able to provide financially for themselves, and it was often at this point that they moved out of the parental home. The respondents find it very important to be financially independent of their parents, and not to rely on state transfers. While most respondents with medium levels of education reached this situation of financial independence after vocational training in their early and mid-twenties, some respondents with university education who were in their late twenties at the time of the interview were still in education (often due to multiple courses). Thus the transition into parenthood occurred for many respondents with medium education in their mid-twenties, and for many of those with university education in their late twenties or early thirties. However, many respondents in our sample do not fit to this schema of early/late transition into parenthood based

on educational background: the large share of childless respondents at age 30 (despite a general desire to have a child) in both educational groups shows that having finished education is not sufficient motivation for the transition into parenthood.

In the interviews it becomes clear that the respondents do not just feel that they have to finish education and find any job before having a child; the job needs to have certain characteristics, and must be considered an *adequate job*. If it does not have these characteristics, it is considered temporary. What is considered to be "adequate" differs for men and for women. Almost all respondents agree that the male partner should provide financially for the family, as this male respondent states:

> *Family means that I earn money and that I am obligated as the father of the family. (L18mp, male, 34, cohabiting, childless)*

He therefore needs a well-paid job that provides enough money so that not only he, but also his partner and his child, can live on his earnings. This is necessary because the female partner is supposed to take care of the child and – in the eyes of most respondents – as a consequence, should not have to work (full-time) in the labor market. Only very few respondents strive for or have established an egalitarian division of tasks in their partnership after having children. For them, financial security is more easily achieved when two partners add to the family income, but they also have more difficulties in making their two careers compatible, as we shall see in Section 4.1.2 on the level of the couple.

The salary considered to be adequate varies according to the value orientation of the respondents: those with non-materialistic or familistic values (the respondents' value orientation shall be analyzed in detail in the section on *priority*, Section 3) are content with much lower salaries than persons who stress the importance of having a challenging job and being successful in their career. The threshold for becoming parents for persons with non-materialistic or familistic values is therefore much lower, and some have already realized family formation.

Another important characteristic of an adequate job for a man should is its stability. This becomes clear in interviews with men who lack this kind of job: they complain that their current employment is only based on a limited contract, and that they cannot have a child under these circumstances, or they stress that they have ventured into self-employment only because they do not have to worry about supporting a family at the moment.

In describing an adequate job for women, our respondents say the salary is not a primary concern. Instead, they stress that the job should provide the

opportunity to return after parental leave and to work part-time, as can be seen in this female respondent's description of her choice of profession:

> *The fact that I always wanted to become [desired profession] is connected to the fact that you can work part-time in this profession and organize your life with children. (L12fp, female, 28, married, childless)*

This part-time employment can add to the family income, and therefore contributes to financial security and safety. The female respondents' requirements for a job vary according to their value orientation: women with familistic values are content with "mini-jobs" and jobs below their educational level, while respondents with a strong career orientation express fears that they might not be able to find work appropriate to their interests and qualifications when they are mothers. These women are convinced that they need to reach their desired professional position before having their first child. One strategy for finding a qualified part-time job is to strive for especially high qualifications. This will give them an advantage over competitors on the labor market and extra bargaining power with their future employer, thus enabling them negotiate a part-time arrangement:

> *I try to get a very good education or a better education than others. That way I can say: I am qualified and therefore people will hire me also part-time, as a specialist. (L01ef, female, 29, LAT, childless)*

This strategy leads to postponing childbirth, especially for women with university education and women who participate in multiple courses of education. The chances of finding an adequate job do not differ by gender and educational background in our small sample: men and women with medium, as well as with university education, report that they have suffered due to the difficult labor market. Many have experienced phases of unemployment, and have had low-paid jobs and limited contracts. These negative labor market experiences hinder them from starting a family.

Being established in an adequate job not only provides a secure financial foundation, it is also seen as providing certainty for planning and organizing the life course. A stable job with clear working hours, responsibilities, and a career path helps the respondents to imagine how their career will proceed in the coming years. Based on this knowledge, they can estimate their working hours and stress levels, and can therefore better imagine what it would be like to have a child in this situation. They can commit themselves to an area of residence and make some long-term investments, such as building or buying a house as a family domicile. Especially respondents in couples in which one partner is still enrolled in education, or is not content with his or her current job position, feel that

they first need to give their lives a clear direction before they can start thinking about having a family:

> *The question: marriage and children, you cannot think about it when (...) the future is so insecure, when both do not know where to go. (L13ef, female, 29, cohabiting, childless)*

As a consequence, the woman above intends to have children within the next five to ten years, but only after she has settled in a job.

The relevance of the economic background and educational attainment for fertility decisions is pointed out in various studies on western Germany and other industrialized countries (e.g., Tölke & Diewald, 2003; Sobotka, 2004). Being enrolled in education, for example, has a clearly negative impact on first birth risks (Hoem, 1986; Klein & Lauterbach, 1994). Europeans have spent an increasing amount of time in education in recent decades, and the direct effect of prolonged education is fertility postponement (Rindfuss, Morgan, & Swicegood, 1988; Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991; Meron & Widmer, 2002: 303). The relationship between education, employment, and fertility is rather complex, and is strongly gendered. For women it is argued that higher educational attainment leads to a higher career orientation, higher opportunity costs of having children, and, therefore, a very sensitive timing of employment interruption (Gustafsson, 2001), and entry into motherhood only after a stable employment situation has been secured (Liefbroer & Corijn, 1999). Similarly, Kreyenfeld shows for western Germany that women with university education have a lower first birth risk than those with a medium or lower educational level (Kreyenfeld, 2004: 300). Nevertheless, even among people with medium or lower levels of education, fertility postponement and childlessness can be observed, mostly because lower levels of education are often connected to lower income, and the couples cannot afford to lose one income (based on the attitude that a mother should not work (full-time) and stay at home with the child) (Dornseiff & Sackmann, 2003; Mills & Blossfeld, 2003; Zollinger, Giele, & Holst, 2004). For men, higher education is usually connected to a higher salary, and therefore seems to foster family formation by providing financial security. Among men with lower educational levels, we can find the largest share of childless persons (Schmitt & Winkelmann, 2005: 18). In addition, term-limited working contracts and unstable or precarious employment situations lead to postponement of family formation for men in the "male-breadwinner societies", to which Western Germany belongs (Mills & Blossfeld, 2003; Schmitt & Winkelmann, 2005).[15] However, some scholars find

[15] An analysis on economic uncertainty performed by some researchers in our research group that compared the data from Lübeck and Rostock also showed that, in Lübeck, a relatively secure career

that, especially among men with higher levels of education, the desire to remain childless is pronounced, as they fear that they would otherwise lose their current standard of living (Holzer & Münz, 1996). Thus the higher the income of the male partner, the lower the risk of having a first or second child (Kohlmann & Kopp, 1997). The research performed in our research team indicates that, in addition to the objective level of income and job stability, the perception and evaluation of respondents of their own economic situations, and of what is necessary to have children, also matter (Bernardi et al., 2008). People who place a high priority on having children usually have low material aspirations, and therefore become parents even though, objectively and compared to others, their economic situation is not favorable. From their perspective however, it is adequate, and they feel they have reached an adequate level of security/safety. On the other hand, people who have increased material and career aspirations set their personal threshold of economic security much higher. I will look more thoroughly at values and preferences in Section 4.3. Adding to the complexity of studying the effects of education and employment on fertility is the need to consider the educational and economic backgrounds of both partners in a couple. Given the gender differences in the effects of education and employment on fertility, the question remains how couples come to an agreement on if and when to have children. If we assume that highly educated women are more likely to postpone, while highly educated men are less likely to postpone, the question arises as to how they will reach an agreement as a couple. We will look at this aspect more thoroughly in Section 4.2.2 because it is strongly related to the factor maturity and the perception of the level of maturity the couple has reached. In concluding this section on individual security, I would like to stress that the effects of education and employment in a certain context can only be explained when we also consider how individuals view their economic situations relative to fertility decisions, including the meanings they attach to job, career, and parenthood.

4.1.2 The Level of the Couple

The first and most prominent factor that needs to be addressed on the level of the couple is whether or not the respondent has a partner. But, similar to having a job, it is not sufficient to have any partner; the partner must be deemed adequate. The respondents generally refer to finding *the "right" partner*. Having found this adequate partner is for all respondents one of the most crucial preconditions

is expected to precede family formation, and that therefore economic uncertainty strongly hampers family formation; while in Rostock, job security and family formation are not so closely linked (Bernardi et al., 2008).

for having children. While most respondents who are currently involved in a partnership mention the issue only in passing, those who are currently single talk more extensively about the necessity of finding the "right" partner, as this 28-year-old male single states:

> *First the partnership has to stand on safe ground. The partners have to agree that they are a couple; that they want to be together. If one marries or not – that's another story. But the couple needs to agree that they want to remain together in the long run. (L02em, male, 29, single, childless)*

Finding the "right" partner is fundamental, because having children is always conceptualized as raising children together with the partner who is the parent of the child. Therefore, the decision to have a child can only be taken when one is sure that the current partner is the person one wants to stay together with – ideally, for the rest of one's life. The partnership should therefore "function well" (*gut funktionieren*) and be *directed towards a shared future*. The reasons given for the need to have a stable and long-lasting partnership are mostly concerned with the well-being of the child. Most respondents believe that, ideally, a child should grow up with both parents around. Parents embedded in a stable and harmonious partnership are able to provide a stable environment for the child, as the close female friend of the man just heard points out:

> *[A precondition for having a child is] a stable partnership, a stable environment (...) Children are confronted with conflicts and problems early enough. And therefore I think, especially for small children, it's important that they grow up in a stable environment and become stable persons. (L16ef, female, 29, LAT, childless)*

Children from this point of view need to live with both parents and grow up in a safe environment and a stable situation; they should not be troubled with conflicts and problems in the relationship of their parents. Divorced or separated parents are not thought to be able to provide such a safe and stable environment. Most single women add another reason why it is vital to find the "right" partner: they do not want to risk ending up as a single mother. For example, a female respondent who is currently single states:

> *I would like to have the right partner; I do not want to be single mother. I want to do this together with somebody. I want the child to have a father, an active father who is there for the child. I do not want to go through all this alone. Even though I do a lot on my own, I do not want to raise a child alone. (L03ff, female, 30, single, childless)*

Indeed, most children under 18 years in western Germany (84%) grow up in households with two married parents, but some of them may be stepparents after a divorce and remarriage (Engstler & Menning, 2003: 24). Only 4.5% of children live with a parent that has never been married (Engstler & Menning, 2003: 25). Other studies show that being engaged in a partnership is, for many people, a very prominent precondition for having children, and that not having a partner may stop them from even considering family formation (Ruckdeschel, 2007: 222).

Once an adequate partner is found, the *division of tasks in the partnership* becomes an important issue: both partners need to agree on who is providing financially for the family and who engages in the household and childcare, as well as to what extent duties are shared or divided. In western Germany, fathers mostly work full-time, while mothers with children under three years of age are mainly not employed or on parental leave, and mothers with older children are mainly not employed or work part-time (Engstler & Menning, 2003: 111, 114). Thus, most of our male respondents expect to provide the family income, while most of our female respondents anticipate first taking parental leave, and then reducing their working hours when they become mothers. If they already are parents, this is the way they have been dealing with the division of tasks in their partnership. Only a few respondents imagine or have established a different division of tasks, sharing equally household chores, childcare, and employment. We will learn more about them in the following section on the social networks. In this section, partnership arrangements are relevant, because if the division of tasks in the partnership enables the woman to work (part-time or even full-time), this can foster financial security for the couple because there is an additional income available. It is vital that both partners can reach an agreement as to how to divide the tasks in their partnership; only after having reached such an agreement can a stable and secure foundation for having children be provided. All respondents engaged in a partnership that they consider "serious" state that they currently agree on their division of tasks within the partnership, and this agreement could also be seen in the dyadic interviews with the partners. However, some respondents report that they have had disagreements about how to share tasks after having a child with their current partner or in former partnerships. They describe processes of discussing and negotiating the issue, and of slowly reaching a consensus, or, in some cases, of breaking up the partnership. One example is a couple who report that they had contrary attitudes when they entered the partnership, but developed a common position in a process of arguing. The male partner states:

> *Well, I used to assume that the woman maybe stays at home and the man [works] (...) And well, then [my wife] has been complaining, how I could assume such a thing (laughing) ... (L12em, male, 29, married, childless)*

His wife explains the issue from her perspective:

> *In the beginning of our relationship I almost freaked out or I did freak out and we started fighting. I said I want to become [desired profession]. And I said I want to have children no matter what. But it is out of question for me that I do this alone and additionally I said that I would not intend to remain at home for the rest of my life and only take care of the children. Then I was called "karrieregeil" [obsessed with career]. And I totally freaked out and asked him: What do you want? Yes! You also want to work! That's exactly the same! Are you "karrieregeil"? No! So what, please, is the difference? Then he was hard pressed to explain matters... (L12fp, female, 28, married, childless)*

Her statement in particular shows that their arguments on the division of tasks included harsh words and emotional agitation. As we can see from this, if two partners do not agree on the division of tasks in the partnership, this can cause severe conflicts; the stability and future of the partnership is questioned and both partners need to spend much time and energy for reaching a consensus. This period of negotiations leads to postponing family formation. Over time, the couple we have just heard have converged in their attitudes, and the female partner presents her views in the following way:

> *For me it's a fact that I would never marry a guy for whom there would not be a theoretical option to say: ok, I will also take care of the child. But it's also a fact that currently I do not have a job that provides me with an adequate amount of money. If I got pregnant now, it would not be a tactical option [that my husband stays at home]. (L12fp, female, 28, married, childless)*

Her husband also presents his theoretical willingness to take care of the child, but states that most probably he will not:

> *In general I am willing to [interrupt my job], I would like to in a sense. But currently our life is more in the direction that I will continue working full-time, because I ... because everything goes well in my job. And, I would say, one would also like to have the money. (L12em, male, 29, married, childless)*

Through arguing, they have reached a compromise that, generally, the father should want to be involved in the care of children. However, they acknowledge that, in their present situation, it would be better if he continued working because

he has a more stable and better-paid job position, while she has just finished education and is currently looking for a job. They both plan to have a child as soon as she has settled in her new job. So, despite their egalitarian attitudes on the division of tasks in the partnership, when it comes to having children, they divide tasks more according to the modernized male-breadwinner model: the female partner plans to stay at home for nine to 12 months and then to work part-time.

Another relevant issue that both partners need to agree on is their *living arrangement*. Most respondents find it self-evident that they will live in the same household with their partner when having children. As long as the couple is living apart together (LAT), with one partner living in a different city and the couple only meeting on the weekends, this is not considered an adequate living situation. The greatest obstacles to a common living situation are the mobility demands of a job. This is the case mainly for respondents with university degrees, most of whom left Lübeck for university and have experienced LAT arrangements in the past. Especially when both partners would like to pursue their careers (which is, as I have stated before, less connected to their level of education than to their value orientation) they may find it difficult to find an adequate job in the same city. Respondents with this orientation and this type of job therefore have been postponing childbirth, and spent much time sorting out how they could arrange their need to settle with the mobility demands in their jobs. One example is a couple consisting of two university graduates who have experienced several phases of not living together in recent years. They expect more changes in the future, as the job of the male partner demands high mobility. They have agreed to establish a "principal residence in life" (*Lebenshauptwohnsitz*):

> *The only thing that will become more difficult is that my boyfriend will leave [place of living] at the end of this year or the beginning of next year because he is changing jobs. But our planning for the future is like that we want to remain together, we want to have a family together and we want to have our "Lebenshauptwohnsitz" [a newly created word indicating a principal residence in life] in [place of residence]-Lübeck. So now in [place of residence] in the long run I could imagine going back to Lübeck. Because my parents are there and I think when I work again part-time, my mother could help take care of the child, when the time has come. (L18ef, female, 30, cohabiting, childless)*

To sum up, on the level of the couple some very influential factors may hinder family formation. Apart from the fact that a partner needs to be available before the decision to have a child is made, the respondents stress that this partner needs to fit their concept of the "right" partner, and that the relationship must be stable, harmonious, and future-oriented in order to provide material and emotional

security and certainty for planning and organizing one's life. Additionally, both partners need to agree on the division of tasks in the partnership, as well as on how to establish a household together despite the mobility demands of a job.

4.1.3 The Level of the Social Network

Although all respondents stress that the couple is responsible for establishing a secure situation before having a child, and argue that couples should not rely on other persons in this situation, they provide rich accounts of the participation of network partners in establishing a secure situation.

On the level of the social network, the category security includes material and financial security and safety, as well as certainty in acting, planning, and organizing. Personal relationships can contribute to these forms of security by providing (or promising) various kinds of resources and practical help. Additionally, there are forms of security that rely to a large extent on personal relations: emotional security and safety, i.e., knowing that there are people one can rely on and call upon in case of problems; as well as behavioral certainty, i.e., having feeling that one is acting adequately. Personal relationships contribute to building these forms of security by providing social support and orientation.

Social Support

Support is mentioned most extensively by respondents who already have children, as well as by respondents who intend to have a child soon. Especially when thinking about the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy, the role of support is often mentioned:

> *Yes, somehow one would manage ("sich schon durchwurschteln"). Her parents support her, my parents support me. Somehow, this would work out. (L07em, male, 30, LAT, childless)*

At a later point in the interview, the respondent just heard specifies the forms of support he would expect when having a baby:

> *Support, in any case, from the parents, mainly, concerning relief, that one can bring the child to them sometime or other, that they take care of the child. Surely also financial support, in case you experience financial hardship, and also psychological support, from the parents mainly, that is human support, that you can feel the*

> *warmth, that you can realize that you are not alone in the world, but that there are some people who are important to you. (L07em, male, 30, LAT, childless)*

In this short quote he mentions three major forms of support: support in childcare, financial support in case of need, and emotional support. The fourth major type of support is, according to our analyses, the provision of housing. The respondent we have just heard does not mention this type of support in connection with having a child, but he currently uses this type of support by living in his parents' house. These types of support are presented in detail in Chapter 4; here I will focus on explaining how they add to the factor security. I have found three main types of support: support in childcare, material and financial support, and emotional support.

The type of support the respondents talk about at greatest length is *support in childcare.* All respondents stress this type of support when talking about the organization of their family life (respondents who have children), or their plans and ideas concerning family formation (childless respondents).[16] The sources most relevant for providing support in childcare are the parents and/or the parents-in-law. Some respondents (intend to) use parental support in childcare regularly, while others prefer occasional support. Parental support is considered to be more flexible and available than institutionalized childcare. For example, some women state that the opening hours of the childcare centers in their neighborhood do not fit their working hours. Additionally, many respondents are skeptical about bringing a child into childcare institutions when he or she is younger than three, and having the child in kindergarten for the whole day. They have the feeling that it is not good for the child to be with people from outside the family for the whole day. Only few respondents do not consider regular parental support to be as relevant: they either consider the mother to be the main caregiver for the child and expect that the mother will stay at home, while the father provides financially for the family; or they are not as skeptical about using childcare arrangements involving persons or institutions outside the family, and expect that these forms of childcare are sufficiently available. These results are in line with recent studies on intergenerational transfers which found that the form of instrumental support mostly provided by parents/parents-in-law is support in childcare (Szydlik, 2000; Kohli & Künemund, 2001; Engstler & Menning, 2003: 146; Haumann, 2006). Other research has shown the widespread use of childcare by family members in Germany: a panel study on young couples with children in western Germany showed that around half of the parents were provided with

[16] The only persons who do not mention support in childcare are some childless respondents who do not want to have children, as well as some of those who are very ambivalent in their family formation timing, or who plan to have a child in five years' time or more.

childcare by the mother's parents, and more than one-third by the father's parents, over the 34 months of the panel (Fthenakis, Kalicki, & Peitz, 2002: 255). In addition, wariness about institutionalized childcare has often been found in western Germany: asked about their preferences concerning childcare for their children when they were four months old, most parents stated that they would like to rely on their parents or parents-in-law (between 50% and 81%), while less than 20% of the parents said they prefer nannies or institutions for children under age three (Fthenakis et al., 2002: 256).

The provision of regular childcare adds to the security factor in two ways: 1) by enabling both parents to work, so that both can add to the family income and provide financial security; 2) by providing a basis for organizing family life without having to rely on the either negatively valued or not adequately available public childcare system, and thereby establishing certainty for planning and organizing family life, as well as for the re-entry into the workplace.

The availability of *financial support* (mostly by the parents) in case of need gives respondents confidence that they would be able to manage financially after having a child, even if their own economic situation is not as good as they want it to be. Expecting that they could rely on this type of support if necessary contributes to the feeling of financial security. As a consequence, fears about not being able to provide financially for the family are reduced and family formation seems less risky. Many young adults in Germany are or have been profiting from financial support for their parents even as adults: e.g., 27% of couples with children (younger than 39 years old) receive regular financial support from their parents, while 57% have received some financial support in previous years (Haumann, 2006: 184).

Similarly, another form of material support adds to the security factor: *the provision of housing.* When housing (at low or no cost) is provided, fears of not being able to provide the financial foundation for a family, or to be forced to lower the standard of living, are reduced. These concerns are expressed by many interviewees, who discuss their fears of unemployment and talk about (current or anticipated) problems in finding a good job in the labor market. Most respondents who receive support in housing already have children or intend to have a child soon, and indicate that living in their parents' house helps them in establishing financial security and ensuring a high standard of living. Some 18% of young couples (younger than 39 years) with children have housing provided for free by their parents (Haumann, 2006: 186).

The last type of support relevant for establishing security is *emotional support.* Having network partners one can turn to in case of problems, who encourage and console in case of need, who offer help or can be asked for advice, who share the experiences of being a parent, or who understand this situation, can

provide a feeling of security and safety; a feeling of being embedded in a network of supportive relatives and/or friends. Most respondents who are already parents talk a great deal about emotional support, and perceive it as being very helpful.

Childless respondents only rarely talk about emotional support directly connected to their decision-making about having children, although they often talk about the general importance of emotional support in their lives. In most cases, they seem to assume that the emotionally supportive contacts they have are rather stable, and will not change when they have a child. Interesting are those respondents who assume that these contacts will change, or who fear that they may lose a close friend if they decide for/against having a child. These respondents are often ambivalent about having children or feel pressured – despite their desire to postpone or forgo having children– into family formation out of a fear of isolation in a group of friends who are all currently forming partnerships and getting children.

Orientation via Behavioral Models

Social network partners also contribute to the security factor by providing orientation. In the interviews, I have identified two social norms of central importance in the process of family formation decision-making: a norm regarding the need to finish education before having children; and a norm regarding the need to divide tasks in the partnership according to the male-breadwinner model after having children.

The norm not to have children during education can also be described as a *sequencing model*, because it stipulates a certain order of events in the life course: one should first finish education, then find an appropriate job, and then start a family.[17] Having children during education is rare in western Germany. In 2006, 6% of students enrolled in university education in western Germany have children (Middendorf, 2008: 11). Most of our respondents consider it self-evident that they should not have children during education, and all cite many practical arguments against having children while still at school or university (workload during studies, lack of financial stability). But they also indicate that individuals who have children during education face rejection in their social environment. Mostly based on their observations of others (usually distant acquaintances) who had children during education, our respondents report that, in the best cases, these students' transition into parenthood is accepted as an "accident". More

[17] More on the western German sequencing model in contrast to an eastern German model of parallel planning can be found in Bernardi et al., 2006.

often, however, it is seen negatively, and these parents are accused being incapable, stupid, immature, or having personality problems. Sometimes, parenthood is even denigrated as an "asocial" behavior, especially if the family is relying on public support. One female respondent and one couple had their children while still at university, and report having experienced some of these reproaches. This shows that, within social networks, attitudes and meanings connected to having children during education are exchanged, sanctions are threatened or enforced, and the enforcement of these sanctions is observed by others. Those very few respondents who do not find it self-evident that it is impossible or undesirable to have children during (university) education all have people within their closer social network who chose to have children during their university studies. They report that they observe how their network partners organize their lives, and say they have discussed the issue with them and evaluate their network partner's behavior positively, even though they would not personally want to have children during education. Although many of our respondents are very uncertain about when to have children, it is clear to them that they do not want to have children during education. The sequencing model structures their life-course and defines appropriate behavior. Thus it provides some degree of certainty in planning and organizing, as well as in acting.

Also, in line with the *male-breadwinner model*, a norm regarding the division of tasks in the partnership after having children may provide certainty in planning and organizing. as well as in acting. In our sample, most interviewed couples agree on and (plan to) live according to a model in which the male partner provides financially for the family, while the female partner takes care of the child and at some point (usually when the child goes to kindergarten at age three or four) works part-time and adds up to the family income. This arrangement is often referred to as the "modernized male-breadwinner model", and is seen in contrast to the traditional model, which defines the mother as a housewife. Around two-thirds of western German couples with children under 10 years of age consider part-time work among mothers to be ideal, while only 6% of western German couples prefer a dual-earner situation (Beckmann, 2002: 5). Most of our respondents who already have children follow this modernized male-breadwinner model, and the mothers work part-time. They have never questioned this arrangement or considered any alternatives. Especially couples who are already parents are aware of the sanctions that may be involved if they do not follow this model: couples in which the female partner works full-time are seen as having a low social status and are pitied because both partners have to work for economic reasons, or they are seen as irresponsible, self-centered, and greedy, because both want to work. In any case, it is expected that the child will suffer from not having the mother available most of the time available. On the

one hand, this focus on the male-earner model seems to facilitate family formation, because if both partners take this assignment of roles for granted, they do not need to spend time on discussing, negotiating, and organizing how to divide tasks, which is, as we have seen, a serious issue on the level of the couple. On the other hand, however, couples in which the male partner is not able to provide financially for the family believe that they cannot establish the financial security they feel they need for a transition into parenthood. For them, insisting on the male-breadwinner model for organizing family formation leads to postponement, as this female respondent reports:

> *[To have a child] is a topic [between me and my partner], but it's not realizable for financial reasons, because I – in quotations – "bring the money home". Thus it's my salary in fact that we currently live on. (L52ef, female, 31, married, childless)*

That she speaks here in quotations says a lot about her difficulties in talking about this situation she perceives as unusual. Neither the quoted respondent nor her partner can imagine becoming parents if the wife is the main breadwinner; therefore, they postpone having children until he has a well-paid job. They also do not know personally any couple with children in which the mother is providing financially for the family. When asked directly about this alternative model, the female respondent states that it would be out of question for her husband:

> *In the beginning, he had to struggle with the fact that I earn more money, and does now when he takes money from my account. He still says: I took money from your account. Then I say: yes, sure. And he still cannot fully cope with it. Well, in this respect, I do not think that this would be acceptable for him. (L52ef, female, 31, married, childless)*

She perceives that it is difficult for him to be financially dependent on her at the moment; therefore she assumes that he would also not agree to a female-breadwinner model when a child arrives. Unfortunately, her husband did not consent to be interviewed. I have, however, interviewed both partners of a couple who are friends of the female respondent just heard, and who are in a somewhat similar situation: the female partner has a more stable and better-paid job than the male partner. The male partner indicates in the interview that, although he would consider it to be financially reasonable if his girlfriend earned the money while he stayed at home with the child, he cannot see himself as a male homemaker:

> *[If we had a child now], I would be a "male homemaker" ("Hausmann"). That would be the logical consequence. Because she has a job in [place of residence],*

> *and her job is currently better paid, her job is secure, nothing can happen there. Well, my job is relatively secure, relatively well paid, but it's also farther away and therefore demands more time. Hence, this would be the logic alternative. If I would like this – this is naturally a different matter: I think, especially as a man it would not be easy. If I imagine in the toddler group, being the only man – no! (L51mp, male, 31, cohabiting, childless)*

Because of these attitudes, he does not want to have any children.[18] Although he presents some concrete images of how unpleasant it would be for him as male caregiver for the child, he does not know anybody personally who lives in this situation. Many of our other male interviewees provide additional arguments against a female-breadwinner model. While none of them assume that their female partners would not be able to fill the role as financial provider, they reject the idea that they should become homemakers. They claim that they would not be able to return to their job, that their careers would suffer, that they would be bored as homemakers and would always need a professional challenge in their life, and finally, that young children need their mothers. An arrangement in which both parents work full-time is not seen as an option for most respondents because they feel that "somebody", usually meaning the mother, should be always available for the children. Although many respondents argue in favor of gender equality in general, when it comes to the concrete question how they would organize their life when having children, they mostly indicate that they cannot imagine an alternative to the mother staying at home with the child, at least for some time.[19] Looking at the social networks, we can see that all these respondents lack persons in their networks who are parents and who share tasks equally. By contrast, the very few respondents who value and strive for a more egalitarian division of tasks within the partnership when they have children have experienced their parents as being dual earners or as sharing responsibilities. It could be assumed that this more flexible model is better suited to women's increasing educational levels, as well as the current labor market situation characterized by a considerable amount of unemployment and precarious jobs, and could therefore serve to promote family formation in times of economic uncertainty. A female partner earning more than the male partner, or a male partner

[18] Very interesting is the representation of gender roles implied in this quote: while he fully accepts that his girlfriend is able to provide financially for both of them, and that she could take over the role traditionally assigned to men, he cannot see himself in the role of the caregiver for a child, the role traditionally assigned to women.

[19] Data from the ALLBUS 2004 for western Germany shows that, although 84% of respondents aged 18 to 30 report "modern" views on the division of tasks between men and women, only 61% of respondents in this age group share "modern" views on the consequences of mother's employment for children (Datenreport, 2006: 517).

who does not earn enough to provide for a family, would not hinder young couples from family formation. However, some couples recount undergoing long processes of negotiation about how to share the tasks when having a child, aiming at an equal distribution, and that during this time the decision to have a child was postponed. In the end, most of those who have finally come to a decision have arrived at the modernized male-breadwinner model as only solution.

To summarize, the (modernized) male-breadwinner model provides certainty in planning and acting for those who are following it, and thereby fosters family formation. As we have seen on the level of the couple, it is a model both partners can agree on because it is supported by various social norms and enforced through certain forms of sanctions. However, if the couple is in a situation in which the male partner is not able to provide financially for the family, while the female partner could, insisting on the model of a male earner hinders family formation. A more egalitarian attitude could enable the partners to establish economic security in a more flexible way, but most respondents – although in general arguing for gender equity – cannot imagine any alternative to the male-breadwinner model. The strength of the norm of following the male-breadwinner model when having children is experienced differently by our respondents depending on the social network they are embedded in. If the respondents' networks include persons who are dual earners or take turns in their tasks, the respondents are more open to these ways of organizing family life, regardless of their educational background and social status. The norm on sharing tasks in the partnership is, therefore, is neither predominant for the whole of western German society, nor in certain milieus that can be distinguished by factors such as social status, but are effective only within certain networks. Additionally, it is not enforced in the same way in all networks, but the perceived strength of the norm depends on the network structure. I shall come back to this in Chapter 5 on the networks.

Orientation via Access to Information and Monitoring of Other Persons

Apart from social norms and behavioral models transmitted in social networks, *access to information* in general also strongly influences the family formation decision-making process. Information can be obtained as a side effect of social interactions, but it can also be actively searched for, or actively given as advice. My respondents state that they are involved in various interactions related to the topic of family formation in which information, and sometimes also advice on the issue are exchanged: they observe their network partners' behavior, they discuss family formation with them, and they may also interact with their network

partners' children. They learn about the costs and benefits involved with having children, without having to go through this experience themselves (vicarious experience), as this respondent who has learned from the experiences of her older sister:

> *I saw my sister, who did her exam parallel to having a child, and I don't want to do this to my child, nor to me – this stress. Therefore, I would take some time off if I had a baby. (L01ef, female, 29, LAT, childless)*

Based on her sister's experiences of having a child during education, she has decided to get pregnant only after her education is finished and she has established herself in a job that allows her to work part-time. Currently, she does not have such a job, and postpones having children until this position is attained.

Some individuals have access to a wide variety of information, while others have only limited information and complain about not having anybody around who has children. Being able to observe how others deal with and think about family formation provides the individual with information about how life with a child could be, helps them to imagine this situation, reduces uncertainty in the decision-making process, and provides the "secure" feeling that they are acting appropriately. The access to information that personal contacts provide not only shape individuals' attitudes on fertility in general, they also shape individuals' attitudes on security issues.

All our respondents *monitor how their network partners deal with family formation and security issues*. They can often give detailed accounts of (how they perceive) what other people think and how they act. When, for example, do their network partners have children? How do they combine family and job? How do they divide up tasks in the partnership? Who is taking care of the child? They report discussing these issues with many persons. I find considerable conformity within many networks in the ideas and attitudes concerning completing education, and in the definitions of what kind of job would be adequate, what standard of living would be desirable, who would be the "right" partner, and what would constitute a fair division of tasks. This may, of course, be a result of homophily (being in contact with persons who are similar), but a large share of relationships have been kept up for many years, long before the topic of family formation came up (e.g., to relatives or old schoolmates), which indicates that there are social influences at work long before family formation becomes a conscious issue, and information and advice on the topic is actively sought for.

4.2 Maturity

The second category relevant in the family formation decision-making process is termed "maturity", and includes above all statements about a feeling of maturity and about becoming an adult, as well as a feeling of being "ready" to become a parent. Maturity is associated with taking responsibility and being willing to give up certain "childish" or "egoistic" things. This factor can also be found on all three levels: the individual feeling of being more or less mature, the perception of the relationship as being more or less mature, and how maturity is defined and dealt with in the social network. I mainly present accounts from childless respondents here because they discuss the issue of maturity more often, at greater length, and more explicitly than those who already have children. Young parents, however, discuss maturity retrospectively, mainly indicating that they underwent a natural process of maturation, which culminated in having a child; or they explain why – despite having a stable partnership and secure jobs – they postponed parenthood in the past.

4.2.1 The Level of the Individual

Many respondents talk about their decision-making process as a process of *personal maturation*, of reaching a status when they *feel ready* to have a child. Some use the term maturity (*Reife*), while others talk about growing up (*erwachsen werden*) or coming of age (*älter werden*). Regardless of the expressions used, the meanings attached to these terms are generally the same. To be mature means, on the one hand, to have graduated from school or university and to be settled in a job (*auf eigenen Füßen stehen*); and, on the other hand, to be willing to accept responsibility for the child, and - as many respondents point out - to give up several things one would otherwise enjoy. Implicit in this is the image of a strong dividing line between young persons in the process of maturation and mature adults; between the childless and parents. Young childless persons are seen as inexperienced; they need to find out what they want to do in their life. They need "to orient themselves" (*sich orientieren*) or "experiment" (*sich ausprobieren*), by, for example, trying different jobs, or new educational paths. They are free to move to different cities or even countries. The sequencing is clear: first trying out things – then having a child:

> *At the moment we don't want a child. He starts this new job, I start these studies. And we first want to orient ourselves. And get our lives straight; guide them in the right direction. Children are often also annoying, they jump about and I find this too strenuous at the moment. I believe one can only cope with this when one's life is on*

> *track. One has to find something which makes you fell content, and a job that is fun and fulfilling. And for me, that means to do these studies, which is what I always wanted, and to go abroad. (L03ef, female, 30, LAT, childless)*

Young and childless persons are considered to be "free" and independent, not bound to any duties. They are sometimes even seen as "chaotic", as they can "do as they please", such as "going out a lot" or traveling to distant countries. But being mature means having a stable job, a stable partnership, and stable living conditions, as well as willingness "to have an orderly life" (*das Leben geregelt haben*). For all respondents, these are important preconditions for having a child.

Some respondents find it very natural and self-evident that they will cross the line between youth and adulthood soon after finishing education and finding a job (mostly those with medium levels of education, who tend to cross the line much earlier than those with higher education) and become parents. It is self-evident for them that, as parents, life will be different, but this does not scare them. They feel that certain things should be done during youth, but that they are no longer relevant for grown adults. Therefore, they see these changes as a natural and necessary part of the process of maturation, and not as restrictions. The things they give up are replaced by other things they did not have before:

> *I think one should let off steam beforehand. I don't have anything, where I would say: I regret this, if I had only done this in my youth. I've had my fun and at some point I really told myself: now it's over, I want to have a family now. (L66em, male, 28, married, 1 child: age 1.5)*

While this 28-year-old male respondent decided one year previously to grow up and become a father, others, like this 30-year-old female respondent, feel that they are not yet even near the line that separates youth from adulthood:

> *And I still shy away from this responsibility. Because I find myself too chaotic for having a child. I can hardly take (laughs) responsibility for myself – and then for another person… (L04ef, female, 30, single, childless)*

Another reason for not feeling mature enough is mostly mentioned by respondents with university education, as this young woman:

> *I think now I first need to work myself free and need to first try to apply the things I have learned and to find my limits. Because after the Abitur one always had the feeling, wow, now you can do everything. And after university it's the same. And then you have to bring yourself back on stable ground and say, ok, I could do a lot, but not everything, and what you can do, you can try out now. And I don't know how*

> *long this will take until I have tried it out. At the moment I am, I think, it's still better without a child. (L13ef, female, 29, cohabiting, childless)*

After completing her education, she faces various life choices, and first needs to try out several things. As we have seen in the section on security, a stable job is an extremely important prerequisite for having a child. Since you should only have a child if you have met this prerequisite, having completed education and found a stable job can also be considered as indicator for having reached maturity. Having children is only an option once all other decisions in life concerning education and job have been made and a stable position is reached. These are important markers for entry into adulthood. It is interesting that the same woman acknowledges that her friend (a mother of a two-year-old child) who is younger than her, but has not attended university, is more grown-up than she is:

> *And sometimes I really have the feeling that my friend, who is so much younger than I am, that she is more grown-up than I am. That it's a matter of experiences in life. She started working at 16 and was somehow at some point an adult – like a flash. (L13ef, female, 29, cohabiting, childless)*

This example shows that maturity is not so much connected to a certain age, but rather to having experienced certain transitions in the life course. While young people are seen as more flexible than mature parents, they are also thought to be more oriented towards their personal well-being. Parents, however, are expected to focus on their child's well-being, and *to sacrifice* their own desires, as this young woman states:

> *These are the goals that currently have priority; I want to pursue things I had to postpone before: traveling, buying a car, such things. So, when I want to have a child, then I want to have it because I want it one hundred percent, and for this I am not ready. Because, I believe, I am too egoistic.*[20] *I could not make the personal sacrifices necessary to fulfill the needs of a child as I would like to. (L51ef, female, 31, cohabiting, childless)*

Responsible parents, therefore, have to be ready and willing to subordinate their own desires for the well-being of the child, as the partner of the young woman just heard also states:

[20] Several persons who do not want to have children at all, or at least not yet, describe themselves as too "egoistic", they all strongly support a gendered division of tasks when having children, and feel that this cannot be combined with their other life interests.

> *One must want it; one must feel called to it. And then one must be willing to change one's lifestyle and to invest the time necessary, in order to do it properly, so that one is there for the child and that both partners don't have to work. It should not be, that the child goes to kindergarten for the whole day and in the evenings the TV is on. (L51mp, male, 31, cohabiting, childless)*

He sums up in one sentence the views of many other respondents: one should only have a child if one can be a *good mother/father*, because parenting should be done "properly" (*ordentlich*). Good parents feel *responsible* for their children; they do not both work, but rather spend a great deal of time with their child. They also provide high-quality care – and do not just let the child watch TV. Some respondents assume, or at least fear, that children whose parents do not devote enough time to them by, for example, both working full-time, risk developing badly:

> *There are also doctors who have children and have a nanny at home and actually work the whole day. Wednesday and Friday afternoon they don't work, but … they probably say, they have studied at university and invested a lot of money in this, but I think, they do not need to have children. They do not see their children anyway. The whole education and everything is done by the nanny, they cannot really influence this. There are also children that turn bad and turn criminal. (L50fp, female, 34, married, 2 children: age 3 and 6)*

Therefore, all respondents agree that parents bear a great responsibility for the well-being and development of their child:

> *I admire them for having children, because they take such a responsibility, also such a responsibility as to how the child develops and what becomes of it. (L04ef, female, 30, single, childless)*

This idea that parenthood will totally a person's change life, inevitably leading the parents to give up certain things, is not only held by those who do not want children or are very ambivalent, but also by those who already have children. They make this point when talking about their decision-making process. One example is this mother of a 9-month-old baby. She describes how the decision to have a child was made, and why she felt the time to have a child had come:

> *And then it was like this: we had been on vacation, we had been skiing and we had been in the Caribbean and we had been in Thailand and again skiing – and you think, this you cannot do later, for example Thailand, you would not go there with a child. And after the last skiing-vacation I stopped taking the pill and thought: now we try. (L15ef, female, 29, married, 1 child: age 1)*

This kind of reasoning can be found in interviews with persons from different educational backgrounds, both men and women. The readiness to have a child is defined in two main ways: a) by having finished education and being settled in a job (the link to factors involved in the category security becomes apparent), and b) by the willingness to accept responsibility for the child and to give up several things one would otherwise enjoy. All our respondents agree on these points, regardless of their gender, educational background, and parity. Many (especially those who already have children) feel that leaving youthful habits and ways of living behind, and making the transition to adulthood and parenthood is a natural process of maturation, and usually starts soon after finishing education and finding a job. Therefore, it could be expected that respondents with medium levels of education will have children earlier than those with higher education. But the picture is not as clear. The variety within groups (especially among those with a medium level of education) is clearly larger than the variety between groups.[21] Especially those respondents who had their first child rather late (in all educational groups) talk about the relevance of issues of responsibility and sacrifice in their decision-making. They indicate that the things that they enjoyed during youth lose their attractiveness as they grow older; therefore, at some point having children does not mean sacrificing too much. Instead, they give something up in order to gain something new and even more valuable. While many of our childless respondents feel that the time has come to have children, others either do not feel mature enough to accept the responsibility[22] or are not yet willing to give up certain things. However, they are convinced that, at some point, they will be ready and willing to do so. Until then, parenthood is postponed. Among these postponers are many singles and people with university degree. A third (very small) group of respondents argue that they – as mature persons – have decided that, since they are not willing to make certain sacrifices (such as a double income and a certain lifestyle, a career for women, or independence and personal freedom), they must avoid having children. They are two men and three women of all three educational levels; some are single, while others are involved in a partnership.

[21] Respondents who already are parents with medium education had their first child on average at age 28 (ranging from 23 – an unplanned child – to 35). Respondents with university degrees had on average their first child at 29.5 (ranging from 26 – an unplanned child – to 33). Only three respondents with *Abitur* have children and had them at ages 22 (unplanned), 25, and 27. While women's ages at first birth in our sample do not vary much with the educational level they have obtained (medium education: median: 27; university degree: median: 28), men with university degrees are clearly older than men with medium education (medium education: median: 27; university degree: median: 32).

[22] Especially a lack of willingness to take over responsibility is seen as one central factor for childlessness (Schneider, 1996: 132).

4.2.2 The Level of the Couple

On the level of the couple, maturity concerns the relationship. A mature partnership is mostly described in terms of duration and reliability. Also of fundamental relevance are the quality of the relationship, having similar attitudes, and agreement between partners concerning family formation. All respondents who intend to have a child soon are in *rather long and durable* relationships (on average, 4.8 years) and are very positive that have found the "right" partner. Because they have the same ideas about their common future, they can imagine spending the rest of their lives harmoniously with each other. Those who have children were together with their partners for a long time before conception (on average, 5.6 years), and are convinced that their partner is right for them. Other studies stress that the durations and perceived stability of a partnership influence the desire for a child and the transition to parenthood (Thomson & Hoem, 1998; Kühn, 2001; Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2004). Schmitt and Winkelmann (2005) argue that individuals' relationships play an important role in their childbearing behavior. A considerable share of childless persons who are about to end their fertile phase soon live permanently alone or in short-term or changing couple relationships, and therefore remain childless. This is mainly true for men (Schmitt & Winkelmann, 2005: 21).

In contrast, respondents who report in the interview that they are not sure if the partner is the "right person" either postpone thinking about family formation or consider breaking up with their partner. In these cases, doubts about the partnership arise because both partners do not *agree in their ideas about family formation* or, in one case, because of a general crisis in the partnership. For example, one female respondent with a strong desire to have a child reports breaking up a relationship because she felt that the partnership was not directed towards a future they both wanted. She finally broke up with her long-term boyfriend because he did not share her ideas about how to organize family life and divide tasks in the partnership and she could not imagine sharing a common future with him:

> *At this age, with 30, one starts thinking about family, children and: "is this really the person with whom I want to have all this?" No, I didn't want to. (L04ef, female, 30, single, childless)*

The maturity of a partnership is, in addition its long duration, also indicated by living together. All parents interviewed and all respondents who intend to have a child soon had been cohabiting before deciding to have a child. Those who are

living apart together feel that they have to first see how living together works out before deciding whether to have a child.

Another indicator for the maturity of a relationship is marriage, or the intention to marry. The most explicit comment on the relevance of marriage before having children was made by the woman we have just heard on the issue of living together:

> *Sure, I will marry before I bring a child into this world. Because I can't do that to the child. Well it's a little judgmental. But I want my child to grow up with both parents, who stick to each other and have sworn this to each other, who are together and are engaged in a marriage. This really is an institution different from living loosely together. And I want for my child to experience it like that. (L03ef, female, 30, LAT, childless)*

Although many state that, in general, marriage is not an important precondition for having a child, they still feel that, for them, marriage is preferable. They mostly present two arguments: 1) that marriage is a beautiful symbol in which two persons acknowledge that they want to spend the rest of their lives together, and 2) that for financial reasons (given the German tax system favoring married couples, or because they want to make financial investments, such as buying a house) marriage is the best model. Therefore, although some conceived the child out of wedlock, almost all the parents in the sample married before giving birth. Only one couple currently pregnant wants to stay unmarried, and this is mainly for specific financial reasons.

Single respondents reported having definite ideas regarding the quality and maturity of a partnership.[23] They all expect that a partnership will need time to develop, and they would not get pregnant when they have just met a new partner. They also stress that they would not accept just anybody as partner in order to have a child, as this single woman with a strong desire to have a child reports:

> *I would not search for a man by hook or by crook and compromise on anything just to get him to give me a child. (L10ef, female, 32, single, childless)*

Only one respondent openly says that she might have a child with someone who later turns out not to be the "right" partner. All other respondents are silent about this possibility, and the women often stress that they do not want to be single mothers. The respondent just mentioned feels that, at 31 years old she might not have much time to find out if her next partner is really "the right one", and to

[23] Some singles state that they have not found this person yet, while others report that they had found a partner with whom they could imagine having children, but the partnership broke up before they were able or willing to realize parenthood.

give the relationship time to develop and mature before getting pregnant. In contrast to most other respondents, she could imagine being a single mother:

> *Similarly I could imagine that I would get to know a partner, get pregnant and realize that he is not the right person and that I can raise the child alone. And I think I could do this, I would be confident. (L10ff, female, 31, single, childless)*

All other singles fear that if the right person does not show up in time, they will have to stay childless, and are somewhat resigned to this possibility, as this male single says:

> *Interviewer: Could you imagine not having any children?*
> *Respondent: Yes, well, to some extent I have resigned to the fact – resigned is a strong word I think, but at the moment I am more of the opinion that maybe it will not happen, but I do not want to tie myself down, I believe, or deal with the issue. I simply wait what time will bring… (L02em, male, 29, single, childless)*

Among all childless respondents who want to have children in general, and who currently have a partner most feel that their relationship is mature enough to have a child; some, however, have doubts, mainly because they are in a general crisis, or because their partner does not want to have children (yet). Studies on couples have shown that if one partner is decisively against having children, the couple mostly will stay childless (Thomson and Hoem, 1998).

4.2.3 The Level of the Social Network

Whether an individual perceives him- or herself as mature and ready for parenthood is strongly related to the network he/she is embedded in. As I have shown for the *security* factor, also regarding the factor *maturity*, the network provides social support and gives orientation.

Social Support

Social support is connected to maturity in two ways: a person who imagines having a child at a point in time when network partners consider her to be too young and immature assumes that either the network partners will withdraw their support, or will offer too much support and try to assume control over their lives. Both assumptions are strong motivations to conform to the norms about when to have children that are transmitted in the network, and not to have a child “too

early". This issue is mainly brought up by respondents who have an unplanned pregnancy. They recall their fear of telling their parents (although they mostly described their relationship as very good and supportive). They also describe losing the emotional support of former friends who remained childless (and to some extent "childish") and who "lived in a different world". However, they made new friends with children and established mutually supportive relationships with them. In contrast to those who had unplanned children (and much earlier than their network partners would have suggested or planned for themselves), those who had or planned to have their children "in line" with their network partners (that is, at a point at which the network partners agree that they have reached maturity) all count on considerable support. Additionally, if, for example, ego's parents start offering concrete support in childcare, this signals to ego that they consider him/her as "ready" to become a parent. The darker side of support is assuming control. One woman who was very young when she had her first child (unplanned) reported that, while her family of origin supported her, they also assumed control, feeling that, given the respondent's immaturity they must take some decisions for her, which produced serious conflicts.

Orientation via Behavioral Models and Age Norms

As we have seen on the level of the individual, feeling mature is strongly connected to having finished education and having settled in a stable job (see Section 4.2.1) This notion is based on a *behavioral model* of sequencing life events. This model is so predominant among the respondents and enforced by sanctions that it can be considered to be a social norm (see Section 4.1.3). This behavioral model provides orientation as to when maturity is reached. Only a few respondents report knowing exceptions to this norm, and they mostly value them negatively. Most respondents agree that, when they were enrolled in education, they did not feel mature enough to have a child. The exceptions to this are the respondents who did not follow the regular educational pathway, but who decided to enter university after they had completed professional training and worked in their profession for some time. They started university in their late twenties/early thirties and maturity is not an issue for them in terms of family formation.

Our respondents generally have some concept of what the ideal age for having children would be, and provide a rather wide or narrow frame, ranging from early twenties to late thirties, but rarely going beyond age 40. Although there is variability, there are certain collectively agreed age limits within which having children is acceptable, so we can identify certain *age norms* that limit the accept-

able time for having children to the space between the early twenties to the late thirties/early forties for men and women.

This view on age limits among our respondents strongly corresponds to their network partners' timing behavior and attitudes. One interesting example comes from a group of friends who are childless and who find it acceptable to have their first child in their mid-thirties. All the people from this group of friends unanimously report during their interviews that they have heard that the average age of mothers at first birth in Germany lies around age 37, as these two friends state:

> *The average age at first birth is currently 37/38 in Germany. (L55ef, female, 33, married, childless)*
>
> *I think the average age at first birth is currently above thirty. Someone has told me it's at 36 or so. (L51mp, male, 31, cohabiting, childless)*

Some of our respondents in their early and mid-thirties feel they are about to or have already crossed their personal age limit, and therefore presume that they will stay childless:

> *I always told myself, when this "inner clock" ticks, it will start ticking at some point. And if until 35 nothing has started ticking, then there won't be anything ticking later on. Well, and next year I will be 35 and I don't think that there will be anything ticking (…) For me 35 has always been the highest, highest limit. Because I don't want, if I take my child to school at 46, that they say: is this your grandma? No, that's terrible. I also think one cannot take as much stress then and no… (L58ef, female, 34, single, childless)*

Their networks mainly consist of persons their age who are voluntarily childless, or who have children who are often already school age.

Orientation via Access to Information

Maturity is, however, not only connected to this abstract and very general model of sequencing life events, but also to the attitudes and behaviors of the actual network partners. The extent to which they deal with family formation and how mature they feel are seen as important points of reference. Many respondents report that their readiness to have a child grew when friends and acquaintances started to have children, such as this woman who is currently pregnant:

> *How did it become more concrete? Yes, that starts – very classic actually: Among the acquaintances the first people have children, and then my boyfriend became godfather three years ago. Among the relatives there were some who were older, who had children and at family reunions, somehow the children came and I started playing with them, and they were cute. But now, especially during the last year, friends also had children, other friends want to have children, have recently married. And somehow the topic has come up in general. And so it came that we said, okay, my boyfriend is 32, I turn 30 in winter, and we said at some point we can now also imagine this. (L11ef, female, 29, cohabiting, pregnant)*

She nicely describes a longer process of dealing with the issue of family formation and of forming a concrete intention to have a child. The starting point was when she observed the first people in her social network having children, people who were older than she. The issue became more pressing when friends and acquaintances her age started talking about family formation, stated their intention to have a child soon, or became pregnant. The accumulation of these events, as well as frequent discussions with their friends on the issue, finally led the couple to formulate their intention to have a child soon, and they managed to get pregnant right away. Observing that others in the same age group become parents, and watching how they deal with family formation helps the respondents to see themselves as parents, enabling them to imagine how their life would be with a child. In addition, in talking to these people, the subject of family formation often comes up. The respondents need to formulate their ideas and make up their minds about their own intentions and plans, as this female respondent reports:

> *People around me are all in that phase in life, if they have a partner then they have recently married and have recently had children. And for them having children is a topic anyway. And when you go there, you deal with the children and because the mothers like talking about the children, one talks about children. And then one starts thinking about one's own situation and talks with them about the topic. (L10ff, female, 31, single, childless)*

Having the opportunity to discuss their own ideas and plans on family formation helps them to become aware of the own desires. Talking about the issue forces them to formulate their own intentions and plans, and thereby fosters a feeling of readiness for family formation.

As I have described in the section on the level of the individual, responsibility and sacrifice are very important factors in maturity. Observing their network partners becoming parents, the individuals are able to see how they deal with this responsibility. One very important finding in this is realizing that, if their friends are able to do it, they could too. Or, as one respondent states:

> *I am scared a lot that this [raising a child] will go terribly wrong. But also others have managed; therefore I think that I shall manage, too. (L04ef, female, 30, single, childless)*

The respondents also learn by observing their network partners who already have children what kinds of sacrifices are involved, and also what gains can be expected. Additionally, the friendships change as their friends have children. Many respondents report that life became "calmer" when their friends had children, and that they lost friends they used to go out with in the evenings to marriage and children. Therefore, at some point they came to feel that the time to start a family had come for them:

> *The older the people got, the more have married, the lazier they got and did not go out anymore. (…) And then these things came up: What do you do now? It cannot go on like this. One looks around, one gets introduced into family life, because persons around also have children. This, I think, plays an important role. One sees that this is okay. Yes and then the topic to start a family came up for us. (L59em, male, 37, married, 1 child: aged 2.5)*

As the quotes above show, the accumulation of events, including the impression that "all the others are having children at the moment", is a signal that they have reached a certain level of maturity. Fueled by interactions with their network partners who have children, our respondents are often encouraged to think about their own family formation. Based on comparisons with their network partners of a similar age who already are parents, our respondents often come to the conclusion that they have reached the same level of maturity, and are therefore ready to have children.

Mutual Reinforcement

Maturity can also be defined through a process of mutual reinforcement among friends and relatives of a similar age. Very relevant for this are older siblings, especially sisters. When sisters get pregnant, this often leads the respondent to consider family formation, and her desire to have her own child grows:

> *My sister was 21 when she got pregnant [the respondent was 15 at that time]. Even at 21 I told myself, this was for her the right decision; that it was okay that she had a child. But for me the time has not come yet. But there it started to be more concrete, that it would be like that at some point; that the thought and the desire have grown. I think that's natural. (L02ff, female, 25, married, childless)*

Equally important are close friends, mainly of the same sex. From the dyad-interviews with close friends, I know that they often foster a feeling of readiness by talking a great deal about family formation, and by encouraging each other to have a child soon (L10ef–L10ff). Alternatively, they may reinforce a feeling of not being ready yet, either by not talking about the topic to each other, thereby implying that it is not yet an issue (L02em–L05em, L05em–L07em); or by encouraging each other to wait a couple of years before having children (L52ef–L56ef).

Those who indicate a strong desire to have children, or who intend to have a child soon, often report having many network partners who have children, are pregnant, and/or want to have children soon. Meanwhile, many of those who cannot imagine having a child (yet) report that, among their friends, almost nobody has children or feels ready for children. Some see the reasons for this mainly in a lack of financial security, and stress that most of their friends are still enrolled in university or are experiencing difficulties in finding an adequate job. Others point out that most of their friends are not yet mature enough to be parents. This female respondent, who also does not feel ready to have a child, calls her circle of friends "childish":

> *I have … how shall I say it … my friends are very young at heart, mentally. We are all still very childish. Therefore, many of them cannot imagine becoming parents yet. (L13ef, female, 29, cohabiting, childless)*

To sum up, network partners influence how individuals define maturity, how they view the issues of accepting responsibility and giving up certain things, as well as their definition of the ideal age for having children. By providing the opportunity to think about or to talk about family formation, as well as to observe how close network partners deal with family formation, network partners foster the individuals' feelings of readiness to have a child. And the reverse is also true: networks that lack persons with children cannot provide these opportunities, and the feeling that it is not time yet for family formation prevails. In addition, the fear among respondents that, by having a child too early, social support will be withdrawn, or that the support offered will assume the form of control, motivates them to align their own ideas of what it means to be mature enough for family formation to those of important network partners.

4.3 Priority

The third main factor in the decision-making process for or against having a child is termed *priority*. What do the respondents strive for in their lives? Do they have various goals or one main aim? And, most important, how do they judge the compatibility of their different life goals? Again, I will look at how priorities and life goals are negotiated at the level of the individual, at the level of the couple, and at the level of the social network.

4.3.1 The Level of the Individual

In the interviews, I find three different ways of formulating *life goals* and evaluating their *compatibility*: 1) respondents prioritize family, 2) respondents aim at having a family, and also have other life goals and perceive them as compatible, 3) respondents feel that having a family competes with other life goals, and have *decided to prioritize* their other life goals, or they are ambivalent and cannot decide between their goals.

A large number of respondents can be described as clearly family-centered, prioritizing having a family. They present their life course as directed towards family formation, express a strong desire for children, and either already have children, intend to have children soon, or suffer because they are single and lack a partner with whom they can realize their family plans. One example of a female respondent who expresses a strong desire to have children, and who plans to have a child as soon as she and her husband are finished with their studies, is this 25-year-old woman:

> *Well, in our life, in any case, family plays an important role. Children, children are simply priority for me. (L02ff, female, 25, married, childless)*

Accordingly she foresees that, as soon as she and her partner have finished their studies, nothing will hinder them from realizing their intention, because they are both willing to compromise on their jobs and careers in order to start a family. To this family-centered group belong men and women with middle as well as higher levels of education. Mostly these respondents do not even talk about other possible life goals, because it is self-evident to them that having a family is the most important thing they can do in life. They define themselves as “family people”, as this father of two children says:

> *I am more a family person, therefore it wasn't a question for me [if I should rather remain single or start a family]. (…) For me it has always been clear that I want family. (L50em, male, 31, married, 2 children: age 3 and 6)*

Having a job for him – as for other respondents in this group – is just a means to supporting his family financially, but is not a goal in itself. When deciding to have children, it was clear to him that he would abandon his freelance job (a job that was very unstable and insecure, but he liked it very much) and search for stable employment.

Respondents who are family-centered have medium and higher education. The majority are women, because men mostly do not see a conflict between having a fulfilling job and having children, and therefore are mostly included in the second group that finds family and other life aims compatible. Family-centered respondents often stress that they are not eager to pursue a career. Most of the family-centered respondents are married and already have a child.

Another large group of respondents also mention life goals in other areas. These include having a fulfilling job, pursuing a career and reaching and maintaining a high standard of living; owning a house and traveling are often mentioned in this context. They feel that these aims are compatible with having children. Some admit, however, that in order to make these aims compatible, they have been postponing childbirth.[24] One example is this 31-year old woman who has insisted on finishing her studies before having children, and who wants to work in her profession, which she feels is compatible with having children:

> *It's fully clear to me that I will work later. If we have children I am certainly willing to take a break. But to me it would be also clear that if the children have a certain age, they will go to kindergarten. And then I can work again. In my job this is possible, I can work part-time. And I want to get out of the house, I want to be in contact with other persons. And afterwards I pick the children up and then I am fully there for the children. (L10ff, female, 31, single, childless)*

This 30-year old man also feels that having a fulfilling job and having children are two important aims in his life:

> *We both have the chance to accomplish a lot in our professions, but, I say, without children … at some point something is missing. You maybe have fun for five years, 10 years, but then, at some point it becomes lonely. (…) For me both, the profession and the family are very important. (L12em, male, 29, married, childless)*

[24] An example is the decision-making process in the partnership of the couple L18 that is presented in the next section on the level of the partnership.

The gender divide is clearly visible here: while for men compatibility means holding a full-time job as a father, and they mostly do not consider staying at home with the baby or working part-time, women always picture having a job which allows them to take a break for a while and to work part-time afterwards. Women who, however, are not content working part-time feel that having a fulfilling job and being a mother are incompatible, and belong to the following group. The respondents who find having a family compatible with other life goals generally have medium or higher levels of education, but it is striking that they very often have university education. Respondents belonging to this group do not differ in gender and parity. They often report that they have been postponing childbirth until they have managed to find a job, which is interesting and appropriate given their qualifications. While men stress that the job also needs to be well-paid, women seek a job that enables them working part-time.

Some respondents feel that having children *competes* with their other interests and life goals. They mostly mention life goals and interests that fall under the headings of self-realization, personal independence, or working full-time. As a consequence, they often state that they do not intend to have children in their lives, as this female respondent explains:

> *It's not that I am strictly against [having children], but it is like that, that I say, I do not need them. I find children sweet and beautiful, but it is also an issue of not wanting to give up my life. And this I would have to with a child. With the partner I have had for the last several years it would have only been possible if I had stopped working completely. No, the whole day sitting at home and changing diapers and in the evenings talking about the baby poop… no, I cannot do this. It is like that! They only talk about children. And this is a full-time job and I would be financially dependent on my partner, I could not work in the first three years because I would not know what to do with the child. (L58ef, female, 34, single, childless)*

The feeling that having children is incompatible with having a fulfilling job and pursuing a career is exclusively held by women, and the fear of not being able to maintain one's standard of living is also mostly expressed by women. Only one male respondent reports that he also feels that, in the current economic conditions, only dual-earner couples can earn enough to sustain a pleasant lifestyle. This is well in line with the predominance of the male-breadwinner model, and the notion that full-time-working mothers are bad mothers, as described above. Men (and also one woman) who feel that having children is incompatible with their other interests in life tend to place a high priority on leading an independent life and on personal freedom, like this young man, who stresses his desire to live as an artist:

> *What's really important to me… I have been often told that I am married to the music. And this is true. My main goal in life is not somehow starting a family or reaching material security. What is most important to me is that I can carry out the music and the things I have in my head and at best have them published and made known to a greater public. Like a self-expression, self-realization in the artistic field. (L09em, male, 30, single, childless)*

Not all respondents who feel that they have life goals that are compete with having children are certain that they want to stay childless. Some respondents present a very ambivalent attitude towards having children. They could imagine different ways their life could proceed: on the one hand, they would be content with having a child and prioritizing family (1); while, on the other hand, in contrast to those who are family-centered they state that they could also very well imagine to staying childless (3). In this case, they would be content prioritizing their careers, as this female respondent states:

> *Respondent: There are two alternatives: Either I will have a leading position and a great job and live for this job; that would be one possibility. And the other, I have children and work again, not in this leading position, bur rather continue in my current position, but that would be also okay.*
> *Interviewer: Do you think you could combine the leading position and children?*
> *Respondent: I don't think so. It could be that one could somehow manage, but how I see my boss here, who works so much, I don't think there would be much time for children. And this would be a shame. I believe I could organize this much better on my current position. (L16ef, female, 29, LAT, childless)*

She stresses that, although she could imagine having children or remaining childless, or pursuing a career or not pursuing a career, she cannot imagine combining having children with pursuing a career.

Respondents who state that their other life goals are in competition with having children very often have a university education, especially those who feel ambivalent. Among our interviewees who are certain that they do not want to have any children are also people with medium education. They set the ideal age for having children much lower than respondents with university education, and are therefore certain that they have already passed the point at which they would have become a parent. Most respondents who consider life goals other than having children are involved in a partnership, so I cannot infer that their attitude is influenced by the lack of a partner for family formation. There are as many women as men who are ambivalent, or do not want to have children.

The relevance of personal values and orientation, as well as of personal lifestyle for the desire for children and the realization of parenthood is pointed out in several empirical studies. People who value self-development, individual free-

dom, independence, and flexibility often do not desire children as much as persons who do not stress these values (Schneewind & Vascovic, 1996; Schneider, 1996; Ruckdeschel, 2004). In addition, a strong orientation on job and career is connected with a reduced desire to have children among women (Nave-Herz, 1988; Schneider, 1996).

4.3.2 The Level of the Couple

The respondents discuss and negotiate their priorities within their partnership. Do both partners agree on prioritizing family and having children, and are willing to contribute to this goal, or do they hold different life goals and values? Not surprisingly, most respondents state that they have similar priorities as their partners. Comparing the accounts of the life goals of both partners in the 11 partnership-dyads available, it can be seen that they are not the same in all details, but they coincide strongly. Not one single respondent talks about having an open conflict with her/his partner on priorities. When two partners express somewhat different life interests and goals, at least one partner states that she/he is rather flexible on it, and does not have strong priorities, as in the case of the female respondent who was quoted in Section 4.3.1 expressing an ambivalent attitude concerning her priorities in life. Her partner does not want to have any children, and prioritizes his job and independence. She states that she could imagine both having a child, as well as prioritizing her career in another part of the interview:

> *I believe it is rather equivalent. Yes… I do not miss anything without child, let's say. I cannot really judge, but I do not really miss it. I could well imagine to go on living like that, to focus more on the job. But I could also imagine it with child. (L16ef, female, 29, LAT, childless)*

She reports that she does not touch on the issue with her partner but rather hopes that, as their relationship develops, their interests will converge.[25] Similarly, another couple consists of one person who is rather against having children, while the other could imagine having a child. This couple reports that they talk about having children every now and then in a humorous way. The female partner, for example, says:

[25] Remarkably, it seems that having to think about and talk about her desires, interests, and priorities during the interview changed the views of this respondent. She realized that her and her partner's life goals are incompatible and that did not want to keep silent on the issue anymore; as a consequence, shortly after the interview she broke up with him.

> *[The topic child] comes up every now and then. We discuss, but this is really only fun: I adore animals and would like to have a dog, we already have two cats and I would like to have a dog, and my husband says: Ok, I get a baby and you get a dog. Such a squabble, that comes up every now and then. (L55ef, female, 33, married, childless)*

Her husband presents the same issue from his perspective:

> *When the topic dog comes up, the topic child comes up. She will get a dog, when I will get a child, that's our deal. She does not really like too much to have a child. But she wants a dog. There I have said: no dog. Then she said: Ok, if I get a child, would I then get a dog? And I said: yes (laughs). (Serious again): No, that is at least, there is something to it, even if it is said out of fun. (L55mp, male, 29, married, childless)*

These examples from both partners are most interesting because they allow us to gain some insights into the process of negotiations on the issue of family formation and life priorities in a couple relationship. Both reveal that they address the issue in a humorous way. By calling their conversation as joke, as not very serious, they are able to address the issue without having to take a clear and definite position, and without risking raising a conflict.[26] Nevertheless, in this conversation they can both learn more about their partner's attitudes and ideas, about if and how the partner may possibly be changing his/her mind over time, and signal possible ways for compromising. This testing strategy is also mentioned by two female respondents whose current partners do not want to have a child yet.

Although, when talking about their current partner, all respondents agree that they have basically the same life goals, when talking about former partners or about the early years in their current partnership, many respondents state that they have had strong disagreements about priorities, and that it took some time to settle the conflict, it eventually led to the break up of the partnership. This male respondent, for example states that he had prioritized his artistic life, and could not imagine having children. When he met his current partner seven years ago, he slowly changed his view:

> *Since we are together this has been a slow development. In the beginning I couldn't imagine to have children. (...) Earlier it was important to me to live as artist, but I never thought of providing the financial supply for children, it was clear that I could*

[26] Interestingly, they both ascribe the initiation of the deal to the partner and stress that it is a joke. This is most probable directed to the interviewer, because they feel it is socially not acceptable to negotiate about having a child in such a way. Nevertheless, it is clearly a process of negotiation that is presented here, whereby both partners try to find out what the other wants and how they can reach consensus.

only cover my own expenses. (...) She always reproaches me that I had told her earlier that I can only take care of myself and that I want to have a partner who earns her own money. So, that I totally refute this classic model that I'd be the breadwinner for my wife and family. And I still think like that. I don't want to have a wife who sits in the household, because also for her this is total shit, this doesn't work. Then you don't have anything from your life. (...) Now there's the model "family" for me. This means responsibility for others. (...) Now it gets more and more important for me to earn money; that I can fulfill my duty as father of the family. That's now my perspective, that's the most important. We want to found a family and this is beautiful. (L18mp, male, 34, cohabiting, childless)

Coming to a decision concerning family formation is a process that may involve a long time span. Diverging ideas concerning having children may be acceptable when one feels too young for children anyway, and they may change over time, so the views of both partners converge. Therefore, initially holding different attitudes does not necessarily need to lead to a break up of the relationship. In our example we can see that, now that the couple has settled their conflict, they can plan on having a child, and had actually stopped contraception use at the time of the interview.

The partnership is not only the place were life goals are negotiated; having a fulfilling partnership itself is for many respondents one aim in life. They want to have a stable relationship for many years, and most imagine growing old with their current partners. While most respondents feel that having a child is a self-evident step in the development of a partnership, and that it will enrich their lives, others expect that having a child will disturb their partnership, as this female respondent says:

Even if my partner says that he'd take care of the child, this means also that he will be there for the child. This means that he doesn't have as much time for me as he did earlier. And I don't want to give up on this commodity, the partnership. Well, because the constellation would have to change inevitably. And this is, I think, a point I don't feel up to. (L51ef, female, 31, cohabiting, childless)

Her partner strongly agrees and also names losses in the quality of the partnership as one main reason for not having children:

Also concerning the partnership something would change. I think (and I also see this among acquaintances and friends), that a child strongly takes center stage. At the beginning simply because you have to take care of it all the time. And then later because the child actively claims both parents. (L51mp, male, 31, cohabiting, childless)

From both interviews we learn that they prioritize their partnership, as well as having a fulfilling job, a high standard of living, and personal freedom. They feel this is incompatible with having children, and therefore prefer to remain childless. The link between a strong emphasis on the couple relationship and a reduced desire for children has also been stressed in other studies (e.g., Schneider, 1996).

4.3.3 The Level of the Social Network

As we have seen in the chapter before, social networks may foster a feeling of security (Section 4.1.3) and transmit a sense of maturity (Section 4.2.3). In this section, we will see that social networks are also involved when it comes to the setting of priorities.

Social Support

The availability of support can have a major impact on how respondents view the compatibility of different life goals. One example is the provision of childcare by parents and parents-in-law. Respondents who expect that they can rely on regular parental support in childcare mostly feel that having a family and working are compatible, in contrast to respondents who do not have access to this type of support. Another example is the provision of housing by parents or parents-in-law. Respondents who can rely on this type of support have fewer concerns that having children endangers their current standard of living, and thus either feel that enjoying a high standard of living is compatible with having children, or place a high priority on having children anyway.

Orientation via Behavioral Models and Gender Norms

The priorities the respondents set in their lives are strongly related to the behavioral models and gender norms conveyed in their networks.

Respondents whose network partners mostly follow the male-breadwinner model in its traditional form (that is, the mother is housewife), mostly favor this model and prioritize having children. Respondents whose network partners mostly live according to the male-breadwinner model in its modernized form (that is, the mother works part-time) favor this model, and either place a high priority on having children, or feel that having children is compatible with other

life aims, such as working in their profession (part-time). Interesting are those respondents who intend to remain child-free, or who are ambivalent. Their network partners either follow the male-breadwinner model (in its traditional or modernized form), or they are childless and have an egalitarian division of tasks in the partnership.

Orientation via the Transmission of Information

The information shared in a social network strongly influences how compatible the respondents perceive different life goals to be. They monitor closely how their network partners set priorities and how they manage to combine different life goals, and these observations often enter into their reasoning. One example is a 34-year-old childless woman who is engaged in a rather loose relationship to an old school friend who has two children. They are not in close contact, but meet each other at birthdays or other festivities. Based on her observation of this friend (and several others), she has learned that having children means staying at home as a housewife. Of course she knows that there are women who combine family and job differently, but she does not personally know mothers who are fulfilled in their jobs or successful in their careers:

> *I only know this extreme case: if you have children you are at home and, yes, you live in your own little world. And I think, this is a great pity. Somehow I have the feeling that these mothers also lose out on something. (L58ef, female, 34, single, childless)*

Not knowing any women personally who have a fulfilling job and enjoy personal freedom despite being mothers, she cannot imagine how it could be possible to combine family and work, and is convinced that two are incompatible. Thus she has decided that, for her, forgoing having children is the best choice. In this view, she fully agrees with her friend with two children, who has given up her profession in order take care of her children.

Many respondents state that they often discuss the compatibility of having children with other life goals with their network partners, and thereby learn about their attitudes on combining family and job. They talk about when would be the best timing for having children, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of certain arrangements, and gather information about subjects such as the availability and quality of public childcare.

Mutual Reinforcement

The setting of priorities is also influenced by how network partners define their life goals, and by what kind of values they consider to be relevant. Especially close friends mainly share the same priorities and mutually reinforce them: if close friends want to stay childless, they enjoy spending their leisure time together, for example, by traveling and going out. These friends are convinced that they would lose pleasurable features of their friendship if one of them had a child (e.g., friends L51ef–L55ef; L10ef–L10ff). Close friends, however, who both want to have children, often encourage each other to have a child at the same time, in order to share all their experiences (e.g., friends L52ef–L56ef).

4.4 Summary and Discussion: Establishing Security, Feeling Mature, and Setting Priorities

Deciding if and when to have children, is as we have seen, a complex process that is not only based on individual reasoning, attitudes, and desires. Rather, it must be conceived of as a project of a couple, including processes of negotiation about the different and sometimes even contradictory attitudes and desires of both partners. Additionally, the network of personal relationships each individual and couple is embedded in influences the decision-making process.

Because individuals do not form their attitudes or act in isolation, but are, rather, bound in a couple relationship and embedded in a network of personal relationships, I found it helpful to distinguish three levels of analysis: the level of the individual, the level of the couple, and the level of the social network. On all three levels I have found several factors relevant for family formation that could be combined to three main categories: *security*, *maturity*, and *priority*.[27] Most factors included in these categories have been named in same or similar terms in various other studies on family formation, but the relevance of the influence of personal relationships on these factors has been widely neglected. In the following, I will therefore summarize the most relevant factors, discuss them in the light of research on family formation, and stress the impact of personal relationships my analyses have revealed.

[27] Note that the factor "behavioral model/compliance to norms" is grouped in all three categories because the existence of such a model and the compliance with perceived norms 1) influences the individual's attitudes and ideas on how to achieve financial security, provides orientation and reduces negotiations within the partnership, and provides the secure feeling of acting adequately and in a way that is accepted by others; 2) such a model and social norms also give a clear indication on the timing of family formation and when maturity is reached; 3) the existence of such a model is also connected to the way priorities are set.

One major precondition for family formation is that individuals feel that they have established *Sicherheit*, a term that can be best translated with the three English terms security, certainty, and safety (Bauman, 1999: 17). This includes four different forms:

First it involves *economic and financial security*, produced by having completed education and having found an adequate job. This result is in line with many studies on western Germany and other Western countries: being enrolled in education, experiencing an insecure employment situation, foreseeing problems in combining family and job, or fearing a loss in the standard of living when having children hampers family formation (Klein & Lauterbach, 1994; Liefbroer & Corijn, 1999; Tölke & Diewald, 2003; Schmitt & Winkelmann, 2005; Ruckdeschel, 2007). Establishing economic and financial security is a project of the couple, who need to agree on a division of tasks in the partnership. The objective financial situation, and, even more important, the subjective perception of financial security and safety, not only depend on the couples' economic performance and success, they are also influenced by personal relationships. Most evidently – and most widely researched – the financial situation of the couple is affected by the support they receive or expect to receive from their network partners. Above all, financial support, the provision of housing, and support in childcare foster the financial situation of the couple (Szydlik, 2000; Kohli & Künemund, 2001; Fthenakis et al., 2002; Engstler & Menning, 2003: 146; Haumann, 2006). Additionally, my analyses show that personal relations also influence the attitudes and ideas the respondents have about establishing financial security and an adequate level of financial security. Friends and close relatives often have similar lifestyles. Individuals monitor closely how their network partners live and what they can afford, and compare their own financial situation and the degree of safety they have established with their network partners' situation. While some respondents and their network partners consider it adequate to earn enough money in order to provide for food and housing, others have clear ideas about additional items or activities they would like to finance, such as vacations, a family car, or the children's hobbies. The definition and meaning of a secure, safe, and certain situation are also shaped by social norms and behavioral models transmitted and enforced through personal contacts. Like other authors who have researched Western countries (e.g., Rindfuss et al., 1988), I have also identified a strong norm of not having children during education, and the behavioral model of the male breadwinner. The male-breadwinner model is largely accepted, and stipulates that security means an economically secure situation for the husband, while the position of the wife is not so relevant. This model is so influential that couples who could establish a female-breadwinner arrangement due to the better economic position of the wife do not

consider or cannot imagine this. The expectations and ideas about how a couple could establish a financially secure situation are also influenced by the information available from their network partners, by what they can learn from their network partners, e.g., about the expenses involved with having children or the costs and availability of public childcare.

Second, *security in the partnership* is relevant. This means that a suitable partner has to be found. Not surprisingly, many studies show that a major reason for involuntary childlessness is the lack of a partner (Dorbritz, Lengerer, & Ruckdeschel, 2005). Another important obstacle for realizing family formation occurs when the partnership does not function as expected (Dorbritz et al., 2005). Our respondents stress that, once a relationship has been established, it needs to be harmonious, stable, durable, and future-oriented. Only then can it provide security, emotional, and financial safety, and certainty on which to base such an important decision, such as having a child. It is also relevant that both partner need to establish a general agreement on family formation, on its timing, and on the organization of family life. Having reached this agreement is one characteristic that defines a stable and secure partnership and provides certainty for future planning. A Swedish study shows that, when two partners negotiate about having a child, both have a veto right. As a consequence, when one partner does not want to have children at a given time, family formation will not be realized (Thomson & Hoem, 1998). My interviews show that many respondents have experienced some form of this situation over the years: because either their partner or they did not want to have a child at the time, they postponed the transition to parenthood.

Third, *certainty in acting and planning* strongly fosters family formation. This certainty largely draws on the social network partners' attitudes and behaviors, the information they transmit, the norms they enforce, and the behavioral models they convey. I was able to show that following the behavioral models of the male breadwinner provides many of our respondents with a clear idea of how to proceed with family formation and how to organize family life. The orientation drawn from the social network provides certainty that one is acting adequately, as well as certainty for planning and organizing one's life, and thereby fosters family formation. But this model does not have a universally positive impact on family formation. For respondents who experience insecurities in the labor market or who strongly support gender equality, the contradiction between these experiences and views and the male-breadwinner model lead to uncertainty as to how a family could be established.

Fourth, *emotional security* derived from the partnership, as well as from the social network in general, is an important basis for family formation. Respondents who expect to receive emotional support in case of an unplanned

pregnancy are more positive about having the child than those who expect that their network partners would react in a negative way, expressing their shock or disapproval, or who feel that having a child might threaten their friendship.

The second category of *maturity* stresses that not just the couple's security, also the individual perception of "readiness" is essential for family formation. Many respondents postpone childbearing even though they feel that the financial situation they have established is sufficiently secure and safe, and even though they have acquired an adequate degree of certainty to plan and organize family formation. They stress, for example, that they do not feel personally mature and adult enough to become parent, that they lack the willingness to accept the responsibility for a child and to give up certain things, or that they feel their partnership is not ready for a child yet, given its short duration or weak stability. Other studies also show that an adult lifestyle and the willingness to take responsibility foster family formation (Dorbritz & Schwarz, 1996; Schneider, 1996). On the level of the couple, the duration and perceived stability of a partnership is also considered an important factor influencing fertility behavior (Van Peer, 2002; Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2004). My analyses show that the respondents' evaluation of their own maturity is not only intrinsically motivated, but is also subject to social influences. I find a strong correspondence between the descriptions of maturity given by close network partners of the same age (either partners or close friends), and that the personal feeling of maturity is mostly formulated in comparison to the level of maturity of the individuals feel their network partners have reached. Most respondents evaluate their social circle as ready to have children, already in the process of family formation, or far from starting to think about family formation.

The meanings connected to maturity and related concepts, such as responsibility and sacrifice of certain interests, are also shaped by the information, social norms, and behavioral models that are transmitted and enforced through personal relationships. For example, the definition of a "mature" partnership is influenced by the access to information they have. While persons who personally and intimately know single parents mostly set a rather low standard for when a partnership can be considered as mature, people who lack positive information about how it can be possible to raise a child alone insist on having long-term relationships with a high degree of stability and partnership quality before deciding on having a child, and express strong fears of going through a divorce and ending up as a single parent. An example for the transmission of behavioral models is the sequencing model, which states that maturity is reached only after a person has finished education and is established in a job. All our respondents state that this is the model most of their network partners currently follow if they already have children, or want to follow when they have children. Additionally, this is

also the model their network partners expect them to follow. Our respondents experience that behavior that deviates from these behavioral models is sanctioned: if persons get pregnant before having an adequate job, it is considered in the best case to have been an "accident"; but often these persons are valued negatively as immature, incapable of properly using contraceptive methods, asocial, and, in case of women, as lacking in self-confidence, or in being old-fashioned and not attaching importance to having a job. Additionally, the information available in the social network shapes the individual's definition of maturity, responsibility, and sacrifice: from persons who already have children, our respondents have learned about the sacrifices involved with having children. In comparison with their network partners, the respondents judge their own capability to take over responsibility. Therefore, having finished education and being established in an adequate job are not the only factors that contribute to a personal feeling of maturity; the social network also has a strong influence on the individual's assessment of his/her own maturity. Social relations and social norms also shape views on the ideal age for family formation. In Germany, most women place the optimal age for childbirth between 24 and 31 (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2004: 18). Our respondents orient their indication of the ideal age strongly on the behavior and attitudes in their social networks. Those who have many network partners who had children early set the optimal age for childbearing start earlier than those whose young network partners are still mainly childless, and intend to have children after age 30.

The third category, *priority*, emphasizes the role of values and life goals for family formation. First, having children is not necessarily a life goal for everyone; and, second, individuals may want to pursue several goals in their life, and may perceive them as being either compatible or in competition with having children. Persons who value life goals than family formation, and who feel that pursuing them is incompatible with having children, decide to stay childless, often despite the fact that they have established a materially secure living situation and perceive themselves and their partnership as mature. Beyond Hakim's findings, which identified three groups of women: those who prioritize having a family, those who wish to pursue a career, and those who are in-between ("adaptive"); our results stress that life goals and values are not only centered around the question of having a career or having a family, but also include issues that cannot be subsumed in these categories, including gender equality, the couple relationship, and personal development. Several empirical studies stress that personal values strongly shape the desire for children. In addition, the desire for an egalitarian partnership (Ruckdeschel, 2004, 2007) and a strong emphasis on the couple relationship (Schneewind & Vascovic, 1996) are connected with a comparatively smaller desire for children. People who embrace values of

self-development and individual freedom often do not desire children as much as people who do not stress these values (Schneewind & Vascovic, 1996; Ruckdeschel, 2004). Moreover, the setting of priorities is also influenced by how network partners define their life goals, and what kind of values they consider to be relevant. Especially close friends mostly share the same priorities and mutually reinforce them: if close friends want to stay childless, they enjoy spending their leisure time together, e.g., by traveling and going out. These friends are convinced that they would lose pleasurable features of their friendship if one of them had a child. However, close friends who both want to have children often encourage each other to have a child at the same time in order to exchange and share all their experiences. The norms and information shared in a social network also strongly influence how compatible the respondents perceive their different life goals to be.

The presentation of the relevance of all three factors on the level of the individual, the level of the couple, and the level of the social network shows that individual (or couple) characteristics are not the only factors that should be considered when interpreting fertility behavior. Indeed, additional insights can be gained by looking at the opportunities and constraints set on this behavior by social network partners. The network partners provide access to support, to information, and to emotionally arousing experiences, and are more or less able to enforce social norms. We shall learn more about how the structural properties of networks affect these opportunities and constraints in Chapter 5.

In the presentation of the factors so far, the interrelation of *security*, *maturity*, and *priority* has been mentioned at various points. Here, however, I want to focus on the interrelations explicitly by providing some examples, each on the level of the individual, the couple, and the social network.

Security and *maturity* are in various ways interrelated. On the level of the individual, finishing education and establishing oneself in a stable job is also often seen as a vital step for personal maturation; the sequencing model defines a "secure" situation, as well as personal "maturity", and thereby also provides orientation and certainty in acting and planning. On the level of the partnership, a "secure" partnership, which is stable and durable, is mostly also considered as a "mature" partnership; agreement with the partner on founding a family provides certainty in acting and planning for the individual, while also signaling the maturity of the relationship and the couple. On the level of the social network, access to social support on the one hand can foster a secure situation, but ego can also draw a feeling of maturity from being offered, for example, support in childcare, or a feeling of immaturity when the fear arises that the network partners might withdraw support, or even try to take over control because they regard ego as too immature to deal with the situation alone. In addition, network partners

can serve as role models, thereby reducing uncertainties in acting and planning, and (if they already have children or plan to have children soon) signaling to ego that maturity is reached.

Nevertheless there are individuals who have reached a comparably "secure" situation in their jobs, but still do not feel ready for children, and there are respondents who feel perfectly ready for parenthood, even though they lack a fully "secure" situation. Here the factor *priority* comes into play.

Priority and *security* are interrelated because the evaluation of the state of security reached and the definition of what a "secure" situation should be like strongly depends on the priorities set, and vice versa. For example, those who prioritize having children are willing to a great extent to compromise on, for example, their job in order to establish a family, and their threshold of when an "economically secure" situation is reached is rather low. Or, to view it from another perspective, those with lower income and career opportunities, or those with lower material aspirations, are more willing to prioritize having children, because they do not consider their job and earning money as a fulfilling life goal per se. Here the individual's profession plays a major role. Different professions demand various degrees of engagement, offer different levels of income, do or do not provide the option of working part-time, and offer more or fewer career opportunities. Thus the choice of profession influences how the compatibility of job and having children is evaluated, and if a career is considered to be a major alternative life goal. This affects the priorities the individuals set, as well as different aspects comprised in the factor security (e.g., financial security, certainty in acting and planning). On the level of the couple, the male-breadwinner model defines a "secure" situation (e.g., financial security with a male provider, security in acting and planning, with a couple agreeing on how to divide tasks in the partnership) and affects how priorities are set: they follow and accept this model, have ambivalent feelings about it, or escape its standards by remaining childless. On the level of the social network, for example, network partners with children provide information about the economic foundation necessary for having children, and at the same time, can show how contented or discontented one can be with prioritizing having children, or with combining family and job.

Priority and *maturity* are connected on the level of the individual in terms of the willingness to give up certain things. On the one hand the willingness to sacrifice supposedly indicates a mature person; on the other hand, it is connected to how life goals are defined and prioritized. When children are the top priority, it is easier to give up a fulfilling job than it is if the parent wants to combine work and children, and realizes it is difficult to do so.

On the level of the couple, the interrelation may include, for example, an agreement about when to have a child: this agreement signals that a mature stage

is reached (or shall be reached rather soon), but it also involves agreeing on the priorities set in life, i.e., whether family formation is postponed in order to first pursue other life goals, or whether having children is considered a major life goal.

On the level of the social network, network partners of similar ages who increasingly have children may signal that the age of maturity has been reached, but they may also foster thinking about how to set priorities, and may influence others to prioritize having children by their example. In contrast, being engaged mainly with network partners who postpone childbearing can have the opposite effect on *maturity* and *priority*.

To summarize, the factors that I have found in my analysis to be relevant in decisions about family formation are in line with those found in other research projects, and they are strongly interrelated. Beyond presenting the factors relevant for the formulation of fertility intentions on the level of the individual and the couple, I could show the relevance of personal relationships in the process of deciding if and when to have children, as well as on how to organize family life. Influences from personal relations strongly shape the individual's attitudes and views, as well as the current living situation. However, the question arises: can conformity in attitudes and behavior be attributed to an effect of social influence, or is it not rather grounded on the fact that individuals choose as their network partners persons who are similar in attitudes and behavior?

Influence or Selection?

I shall discuss the problem of selection and influence using the concrete example of the factor *priority*. The respondents' priorities in life and their network partners' priorities in life strongly coincide. Analyzing the interviews, we can show that this conformity is to some extent reached by selecting adequately fitting network partners, but it is also reached after a process of social influences that take place, leading the network partners to develop coinciding attitudes.

The selection effect can be illustrated by the fact that many respondents report that friends with different priorities in their lives have lost relevance or even moved out of their social networks in recent years. One example for this is the friendship dyad L50fp–L58ef. These are two female friends, aged 34 and 35 years, who have known each other since their school days. While one is married and has two children aged six and four, the other is childless and currently single. The married mother fully prioritizes her children: "For me it has always been certain that I would like to have children" (L50fp). Having a job is just a means for allowing the family to lead a good life. Currently, she is distributing news-

papers in the mornings before the children wake up, but she does not plan to work in the profession she was trained in (retail saleswoman), because she wants to be there for her children:

> *I currently only have a mini-job. Yes, I do a paper route and wait that I get a fixed district. For me this is the optimal work if one has children. My smallest child is now in kindergarten, but I have a big daughter who comes to school and has six weeks of vacation. And you don't leave a first grade kid alone for six weeks. This doesn't work. And it's like that: when I do the paper route in the early morning, the children sleep and my husband is there. And afterwards, I'm there for the children. This is important for me. And this works well. (L50fp, female, 34, married, 2 children: age 3 and 6)*

Her childless friend, however, prioritizes leading an independent life and working in an interesting job. She cannot imagine staying at home as a housewife, but, since she cannot imagine how to arrange having children and leading a more independent lifestyle, and feels that children are incompatible with working and enjoying one's leisure time, she has decided not to have children:

> *If I was at home every day with the children … the money wouldn't be there, I could not be as spontaneous; I could not say in the evening: let's go out for dinner, because at eight the children have to be in bed. And these kinds of activities would fall by the wayside, wouldn't they? For me there is only either this side or that side. And I have to take a decision for one or the other. (L58ef, female, 34, single, childless)*

Although both women have kept up contact over the years, inviting each other regularly to birthdays and other events, they do not consider each other to be close friends, and the childless woman reports that the friendship has changed when her friend got children:

> *Most of my friends I have for a very, very long time. For example [Name of her friend], with her I'm friends since we were 13. So these are very long-term friendships. And I think it's clear that one also drifts apart to some extent. That also the interests are fully different. When I work additionally on the weekends or go clubbing, they sit well-behaved at home with their husband and children. It's their life, it's ok, I also find this nice. And this is then my life. One tries to keep the friendship up, because the time establishes a bond. But It's a difference in the quality of the friendship, absolutely. (L58ef, female, 34, single, childless)*

Both women define close friends as people who share their priorities and have children of the same age, or who do not want to have children (yet). While the young mother rather automatically comes into contact with other parents through

her children, the childless woman reports that she is actively looking for new friends, mostly younger friends, because they have at least not yet prioritized family life and are free to engage in various activities:

> *One starts looking for younger friends. I have a friend who is my age, my best friend, who fortunately thinks how I do. But otherwise most in my age have children; and those somewhat younger, they are still a little more free-spirited, crazier, however you want to call this. They do not have this square ("spießig") habitual ways of life. (L58ef, female, 34, single, childless)*

As much as these two old school friends serve as good example for the selection effect, since both have chosen as their closest friends people that share their priorities in life, the childless respondent is also a good example that it is difficult to escape certain forms of social influence. Although this respondent has reduced contact to her old school friend, she still sees her sometimes and knows how she is living. Based on her observations, she has learned that having children means staying at home as housewife. Of course she knows that there are women who combine family and job differently, but she does not personally know any mothers who are fulfilled in their jobs or even successful in their careers. Not knowing any women personally who have a fulfilling job and enjoy personal freedom despite being mothers, she cannot imagine how it could be possible to combine family and job. She is convinced that the two are incompatible, and that it is therefore the best choice for her to forgo having children. So, despite selecting her closest network partners, this respondent is affected by social influences because persons she has thrown out of her current network or marginalized are still influential. I found that a considerable share of ties within my respondents' social networks are persistent, and have been included in the network for the last 10 years. These are relatives or old school mates, as well as many acquaintances. They have not been selected especially when the topic of family formation came up. There are also many ties that the respondents say they would like to exclude because these persons do not agree with their way of thinking about family formation, but they cannot because they are relatives or colleagues at work whom they cannot avoid.

To sum up, some personal relationships an individual has are selected based on his or her values, interests, and life goals; while other relationships are more stable over time, and individuals feel that they cannot change them. Despite the selectivity effect, I could show that personal relationships influence values, interests, and life goals by transmitting social norms and providing access to information. How exactly these social influences are transmitted, and what kind of personal relationships are most influential shall be analyzed in Chapter 5. But first I want to highlight the core category I developed from the data, and its

implications for individuals who are in the process of thinking about family formation and formulating their fertility intentions in the interview situation.

4.5 The Concept of the "Good Mother/Father" and a Typology of Fertility Intentions

The factors forming the three categories *security*, *maturity*, and *priority* are not only interrelated, they are also all connected to one underlying core category: the concept of the "good mother/father". This mainly describes the necessity for a "good mother" to reduce paid work to take care of her children, and the accompanying necessity for a "good father" to take over the full responsibility for the economic well-being of the family. The responsibilities for childcare in the couple are clearly gendered, and childcare is mainly ascribed to the mother. The mother is expected to invest her time and energy into caring for her children, while fathers are expected to devote at least their leisure time to the children. The image of the mother as main caregiver was not only identified in the Lübeck interviews, but is also confirmed by various other studies and surveys for (western) Germany: e.g., in 2000, 65% of ALLBUS respondents supported the statement that small children suffer when their mothers are working (Konietzka & Kreyenfeld, 2004: 37). This core category has also been described in some other Western countries, e.g., the US or Italy (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002; Bernardi, 2003; Dillaway & Paré, 2008).

The gendered image of the "good mother/father" strongly shapes the discussion on *security*, *maturity*, and *priority*. Security is often seen as being established only in the male-breadwinner model, which in turn reinforces the image of the "good mother/father". The discussion on maturity involves the notion that men, and, to an even greater extent, women can only have children when they have reached a point in their lives when they are willing to either take over the role as main earner (men), or to give up/reduce work (women), and for both to give up other interests in their life. Priorities are affected because the image of the "good mother/father" cements the impression that having children and pursuing life goals other than becoming a parent are – outside the model of the male-breadwinner – difficult if not impossible to combine. If men and women feel that they can only be "responsible", that is, adequate and acceptable parents if they give up other life interests, the decision to have children involves a clear statement on the priorities one intends to set in life. An institution that aims at easing the compatibility of family and work is – in line with the image of the "good mother/father" – viewed skeptically, especially when it involves daycare for children under age three or after-school care for older children. Our interviews

show that our respondents only rarely know persons who use childcare for children under age three, full-time kindergarten, or after-school care – so they lack access to positive information about these types of childcare. This is not surprising, given that the share of children using these kinds of childcare are very low in western Germany. For example, in 2002, 3% of the western German children under age three and 6% of the school-age children were offered a place in public childcare. In kindergarten (from ages three to six) all children were offered a place, but most only for half a day (Konietzka & Kreyenfeld, 2004: 38).

The omnipresence of this motherhood- and fatherhood-image strongly shapes how individuals think about family formation, and how they reach (or do not reach) a decision regarding if and when to have children. Four main types of balancing family formation with alternative life goals could be identified from the interviews:

- **Children are *the* major life goal**: These respondents say that having children is their most important aim in life, do not ponder any other goals in life. Careers are seen as necessary for providing the economic basis for having children. Respondents in this type have realized or are about to realize fertility intentions rather early, as soon as a secure situation and a feeling of personal maturity are reached. Persons following this path exclusively follow or plan to follow the (modernized) male-breadwinner model. This model gives them clear orientation, and shows them that they are well in line with social norms and expectations from their network partners (and can expect in return different forms of support from them). It reduces conflicts in the partnership, because the division of tasks is clear and does not need to be negotiated, and it is also a clear indicator of what job can be considered adequate. Additionally, the male-breadwinner model fosters a feeling of maturity, indicating how and when family formation can start, and also provides a clear set of priorities. The image of the "good mother/ father" is not questioned.
- **There is a way to combine having children with other life goals:** These respondents allow room for other life interests during a lengthy period *before* becoming parents. First, education and career, leisure time activities, travel, as well as values as self-realization, are the focus. But at some point having children becomes central in life, and then other interests lose importance. Because this way of thinking about family formation includes investing considerable time and effort into achieving an economically secure situation, and allowing considerable time to develop personal maturity, it frequently leads to fertility postponement. The modernized male-breadwinner model does not serve as a point of reference in the phase

before having children, during which gender equality in education and job is desired, but later on many respondents follow it, perceiving it as the only feasible model for raising children. Despite the presence of ideas about gender equity in the first phase, the gendered concept of the "good mother/ father" remains unquestioned in most cases.

- **Ambivalence about life goals:** These respondents are ambivalent about combining life goals or deciding for one major life goal. This pattern is often connected with difficulties in establishing an economically secure situation, and the exposure to contradictory values and behavioral models. One major example are persons who would, on the one hand, like to follow the modernized male-breadwinner model when having children, but who, on the other hand, also value other life goals (e.g., their job and career), and feel that the two are incompatible. Some respondents also support gender equality, and stress that they feel that women should not stay at home as housewives, but strive for high education and finding a fulfilling job. At the same time, however, they also stress that children should not be in daycare institutions for too many hours a day, and that the mother is the primary person for childcare. This leaves little room for compromise: only a part-time job that demands high qualifications and is challenging – and which additionally includes working hours that are compatible with half-day childcare institutions – will do. Respondents who experience these kinds of contradictions either have to find a compromise in order to start planning for or having children (and often express some dissatisfaction), or they are very ambivalent in their intentions about having a child. This pattern therefore leads to fertility postponement.
- **Other life goals are more important than having children:** These respondents perceive that having children is incompatible with other life goals, and therefore decide to prioritize the other life goal(s), and to forgo having children. In this case, the establishment of financial security and their assessments of their own, as well as of the couple's, maturity levels are not relevant as factors in the decision-making process. In regarding having children as incompatible with other life goals, these respondents also follow the image of the "good mother": if you cannot give up your own interests in order to be a good mother, you must forgo having children.

These types of balancing family formation with alternative life goals are interrelated with the respondents' fertility behavior, as presented in the interview (if they already have children), or with the fertility intentions they express during the interview (if they are childless). Based on the interview material I have developed a typology of fertility intentions, represented in Table 7. This typology

was produced in connection with the REPRO project on "reproductive decision-making in a macro-micro perspective", funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission, in which the analysis of the Lübeck data is part of the Work Package 5 on "Fertility intentions and behavior in context: a comparative qualitative approach", headed by Laura Bernardi (REPRO, 2009) In this work package, several researchers have jointly developed a typology of intentions for eastern and western Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Italy, and France. The typology I present here uses the terms and definitions developed from the western German data, but was certainly informed by the discussions in the working group about the different types of intentions, their boundaries, and the distinguishing characteristics.

Table 7: Typology of fertility intentions

Fertility intention/ parity	**Definition**
Established parenthood	Respondents are parents or pregnant at the time of the interview
Ready for parenthood	Respondents intend to have a child now or soon (e.g., after waiting three months after stopping the pill).
Ready for parenthood if	Respondents want to have a child but lack one necessary precondition. They actively try to establish this precondition.
Ambivalent	Respondents are unable to decide if or when to have a child and wave between having a child now, later or never.
Uncertain	Respondents want to have a child, but are very uncertain about the timing.
Parenthood is far	Respondents in general want to have children, but feel that parenthood is still far and an issue they will consider only later in their lives.
Voluntarily childless	Respondents do not intend to have a child.

Apart from respondents who already have children and therefore are grouped as "established parenthood" we can distinguish five types of fertility intentions among our childless respondents: *ready for parenthood (if), ambivalent about having children, uncertain about the timing, parenthood is far, voluntarily childless*.

Respondents who feel ***ready for parenthood*** express a strong desire for having a child. They have agreed with their partner to start trying for a child, and have stopped using hormonal contraceptives. They are married or intend to marry soon, and have concrete ideas on how to organize family life. This intention is only held by a small number of our respondents. In contrast, there is a rather large number of respondents who also express a strong desire to have a child and have concrete ideas on how to organize family life, but they lack one necessary precondition before they can start trying for a child. Therefore, they feel *ready for parenthood if* they have managed to establish this precondition, and are currently investing much effort in trying to achieve it. This lacking precondition is an aspect comprised in the categories *security* and *maturity,* e.g., ego or his/her partner has not finished education yet, but expects to do so rather soon; ego's partner does not feel ready for a child, but ego tries to convince him/her; ego is currently single, but is actively trying to find a new partner who agrees to have children soon. Respondents who feel ready for parenthood either *prioritize* having children or feel that they can combine having children with other life goals.

Some of the childless respondents talk about having children in a very ***ambivalent*** way. On the one hand, they would like to have a child, while on the other hand, they can also imagine that they would be happy living without children. They discuss the costs and benefits involved with having children and talk in detail about many forms of *security* and *maturity.* They perceive that having children is incompatible with other areas of life important to them and therefore they will need to *prioritize* one area of life, but they currently cannot take a decision.

A rather large group of respondents feel that ***parenthood is far,*** and is currently not an issue for them. Although they in general would like to have children, they have not yet thought much about it, because they feel that they will become parents only at a later point in time. They are often singles and enrolled in education and feel that they have not reached yet the preconditions comprised in the factors *security* and *maturity*. Although they feel that one day they will *prioritize* having a family, this is simply not an issue yet. They also have only vague ideas about how they would organize family life.

In contrast to those respondents for whom parenthood is far, respondents who are ***unsure about parenthood*** have thought about having children frequently, but currently feel unable to make a decision about when to have a child. Similar to respondents who are ambivalent, they also talk at length about the advantages and disadvantages of having children and different forms of *security* and *maturity*. However, in contrast to them, they are sure that they want to have children; they are just not sure about the timing. The timing is essential because they feel a combination of having children with their other life interests is only

possible, if they choose the right time. However, because they have difficulties defining the "right" moment for having children, they postpone childbirth, hoping that some day they will "feel" that this "right" moment has arrived. Among the respondents who are unsure about parenthood, most are involved in stable partnerships.

Some of our respondents indicate that they intend to remain ***voluntarily childless***. They are partly singles, and partly engaged in stable partnerships. They *prioritize* other life goals than having children and feel that they could not combine these interests with having children.

Table 8 displays how the fertility intentions correspond to the types of balancing family formation with alternative life goals presented earlier.

Table 8: Balancing life goals and fertility intentions/behaviour

Children are the major life goal	Combining children and other life goals	Ambivalence about life goals	Other life goals are more important
established parenthood **ready for parenthood (if)**	**parenthood is far** **uncertain about timing**	**ambivalent on having children**	**voluntarily childless**

Persons who see their major life goal in having children, who have clear ideas about when to have children and how to organize family life, and who decide for parenthood as soon as they have established a secure situation and feel mature, can be found in our sample among respondents who already have children (*established parenthood*), as well as among those who intend to have children soon (*ready for parenthood*), or as soon as they have established certain well-defined preconditions needed for family formation (*ready for parenthood if)*. They all share strong and gendered ideas on "*the good mother/father*", and, by prioritizing having children over other life goals, feel that they are well-prepared to follow the male-breadwinner model.

Persons who see a way to combine having children with other life goals can to some extent be found among those who already have children (*established parenthood*); in these cases, they are mostly pregnant or have very young chil-

dren at the time of the interview –that is, they did not enter parenthood until their late twenties/early thirties. They can also be found among persons ready for parenthood immediately (*ready for parenthood*) or only after having established certain conditions (*ready for parenthood if*). Additionally, many of these persons belong to the group of respondents who feel that family formation is not of interest for them yet (*parenthood is far*), or who feel unable to decide when a good moment for family formation would be (*uncertain*), and who therefore keep postponing the transition to parenthood. In this group, the respondents expect that, at some point in the future, they will feel prepared to live up to the image of the "*good mother/father*", but only after having enjoyed and pursued other life interests beforehand. The determination of this point in time is strongly related to the categories of *security* and *maturity*, because only when a secure situation and a feeling of maturity are reached will they feel ready to become parents.

Persons who are ambivalent about their life goals also express ambivalent fertility intentions, and therefore keep postponing making a decision for or against having children. They strongly reflect on the image of the "*good mother/father*" and its implications for them, and discuss how they can be able to be a "*good mother/father*" and, at the same time, follow their own interests.

Persons, who feel that other life goals are more important than having children, are those who do not intend to become parents, but who instead remain voluntarily child-free. They feel that they cannot combine being "a *good mother/father*" with their other life interests. Aspects of *security* and *maturity* do not matter for their decision.

To summarize, the core category of the "good mother/father" can explain much of the variation in fertility intentions, depending on whether it is accepted or challenged, and on how it can be combined with general attitudes on gender roles. The image of the "good mother/father", together with related categories such as *security*, *maturity*, and *priority* are, as we have seen transmitted, reproduced, negotiated, and challenged in social networks; and personal relationships have an influence on how individuals perceive and deal with family formation. How exactly social influences are transmitted, and what kind of personal relationships are most influential, shall be analyzed in the following chapter.

5 Personal Relations, Social Influences, and Social Networks

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, personal relationships play an important role as individuals think and make decisions about family formation. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at the personal relations our respondents have, at the social networks they are embedded in, at the interactions they are engaged in, and the processes of social influence that take place.

In this endeavor, I have combined the qualitative interview data with the standardized network data. This chapter first presents the respondents' networks as they were represented in the charts, grids, and interviews; and analyzes important aspects of the networks' structure and composition (5.1). Then, I will focus more on the qualitative data, exploring the channels and mechanisms of social influence on fertility intentions (5.2). The last section of this chapter will combine the qualitative insights on social influence with the analysis of the network structure, and show how network structure and fertility intentions are related (5.3.).

5.1 Network Structure and Composition

The theoretical proposition underlying network research is to explain individual behavior by structural features of the network an individual is embedded in (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996; Windeler, 2001). Therefore, we shall first take a closer look at the structural features of the social networks collected. A multitude of structural features could be considered. The presentation here centers on network characteristics that have been related to mechanisms of social influence, and have been indicated as fertility-relevant in the literature I have reviewed (see Chapters 1 and 2). Here, I present in detail two central characteristics: network size and density. Other characteristics, such as heterogeneity, will be introduced later this chapter. Special attention is paid to the composition of the networks and the characteristics of the network partners involved, including the share of kin and the number of network partners with young children.

S. Keim, *Social Networks and Family Formation Processes,*
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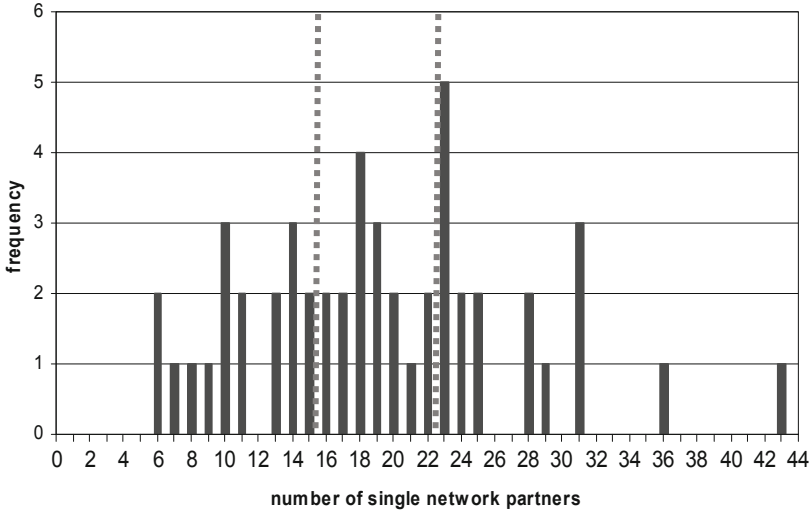
5.1.1 Network Size

The number of persons inserted into the network chart determines the network size. The network chart and name generator I have used in the interviews display a large share of the social relations ego is currently involved in, with a median size of 18.5 single persons. Thirty-five respondents not only included individuals, but also groups of people in their network chart. These groups contain in median 12 persons, with the largest groups mentioned encompassing around 40 persons. The two smallest networks include six individuals and no groups, while the largest network contains 43 single persons and five groups, with each group composed of an average of 19 persons. Figure 8 displays the distribution of network size of single persons in our sample.

Figure 8: Distribution of network size counting single persons only



The distribution was subdivided into three equal parts based on the number of network partners (see the two dotted lines). Accordingly, respondents indicating six to 15 network partners were placed in the small networks category, respondents with 16 to 22 network partners were found to have medium-sized networks, and respondents with 23 to 43 network partners were classified as having large networks. Additionally, I grouped the cases based on the accounts of per-

sonal relations and the social network given in the qualitative interview. In most cases, both groupings come to a similar result. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data is discussed in more detail in the excursus in Section 5.1.1.

Respondents with rather large networks present themselves as very sociable; they enjoy meeting and going out with friends and relatives, and state that these persons are very important for them. In our sample, most respondents with large networks are almost exclusively involved in partnerships, they are often women, have higher levels of education and have been living in different cities in recent years. They have kept friendships from kindergarten and school, and have made many new friends over the years (through their jobs or hobbies, while at university or in training, or by meeting other parents after having children). Large networks are often very heterogeneous in composition, containing persons of different ages, professions, places of residence, partnership status, parity, etc.

Small networks are mostly held by respondents who explicitly state that they do not want to be involved with too many people, and are therefore content with the size of their networks. They state that they would rather have a few good friends than many acquaintances, or stress that their partnership or their (nuclear) family is most important to them. A large number of network partners are evaluated negatively as causes of stress, and respondents complain of needing to spend time with them or to enter into commitments. While these respondents are happy with their small networks, two respondents can be characterized as isolated in their social relationships. They explicitly want to have more contacts and intend to invest more time in their personal relationships in future. In our sample, most respondents with small networks are men and women who are either married and have children, or they are singles or living apart together with their partner and childless. In contrast to respondents with rather large networks, their educational backgrounds are very heterogeneous. While one explanation for the large network size, especially among people with university degrees, was their greater opportunity for meeting people and making new friends when moving and studying in different cities, this group includes university graduates who did not stay in touch with friends from university, or they only have contact with them, and do not have friendships with people beyond this circle.

Excursus: Contrasting Network Data with the Accounts in the Interviews

In most cases, the individual evaluation of the own network, as well as the accounts of social relations during the interview, correspond to the grouping of the networks as small, medium, or large, based on the measure of single network partners from the network chart. One example is this female respondent, who

reports having extensive relationships with kin and friends during the interview, and states:

> *I have a good network. If I didn't feel good, I'd have persons I could turn to. Regarding different issues: there are persons living here in the same city, [there are persons] for talking about problems with my husband, otherwise my husband would also be the person I talk to. And then there are dispersed persons I could contact regarding more special problems. (...) Actually, I always have a parallel connection; there are always two persons I could turn to. (L08ef, female, 29, married, 1 child: age 2.5)*

With 29 single persons, her network is large (the median is 18.5) – it is actually the sixth-largest network in my sample.

However, there are a few cases in which the number of single network partners does not correspond to the self-evaluation of the respondents and the impression I got from the interviews. Mostly the grouping according to the network chart categorizes these networks as small or medium, while the accounts during the interview tend to reveal medium or large networks. In all of these cases, the respondents have included not only single persons, but also several groups in their networks, which the network measure does not account for. Taking these groups into account, it becomes clear that the networks are not small, but medium; or not medium, but large. Having allowed the respondents to insert groups of persons into the network chart provides a serious problem here. Not including groups into the measure for network size classifies some networks as smaller as the interactions the respondents report would indicate. However, including groups does not lead to a better matching of accounts and the network measure. When groups are included, many networks seem larger than the accounts the respondents give in the interview would indicate. Including the groups helps us to gain a better network measure of whether ego is in frequent contact with the persons involved, but less so if ego simply inserts, for example, all of his or her colleagues, irrespective of the actual contacts with them. Therefore, one problem in comparing these networks is, that not all respondents feel that they should include "all colleagues" in the network chart, and thus totally omit certain groups, even they are also relevant for them.

Because of the difficulties I encountered with the groups of persons inserted into the networks, I decided to be careful with using the groups for calculating the network size. Thus I chose to use only the single persons inserted. Additionally, I base the categorization of networks as small, medium, or large on a combination of the number of single network partners, the number of groups, and the accounts in the interviews.

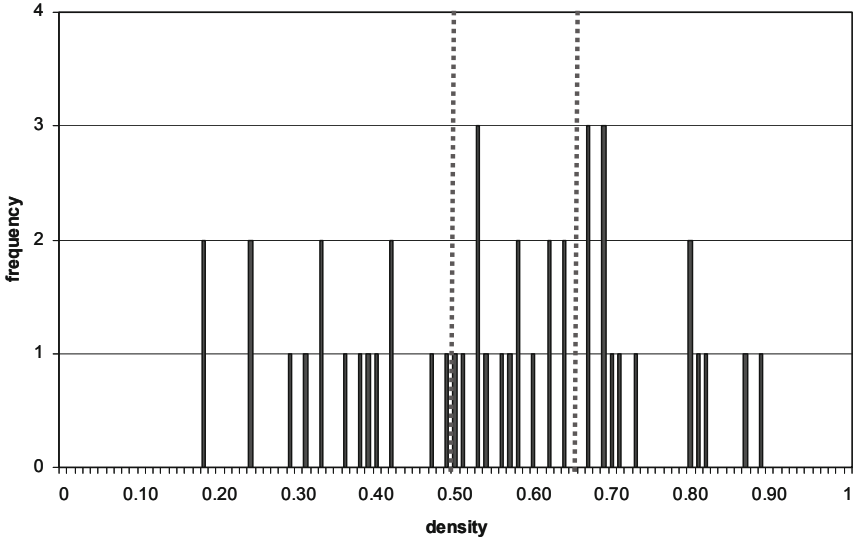
In six cases the accounts in the interviews indicated a rather large variety of contacts and many persons came up that have not been inserted into the chart. Therefore, the networks classified as small or medium based on the network chart were re-evaluated according to the qualitative accounts as medium respectively large. In two cases the networks were changed from medium to small based on the qualitative accounts. In these cases the interview revealed that the respondents were only rarely engaged with most persons indicated in the chart and/or have not been in contact with them in the last twelve months. In these two cases the network chart represents the networks the two respondents would like to have or the contacts they have ever had in their life, rather than the contacts they are presently engaged with. Finally, this leads among the 50 respondents to 17 small networks, 14 medium sized networks and 19 large networks.

5.1.2 Network Density

The classical density measure designates the number of realized relationships over the number of possible ones among ego's network partners; the measure ranges between 0 and 1. While 0 indicates that none of the network partners know each other, a density measure of 1 indicates that all of the network partners know each other. For the formula, see Chapter three.

In my sample, I found a median density of 0.56, which means that 56% of the possible relationships among the alters have been realized. In the two networks with the lowest density, only 18% of the possible relationships have been realized, compared with 89% in the network with the highest density. Figure 9 displays the distribution of network densities in our sample (density is rounded to one decimal for a better overview).

Figure 9: Distribution of the network density



As with the network size, I have also divided the networks into three equal groups (see dotted lines in the graph): networks with low density or rather sparse networks, ranging from 0.18 to 0.49; networks with medium density, ranging from 0.5 to 0.64; and networks with high density, larger than 0.64.

Respondents with very dense networks are usually married and have one or two children. Married respondents with children often include many of their own relatives, as well as their partner's relatives as rather important in their networks – persons who know each other well. With these persons, they are often engaged in relationships of mutual support, with parents often providing support in child-care. Respondents with sparse networks are, in contrast, mainly childless, and mostly cohabiting, living apart together (LAT), or single. They all have in common that they do not include many relatives among their most important network partners, and have several friends who do not know each other well.

5.1.3 Network Composition

Drawing on the concepts and arguments in network research, as presented in the first and second chapters, it should be of relevance for processes of social influence what role relations are included in the social network (e.g., thinking about

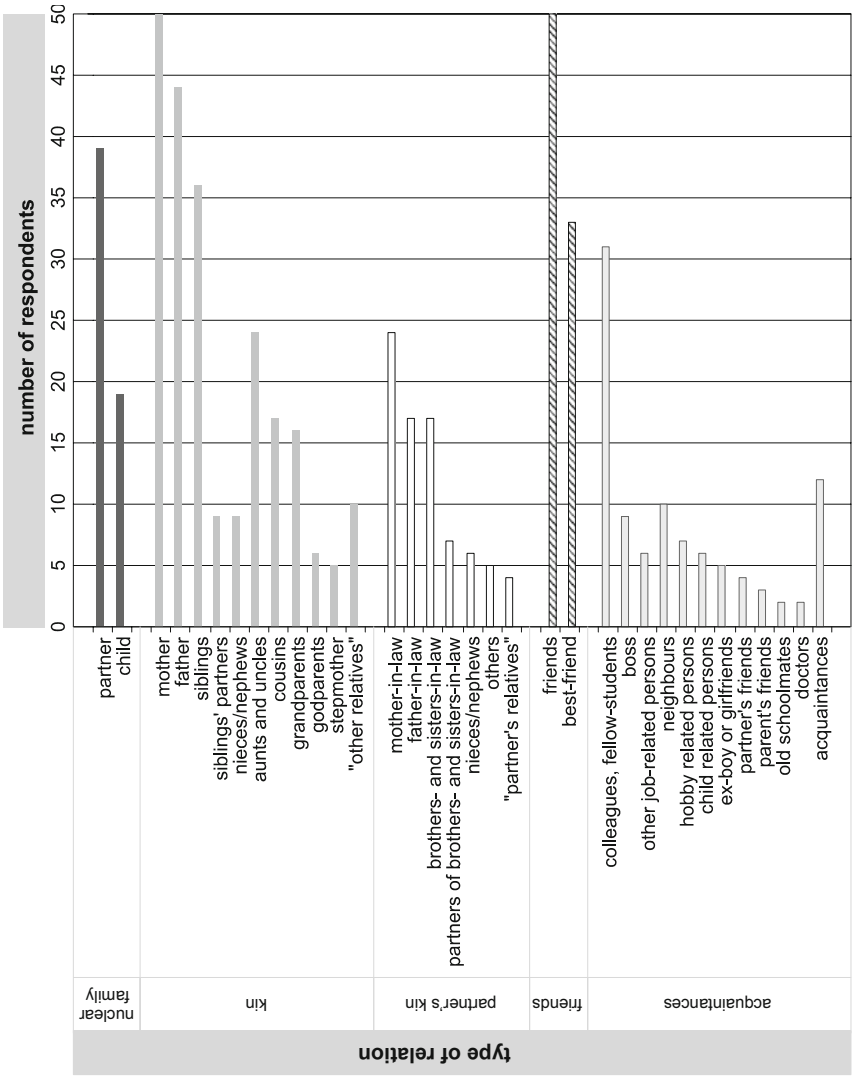
intergenerational support), and how many network partners already have (young) children (e.g., thinking about access to information in communication networks).

Social Relations that Form the Respondents' Networks

All network charts contain relatives (mostly parents and siblings, and the partner and children if relevant), as well as persons considered to be friends[28] and acquaintances. A full overview of the persons inserted in the network chart is provided by the following graph (Figure 10). Note that all respondents who are involved in partnerships or who have children name partner and/or children in the network. There is a similar situation with siblings and grandparents who are alive. But this is not necessarily true for the other types of relationships. In some cases, fathers are deliberately not included into the network, not even as problematic or not important. Similarly, not everybody who has a job inserts his or her colleagues or boss.

[28] I am aware that defining "friendship" is a delicate issue (cf. Pahl & Spencer, 2004). For our purposes, it is sufficient to simply refer to how the respondents designate their network partners. All of them include persons they describe as "friends" in their chart.

Figure 10: Personal relations included in the networks



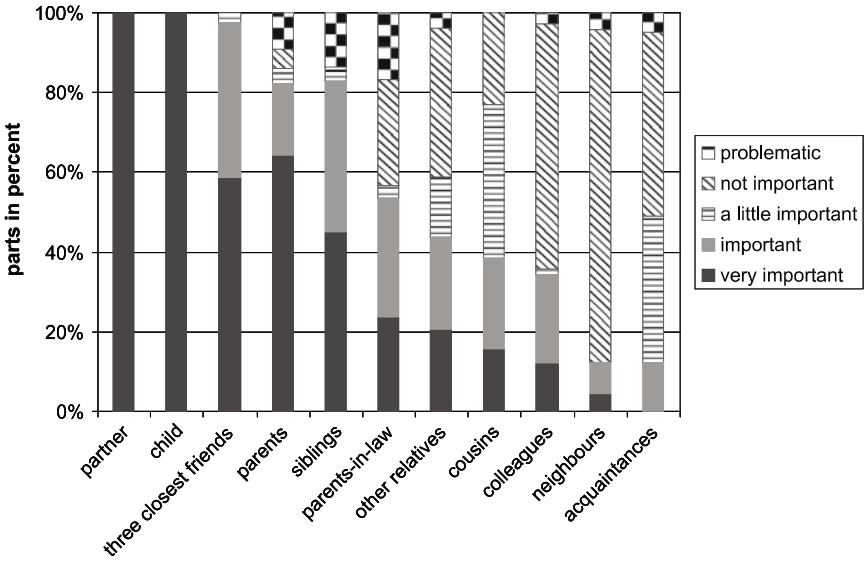
It turned out that the category "importance" in our name-generating question was interpreted mostly as "emotional importance", "emotional closeness", "intimacy", and "trust"; and entailed frequent contact, either in person or via phone and e-mail. Thus, I argue, the different levels of importance ascribed by the respondents can be taken as a measure of tie strength. The network partners rated as (very) important are mainly described as people to whom respondents are emotionally close and in frequent contact, and with whom they are involved in a reciprocal support relationship. They are, in most cases, partners, children, parents, siblings, and the closest friends (see Figure 11). These persons can be – based on the definition outlined by Granovetter – seen as "strong ties". According to Granovetter's (1973: 1361) definition, the strength of a tie is defined by four dimensions: amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services. Of little importance are mainly acquaintances (e.g., teammates, former schoolmates, neighbors) and some not-so-close friends and relatives. The respondents do not feel emotionally attached to these persons and do not exchange reciprocal support. They can be considered to be "weak ties".

There is also a group of ties that some respondents designate as strong ties, while others see them as weak ties: parents-in-law, cousins, aunts and uncles, and other relatives, as well as the partners' relatives (designated as "other relatives" in the table below) and colleagues. The indicated tie strength for these role relations mostly varies with parity: individuals who are already parents assign more importance to their own and their partner's kin. Another interesting finding is that cousins often are indicated as strong ties by persons who do not have any siblings. The following graph (Figure 11) displays the role relations according to their *importance* (see also Keim, Klärner and Bernardi, 2009).

Note that this graph only includes the persons named in the chart. For example, the fathers who were excluded from the chart because egos felt that they are too irrelevant even to be included as not important or problematic are not illustrated here. This graph therefore cannot be interpreted as a description of the importance of certain relationships in general; rather, we must read it as showing how respondents evaluate those persons they feel that are of some relevance in their life, and take into account the normative information conveyed. For example, grandparents are – if at all – often considered to be very important or important.[29] This is not necessarily based on emotional closeness or high frequency in contact, but because of the role relation per se.

[29] Grandparents are not indicated in this chart because the small numbers of grandparents have been included with other kin in the category "other relatives".

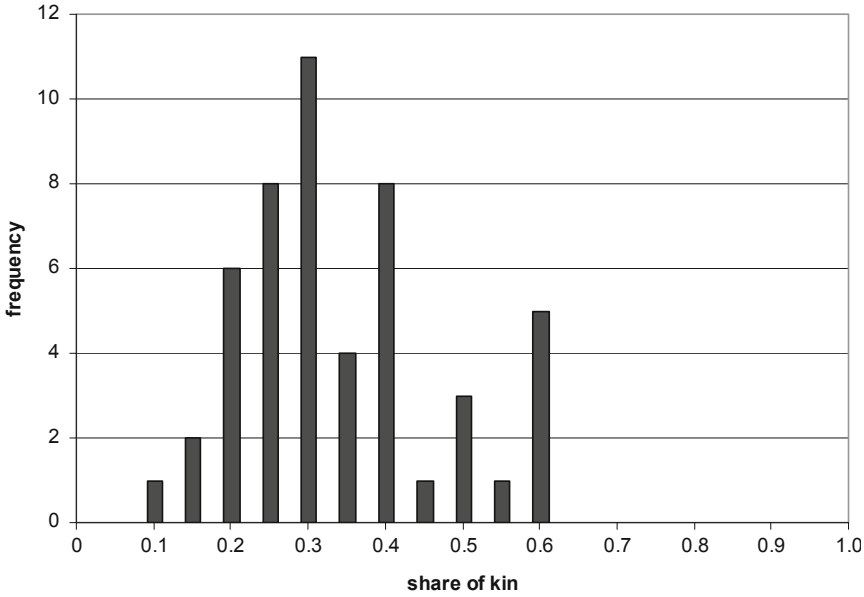
Figure 11: The importance of personal relations



The Share of Kin in the Network

One measure summarizing network composition that merits special attention is the share of kin. Most respondents indicate their mother, father, and siblings in the network chart. Concerning other relatives, I find a large variation: some include aunts, uncles and cousins, others grandparents and/or the families their siblings have founded, and some also indicate several persons belonging to their partner's family. In some networks, the kin indicated represent a major share of all network partners, while in others, friends and acquaintances dominate. The distribution of the share of kin in the network is u-shaped. The minimum lies at 0.09, the maximum at 0.62. The medium share of kin is about one-third (0.31). Nine respondents indicate that 50% or more of the persons they indicate in their network are kin. A high share of kin is mainly indicated by respondents who are married and have children, and is due to the fact that they indicate not only members of their own, but also of their partner's kin, while including comparably few friends and acquaintances. Figure 12 displays the distribution of the share of kin.

Figure 12: Distribution of the share of kin

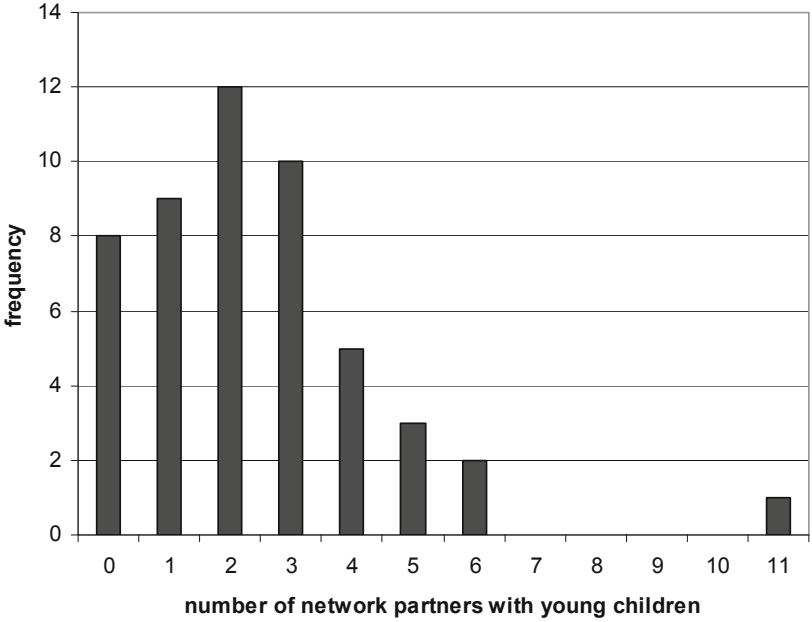


Network Partners with Young Children

The vast majority of respondents report that they have at least one network partner who has a child not older than age five,[30] or who is currently pregnant. The median number of persons with young children in these networks is two, and the number of persons ranges from zero to 11 persons. The following graph displays the distribution of frequencies (Figure 13).

[30] I set five years as limit because in the interviews it became evident that the respondents mostly report on influences from persons who are currently pregnant or have children younger than five years old. They rarely refer to observations about family formation they made more than five years ago. They point out that earlier family formation was not an issue for them yet, and that they therefore did not monitor persons who had children with much interest. This is one example of how the qualitative results can inform the variables analyzed by quantitative means.

Figure 13: Distribution of the number of network partners with young children



While childless respondents have mostly no or only one or two network partners with young children, respondents who are parents mostly include three or more network partners with young children in their network (unless their child was unplanned and most of their friends are still childless).

Knowing the number of network partners with young children does not, however, tell us anything about how the respondents perceive and evaluate these persons, their children, and their family lives. Therefore, to capture the subjective meaning of network partners with young children, I shall now compare the number of network partners with young children with the respondents' perceptions and evaluations of their personal relations and social network provided in the qualitative interview.

Respondents who do not have a single person with a young child in their networks mostly feel that this is perfectly normal, and that children will enter their networks at a later point in time. Most of them are men between the ages of

29 and 31. These men, as well as the single women in this group, either set their personal ideal age for having children clearly above 30, or intend to remain childless. This raises an interesting question: Are these respondents embedded in a network of childless persons because they are not very interested in family formation (yet), and have therefore actively chosen network partners who are childless; or are they childless because they are surrounded exclusively by childless people, and are influenced by them? For one female respondent, selection effects are clearly in the foreground. She intends to remain childless and reports that former friends who had children dropped out of her network over time because they developed different interests. Most others, however, do not mention such a selection. Their oldest friends (often from school) are still childless, as are the new friends they have found. These respondents are often attending university, and have made some of their friends there. Given the fact that very few university students have children, the respondents' decision to enroll in university is accompanied by a low probability of making friends with young parents.

A large share of respondents report having one or two network partners with young children in their network. These respondents form a very heterogeneous group. They include men and women between the ages of 25 and 34. Some are childless and others are parents; some are single while others involved in relationships. Their educational attainment ranges from medium to university level. In addition, their perceptions and evaluations of their networks vary: while some are rather indifferent to the fact that their network partners have children, others feel these network partners are a constant reminder for them that family formation is becoming a more pressing issue, and that they should think about having a child soon.[31] Some stress that they enjoy spending time with these persons *because* they have children, others see them as a good example of the reasons for not having children. For those respondents who have their own children, network partners with children are valuable contacts who similar experiences. In this group, we can also see selection effects: some persons report that they lost contact to former friends when they had children, while others say they enjoy being in contact with young parents, or even deliberately seek them out. On the other hand, many relationships with persons who had children have been stable over the last five years. Although some contacts to persons with young children can be seen as a given (relatives, colleagues), they are maintained with varying intensities by the respondents: while one couple has rather close contact with a cousin and his family because they enjoy playing with the cousin's kids, another respondent says he does not like meeting his colleague's kids very often, and that he prefers to meet with his colleague alone.

[31] And this evaluation cannot be explained by age. It is not the case that the younger respondents are more ignorant, while the older feel more pressure to have a child.

Respondents who include three and more persons with young children in their network are mainly women and mothers of one or two children. This group primarily consists of married women, aged 29 to 36 with medium or post-secondary education. Their networks contain siblings and cousins, as well as several friends with young children. They often report that many of their old friends had children at the same time they did, and that they also found new friends among other parents they got to know in birth preparation classes, in play groups, or from the kindergarten. These new friends are often friends of the mother, who usually takes care of her children to a larger extent than her husband, and who therefore comes into contact with other parents (mainly also mothers) more frequently. Thus, especially in couples with a rather traditional division of tasks in the partnership, I find that the mother reports having twice as many network partners with young children as the father does.

5.1.4 Summary: Network Varieties – Community Lost, Saved, or Liberated?

The social networks of young adults in their late twenties/early thirties show a broad range of varying characteristics: from a rather small to very large size; from a very dense to very sparse structure, from a small to a large share of kin, from including no network partners with young children to many. Thus it becomes clear that the networks are as varied as the stories of our respondents presented in Chapter three. Nevertheless, certain patterns can be discerned. For example, dense networks usually include a large share of kin, while networks which include a majority of friends and acquaintances are in general sparse. Dense networks are mostly seen among persons who already have children, which can be explained by the fact that parents report in the interviews that contacts to kin have increased with the transition to parenthood. These regularities could have been expected from the literature on social networks available (see Chapter 1) and shows that the networks I have collected are well in line in this respect, although my study only draws on a (for network study comparably small) sample of 50 networks from young respondents.

The networks collected include a wide variety of different contacts: strong ties, such as kin and friends; but also weak ties, including colleagues, neighbors, and distant relatives. While most contacts are described in positive terms, many respondents also classify some persons as “problematic” or “difficult”. Although most of our respondents who belong to an age group in which having children can be a salient topic include at least one person with a young child in their network, there are several respondents (all childless) who do not have any contact with young children.

In terms of the community question raised in the first chapter, the vast majority of the networks I have collected fit either the "community saved" (a rather dense network, including a large share of and strong ties to kin), or the "community liberated" (a rather sparse network, including many strong and weak ties to friends) theory. In addition, this result is in line with the research on the community question conducted in Germany (Diaz-Bone, 1997; Hennig, 2004; see Chapter 1). Only two respondents are relatively isolated. These networks fit the "community lost" hypothesis: they are extremely small, and most of the ties present cannot be seen as strong because the respondents are not in frequent contact with their network partners, and do not feel emotionally close to them. These respondents have put much energy in their careers after finishing education, and have neglected old friends while not finding any new ones. For one of these respondents, additional conflicts in his family of origin are a major source of his isolation; while for the other, a high degree of mobility and frequent moves, including abroad, have contributed to the thinning of his network.

Before I compare the network structures I found with the fertility intentions the respondents have expressed, I shall first explore in detail how social influence functions by identifying the channels and mechanisms of influence involved.

5.2 Channels and Mechanisms of Social Influence

Based on the analysis and categorization of the respondents' accounts of social influence, I tried to identify the persons relevant in the decision-making process and the mechanisms of social influence involved. Analyzing processes of social influence is a delicate matter, because individuals are often not aware of being influenced, and do not want to present themselves as dependent on others in making their choices. Asking our respondents directly about the persons who influence their ideas, plans, and behaviors concerning family formation led us to three types of answers. The first group stated that they do not feel influenced in any way, and insisted that they make decisions autonomously. The second group of respondents recalled certain influences only after talking for awhile about the issue and considering who could have been influential. A third group provided clear examples of how other persons have shaped their ideas, desires, intentions, and behavior. Regardless of their answers to the direct question, however, the respondents all gave rich accounts of social influences while recounting their experiences, plans, desires, and attitudes. As I showed in the previous chapter, the respondents' decision-making processes cannot be explained solely by looking at the level of the individual; the social relations they are embedded in have

also to be accounted for. In this section, I will take a closer look at the relationships that exert influence and explore the ways in which network partners can affect individuals' fertility intentions and behavior.[32]

5.2.1 Who Is Influential?

As we have seen in Section 5.1 on social networks, the respondents place a wide variety of individuals into the network chart, always including relatives and persons considered to be friends or acquaintances, with the latter often designated in their function as colleagues, neighbors, etc. In the following, I seek to identify the various persons named as network partners who help to shape the respondents' fertility intentions.

I have explored in depth the persons the respondents tend to cite when explaining their own attitudes and intentions concerning family formation. My focus was especially on the persons they talk to about family formation, those whose fertility behavior they observe, and with whom they interact frequently. I have analyzed who provides them with information on fertility-related issues, whose opinions they value, from whom they seek advice, how they expect others would react if they had a child, who would and could support them, and who is perceived to be a role model. In the following, I will describe in detail who these "influential" persons are, whether and how they are included in the network chart, and in what way they exert influence. Because it could be assumed that strong ties have a stronger influence on individuals' childbearing decisions, I will also compare alters' "importance", as defined by the respondents; and alters' actual influence on ego's fertility intentions, as shown in my analysis.

The Partner

All respondents feel that having a baby is a decision both partners have to make together. Respondents who are engaged in a partnership often talk about family formation, stating what they as a couple ("*we*", "*us*") feel, intend, and have decided:

> *In our life family is very important. We have already thought about it: first studies, then working, so, around 30. If it did not work out, that would be a pity, but in the end we would want to have children. (...) But we are not like that, that we would say career is more important than everything else. But rather family is in first place,*

[32] An overview of these results is given in Keim, Klärner and Bernardi (2009).

then the job (...). Family and life planning is a "we"-story. We think about this together, it is not only my decision. In the end, when you are married, it becomes a "we" form. (L02ff, female, 25, married, childless)

Most respondents report that they have spoken with their (current and also former) partners about having children, and that the current partner is always the first person they would talk to on the issue. Couples with a (strong) desire to have children report having frequent conversations about family formation. However, respondents who do not want to have a child also report that they often discuss the issue with their partner. These conversations serve two purposes: 1) the partners exchange information about how the other sees the issue family formation and negotiate a common position as a couple; 2) the partners reassure each other that this common position has not changed.

Given this general attitude that having a child is a project both partners need to agree on, it is evident that non-agreement in a couple hampers fertility. Partners must agree on three key issues: 1) whether to have a child, 2) when to have a child, and 3) how to organize family life. Most respondents state that they always have agreed with their partner on having children. Only a few interviewees report that they had had disagreements with their partner in the past, and that their ideas converged over time, or that they still disagree. Especially for respondents with a strong desire for a child, a disagreement about *whether to have children* is a serious matter. If they cannot reach an agreement with their partner, this may lead to a break up of the partnership. One respondent reports having ended a former relationship, in part due to their disagreement about having children. Among the respondents who already are parents, disagreement about having a further child is rare. In contrast to the childless respondents, they do not see their partnership threatened by a disagreement with their partner, and seek to find a compromise. In cases where both partners agree to remain childless, they strongly support each other in their choice, and strengthen each other against outside social pressures to have a child. Agreement on the *timing of childbirth* is, however, – at the time of the interview as well as in the past partnership history – less common. Many respondents report having different timing preferences, with one partner having to wait until the other partner is ready, or one partner trying to persuade the other to have a(nother) child sooner than they want to. If at least one partner wants to have a child soon, there is considerable discussion of family formation between the couple, and they formulate plans for when to have the first child. In the course of these conversations, the partner who has been hesitating often finally consents to having a child. If one partner is determined not to have a child soon, however, it is not going to happen. This means that, in the short run, the partner who does not want to have children yet always has veto

power. Most couples who want to have children state that they agree on how they will *arrange family and work*. Only a few indicate that they had arguments about it, but disagreement on this issue leads to postponement of childbirth. The partners must reach a consensus on organizing family life, and on adjustments to their current employment and living situations. As I have noted in the preceding chapter, couples who, for example, would like to follow the male-earner model, but the male partner holds a low-paid and unstable job position, postpone having children if they cannot agree on sharing tasks in the partnership differently. Interestingly, those respondents who do not want to have children stress the fact that they feel having children is incompatible with sharing tasks equally in the partnership. Because the women do not want to stay at home and give up working while the children are small, while their male partners cannot imagine staying at home during this time, they both conclude that their desire to have children is not very strong.

The partner is always indicated as "very important". This rating is also given by respondents who report that they are not very content with their current partnership (e.g., a female respondent who is living apart together with her partner, and who, despite reporting several problems, rates him with the highest possible mark at 6.5). Therefore, it can be assumed that the chart is not sensitive to current problems in the partnership; instead, it tends to reflect the "overall" picture – and, to some extent, maybe also the desired or "normative" picture.

In sum, the partner is (one of) the most important person(s) in the network, as well as the person with the greatest influence on the respondent's attitudes and intentions concerning having children.

The Parents

Parents are most often named when the respondents were asked to name persons who influence their attitudes and intentions regarding family formation.

Most respondents state that they had a happy childhood, and want to pass this on to their child(ren). Only one feels hesitant about having children after having experiencing conflicts and problems in the family of origin. I find strong similarities between how the respondents have experienced family life in their family of origin, and how they themselves want to organize family life, irrespective of how important the parents are rated at the time of the interview. The respondents assert that, to a large extent, their ideas and views about family formation, as well as their images of a good mother/father are based on their experiences in their family of origin, and on how their parents have dealt with family formation (see mechanism: social learning/socialization). The issues most

frequently addressed were the division of tasks in their parents' partnership, the experiences they had with comparatively young/old parents, and the number of siblings and spacing of their birth. In addition, the interviews with the mother-child dyads show that they share to a very large extent the same attitudes and ideas about family formation and family life. Only a few respondents explicitly criticize some aspects of their parents' behavior – mainly that their mothers have stayed at home as housewives for many years – and state that they want to do it differently. In their criticisms, they are often in line with their parents current attitudes, who may also feel, for example, that staying home as housewives (for too long) had negative aspects they had not anticipated, such as problems getting back into the job market when the children grew older. Although childhood experiences exert a very strong influence, especially because they transmit attitudes, values, and behavioral patterns that are taken as self-evident; there is room for change, and this change may be encouraged by the parents, who evaluate their behavior based on their experiences, and may come to the conclusion that, in some respects, they should have acted differently. No matter how the relationship to the parents is today – whether they are emotionally close and in frequent contact or not – parents are influential because they have shaped the context the respondents were socialized in, and these early life influences remain important in later life.

Parents who are considered as very important additionally affect their children's attitude and behavior by transmitting their values, attitudes, and expectations. I know from the interviews with mothers, as well as from the accounts the young respondents give of their parents, that the parents hold and express expectations about how their children should behave concerning family formation. In some ways, parents expect that their children will behave as they did, while in others they acknowledge that times have changed, and that their children must therefore behave differently. Parents acknowledge, for example, that their children must wait before starting a family because they are pursuing higher levels of education than they did, and may therefore finish their education at older ages. They do not expect their children to start a family as early as they did, but they – generally want them to follow their own example by not have children during education, and waiting until they are settled in a job. The interviews with the respondents' mothers show that many of them did not benefit from a good education, did not invest in learning a profitable profession, and stayed at home as housewives for many years. Most are content with their situation, indicating that they are fortunate to be in a stable marriage, while mothers who are divorced recount how difficult it was for them to establish themselves in an adequate job after the divorce. All mothers, regardless of whether they have experienced divorces themselves or are engaged in a stable marriage, expect their daughters to

act differently, and to adapt to modern times. They expect their daughters to invest more time into their education and into getting established in a job, because they feel that their daughters should not be financially dependent on their partner – mainly because marriages are not as stable as they used to be, and their daughters therefore risk becoming single mothers who will have to provide financially for their family. Out of this concern for security, they both favor and promote marriage, but they also encourage their daughters to acquire job skills and to keep working part-time when having children. Mothers do not, however, expect their daughters to question the male-breadwinner model and live as a dual-earner couple.

When the respondents have reached a certain age, are involved in a partnership, and are settled in a job, many parents start asking for grandchildren, and the topic of family formation comes up often in conversations with the parents. Many respondents report that their parents repeatedly express a desire for grandchildren, ask them about their future plans, and try to motivate their children to start a family. The parents have strong expectations as to their role as grandparents, mostly including the willingness to support their children financially, as well as by providing childcare. Many childless respondents report feeling some pressure from their parents to have children soon. Especially voluntarily childless respondents report disagreements and a lack of comprehension, which may be one reason for rating their parents as of little importance (see mechanism: social pressure).

Parents who are considered as (very) important are generally relevant sources of support. They often provide financial resources to their children, especially while they are enrolled in education, and sometimes also afterwards until they have a well-paid job. Parents also provide cheap housing, and thereby ameliorating the couple's financial situation. Parents are important sources of emotional support and advice, and many respondents expect them to provide support in childcare. Support in childcare is one of the most influential forms of support when it comes to family formation. For some respondents, the expectation of receiving regular support in childcare by the parents fosters their realization of family formation; while for others, the fact that they cannot rely on their parents' help (because they live too far away, or they are still working) is one factor that can lead to the postponement of family formation. This supportive function of parents also provides them with sanctioning power. If their children do not conform to their expectations, they can withdraw their support.

Some parents are, however, designated as of little importance, not important, or problematic. These parents often discourage the respondents from having children. One respondent states that he had negative experiences in his family of origin, and therefore would not like to have children himself. Other respondents

state that, due to conflicts with their parents, they do not receive any support from them.

The Parents-In-Law

Parents-in-law are influential indirectly via the partner because they have shaped her or his view on family (see mechanism: socialization). From the couple interviews, I know that the daughter- or son-in-law tends to look at the way the partner's family of origin has dealt with family formation and organizing family life more critically than the partner him/herself, and often questions assumptions that appear self-evident to the partner.

Parents-in-law are rated as (very) important by almost half of the respondents, and these respondents are most open to influence by the parents-in-law. They are aware of the attitudes and expectations of the parents-in-law, but do not feel as obliged to follow them as they would if they came from their own parents. They value their parents-in-law as providers of support in childcare, or they expect to receive this type of support from them when they have children. Especially when parents-in-law are considered of little importance, not important, or problematic, respondents criticize how they dealt with family formation or express concerns about leaving their children with them. Respondents with children who placed the parents-in-law in the outskirts of the chart or as problematic mostly do not rely on their support in childcare.

Parents-in-law are most relevant and most influential when the relationship to the respondent's own parents is bad, and their own parents are rated as problematic or of little importance. The strongest positive effect on childbearing is seen when respondents consider both their parents and their parents-in-law to be (very) important, and when both parents and parents-in-law express a desire for grandchildren, and announce that they are ready to provide support them financially, as well as in terms of childcare.

Siblings and Cousins

The relevance of siblings was suggested in literature, and the interviews confirm this. Additionally, I found that, especially for respondents who do not have any older siblings, older cousins can be influential in the same ways.

The role of siblings and cousins in influencing the respondents' fertility desires, views, and behaviors, depends strongly on age, sex, and parity. Siblings and cousins, especially when they are older and of the same sex, are often seen

as role models, or at least as important points of reference, concerning when to have children. If siblings and cousins hold an important position in the respondents' networks and already have children (regardless of whether they are older or younger), the respondents often talk with their siblings and cousins about having children and their experiences and attitudes. They also observe their siblings' and cousins' behavior, and frequently interact with them and their children. This close contact can set off processes of social contagion, in which the respondent feels emotionally drawn to having a child (see mechanism: contagion). Additionally, the respondents learn from their siblings how they deal with family formation, especially in regards questions such as when to have children, how many children one should have, how one should organize family life, and the division of tasks in the partnership. If older siblings and cousins do not have children, they tend to serve as role models who demonstrate that not having children or postponing having children is adequate. For respondents who lack siblings or cousins with children, a very influential opportunity for learning about family formation is missing. Nevertheless, if the sibling is childless, the parents' expectations for having grandchild may fully fall upon the respondent, and intensify the social pressure to have a child. Especially siblings with children are often expected to provide support in childcare.

Siblings are usually more often described as a strong tie, and therefore tend to have a greater impact on fertility choices than cousins. However, especially when there are no siblings available, because the respondent does not have any (older) siblings (of the same gender) or because the relationship is weak or problematic – cousins are often relevant network partners. Siblings and cousins described as weak ties have comparably little influence: they do not exert social pressure or provide grounds for social contagion or extensive social learning. They may, however, provide some pieces of information on family formation.

Friends

Family formation is an issue respondents often discuss with their friends, often in the context of general conversations about the future, career plans, the partnership, etc. In these discussions, the respondents exchange information with their friends, learn from them about their attitudes and expectations, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of certain behaviors, and are forced to formulate their own ideas about family formation. Respondents engaged with friends who already have children monitor their behavior and experiences closely: often they have discussed family formation with their friends when they made the decision to have a child and they have observed how their pregnancy progressed. They

have also witnessed, and, to some extent, shared in their joys and burdens of becoming a parent. They are observing their family life, watching their child grow, and are in regular contact with their friend's child. These respondents report that, through their friend's child, they have developed a feeling that they themselves could imagine having a child, and their desire to have a child has grown (see mechanism: contagion). Friends also provide opportunities for learning about family formation, the costs and benefits involved with having children, the preconditions necessary, approaches to dealing with family life, etc. The friends' experiences fuel the respondents' own imagination. Without having to have the experience themselves, they can better imagine what it would be like (vicarious experience). If these opportunities are missing in networks with no small children (which is increasingly the case in Germany, given the current level of postponement and increasing number of childless persons), an important factor that promotes and accelerates family formation and fertility is missing. As with siblings, friends are also seen as a potential source of support, both emotional, as well as in providing help with childcare. The more the topic of family formation comes up among their friends, the more the respondents report being forced to think about, express, and justify their ideas about family formation. This often leads them to form concrete plans concerning family formation, fostering the realization of their intentions.

The analyses of friendship dyads we have performed in our research group showed that friends instigate or appease each other regarding having child; they confirm to each other that their way of living (currently planning for a child, postponing, or forgoing childbirth) is not only acceptable, but also the most desirable option (Bernardi et al., 2007). Friends conforming in their intention to stay childless are able to guard themselves from the general social norm to have a child by establishing their own group norm and assuring each other that their behavior is appropriate.

The respondents separate persons designated as friends into "close friends", rated as very important or important, and "other friends", where the rating ranges from important to a little important. Friends can also be problematic. Very important friends are also very influential, because the close and frequent contact provides many opportunities for social learning and social contagion; the respondents value the advice of their close friends highly and mostly evaluate their behavior positively. Pressure to conform is also more common. If close friends have children, most respondents feel that this is changing, or could change, their friendship in terms of the amount of time that can be spent with each other. Close friends who are involved in a serious partnership, are planning to start a family, and then have children, therefore put strong pressure on the respondents to also follow their lead, in order to avoid being "the only childless person left". All of

these mechanisms also function for friends who are not considered very important – but then mostly with less intensity and frequency. They are mainly relevant for providing certain pieces of information for social learning.

Acquaintances

Acquaintances are all persons the respondents do not consider to be friends but still indicate in their network chart because they are engaged in personal contact with them. These may be, for example, colleagues or persons related to a hobby or club the respondents belong to. By definition, acquaintances are not rated as (very) important, but rather as of little importance or not important, and are often described by their role relation as colleague, boss, doctor, teacher, etc. Despite their position in the outskirts of the network chart, they are very influential in one specific way: acquaintances are very valuable sources of information. From acquaintances, the respondents reportedly learn about "new" behavior, such as paternal leave or the use of early childcare institutions. Especially influential are acquaintances who have been trying to get pregnant for a long time (some also with the help of assisted reproduction techniques). Some women report that learning from acquaintances that getting pregnant may take at least several months triggered their decision-making, encouraging them to start trying much earlier to have a child than they would have if they had assumed that they would conceive right away. So this information, coupled with the fear of being permanently childless, seems to represent powerful influences against postponing.

One group of acquaintances is especially relevant: colleagues. Many female respondents report that they monitor how their colleagues deal with family formation, taking parental leave, returning to the job, etc. They observe how long their colleagues take a break from work, learn about the difficulties they face when they come back to the job, and draw conclusions from this about how they will be able to manage themselves. Male respondents learn about the benefits and costs of taking parental leave (e.g., the consequences for their career prospects). Knowing men who engage in such behavior can foster a positive evaluation, and lead to adoption of the new behavior.

Reference Groups

The analyses show that it is not just single persons who are relevant for the forming of individuals' childbearing intentions, but also groups of persons. These groups are often labeled "my circle of friends", "the people around me", but also

special groups such as “my former schoolmates”, “my colleagues”, and “my fellow students”. These groups mainly consist of people of the same age, who often also have a similar education and partnership status as ego. Looking at these groups provides some sort of measure that builds an imaginative scale ranging from “most of the members of this group are childless”, “many start thinking about family formation”, “some are having children”, “many are having children”, to “most are having children”. Accordingly, one is either early in having children (when most do not), or late (when most already have children); thus, one is either somewhat in line and conforming, or deviant. Considerations on the timing of childbirth and the perception of one’s own readiness often include this kind of evaluation.

The members of these groups are placed in various positions on the network chart, rated from very important to of little importance. Many group members have not been placed as single persons into the chart, but rather as a group as “other friends” or “former schoolmates”. Some also have not been indicated in the chart at all (for example, friends of friends).

5.2.2 Mechanisms of Influence

The respondents describe various social interactions which are related to their own thinking and decision-making about family formation. They observe other people’s fertility behavior, they engage in conversations about family formation and related issues with them, and they interact with people who do or do not have children. In these ways, they may come in close contact with children and family life. All these interactions are sources of social influence, and in this chapter the most relevant mechanisms of social influence found in the interviews shall be described in detail.

Social Learning

Recurring themes in the presentation of the factors relevant in deciding about family formation on the level of social networks in Chapter 4 are learning from others, receiving information, etc. The following section is based on a detailed collection and summary of all the incidents of information-transmission mentioned during the interviews. These interviews revealed that there is a large variety of information transmitted. Most influential in the decision-making process about family formation is information on the following: the presence, urgency, and topicality of family formation for others; the costs and benefits of having

one, two or more children; the timing and spacing of childbirth; conditions necessary for family formation and how to achieve them; ways of organizing family life and options for combining family and job. In sum, the modes of action individuals perceive as feasible, as well as their knowledge of every aspect of family formation, family life, and related issues, are all to a large extent transmitted via a process of social learning from personal relations. One example is this female respondent, who reports that, because her mother dealt with family formation by having children while still at university, she also planned to have her children before graduating. In the end, however, she decided against it, having observed closely some fellow students who had children while students:

> *First finish university, then marry, but surely, I am not just a security fanatic, but also a danger fanatic… A child, one cannot do this along the way, and if one has to study a lot and so on. That's simply, yes, a risk factor. It sound so unemotional, but I can see it with my colleagues who have children. This has not been a bed of roses for them. Two have even failed their studies. (L12fp, female, 28, married, childless)*

Currently, she shares with most of her close network partners the idea that she should first find an adequate job (this means a job that allows her to take parental leave, and to return part-time afterwards), and then have children.

A lack of *access to information* on fertility-related issues hinders family formation: in networks in which all members in the same age group agree that family formation is not an issue, yet and nobody already has children, they do not have access to any substantial information on how their lives would be having children. In contrast, access to information on having children can encourage the development of plans for family formation. However, as we have seen in the quote above, having access to information that indicates that having children (at a certain time) is stressful may also lead to fertility postponement. So not only is access to information is relevant; the content of the information transmitted matters.

The *content of the information* transmitted varies among respondents, but also among the network partners of one single respondent: alters promote having children, postponement, or childlessness; they argue for early, medium, or late childbirth; they provide information on an equal or gender-segregated distribution of tasks in the partnership; they favor housewives or part-time working mothers, male breadwinners or active fathers. This information are always connected to an evaluation, loaded with meaning, and often reveals the expectations others have about ego's behavior: it is perceived as good or bad to have children or to have children early. At the same time, the definition of "early", "ideal", and "late" is transmitted (with "early" ranging for women from around 20 up to 25,

"ideal" from early twenties to early thirties, and "late" from early thirties to early forties).

By providing information, the sender in some cases consciously aims at *persuading* ego to comply, while in other cases the information is given without this (conscious) intention – but may certainly have the same effect. On the side of the receiver, there are occasions when ego actively *searches for information and advice,* or receives it without having asked for it – sometimes even without wanting to hear about it. Mainly persons who already have children talk about receiving and searching for advice concerning family life. But also some childless respondents who intend to have a child soon mention the need for advice: knowing some potential sources of advice provides them with the secure feeling that they are not alone when they step into this new situation of being a parent of a child, and therefore helps in reducing uncertainty. Some examples show that the transmission of information may influence ego's attitudes and behavior in ways that escape the individual's notice. The respondents feel that the behavior they display is simply "natural", without being aware that the information they have received about this type of behavior, and the information they lack about alternatives, has determined their choice (this is especially the case for socialization effects). In contrast, there are also examples of information transmission that are perceived as such, and ego decides whether she/he wants to listen to this information at all, how to evaluate this information, and whether to incorporate it into their current attitudes and intentions, or ignore it.

Providers of this information can be seen as *role models*: their behavior and attitudes are valued positively, and ego intends to follow their example. There are also negative role models showing ego how she/he does not want to behave, but often contact to those persons is limited due to a general feeling of dislike. Moreover, apart from extended kin, colleagues, and some acquaintances, no negative role models were mentioned in the interviews.

Personal relations can also be turned to as providers of *vicarious experience*: persons who are, in many respects, similar to ego (the most relevant aspects are gender, age, education, profession, workplace, partnership status) and engage in a certain behavior, such as having a child, can be observed, and from their experiences ego infers what would happen to her if she had a child. This behavior can also include remaining childless, timing childbirth early, sharing tasks equally, etc. How ego evaluates alter's behavior is irrelevant for the process of drawing information by comparison, but the effect of the influence is stronger when ego values alter's behavior positively, and presently considers engaging in this behavior her/himself. Then, egos also tend to perceive more (and talk more about) how similar persons act. If having a child for a similar other at a certain

time turns out positively, this can greatly encourage ego, while perceiving problems may discourage her/him.

Providers of information can also be seen as important *points of reference*. Not just the single person, but a perceived reference group (as the circle of friends, the old schoolmates), can be relevant. Looking at this reference group provides some sort of measure that builds an imaginative scale with a range of, for example, "most of X are childless", "many start thinking about family formation", "some are having children", "many are having children", and "most are having children". Accordingly, one is either early in having children (when most of group X do not have children), or late (when most of group X already have children); one is either somewhat in line and conforming, or deviant.

Socialization in the family of origin can be regarded as one special form of information transmission. The respondents assert that, to a large extent, their ideas and views about family formation, as well as their images of a good mother/father, are based on their experiences in their family of origin, and on how their parents have dealt with family formation. Issues addressed most often were: the division of tasks in their parents' partnership, the experiences they had with comparatively young or old parents, and the number of siblings and spacing of their births. The organization of family life the respondents grew up with is self-evident to them, and they mostly do not consider any alternatives:

> *It would be good, I think, if someone stayed at home with the child. I can say this from experience, because my mother didn't work and I cannot really imagine how it would be if both parents worked. (L05em, male, 29, single, childless)*

Most respondents share this experience of growing up with a mother who was at home as housewife. Those who grew up with both parents working, however, say that this is the model they will follow when they have a family, as this young man reports:

> *I think an ideal family, this is what my parents demonstrated to me. An intact home, both were working; this means I was self-reliant rather early, had my own key, so called latchkey child ("Schlüsselkind"[33]). But I nevertheless got everything I wanted, concerning my needs. My parents have always been there, I take my problems to them at any time (...) I believe, if one is there when one is needed, then everything is well. But one should not cling too much and stick to the child's back. (L60em, male, 31, single, childless)*

[33] *Schlüsselkind* is a term which is used by many respondents in a negative way, designating a child who is deprived of a loving and caring environment. The quoted respondent, in contrast, defends the term and tries to use it in a positive way, stressing the advantages of early self-reliance; but he refers to the negative stereotypes by insisting that he has never felt deprived of anything.

Following their parents' model provides orientation and the secure feeling of dealing with family formation just as well as the parents have (the vast majority of respondents evaluate their parents behavior positively). However, there are some modifications in the behavioral models and when it comes to other aspects of family formation. For example, in terms of the ideal age of family formation, the respondents largely do not follow their parents example, and (want to) have their first child much later than their parents did. In this case especially, respondents with a university education stress that their situation differs considerably from the situation their parents were in when they were in their children's age, as this 30-year-old childless male respondent explains:

> *My father said once that at my age he already had two kids (laughs). I don't take it to heart. I think earlier times were different; you cannot compare this with today, can you? He was soon in his working life; he did not go to university. (L07em, male, 30, LAT, childless)*

The respondents explain that, in contrast to the generation of their parents, the time spent in education is longer, and this leads to having the first child at higher ages.[34] Therefore, they feel that having the first child around age 30 is now common. In considering issues such as the ideal age of childbirth, and the desire of highly educated women to combine family and work, they look to their siblings, cousins, colleagues, and friends – persons of their own generation- as role models more than to their parents. From the interviews with the respondents' mothers, I know that they also perceive that times have changed: they explicitly encourage their daughters to pursue higher education and to enter the labor market before becoming parents, and that they do not expect them to have children as early as they did. Although primary socialization is very influential and parents are often considered role models (and, as we can see, the behavioral models the parents provided, such as the sequencing model or the male-breadwinner model, are still largely unquestioned), secondary and tertiary socialization is also relevant, and channels other than the family of origin are influential. Observing how friends and young relatives shape their lives provides them with an idea of how to deal with family formation in an era different from the time when their parents took that step.

[34] Interestingly, although they stress how different the situation today is from that of their parents, and that they cannot orient their lives on their example, they still follow the sequencing model and do not question it.

Social Pressure and Social Control

In Chapter 4, I showed the relevance of social norms, behavioral models, sanctions, and expectations from network partners when making decisions about family formation. When individuals are "forced" to comply with a behavior their network partners want them to engage in by means of sanctions, this type of influence can be labeled as social pressure.

As with the transmission of information, social pressure is exerted regarding various types of behavior: pressure to have a child, to postpone childbearing, or to remain childless; pressure to follow a certain timing model for the birth of the first, second, and further children; pressure concerning the number of children; and pressure to follow a certain model of organizing family life, such as sharing tasks in the partnership and combining family and job. Additionally, pressure exerted in one network can go in various directions: e.g., some persons pressure ego to have children, while others hinder her/him.

Social pressure can be based on *social norms*: there are strong norms most respondents comply with (e.g., sequencing norm, modernized male-breadwinner model), as well as norms or behavioral models that dominate in certain networks, but not in others. In all cases the respondents are aware that they are expected by others to comply with these norms, and are aware of the sanctions for not complying. Sanctions for having a child during education include: disappointment/anger of the parents, which may include the loss of their emotional and financial support; lack of understanding from friends and exclusion from the circle of friends who are still childless; and being labeled as immature, irresponsible, and asocial. Rejecting the male-breadwinner model and living as a dual-earner couple with children can cause parents to be regarded by others as selfish, materialistic, and uninterested in the needs of the child, a bad mother, a poor earner, or low-class. Sanctions for not wanting children may include being regarded as selfish, materialistic, deviant, cold, ignorant, and a hater of children. Especially some singles fear social isolation if they remain childless in the long run, as they observe more and more persons in their circle of friends entering into permanent partnerships and becoming parents:

> *Well, it's like this: everywhere in my circle of friends couples form, or they already have children. And I am alone. They all have their little families and their "we" in life. And I have the thought: What about me? Am I left over? Everywhere around me, there's nobody who is single. That's a little, there's a little bitter aftertaste. (L03ff, female, 30, single, childless)*

In general, expected *sanctions* for remaining childless always include the loss of supportive and emotionally close relationships.

Social pressure is sometimes *intended*, as is the case when, for example, parents make clear to their children that they would not like to see them have a baby while still enrolled in education. At other times, however, pressure is an *unintended* side effect of other's behavior. In any case, the respondents all have a perception of how other persons expect them to act, which must not necessarily conform to the expectations alter would express. L08ef:, for example, was afraid her mother would be very upset that she got pregnant before finishing her education, and was surprised to find that, for the mother, the joy of becoming grandmother and the fact that her daughter was in a stable relationship and was almost done with her studies prevailed. The senders are also equipped with varying degrees of *sanctioning power* in case ego does not comply. Network partners who are considered to be emotionally close, with whom ego is engaged in a relationship of frequent contact and reciprocal support (e.g., parents) have more sanctioning power than network partners who are less close, in contact less frequently, and who do not exchange support (e.g., acquaintances).

The receiver, in turn, may *be aware* of the (attempt to exert) pressure and feel put under stress, and either *comply or resist*. To follow alter's expectation can be perceived as a subjective obligation, or the receiver complies without feeling pressured because he/she has internalized the social norm, and refer to the behavior the alters ask for as "self-evident", and totally in line with their own attitudes and desires. This perception of self-evidence of certain behaviors also means that persons who do not follow these norms constantly have to justify and explain themselves: they need to explain why they do not want to have children, and they need to explain why they only want one child – whereas those who want to have children are rarely asked to give their reasons. So, also social pressure is a mechanism of influence that, on the one hand, can be so powerful or so subtle that individuals cannot guard themselves; and, on the other, provides space for individual agency. The effect of social pressure in influencing ego's behavior depends on who is exerting the pressure and on the network structure, as we shall see later.

By transmitting information and advice in social networks, and by conveying the modes of action possible, the respondents are not only able to learn from their relatives' and friends' experiences, they also learn what is considered as "common" or "normal" in their social environment, i.e., what behaviors and attitudes are acceptable, and which are not. This normative function of social networks and the potential for pressure to conform is rather invisible in most interviews, and perceived conformity, as well as conformity found in the interviews of best-friends dyads, is high. Pressure to conform is more clearly noticed when interviewees deviate from what they feel is considered to be normal in their social surrounding. One respondent, for example, states that being mother

and housewife for at least some period of time is considered normal by most persons she knows (and, potentially also by the interviewer she is addressing now), while working mothers are evaluated as "terrible":

> *Respondent: At the risk of sounding terrible, I would, I assume, never stop working. I would be desperately unhappy if I were at home. Whereas, I have nothing against housewives. My sister has been housewife for five years – but I would go berserk. (...)*
> *Interviewer: Why do you think this sounds terrible?*
> *Respondent: Well, one also talks with others about it. They find it horrible when I say something like that: "How can I say something like that! Then I should not have any children and focus on my career!" I don't like talking with my sister about this issue, because I don't feel good then. (L55ef, female, 33, married, childless)*

This passage shows that the respondent experiences these conversations as stressful, and feels pressured to conform. Descriptions of social pressure such as this one are rare in the interviews, and most respondents present themselves as in agreement with their network partners; they find their attitudes and behavior self-evident, and only rarely question their network partners' approaches or consider different ways of dealing with family formation

The *agreement and alignment with close friends* on the issue of family formation is also relevant. Most respondents agree with their close friends on their attitudes and intentions on having a child: together they choose to postpone starting a family, to have children, or to forgo having children. If one partner already has a child while the other is childless, the childless person intends to follow soon. This agreement and concordance provides them with the secure feeling that they are acting appropriately. At the same time, close friends are providers of emotional support, and as such have sanctioning powers. How much social pressure can be involved in establishing this conformity can be seen in the few cases in which conformity is not given. These respondents openly state that non-conforming behavior may result in losing their friend, and thereby a source of emotional support. One example is that of a woman who has not yet made up her mind yet if she wants to have children or not. Her best friend, however, does not want to have children and would be shocked if she got pregnant:

> *[My best friend] would first be appalled, but would then support me. But I think it wouldn't suit her well. Sure, because it would take something away from her. I assume she would be somewhat shocked if I was pregnant. I think for her it would me more difficult if I got pregnant, than it would be for me if she got pregnant. Because she absolutely does not want to [have a child]. (L55ef, female, 33, married, childless)*

She reports that her friend takes it for granted that she will stay childless, and would be upset if she does not. Although she assumes that her friend would in the end keep supporting her, she thinks that their friendship would suffer. Thus, one consequence of deciding to have a child might be losing the emotional support of her current best friend. One way to deal with this situation is to conform to the best friend's expectations and not to have a child; another way would be to reduce contact to and emotional involvement with this friend who does not support one's life choices, and to increase contact to other friends. This choice was made by another woman who, several years ago, was close friends with the woman just heard, as well as with her best friend. Now, however, she rates both of them only as a little important, and talks about her former friend who does not want to have children in a very distant tone:

> *I know that [this friend] finds children silly. That she can't appreciate them, and that she cannot understand it when other people have children. At least she expresses it that way. Seeing that, this is how I would imagine her attitude would be towards me if I got pregnant. (L52ef, female, 31, married, childless)*

She adds that she prefers talking about the issue with the woman she considers her best friend, who shares her views and also wants to have children.

Social Contagion

Some forms of influence do not involve social pressure, learning, or support. One example is this female respondent, who, when asked about her future plans, first talks about her job and her concerns about finding a new partner, and then introduces her statement about wanting children in the following way:

> *I have a sister who is three years older than I, and she has now two children, my godchildren… And I realize that I always look forward to meeting them, that I am often in contact with them and always try to be there at their crucial experiences ("Schlüsselerlebnisse"): second birthday, third birthday, the first carrot mash, and so on (…) They are now, one has turned two, the other is four. And I do realize that I would somehow also like to have this. (L10ff, female, 31, single, childless)*

By being in contact with her sister's children, she states, she has realized that she always looks forward seeing them, and that, as a consequence, she knows that she would also like to have children. Similarly, the following male respondent introduces his desire to have children by talking about being in contact with his

friends' children. Despite presenting his life course and plans in a rational tone throughout the interview, here he uses rather emotional vocabulary:

> *Well, first this is now the time that among my acquaintances this is happening at the moment, that they have children (…). Yes, well, I find it beautiful. It is incredibly interesting and cute of course. Well, actually I would also like to have a child, yes. (L02em, male, 29, single, childless)*

Yet another respondent describes how *emotionally rewarding experiences with children* lead to a growing desire and a growing readiness to realize family formation:

> *At the family reunions the children came and, well, earlier I couldn't appreciate them. I didn't want them. But somehow recent years I found that I was playing with them, and they were somehow – I don't know – rather cute. (…) And then we said, at some point we can also imagine having children. (L11ef, female, 29, cohabiting, pregnant)*

The consequence of social contagion processes in a circle of friends can be a *cascade of events* (see also Bernardi, 2003): most persons in this circle of friends have children at the same time, without consciously planning to have children at the same time. They are often surprised and interpret it as a coincidence:

> *Respondent: And at the same time, but this was rather a coincidence, that many among our acquaintances who also got pregnant (…) they had, it seems, all made the decision at the same time…*
> *Interviewer: Did you know that beforehand, have you talked about it?*
> *Respondent: No, I have talked about it only with one friend. And this is funny, she had said that with her partner it went well and that they wanted to have a child, and then I said: yes, we also. (L15ef, female, 29, married, 1 child: age 1)*

In sum, social contagion is a process that often goes unnoticed, and in many cases neither the sender nor the receiver of this form of influence is aware of it. Social contagion processes include a) emotional arousal and/or b) a non-conscious synchronization of events.

Provision of Support

The resources and support individuals have access to shape the scope for their behavior, and limit or provide opportunities to act. As I have shown in Chapter 4,

the realization of family formation and the organization of family life are connected to the support available.

Most respondents have been or still are profiting from their parents' *financial support*. Although all respondents feel that having a child is a step they can only take when they are financially independent of their parents (a view their parents strongly support, as I know from the interviews with the mothers), most draw confidence from the knowledge that their parents would always support them financially if needed. Exceptions are the few respondents who do not have good relationships with their parents, but most of them can rely on their parents-in-law. When childless respondents talk about what would happen if they had a child right now, parents' financial support is often mentioned. Having a child is a step they can only take when they are financially independent of their parents or of public support (a view their parents strongly support, as I know from the interviews with the mothers). Although they indicate that they would neither expect nor want to receive regular financial support by others, they actually mention various ways that their network partners (could) add to their financial security: e.g., by providing financial support in case of need, by providing low-priced housing, and by providing help with childcare. The perception that *material support* could be obtained in case of an unplanned pregnancy often goes together with the attitude that they would not abort the child. One young mother who had an unplanned pregnancy while she was still in education states that, when she looks back at the time when she learned that she is pregnant, she realizes she never considered aborting the pregnancy. She felt confident that she could deal with having a baby, first because she felt confident that the partnership is stable and "directed to the future", and second because she knew that her parents would always support her:

> *Interviewer: Did you then ask yourself if you want this child or not?*
> *Respondent: No, this has in principle never been a question. I always had this feeling of safety from my family, this I always had. I knew, I would somehow make it. (...) My parents have always supported me. I knew, financially I could count on my parents. (L08ef, female, 29, married, 1 child: age 2.5)*

Another form of material support relevant in the process of family formation is the *provision of housing*. Some respondents live in their parents' house or in a house or apartment provided by their parents, and pay reduced rent:

> *We do not live badly here, we live relatively cheap. We only pay 600 euros rent, that's really low priced for this area and the size. Because my parents own the house we can say at any time: ok, we don't pay now, we will pay this later. We haven't had to say this yet, luckily. (L17mp, male, 34, married, 1 child: age 1.5)*

Most respondents receiving this kind of support already have children or intend to have a child soon. However, the provision of material support may also establish a power relationship, or a dynamic of dependency. Being financially dependent, or at least profiting from the parent's money/material resources may also lead to a pressure to conform to their views – fearing that one would lose support if one disagrees with them. In fact, agreement between supportive parents and their children is high, as I know from the dyadic parent-child interviews, whereas couples who do not receive support report conflicting attitudes and expectations. One couple in the interviews said that they had been living in their parent's house, but experienced conflicts which finally led them to move out and renounce parental support.

The type of support most relevant in the respondents' narrations is *support in childcare*. Most respondents consider the parents and/or the parents-in-law as providers of support in childcare; sometimes sisters are also mentioned:

> *Ideally, I'd give the child to my sister or my mother or my mother-in-law. So, ideally within the family. (L55ef, female, 33, married, childless)*

Some respondents (intend to) use parental support in childcare regularly, thereby enabling both partners to work, while others prefer occasional support in order to have some free-time. Parental support is considered to be more flexible and better available than institutionalized childcare. Additionally, many respondents are skeptical about having a child looked after in childcare institutions when it is younger than age three, and of having the child in kindergarten for the full day. This would lead to an alienation of parents and children, and children would develop deviant behaviors (e.g., become criminal). Especially for female respondents who are skeptical about institutionalized childcare, but who do not want to be or cannot afford to be housewives, and for those whose working hours are incompatible with the public childcare available, regular parental support is seen as a necessary precondition for having a child. Only a few respondents favor childcare outside the family. They state that their parents/parents-in-law are not available for regular support (because they live in another city or are still employed) and/or that they do not feel that their parents should be involved regularly.

In addition, the interviews with respondents who already have children show that most of them rely on parental support and (plan to) use public childcare only when their child is three and older (kindergarten), and only for half a day. Those who profit from support in childcare by the grandparents regularly are more willing to decide to have a second child soon than those who do not. But to what extent is childcare by grandparents available; and how willing are

they to provide support? One large group of respondents feel that it is self-evident that their parents/parents-in-law are or will be willing to support them regularly, and some report that the parents have offered their help several times. Some even state that their parents/parents-in-law would be upset if they chose institutionalized childcare:

> *And my parents often take care of my nieces, when my sister works. And they have said that they would certainly also do this for us (...) If one employs a child minder, I think, the parents would even feel their toes had been stepped on ("auf den Schlips getreten")... (L15ef, female, 29, married, 1 child: age 1)*

This story also shows how closely social support and social pressure are linked. The grandparents have their own attitudes and expectations as to who should take care of the child, and are capable of providing or withdrawing support depending on their children's compliance. How much the availability of regular support in childcare fosters family formation becomes clear when comparing interviews of respondents receiving or expecting parental support in childcare to those of persons who do not. Some of them would like to have their parents' regular support, but cannot, either because they do not live in the same city, or because their parents are still working. In some cases, the respondents do not want their parents/ parents-in-law to provide regular childcare because they either have conflicts with them, or do not agree on how to raise the child. There are also some respondents who feel that regular support is too much to ask of their parents/parents-in-law, and that it is not the grandparents' job to take care of the grandchildren regularly (especially if the parents are rather old or are very busy in work and free-time activities). Particularly those respondents who would like to have parental support in childcare (because they dislike public childcare, but want to/ need to work both), but cannot, talk about many problems and concerns about when to have a child, and how to organize family life and work life. Their intentions regarding if and when to have a child are often more vague than those of the respondents that can rely on parental support. In these cases, missing support is inhibiting family formation. For two smaller groups of respondents, however, missing support by parents in childcare is not as relevant, either because the woman plans to stay at home as a housewife as long as necessary (and her partner is able to provide financially for the whole family); or because the respondents have positive views about institutionalized childcare, and feel that public childcare meets their requirements. Apart from occasional help with childcare from parents, many respondents also report that other relatives, such as siblings and cousins, as well as friends and neighbors, support them occasionally with childcare, or have promised support when they have a child. Especially childless respondents who presently provide childcare for relatives and friends count on

receiving this kind of support in return (reciprocity). Knowing that they could draw on this support provides a feeling of security, of not being left alone in an unknown and presumably stressful situation of raising a child, and thereby also fosters their intention to have a child.

Emotional support provides a feeling of security and safety. Respondents who already are parents often report that their network partners encourage and console them in case of need, have offered help, can be asked for advice, and that they understand their situation as parents, and thereby help in reducing stress and uncertainty. One example is this quote by a mother of a three-year-old, who talks about an emotionally supportive colleague:

> *I arrived at her place and I was totally wiped out, because I was stressed, [my child] had been crying, because I left – and my colleague made me feel comfortable ("hat mich aufgefangen"). And every time it's like that. I am often at her place because of our work but it also has a private character. And each time I come back from her totally recovered. I don't know how she does that. She makes some special tea and says, yes, please sit down here and ... it's like going to the sauna. (L08ef, female, married, 1 child: age 2.5)*

For respondents with children, it is very important to have persons in their networks who share the experience of being parents, and who are perceived as being more understanding, and, in various ways, more supportive than childless persons. Respondents who are childless mostly talk only in very general terms about emotional support, and not so much in connection with having children – unless they fear losing emotional support by having or not having a child. Here, the mechanism of social pressure comes into play; some concrete examples of this will be presented in the next section on social pressure. Some respondents fear that the emotional support exchanged in a friendship may be at stake when they disagree with their friend on whether and when to have a child. Respondents who report this kind of disagreement are aware that if they decide to have a child, they risk losing their friend – and thus an important source of emotional support. Unless there are other friends who could replace the loss, it would challenge the respondents' feeling of emotional security. Emotional support for persons who disapprove of having children may therefore discourage them from having children, while emotional support by those who approve of having children may enhance their willingness to become a parent.

5.2.3 Discussion: Mechanisms and Channels of Social Influence

In the following section, I want to discuss the mechanisms and channels of social influence I have identified in my data against the background of the research on fertility and social networks available.

Mechanisms of Social Influence

Previous work on social networks and fertility mainly defines three mechanisms of how personal relations and social networks affect fertility intentions and behavior: "social learning", "social influence" (Bongaart & Watkins, 1996; Montgomery & Casterline, 1996), and "social support" (e.g., Bühler & Fratczak, 2007).

In most definitions, *social learning* comprises the transmission of information (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996: 153-156) and the joint evaluation of these pieces of information (Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996: 659). It can occur when talking to people, but also when observing other persons. However, "little is known about learning mechanisms and the formation of perceptions in respect to demographic behavior" (Montgomery & Casterline, 1996: 159). This statement, given in 1996, still holds today, at least for Western countries, where the thematic concern is not the transmission of information on contraceptive use, but rather the transmission of "new" ideas, e.g., on voluntary childlessness. My research shows that the *transmission of information on five general topics* is most common, as well as most influential among my respondents:

- information on the presence, urgency, and topicality of family formation for others,
- on costs and benefits of having one two or more children,
- on the timing and spacing of childbirth,
- on the conditions necessary for family formation, and on how to achieve them,
- on ways of organizing family life, as well as on options for combining family and job.

In most of the cases, access to these kinds of information presented here promotes family formation by providing motivation to have children, and supplying advice about if and when to have children, and about how to organize family life. So when individuals know how other persons organize their family life, this can motivate, encourage, and help them decide to have a child. In contrast, a lack of

access to information leads to a feeling of uncertainty about whether or when to have children, or about how to organize family life, and thus encourages postponement. In some cases, however, having access to heterogeneous or contradictory information also leads to uncertainty and fertility postponement. I will come back to this point when talking about the network structure. At this point, I want to stress that, in judging the impact access to information may have, the content of the information transmitted is relevant.

Information transmission can be a process the individual is conscious of, especially when ego actively searches for information; but it can also work on a subconscious level, as described in socialization theory. Individuals learn what is "normal" or "adequate" in everyday interactions, and pieces of information accumulated when growing up in the family of origin are often considered to be "self-evident" facts. For example, for some respondents who grew up in families in which the father was providing the family income, while the mother was housewife, it is self-evident to organize family life according to the male-breadwinner model and they have never considered the necessity of alternatives.

In the process of social learning, not only the transmission of information, but also the evaluations of these pieces of information play a crucial role. How certain pieces of information affect fertility intentions and behavior strongly depends on how they are *evaluated*: the costs of having children can be considered as "bearable" or as "unacceptable", and, as a consequence, are seen as a minor drawback which will not prevent ego from having children; or they can be seen as a major obstacle which makes not having children preferable. These evaluations are not only based on individual preferences, but are also products of social interactions, and can therefore be regarded as "joint evaluations" (Bongaarts & Watkins, 1996). I found that different network partners play different roles in the evaluation: persons who are role models are considered to be trustworthy sources of information, their attitudes and behaviors are evaluated positively, and their evaluations are accepted more consciously; while persons who serve as points of reference are not valued per se, but information transmitted by them is considered relevant because they are in a similar situation as ego. They are, therefore, also important counterparts in joint evaluations of certain issues. Individuals who provide vicarious experience do not necessarily need to be similar to ego (as points of reference) or evaluated positively (as role models), but they display a relevant behavior and ego can infer from their experiences what could happen if he/she engaged in this behavior.

The term *social influence* is often used in general for any type of effects personal relations could have on individuals' attitudes, intentions, and behavior. Family researchers have also used the term for effects other than social learning and social support, or effects that are based on the human desire to avoid

conflicts within groups. In this sense, the term *social pressure* can also be used, which describes individual behavior as being motivated by positive sanctions for conforming behavior, or fear of negative sanctions for deviant behavior. The mechanism of social pressure has been mainly analyzed in developing countries. This research considers social pressure as a critical factor in maintaining high fertility and in hindering the use of contraceptives. However, at a certain point, once the fertility decline has started, the direction of social pressure can shift from discouraging to encouraging contraceptives use. Montgomery and Casterline (1996) describe four areas in which social pressure may have an impact on fertility behavior in the US: adolescent fertility, choice of contraceptives, use of family planning and reproductive health services, and acceptability of childcare arrangements. I found in the analyses that social pressure is exerted in similar fields I have already named for social learning:

- pressure to have a child, to postpone childbearing, or to stay childless;
- to follow a certain timing model for the birth of the first, second, and further child;
- concerning the number of children; and
- to follow a certain model of organizing family life, sharing tasks in the partnership, combining family and job.

Like the transmission of information, social pressure can also be exerted in various directions, encouraging or discouraging people from becoming parents, and one individual can be subject to pressure in opposite directions.

Social pressure can be based on general societal norms with which "everybody" complies, as well as on group norms set by the persons one is engaged with. These norms are enforced by sanctions. I was able to identify three major sources of social pressure:

- Parents expect their children to become parents at some point; this should not occur too early (not before they are settled in a job) and not too late (because they do want to become grandparents when they are too old). The closer the contact to the parents, the more the children feel obliged to fulfill their expectations; the more supportive the parents, the more sanctioning power they have.
- Individuals expect their close friends to consider becoming parents at a similar point in time. Individuals who have children "too early" or "too late" risk losing their friends due to diverging interests. Conformity in fertility-related attitudes, desires, intentions, and behaviors are very common among close friends and fostered by the fear of losing this friendship.

- Social pressure is also relevant when it comes to the use of childcare arrangements: what kind of childcare can be regarded as acceptable, at what age is the use of external childcare appropriate, and for how many hours?

In addition to social learning and social pressure, I have identified in my data a third mechanism of social influence that had been introduced to fertility research by Laura Bernardi (2003) in her study on Italy: *social contagion*. Social contagion is defined as the automatic adoption of attitudes, goals, or behaviors that others are perceived to hold without any conscious intent or awareness (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004). This mechanism stresses two non-cognitive aspects: a) persons mimic other people's behavior without thinking about it (Marsden & Friedkin, 1994: 4), which leads, as I could also show, to a synchronization effect of childbearing events in close-knit groups of friends, even though the friends indicate that they never intended to have their babies at the same time; and b) individuals are motivated to have a child not by learning about costs and benefits, but by emotional arousal: many of my respondents reveal that experiencing how a close network partner experiences pregnancy and watching him/her living with the baby, as well as having contact with the baby, can arouse emotions and provoke a "feeling" that one also wants a baby. This contagion effect is a powerful mechanism fostering the transition to parenthood.

The fourth mechanism of social influence I want to discuss here is *social support*. So far, social support related to fertility intentions and behavior has been analyzed mainly in developing or post-socialist countries, and several studies found that individuals' fertility behavior is influenced by the resources they have access to (e.g., Philipov et al., 2006, Bühler & Fratczak, 2007). Studies on social support and fertility mainly deal with two forms of social support: economic support and support in childcare. Studies in Eastern Europe show that receiving support which can ameliorate the economic situation of the household fosters fertility (e.g., Bühler & Philipov, 2005), but little is known about whether and how economic support can foster childbirth in Western countries.

My analyses show that (prospective) economic support does play a considerable role in fertility-decision making: although the actual provision of economic support may be low in Germany, e.g., only 18% of young couples (younger than 39 years old) with children have housing provided for free by their parents (Haumann, 2006: 186), many of the respondents indicate that they derive much comfort from the knowledge that they could rely on financial support in case of need. This expectation encourages them to have children even if their job is not perfectly safe and their bank account is not filled with the money they would have liked to have saved. In contrast, respondents who cannot rely on this type of support are much more in need of establishing the prerequisites for

family formation through their own resources, and present themselves as more uncertain, more affected by labor market uncertainties, and having more doubts concerning whether and when to have a child.

In my data, (expected) support in childcare also proved to be very relevant for family formation. We know from traditional societies that social support in childcare can foster family formation (Crognier et al., 2001; Bereczkei, 1998). In modern societies, there is little sociological research on the effect of informal support in childcare on fertility decision-making. One exception I came across is a rather dated study from the US that showed that employed women who rely on childcare by relatives are more likely to plan another birth (Lehrer & Kawasaki, 1985). More recently, Hank and Kreyenfeld (2003) could show that in western Germany it has a positive impact on the transition to the first child if the woman's mother lives in the same city as the couple. My interview data reveals that, not only the woman's mother, but also the parents-in-law are relevant providers of support in childcare, as are, in some cases, siblings and friends. Additionally, I can show that, in many cases, parents not living in the same city but close by, are also relevant providers of support in childcare (and children spend afternoons, nights, or weekends with them), while parents living in the same city are sometimes also not expected to provide support because a) they are still working, b) they are in bad health, c) they are not seen as close contacts. My data also indicates that parental support in childcare encourages having the second child. Receiving or expecting to receive this type of support helps in combining family and job, and thereby contributes to establishing a "secure" situation. It also provides a feeling of security, of not being left alone in an unknown and presumably stressful situation of raising a child, and thereby also fosters the intentions to have a (further) child.

A third major form of support I have identified is emotional support. It provides a feeling of security and safety, reducing stress and uncertainty. In a friendship, emotional support may be at stake when two friends disagree on whether to have a child at all. Respondents who report this kind of disagreement are aware that, if they decide to have a child, they risk losing their friend – and with him/her an important source of emotional support. Emotional support by persons who disapprove of having children therefore may discourage them from having children, while emotional support by those who approve of having children may enhance the willingness to become a parent. The expectation that they will lose emotional support is also very important for some respondents who are currently single, but in the opposite way: they fear that they will lose emotional support when their friends become parents and have less time for them. Here we can see how social support and social pressure are closely linked.

In sum, the research shows that influence mechanisms such as social learning, social pressure, and social support described in studies on developing or post-socialist countries are also at work in our research setting, a western German city – despite access to information via mass media and the Internet, despite the existence of a welfare state and (at least some) access to childcare services, and despite a perception that modernization and individualization processes lead to a weakening of traditional bonds and an expansion of individual autonomy.

Channels of Social Influence

I identified eight major channels of social influence: the partner, the parents, the parents-in-law, siblings, cousins, friends, acquaintances, and groups of reference. The relevance of partners, parents, and siblings for fertility have been analyzed in various research studies in Western countries, and my findings are well in line with their results: they also indicate that partners, parents, and siblings are very important channels of influence. However, I could identify further relevant channels of influence, I shall discuss below.

Not surprisingly, a considerable amount of research on fertility deals with the partner's role in family formation and stresses the relevance of the partner and the need for both partners to come to an agreement (e.g., Beckman, 1984; Thomson & Hoem, 1998). Also, in my interviews the partner was revealed as the person who exerts the most effective influence on the respondent's attitudes and intentions concerning having children. If both partners agree on having a child, on postponing childbirth, or on remaining childless, they support each other strongly against any outside pressure to behave differently. However, if the partners disagree on whether and when to have children, or on aspects of organizing family life, they do also actively, and consciously try to exert influence on each other in order to convince their partner of their position. They share information on fertility-related issues and try, for example, to engage the partner – or discourage the partner from engaging – in frequent contact with families with children. In the worst case, the disagreement can culminate in the ultimate pressure they can exert on each other: either they come to an agreement or they break up the relationship.

However, scholars have pointed out the need to focus not only on the couple, but also on kinship ties. Research focusing on parents and their offspring (Axinn et al., 1994; Murphy & Wang, 2001) has, for example, shown a positive correlation of fertility patterns and family values across generations in US and other Western countries. My study conforms to these results and shows that parents exert – together with partners and close friends – very effective forms of

social influence. Beyond that, I was able to show the mechanisms that lead to this positive correlation. To some extent, parental influence works irrespective of the current relationship situation; that is, even if parents and children are engaged in a problematic relationship and have stopped talking to each other, the socialization the respondents received in their family of origin continues to be effective and serves as a basis for a correlation of fertility patterns across generations. Interestingly, this does not work in all areas in the same way: on the one hand, for example, regarding the image of the "good mother" as main caregiver for the child, the agreement of parents and their adult children is strong, and oriented on how the parents have organized their family life; while on the other hand, regarding the timing of parenthood, both parents and their adult children agree that times have changed, and that the children should first be engaged in education, and only at a later point in time consider family formation; so that on this point they have both come to a new perspective (jointly evaluating the information they have access to).

If the current relationship with the parents is good, they are even more influential: I find conformity in parents' and children's expectations and attitudes; parents are the most important sources for various kinds of support that are considered as being relevant when having children, and together with their supportive function, they also have considerable sanctioning powers. They may, for example, use their power to enforce their desire for having grandchildren, or to impose their views on how family life should be organized. If the relationship with the parents is bad, or if the parents are not able to provide certain forms of support, a lack of parental support can be a serious obstacle for being able to realize the desire to have a child. However, in this case parents-in-law can step in. I found that respondents who lack parental support have often been able to fill this gap with their parents-in-law: they consider them as very important persons in their networks, are engaged in frequent and close contact with them, and (expect to) receive considerable support from them. This result stresses the necessity of considering not only the parents, but also the parents-in-law, and is another argument for including the couple's perspective in research on fertility.

Previous research has also focused on siblings (Axinn et al., 1994; Murphy & Wang, 2001), showing correlations in fe

rtility patterns and family values among siblings. In conformity with these results, my analyses have shown that siblings – especially when they are older and of the same sex – can be very important sources of social influence. Additionally, I have shed some light on the ways that siblings exert social influence: they are often seen as role models, especially when they take an important position in the network, or at least as points of reference, providing information about how to deal with family formation. As a consequence, they are sources of

social learning. Siblings who are considered to be important network partners are (expected to be) valuable sources of social support. If they already have children, they provide frequent and close contact with children, which can induce processes of social contagion. All this can lead to conformity in fertility patterns and family values among siblings.

In very similar way, cousins can be very influential network partners. Especially for respondents who do not have any (older) siblings or do not have close contact to their siblings, cousins can serve as points of reference or role models; they can be sources of social learning, social contagion, and social support. Brothers- and sisters-in-law and the partner's cousins can also be influential – but mostly indirectly via the partner, or if the couple has been involved with each other for a long time.

To my knowledge, previous research on personal relations and family formation of adults only rarely deals with relationships other than partners, parents, and siblings. For example, the impact of friendship ties on family formation has mostly been studied concerning adolescents and their peers, e.g., in studies on teenage pregnancies (Billy & Udry, 1985; Arai, 2007). To my knowledge, only one study has considered friendship influences on adult fertility (Bernardi, 2003) and found considerable peer influences in Italy. Bernardi's insights are well in line with my findings in a western German context: friends are very important communication partners, and therefore valuable sources for social learning. When friends already have children, their experiences are taken as a basis for the respondents' own vision of the future. Without having to have the experience themselves, they can imagine better what it would be like to have a child (vicarious experience). Especially close friends can, like siblings and cousins, be sources of social contagion if they already have children, and they are in most cases expected to provide social support. Close friends can also exert social pressure to conform, either by having children or by remaining childless.

Additionally, I also identified two channels of influence that, to my knowledge, have not yet been considered in fertility research in Western countries: acquaintances and reference groups. Acquaintances are persons who are not seen as friends but who are still engaged in personal contact with (e.g., colleagues or persons related to a hobby or club the respondents belong to). They are very influential in one specific way: acquaintances are a very valuable source of information and provide a basis for social learning. The relevance of acquaintances – or, in network terminology, "weak ties" – for individual behavior has been shown in various fields of research (Burt, 1987; Friedkin, 1993; Marsden & Friedkin, 1993), but not in fertility research.

Up to this point the channels of social influence I have described have been single persons in a certain role relation to ego. The interviews revealed, however,

that many respondents are not only influenced by single persons, but also by certain groups of persons, and that the influence this group exerts functions in a very specific way. These groups are often labeled “my circle of friends”, “the people around me”, but may also be special groups, such as “my former schoolmates”, “my colleagues”, or “my fellow students”. These groups mainly consist of people of the same age, and often have a similar educational level and partnership status as ego. Looking at these groups, ego builds an imaginative scale ranging from “most of the members of this group are childless”, “many start thinking about family formation”, “some are having children”, “many are having children”, to “most are having children”. Accordingly, ego can be early in having children (when most do not), or late (when most already have children); ego can be somewhat in line and conforming or deviant. Considerations on the timing of childbirth and the perception of personal readiness often include this kind of evaluation.

My research is well in line with previous research that stresses the relevance of the partner, parents, and siblings as channels of social influence affecting the individual’s fertility intentions. Additionally, I was able to show that friends are also relevant channels of social influence for adult respondents. These role relations (partner, parents, siblings, friends) can be described as strong ties in most cases. According to Granovetter’s definition, the strength of a tie is defined by four dimensions: amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services (Granovetter, 1973: 1361). Strong ties can therefore be represented by persons who are engaged in frequent contact with ego, who are emotionally close, and who help each other on a regular basis. Strong ties often build cohesive networks of high density in which information is transmitted quickly. But dense networks also tend to produce homogenous evaluations and normative pressures (Friedkin, 1982; Coleman, 1990). My data shows that also when it comes to thinking about family formation processes of social learning and social pressure affecting fertility choices are strongly connected with the strength of ties a network is composed of. Further, I identified four channels of social influence that have, to my knowledge, not been considered in fertility literature: parents-in-law, cousins, acquaintances, and groups of reference. While parents-in-law and cousins can often be considered to be strong ties, acquaintances represent weak ties. They are emotionally distant from ego, and mutual reciprocity is not expected. In line with Granovetter’s (1973) findings on weak ties, I could also show that weak ties do not have a direct sanctioning power, but that they can be valuable sources of new information.

5.2.4 Summary

I identified four major mechanisms of influence and eight major channels. Certain mechanisms of influence are especially effective when they are exerted via certain channels, therefore I will summarize now both in combination.

- The mechanism of *social learning* comprises the transmission of information from the *partner*, the *parents*, *siblings,* and *cousins*, among *friends* and *acquaintances* (especially when they are of the same gender and age). Social learning is effective from network partners that are considered as strong ties, but also from weak ties. Relevant information mainly centers on five topics: the presence, urgency, and topicality of family formation for others; the costs and benefits of having children; the timing and spacing of childbirth; the conditions necessary for family formation and on how to achieve them; the ways of organizing family life, as well as the options for combining family and job. Access to information mostly motivates and fosters family formation by providing orientation. In some cases, however, having access to heterogeneous or contradictory information can lead to uncertainty and fertility postponement. Judging the impact of access to information may have, the content of the information transmitted, and the evaluation of this information is relevant. One specific form of social learning is in comparing one's own situation with that of *reference groups*: if childbearing is not an issue for them, it needn't be an issue for ego yet; however, if many of them start having children, ego becomes aware of the topic and starts thinking about family formation.
- *Social pressure* describes individual behavior as being motivated by positive sanctions for conforming behavior, or fear of negative sanctions for deviating behavior. Social pressure is mainly exerted in four fields: on having, postponing, and forgoing children; on the timing and spacing of childbirth; on the number of children; and on organizing family life and combining family and job). Social pressure can be exerted in various directions, thereby encouraging or discouraging people from becoming parents, and one individual can also be subject to pressure in opposite directions. Persons holding sanctioning powers – that is, mostly strong ties, such as the *partner*, *parents, parents-in-law and close friends* – most effectively exert social pressure.
- The mechanism of *social contagion* points out that individuals can also adopt certain attitudes or behaviors from others without perceiving potential sanctions. This non-conscious adoption can be brought about by mimicking others' behavior (and perceiving the transition to parenthood as "self-

evident" and "natural" because others also do so); or by emotional arousal induced by close contact with (small) children, which can motivate childbirth. Social contagion is most effective via *friends, siblings, and cousins* when they are strong ties.

- *Social support* is most relevant in three forms: (prospective) economic support, mainly from *parents* and *parents-in-law*; (expected) support in childcare from the *partner*, but also from parents and parents-in-law and less often from *siblings* and *friends*; emotional support from kin and friends. All these forms of support help establish the preconditions for having children, provide orientation, reduce stress and uncertainty, and encourage the individual to have (further) children. Support is mainly expected/received from persons who are considered to be strong ties.

The relationship between channels and mechanisms of social influence is summarized in Table 9.

Table 9: Mechanisms and channels of social influence

Mechanisms of influence	Channels of influence	How/on what influence is exerted
Social pressure	partner, parents, close and other friends	pressure to conform in whether and when to have a child as well as how to organize family life
Social contagion	close and other friends, siblings and cousins	emotional arousal motivates having a child
Social support	partner, mainly parents and parents-in-law; also siblings, cousins and friends to some extent	access to resources - helps planning whether/when to have a child - facilitates family formation and family life, especially the combination of family and work
Social learning	partner, parents, close and other friends, siblings and cousins; colleagues, acquaintances; group of friends/ acquaintances that serve as frame of reference	access to information - helps in the decision-making process (e.g., information on costs/benefits of parenthood, postponement, or childlessness) - motivates own thinking about family formation (e.g., when network partners consider having children) - shapes attitudes and values, e.g., the image of the "*good mother/father*".

5.3 The Relevance of the Network Structure

After having presented characteristics of the network structure, the persons who are relevant when it comes to family formation, and the mechanisms by which they influence ego, I will now aim at bringing together network structure and fertility intentions. I have analyzed the relationship between several network characteristics and fertility intentions of the childless respondents – some have proved to be rather irrelevant, while others revealed clearly how they are connected to processes of social influence, and, as a consequence, to the fertility intentions expressed. In the following, I shall first present the relationship of the structural characteristics I have introduced in Section 5.1 with the fertility intentions: size, density, share of kin, and number of young children in the network. Based on this first analysis, I shall develop a typology of fertility-relevant social networks.

5.3.1 Fertility Intentions and Network Structure

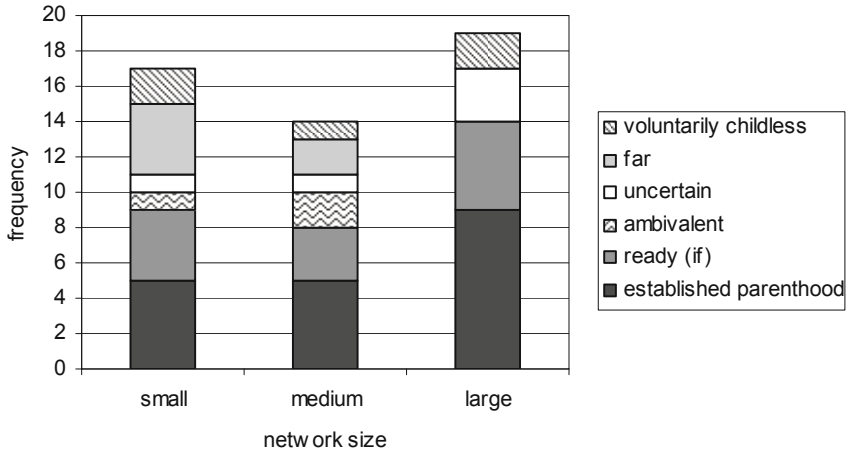
For the fertility intentions, I come back to the categorization scheme of intentions and practices concerning family formation presented in Chapter 4. I distinguish between respondents who already have children (*established parenthood*[35]); respondents who intend to realize family formation soon (*ready for parenthood*); respondents who would like to realize family formation soon but first need to establish one important precondition (*ready for parenthood if*); respondents who do not feel that family formation is an issue yet (*parenthood is far*); respondents who are uncertain about when to have children and therefore postpone family formation (*uncertain*); respondents who cannot decide not only when to have children, but also if they want to have children at all (*ambivalent*); and, finally, respondents who intend to remain childfree (*voluntarily childless*).

[35] Certainly, I could differentiate those who are already are parents depending on their intentions to have a further child. These intentions can be grouped in the same categories as their intentions for the first child: two respondents feel ready for parenthood, four feel ready but first need to establish an important precondition (e.g., finish education, build a house), two feel that the second child is far in the future, four feel uncertain about having a second child, three exclude the possibility of having a second child, and three exclude the possibility of having a third child. None is ambivalent about having a further child. Because deciding to have a further child is different from deciding about the first child, and because the sample contains only a few parents, I will not get into details comparing their intentions and networks, and will rather group them as a contrast group of having established parenthood.

Network Size

A comparison of network size (categories: small, medium, large; developed from combining qualitative and quantitative data) and fertility intention in the data does not provide a clear picture among the childless respondents (see Figure 14). Especially respondents who feel ready for parenthood, are unsure about the timing of parenthood, or intend to remain childless are found in all three categories of network size.

Figure 14: Network size and fertility intention



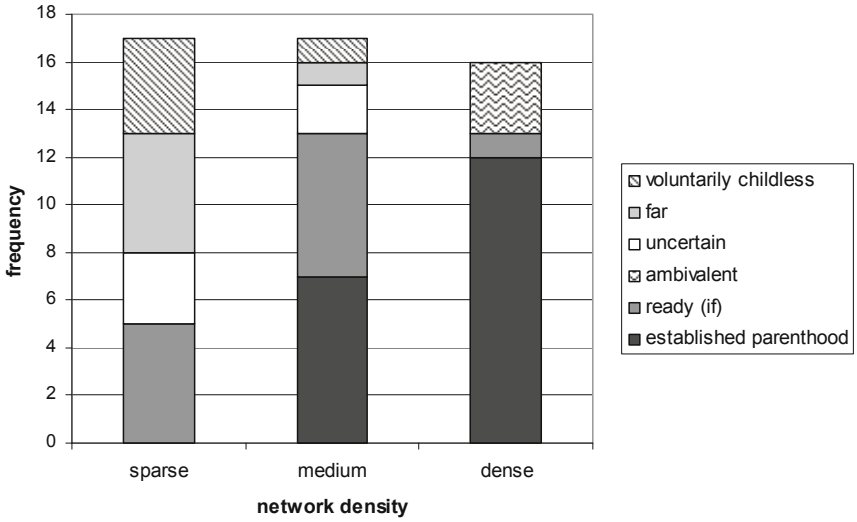
Remarkable are three details: respondents who are already parents are more often embedded in large and medium size networks. In contrast, respondents who feel that family formation is far or who are ambivalent about family formation are exclusively embedded in small and medium-sized networks.

Density and Share of Kin

Concerning the network density, the overall picture is rather compelling (see Figure 15): respondents embedded in dense networks in most cases either already have children, or they are childless and intend to have their first child soon.

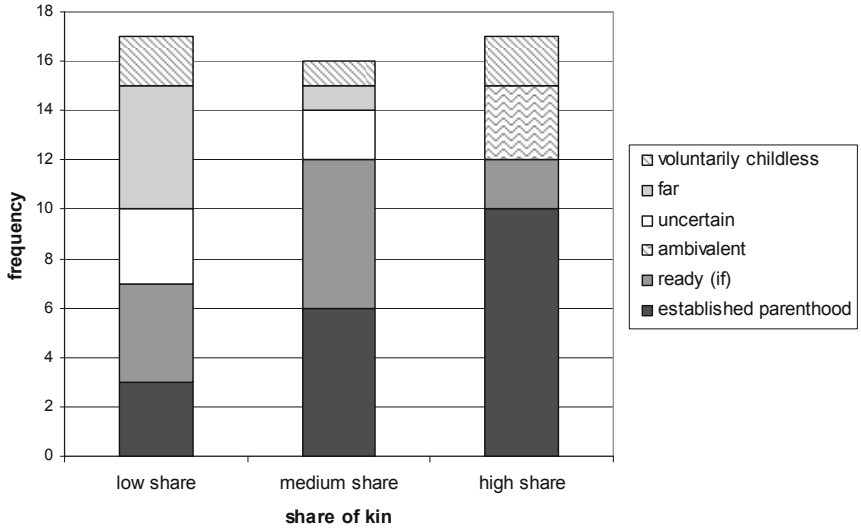
In contrast, respondents embedded in sparse networks in most cases are postponing the transition to parenthood (intention: far or uncertain), or they intend to remain childless.

Figure 15: Network density and fertility intention



Respondents who express an ambivalent intention are embedded in dense networks exclusively. In the sample most dense networks include a high share of kin. If we look therefore at the share of kin, the picture is very similar (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Share of kin and fertility intention

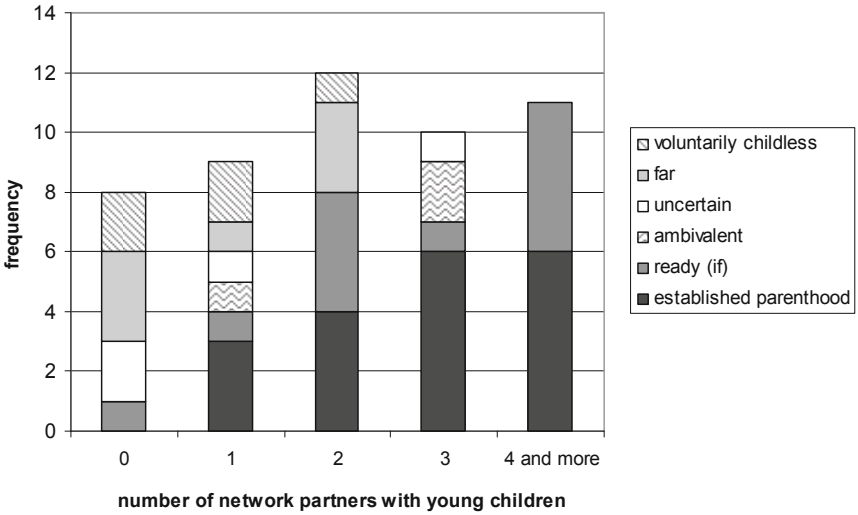


Respondents who have established parenthood or feel ready for parenthood mostly indicate a medium or high share of kin, while respondents who postpone or intend to forgo childbearing indicate a rather low share of kin.

The Number of Network Partners with Young Children

Respondents embedded in networks containing no or only one network partner with a child (included are network partners who are pregnant or whose child is younger than five years) mostly postpone childbirth (intention: far, uncertain, or ambivalent) or intend to remain childless. Meanwhile, respondents embedded in networks containing many children (three and more) are mostly already parents or intend to become parents soon (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Number of network partners with young children and fertility intention



5.3.2 Developing a Typology of Fertility-Relevant Social Networks

So far, I have contrasted the different types of intentions with network characteristics such as size, density, share of kin, and the number of network partners with young children. This has shown us that these factors are more or less clearly linked with certain intentions. I have summarized these findings in Table 10.

Table 10: Intentions and network characteristics

	Established parenthood	Ambivalent	Ready and ready if	Far	Uncertain	Voluntarily childless
Network size	large	small	large and small	small	large and small	large and small
Density and share of kin	very high	high	high and low	low	low	low
Young children in the network	many	some	some	no	some	few/none

Large networks often coincide with already having children. Small networks often coincide with ambivalence and perceiving parenthood as far. For the other types of fertility intentions, the link with the network size is less clear. Dense networks mostly coincide with parenthood or the intention to have a child soon. But there are two exceptions: persons who are ambivalent are embedded in a dense network, but postpone childbearing; and persons who feel ready for parenthood, but are embedded in a sparse network. The more children included in the network, the less likely is postponement or voluntary childlessness. However, for respondents who feel uncertain about having children, postponement of childbirth coincides with a considerable number of network partners with children.

As we can see, size, density, and number of young children in the networks are not sufficient for distinguishing the different types of fertility intentions; other factors need to be taken into account. In subsequent analyses, I have therefore compared in more detail the networks of persons with different fertility intentions.

When analyzing social networks and fertility intentions, we need to be aware of the double relationship between social networks and intentions. The correspondence between network structure and intention does not tell us anything about the direction of the relationship between the two: Do the respondents hold certain intentions because they are embedded in a certain network structure which influences their attitudes and behavior? Or are they embedded in a certain network structure because they hold certain attitudes about family formation and have therefore selected their network partners accordingly?

Reliable insights into influence and selection effects, into the dynamics of networks, can only be derived from longitudinal studies that allow us to analyze how networks, as well as intentions, change over time. However, the rich qualitative interview material does provide some information about how the respondents feel their networks have changed; their strategies for establishing, keeping

up, or losing contacts; as well as information about processes of social influence that allowed us to identify certain influence mechanisms and relevant network partners (see Section 5.2). This information allows us to take a deeper look at the processes of selection and social influence presented by the respondents, and how they are interrelated. I cannot analyze and differentiate selection effects and the effects of social influence on fertility intentions; for this longitudinal data would be necessary. But I can draw on respondents' accounts of how their relationships have developed and about what kind of relationships they value currently to get some insights into the selection taking place – and to see how accounts of network partner selection may differ for persons expressing different fertility intentions. In the analysis of the interviews, I have produced detailed descriptions of the structure and composition of the social networks, the mechanisms of social influences, and the selection of network partners for each type of fertility intention/behavior. In the following, I shall present a summarized version of these descriptions.

Type 1: Established Parenthood

A considerable share of persons in our sample already has children. They talk about their decision-making for the first child retrospectively as well as about their intentions to have a second or third child.

Persons who have established parenthood are generally embedded in the most densely knit networks within the sample, and include the highest share of kin. Often not only the kin form a densely knit clique, but also, in half of the cases, the friends are engaged in one or two closely knit cliques, and their networks are rather large. These respondents include many network partners who have children (kin and friends), and they evaluate their network partner's family formation and family life usually very positively.

They report retrospectively their views on having their first child, and also their attitudes about having a further child, and about various forms of social influence (learning, contagion, pressure). They mostly receive considerable support that facilitates their family life, especially support with childcare. When they talk about changes in their networks, many respondents indicate that, because of having children, their relationships to kin have strengthened and improved, and that their parents(-in-law) and siblings in particular provide support in childcare. Contacts to persons who remained childless have decreased, while they have met new friends who have children of similar ages as their children.

Because almost all of their 'important' network partners either belong to their family or have or strive for a family of their own, I label their networks as *'family-centered'* (see Figure 18).

Type 2: Ready for Parenthood (if)

A small number of respondents indicate that they intend to have a child soon. They plan to or have already stopped using contraceptives. Several others definitely want to have children or report feeling ready to have children at the time of the interview, but lack a very important precondition (e.g., economic stability or a partner who consents to have children at present). To the extent that it is possible, they are actively trying to create the conditions necessary to enter parenthood (that is, they are searching for a better job, are trying to convince their current partner to have a child).

Both, those who are already trying to have a child, as well as those who are still working on establishing the necessary conditions, have networks that are either dense and include many kin, or are sparse and include few kin. They also vary in network size. In any case, they include a large number of persons who have young children. Their networks are mostly composed of one clique of relatives, and either friends who are not in contact among each other, or one or two cliques of friends. If there are several cliques, their members are, in general, very similar in their attitudes and behaviors related to family formation: for example, they evaluate having children positively. The respondents in turn evaluate their network partners' family lives and family formation mostly positively.

Almost all persons who feel ready for parenthood talk about processes of social influence. They refer to mechanisms such as social pressure, social learning, and contagion as well as the availability of support (not only in childcare) encouraging them to have children. Those embedded in dense networks tend to stress pressure, while those in sparse networks talk about learning and contagion – but accounts of all mechanisms are found in both network types. Some respondents indicate that, with their growing interest in children, their network is changing, or will change once the child is there. They seek to increase contacts to persons who are family-oriented (as their parents and kin), and who have young children themselves, because of the common interest in raising children, and because they expect that their network-partners will be able to provide support, e.g., in childcare, but also in giving advice. Most, however, indicate that their closest relations have not and will not change fundamentally with their transition to parenthood.

The dense networks including many kin resemble very much the networks of persons who already have children, and are therefore also labeled *family-centered networks*. Respondents embedded in this type of network include a large share of kin, as well as many 'important' network partners who have families of their own or who want to have one soon, and who can provide orientation regarding family formation and the organization of family life. This expectation of considerable support and an orientation on network partners who already have children can be also found among respondents whose networks are sparse, very heterogeneous, and include few kin. Here, the selection of network partners is more pronounced. Developing an interest in family formation, these respondents are increasing contacts to kin and friends who have children, and are exploring to what extent they could draw on their network partners' support. I have labeled these networks as *supportive networks* (see Figure 19).

Type 3: Ambivalent

Some of the childless respondents talk about having children in a very ambivalent way. On the one hand, they would like to have a child now, while on the other hand, they can also imagine being happy living without children in general, or postponing childbirth for another period of time. They discuss the costs and benefits involved with having children, and perceive that having children is incompatible with other areas of life they are interested in.

Their networks are small or of medium size, dense, and include many relatives as well as many persons with young children. Respondents who are ambivalent are embedded in networks composed of two cliques: one clique of relatives and one clique of friends. Most striking is that both cliques contain very important network partners (one clique exclusively kin, the other exclusively friends) and that both cliques hold very different - if not to say opposite - ideas of life, lifestyles, and values. One clique is composed of family-centered person who mostly have children, the other clique is composed of persons who intend to remain childless or postpone family formation. Both cliques exert pressure on ego to conform to their behavior and ego tries to deal with these contradicting ideas, values, attitudes, and behaviors – and the connected expectations the network partners hold about ego's behavior, but has not (yet) found a way of integrating them.

The respondents provide rich accounts of incidents of social pressure, learning, contagion and support: i.e., social influences exerted by their kin that motivate/encourage/pressure them to have a child (soon), and social influences exerted by their friends motivating/encouraging/pressuring them to remain (pres-

ently) childless. Respondents in this group are not very content with this 'in-between-state' in which they are subject to social influence in different directions; however, they find it very difficult to get out of this situation. One way we could imagine resolving this stressful situation could be to give up certain relationships. However, the respondents find it difficult to give up any of these contacts, first because they are closely connected within each clique: reducing or giving up contact to one person in a dense clique can only work if one also gives up contacts to the other persons in this clique. So the only way would be to reduce or give up contacts to the whole clique of persons. And, second, the respondents were at the time of the interview unable to select one or the other group, because they value the members of each clique as very important network partners. This shows that some social relations (as parents and siblings, as well as close and long-term friends) cannot easily be given up and exchanged with other relationships.

I label this network containing two contrasting cliques containing very important network partners a *polarized network* (see Figure 20).

Type 4: Parenthood is Far

Some respondents feel that parenthood is not an issue for them yet. Although they in general would like to have children, they have not yet thought much about the issue, because they feel that they will become parents only at a later point in time.

In contrast to respondents who feel ready for parenthood, those who perceive parenthood as far away are embedded in networks that lack any network partners with young children. Their networks are rather small, sparse and include a low share of kin. The networks are either composed of no cliques, including only persons who are not interrelated, or a few cliques that are all similar.

Lacking children in their network, they cannot report any social learning or contagion that would motivate them to consider having children. These respondents mostly have never thought about support in childcare or discussed this issue with others and therefore are rather vague in talking about their expectations and ideas about how they would organize childcare. In some cases, they perceive some pressure by their parents to start having a family, but they mostly argue that most persons their age are still childless. Most respondents in this group report that they have had their closest friends since their schooldays, and do not, for example indicate that they have lost former friends because they had children. Nevertheless it is likely that there is a selection effect. They have all been singles for long periods in their lives, and also their friends are mostly

singles. Therefore, we can assume that, being single, they have preferred to maintain contacts with other singles rather than with couples. Thus, they could have lost contact to couples in their network long before these couples started thinking about family formation. In the interview, these respondents do not reflect on processes of selection and only very rarely on processes of influence. Rather, they often explain their attitudes and behavior by referring to their friends who are thinking/behaving similarly.

Families do not play a major role in their networks. Neither their own family (low share of kin), nor friends who have established a family of their own. I label this type of network as *family-remote network* (see Figure 21).

Type 5: Uncertain about Parenthood

In contrast to those respondents for whom parenthood is far, respondents who are uncertain about parenthood have been often thinking about the issue, but currently feel unable to make a decision. They are all confronted with a situation they feel is incompatible with having children (e.g., their male partner cannot provide financially for the family, they are enrolled in education, they want to pursue a further career step, or their partnership is in a crisis), but nevertheless they feel that they have reached an age it which family formation is not far anymore. Similar to respondents who are ambivalent, they also talk at length about the advantages and disadvantages of having children, but, in contrast to them, they are not so much torn between two options, but are generally uncertain about how to deal with family formation, and especially with the timing.

They are mostly embedded in sparse networks with few kin. Their networks vary in size, and either include no children or some persons with young children. But, in contrast to the respondents who feel ready for parenthood, they either evaluate their network partners' living arrangements rather critically and in many ways negatively, and/or feel that their network partners' situation is not comparable to their own.

Although they perceive their networks in general to be supportive, they have access to only a little support with childcare at the moment. In this group, respondents have selected their network partners according to their interest in their profession or their hobbies, but they have also kept contacts to old school friends, including to those who have children. Often they get from the latter some impression that the time to start family formation is approaching (social learning), while the former are still postponing the issue, or if they have children already, it was 'unplanned', and they serve as negative role models, providing evidence of how difficult it is to combine different life goals. This is mostly true

for highly qualified women who want to combine family and job. They experience that their female colleagues either are still childless or have dropped out of their careers by becoming mother. In contrast to respondents who are ambivalent, uncertain respondents do not feel pressured in one or the other direction. The main form of influence they talk about is social learning. They may also, for example, report that they lack information or a role model to show them how to combine their personal and professional interests, or that they lack a male breadwinner who could facilitate family formation.

I have labeled this type of network *as non-supportive network* (see Figure 22).

Type 6: Voluntarily Childless

Some of the respondents do not want to have any children. Their networks are mostly sparse, vary in size, and include few kin. They resemble those of the respondents who feel that parenthood is far, that is, they include few or no persons with young children. In contrast to them, they often have a close friend who also intends to remain childless, or their networks center very much on a common interest (e.g., being composed of persons in the same profession or with similar artistic ideals). Respondents in this group more often than others rate the relationship to their parents as of little importance, not important, or problematic.

Persons who intend to remain childless are those who talk the most about changes in their networks, and who clearly relate them to their decision to remain childless, and to their network partners becoming parents. They also indicate that they experience social pressure to have a child, mainly by parents and kin, but also by friends, which makes them avoid the topic with them and – to some extent, also decreased contacts to them. In turn, by being able to establish, increase, and cultivate relationships to persons who do not want to have children at all, or at least not at the moment, they escape social pressure to have children. The few contacts they have with persons with young children also encourage them to remain childless, because they evaluate them rather negatively.

I label their networks, which include persons who share very similar interests (e.g., job, leisure time activities) that are different from family formation, as *childfree by choice* (see Figure 23).

My analyses revealed five network characteristics that help to distinguish between different kinds of fertility intentions: density, share of kin, number of young children in the network (especially among the strong ties), availability of support in childcare, and the number and similarity of cliques. While some of

these characteristics designate general properties of the network structure (density, cliques), others refer to the network's composition (share of kin), or to certain characteristics of relevant ties (having children, providing support). Additionally, the network dynamics also have to be taken into account, because they help to distinguish between selection effects and processes of social influence.

Grouping the respondents' networks according to these categories, I was able to relate to each of the six types of fertility intentions one network type (see Table 11).

Table 11: Fertility intentions and relevant network characteristics

Intention/ network characteristics	Established parenthood	Ambi-valent	Ready and ready if	Far	Uncertain	Voluntarily childless
Density and share of kin	very high	high	High or low	low	low	low
Young children in the NW	many	some	some	few/ none	some	few/none
Available support in childcare	considerable	some	some	-	little	little
Existence and similarity of cliques[36]	none or few similar cliques	two contrast ing cliques	none or few similar cliques	none or few similar cliques	none or few similar cliques	none or few similar cliques
Homogeneity	rather homo-genous in partnership status and parity	contras-ting cli-ques	rather homo-genous in partnership status and parity or rather hetero-geneous	rather homo-genous in partner-ship status/ parity	very hetero-geneous in partner-ship status and parity	homo-geneous in partnership status, parity and interests
Network dynamics	high share of long-term ties, selection of family-oriented persons	high share of long-term ties	high share of long-term ties or selection of family oriented persons	no con-scious selection based on fertility prefer-ences	no con-scious selection based on fertility prefer-ences	selection of childless persons
Network type	***Family-centered***	***Polarized***	***Family-centered* or *supportive***	***Family-remote***	***Non-supportive***	***Childfree by choice***

Only by combining all of these network characteristics am I able to distinguish the different network types that correspond to the different fertility intentions. Although, for example, the existence of cliques is somewhat linked to the density of the network, it has to be considered as a separate factor because the existence of two contrasting cliques makes the difference for persons holding polarized

[36] Cliques, that is groups of persons who are in close contact with each other, with similar or diverging attitudes on having children.

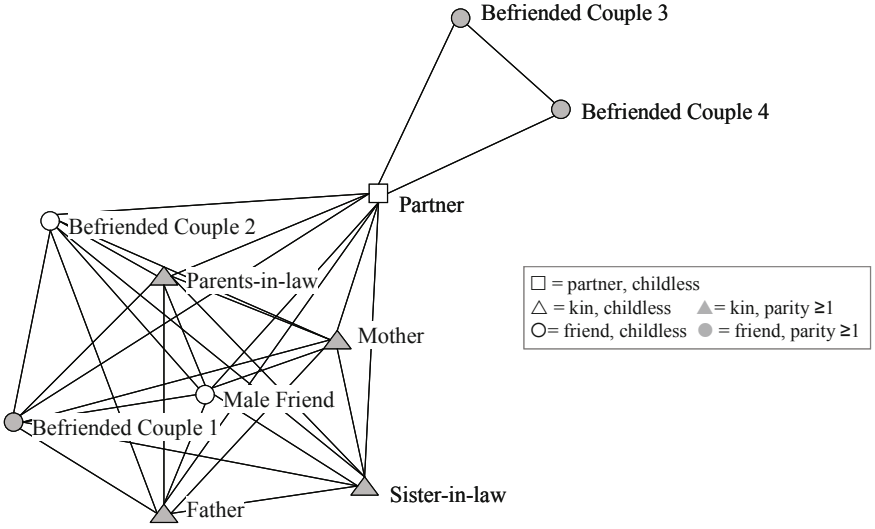
networks, and who are ambivalent about having children (compared to other persons with dense networks).

In the following, I shall present for each network type exemplary a graph of the network, and a case story for the corresponding respondent. The network was graphed with the software *VisuaLyzer*.

The Family-Centered Network

One typical example of a dense *family-centered network* including a large share of kin can be seen in Figure 18. The graph presents the ten most important ties ego has inserted into the network chart and the relations among them as indicated in the network grid. The lines designate relations between alters rated (from ego) as "know each other well" or "are in close contact".

Figure 18: Family-centered network



The family-centered network above is held by Paul (L61em), a 31-year-old male respondent who married half a year ago. He has medium education (*Realschul* degree) and a professional degree for 11 years. He holds a permanent, full-time job. His wife also holds medium education and is fulltime employed.

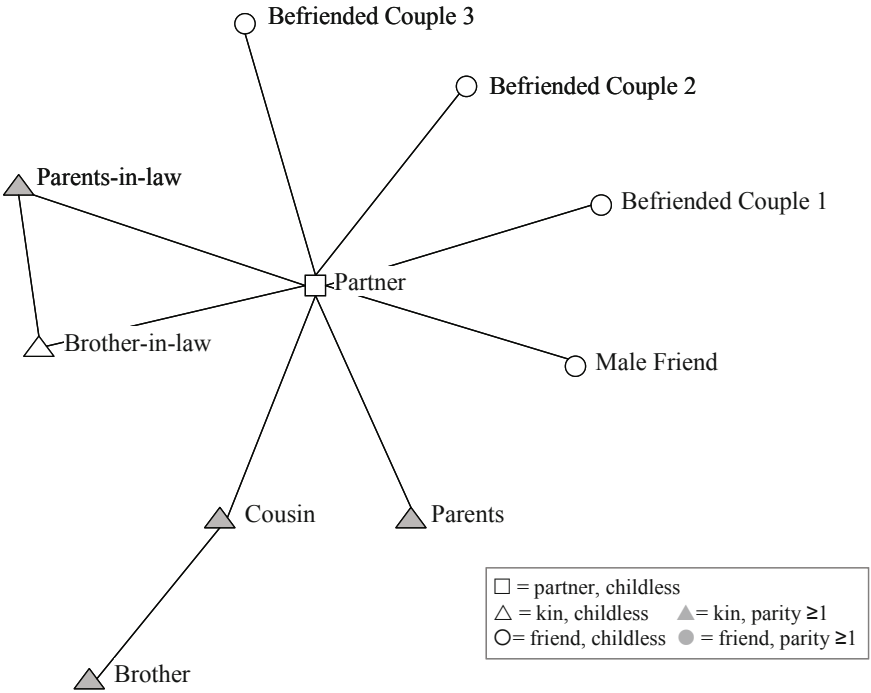
Paul's network is of medium size, rather dense, and contains a medium share of kin (size: 13 single persons and six groups; density: 0.64; share of kin: 0.32). It is composed of kin and two dense cliques of friends. The kin include: parents, parents-in-law, and sister-in-law. Many persons in his network already have children or intend to have a child soon. His 10 most important network partners are his wife, parents, parents-in-law, sister-in-law, and several friends who form two cohesive cliques. Paul has known all of his friends for several years, those he knows for the briefest time are mainly his wife's friends, whom he met when he got to know her.

Paul talks about processes of social contagion, social learning, and social pressure. In recent years, he has witnessed that many friends whom he and his wife have known for many years have had children and increasingly talk about family formation and family issues. He came into contact with these children and realized how well he gets along with them, and how much pleasure it brings to him to be with children, which he indicates as motivation for his fertility intention. Having moved back into his parents' house, he expects to benefit from parental support when he has children, and the contacts with them have increased. Motivated and encouraged by his friends and the support kin and friends have offered, he feels ready for parenthood. He states: *"I am very fond of children, when there are little ones in our circle of friends I can deal very well with them, there's not fear of contact."*

The Supportive Network

The following figure indicates a supportive network also held by a person who intends to have a child soon. However, this network is sparse.

Figure 19: Supportive network



This *supportive network* is held by Roman (L12em), a 29-year old male respondent. Roman has been married for four years and has known his wife for eleven years. He has taken the *Abitur* and a university degree. For the past three years ego has been permanently employed in a position that suits him well. His wife also has a university degree and is about to start in a new job.

Roman's network is of medium size, very sparse and contains a rather small share of kin (network size: 19 single persons and four groups; density: 0.29; share of kin: 0.29). The kin include his parents, brother and cousin with his family, as well as his parents- and brother-in-law. There are family conflicts, so that ego's contact to his parents and his brother is not stable, nor is the contact between his parents and brother. In addition, other family members are labeled as not important. His network also includes several friends (many of whom are couples) and colleagues. His cousin is married and has three children, aged five, three, and one year. The other persons in his age he indicates are childless, although we know from his wife that she sometimes babysits for a friend. His 10

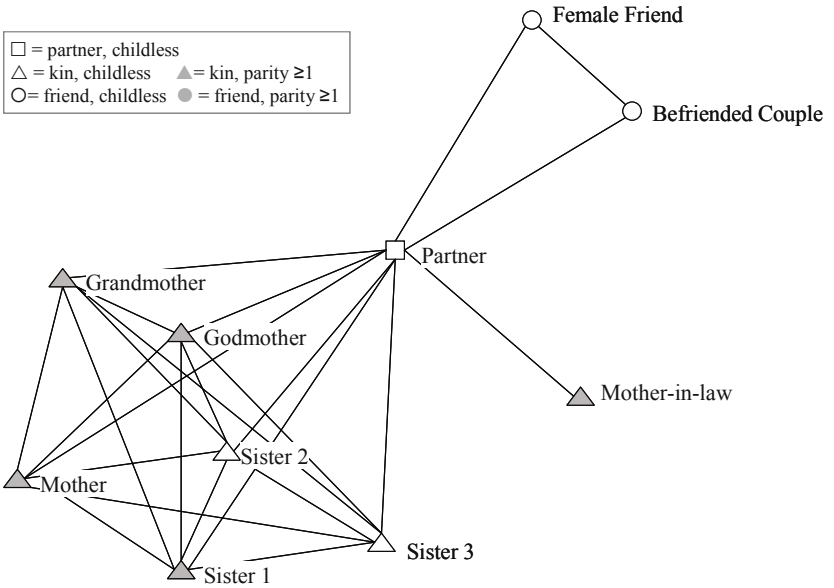
most important network partners are (in the order they are indicated): his wife, his brother-in-law, his parents-in-law, and his cousin (indicated as very important), his brother, three befriended couples, and a male friend (indicated as important), and his parents (indicated as a little important), who are not much in contact among each other. Most of his friends he has had for several years and got to know them during his studies. They share similar professional and leisure time interests. Additionally, Roman reports about having increased contacts to his cousin.

Roman indicates how much he enjoys being with his cousin's children, and that he would also like to have a family of his own. He also states that his parents-in-law have offered support in childcare, and building on this he holds precise ideas about how to organize childcare and family life: *"[My partner's] parents would support us; they could take care of the child maybe one day a week."* The interview shows processes of social contagion, social learning, and social support. Also it seems that, with his growing interest in family formation, he has increased contacts with his cousin who already has children. Encouraged and motivated by his cousin and the parents-in-law who offer support, he feels ready for parenthood, and intends to realize parenthood within the next few years, whenever his wife feels ready to have a child.

The Polarized Network

The *polarized network* is held by persons who feel ambivalent about having a child. Figure 20 indicates such a network.

Figure 20: Polarized network



This network is held by Simone (L55ef), a 33-year-old female respondent. Simone left school after 10 years with a medium degree, and got a professional degree. For more than 10 years she worked in her profession, until she decided to take the *Abitur* and enter university. Currently she is enrolled at university, and plans to finish her studies in one year. She married three years ago. Her husband has stopped his university education and earns money in some odd jobs, but plans to finish up his studies soon.

Simone's network is of medium size, with a high density and a high share of kin (size: 17 single persons and two groups; density: 0.67, share of kin: 0.40). The kin include her mother, three younger sisters, grandmother, godmother, and parents-in-law. Other aunts and her father she labels as "not important at all". Additionally, her network includes friends and colleagues. She is in contact with her closest friends since her school days. Three of her network partners have

small children or are pregnant (her sister and two colleagues). Her 10 most important network partners are (from most to least important): her partner, her mother and sisters, her parents-in-law, her godmother, her grandmother, a befriended couple (all indicated as very important), and a female friend (indicated as important). These persons form two densely knit groups of persons who know each other well or are in close contact (rated 3 or 4 in the grid): one of the respondent's kin, and one of the couples' most important friends. As I learned in the interview, belonging to the latter group is one other friend who was not included in the network grid due to its limitation to 10 persons. The persons belonging to ego's kin either have children themselves (including ego's sister, who is two years younger than her and has two children, aged 5 and 8), intend to have children in general (the two youngest sisters who are 21 and 25 years old), and ego assumes that they expect her to have a child rather soon. In contrast, her closest friends are childless and do not intend to have children soon.

During the interview, ego reports incidents of social learning, contagion, pressure, and support that encourage her in having a child (e.g. via her sister who already has children). At the same time, I can identify incidents of social learning and social pressure that encourage her to remain childless (for the time being or permanently), mainly involving her two closest friends who are voluntarily childless or very uncertain about having children. Being torn between these two groups with (perceived) conflicting expectations; ego is unable to decide in favor of a particular behavior. For example she states:

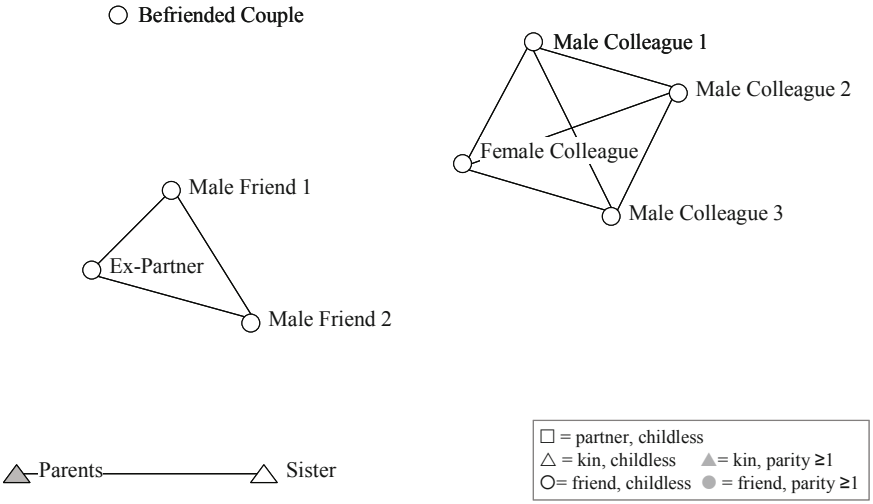
> *"If I would get into conflict with [female friend 1], this would produce a large hole in my network. My siblings could compensate this surely, but you do like to have a neutral person from outside the family sometimes. Sometimes, I think about the "what if": what if, through our life situation we get into conflict, then I would lose a very close friend. This scares me."*

As a consequence, she keeps using contraceptives and postpones deciding about having a child.

The Family-Remote Network

Respondents who feel that parenthood is far are embedded in family-remote networks, as presented in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Family-remote network



This sparse network is held by Thomas (L05em), a 29-year-old male respondent. Thomas is currently single and childless. He has acquired a university degree. Currently he is about to finish his doctoral thesis and has no concrete plans for the future, but rather expects that he will move to a different city for his first job. He has been involved in few partnerships and has been single for some time.

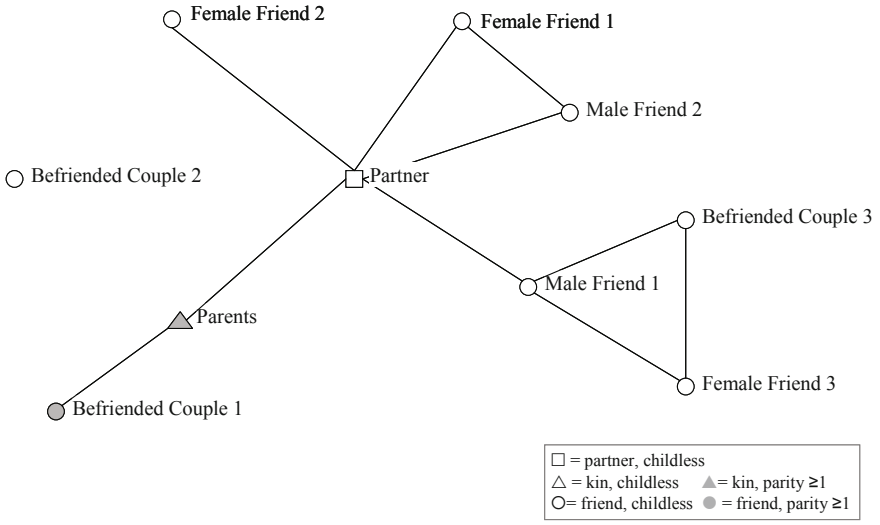
Thomas' network is of medium size, is sparse, and contains very few kin (Network size: 17 single persons; density: 0.31; share of kin: 0.18). The kin include his parents and his sister. His other network partners are friends and colleagues. None of his network partners has children. His 10 most important network partners are (in the order they are indicated): his best friend, his parents, a befriended couple, his sister, a befriended male colleague, his ex-girlfriend, three befriended colleagues, a male friend. There are three cliques that are not interconnected: his parents and sister, old school friends (including his best friend and his ex-partner) and befriended colleagues. They also do not live in the same city, but are dispersed in northern Germany.

Since none of his network partners have children, Thomas perceives family formation as something that is not an issue yet. First he wants to establish himself in a job and find a partner. He also stresses that, among the persons in his school class, most are childless. So he has in his circle of friends and former schoolmates little opportunity for social learning and social contagion that would encourage him in family formation. His closest friends are mostly singles, and he shares with them the perception that parenthood is far. Accordingly, he has not thought about the support he could expect or might need, and has only very vague ideas about how to organize family life. Thomas states: *"At some point I would like to have children and a family (...) I think it's normal that people with higher education are older when they found a family. Looking at our school class – there are not so many children yet."*

The Non-Supportive Network

Both the supportive and the non-supportive network are sparse networks including few kin. However, while respondents embedded in the former network type have access to fertility-relevant types of support, those embedded in the latter type do not. Figure 22 shows a typical example of a non-supportive network.

Figure 22: Non-supportive network



This network is held by Maike (L52ef), a 31-year-old childless woman. She has been married for half a year, and has been together with her partner for almost six years. She has medium education and a professional degree for 11 years. She currently holds a permanent full-time position she is content with. Her partner has just finished his professional training and earns only a little money, so that she is providing for the couple's income.

Maike's network is rather large, is of medium density, and contains very few kin (Network size: 24 single persons and two groups; density: 0.56; share of kin: 0.15). The kin include her parents and her mother-in-law. Her other network partners are friends. None of the network partners of her age has children. Her 10 most important network partners are (in the order they are indicated): her husband, her best friend, her parents (indicated as very important), a befriended couple, her best friend's partner, another befriended couple, and a male friend (indicated as important), as well as three more befriended couples (indicated as a little important).

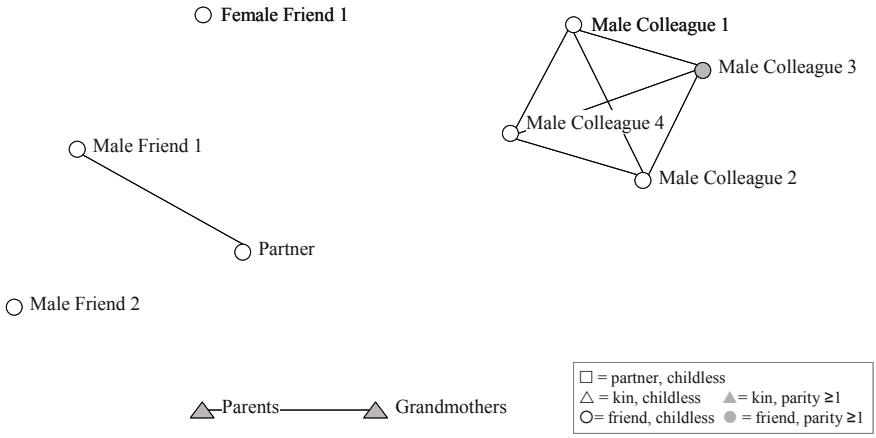
Maike's narration reveals mainly two forms of influence: social learning and social support. She does not talk about social contagion – which is not surprising, because she does not have any network partners with small children. She also does not feel much pressured into family formation. The information conveyed to her tells her that family formation slowly becomes an issue for the persons around her, and she talks with her friends about if and when to have a child, as well as about the preconditions that have to be set. With interest she observes a female friend whose husband is in a similarly economic difficult situation as hers, and who has just decided to get pregnant. Although she perceives her network as very supportive in general, she feels she will not be able to draw on much support in childcare. Her mother is working full-time; her father is already retired but engaged in various activities he would have to give up then. The contact to her mother-in-law is not very good, and also her childless friends do not cross her mind as potential sources of support. However, she feels that she might need substantial support in childcare if she had to return to work early in order to help finance the family. While for example the parents in polarized network can exert social pressure to have a child combined with offering support in childcare, in this case – although the respondent is aware that her parents would like to have a grandchild – she does not feel pressured in any way by them. Her network contains old school friends, as well as newer friends she shares her hobbies with. All are still childless, but her closest friends are starting to think about family formation. Lacking persons with children in her network, Maike gains little orientation on family formation. In other networks of this type difficulties to find orientation are not necessarily due to a lack of children in the network, but rather due to perceiving the own situation as fundamentally different to that of other

friends (e.g. concerning education, profession or partnership). Not knowing how to organize life with a child in her present situation, and lacking adequate role models, Maike is uncertain about when to have a child.

Childfree by Choice Network

The last sparse network type is the network by respondents who are voluntarily childless, see Figure 23.

Figure 23: Childfree by choice network



This network is held by Natalie (L54ef), a 31-year-old childless woman. Natalie finished school 11 years ago. She holds a professional degree since nine years and has been working in the profession she was trained in. Currently she is employed in a professional field she has not been trained in, but she has knowledge about because it corresponds to her hobby. She does not intend to remain in her present job because it does not allow her to develop further. She would like to come back to her old profession, but has found this to be difficult. She is currently looking for a new job. She lives apart together with her partner, with whom she has been together for two years. They both live in the same city, and would only move in together if they could afford a four room apartment so that each person could have their own room, in addition to a commonly used sleeping- and living room. Her partner is currently enrolled in educational training and self-employed.

Natalie's network is of medium size, and is sparse with a low share of kin (network size: 18 single persons plus one group; density: 0.24; share of kin: 0.22). Her kin include her parents and grandparents. Aunts, uncles, and cousins she labels as not important. Only one of her network partners has small children, a colleague, but she does not come into contact with these children, and the relationship to the colleague relies strongly on the common interest in the profession. Her 10 most important network partners are (in the order they are indicated): her boyfriend, her two best friends, her parents, and her grandparents (all on the same level of very important; another friend and four colleagues (all on the same level of important). They mostly are not in contact with each other. Ego describes her selection of network partners: she lost contact to her former friends and classmates when they had children (she reports that they all had children at the same time and motivated each other), because their interests developed differently.

Natalie does not talk much about processes of social influence; rather, she stresses the conformity among her network partners who are childless and do not think about family formation. They share similar interests with her, such as her interest in her current job, which is connected to her hobby, or her interest in the profession she was trained in. Especially her partner and her two closest friends (male friend 1 and female friend 1) value personal freedom and independence highly – as does she – and share a similar view on life. The only outliers are her female colleagues. She perceives social pressure to marry and have a child by her female colleagues, whom she regards as „ultraconservative". These colleagues get on her nerves and she classifies them as problematic in the network chart. From her parents and grandmothers, in contrast, she does not perceive any pressure to have a child and feels that they fully accept her choices. Ego does not talk about social support in case of having a child because having a child is so much out of question for her that she has never thought about it.

5.3.3 Discussion: Fertility-Relevant Networks

Describing the functioning of the channels and mechanisms of social influence gives only a rather scattered picture of the impact of social relations. The strength of the network approach is, however, to consider not only singular ties, but also the patterns they form, which affect the functioning of the mechanism of social influence and the relevance of certain ties. In relating networks and fertility-related attitudes with intentions and behavior, one has to consider two perspectives: 1) how network structure via certain mechanisms of influence exerts influence on individual attitudes and behavior; and 2) how individuals search for,

and become involved with certain network partners who correspond to with their attitudes and behavior. Initially, we can therefore only confirm that there is a correspondence between certain network structures and certain fertility-related attitudes and behaviors, but not say anything about the direction of the effect – unless we take a closer look at network dynamics and processes of social influence.

Many of my findings are in line with the propositions of the functioning of mechanisms of social influence put forward in network theory.

As network theory explains, persons in dense networks conform in attitudes and behavior with their network partners, the norms are reproduced and the information transmitted is rather redundant – thereby reinforcing traditional norms and values, and not leaving any space for "innovations" (Burt, 1983, Marsden, 1987: 124; Mieneke & Midden, 1991). Respondents embedded in dense networks in my sample report various incidents of social pressure and conformity in attitudes and behavior. They hold rather homogenous networks and have little access to persons who display "innovative" fertility-related behavior (if we consider as innovative remaining childless or – as women – intending to combine job and children). Processes of social learning therefore encompass redundant and non-contradictory information, and joint evaluations foster the reproduction of the status quo. Therefore, social learning as well as social pressure lead to conformity. Since dense networks are structured rather homogenously, and composed mainly of family-centered persons, egos conform to family-centered behavior, which means they intend to have children soon. Social pressure – as assumed – works best in dense and homogenous networks. Networks of family-centered persons include many network partners with children, so that processes of contagion also foster family formation.

But I also found one important exception: there are persons embedded in dense networks that include network partners with young children – but for them, processes of social influence do not promote family formation, but rather postponement. These polarized networks contain two opposing cliques. Having access to opposing information and being subject to pressure in opposite directions, fertility postponement is for them, at least for some time, the only alternative to changing their network partners in order to resolve the conflict. This shows that the analysis of network structure must also include an analysis of the *content* transmitted in these networks.

In sparse networks, in contrast, new information is supposed to diffuse quickly; weak ties often have a bridging function and can provide access to new pieces of information; sparse networks are supposedly rather heterogeneous and should not reproduce norms and conformist behavior (Burt, 1983; Mieneke & Midden, 1991).

I also found that sparse networks are often rather heterogeneous, and egos embedded in this type of network do not experience much social pressure to have a child. Instead, they have access to information about life goals other than having a family, as well as about various options for organizing family life. This is especially true for respondents who feel ready for parenthood, and respondents who are uncertain about starting a family. While those who feel ready have used their network to its potential, increasing contacts to persons they perceive as supportive in having children, and explaining their decision to have a child not as "natural thing to do", but as their "individual choice"; respondents who are uncertain also consider it to be their "individual choice" but have not yet made a decision, and do not feel pressured to do so. As they are embedded in heterogeneous networks, including persons with different attitudes and behavior, and have not selected their network partners consciously based on their fertility-related attitudes, they balance different options and models of how to organize family life, and often find it difficult to decide given the variety of options. Social contagion processes regarding a cascading of events cannot enfold their full potential in sparse networks because the network partners are not in contact among each other. In sum, I would suggest that sparse networks do not necessarily hinder family formation, but also do not foster it as efficiently as most dense networks.

However, some of the sparse networks I found to be rather peculiar. These are the childfree networks of respondents who intend to remain childless, and respondents who feel that family formation is rather far. Both network types are rather homogeneous in composition in terms of profession, partnership status, and parity, and center on similar interests. Voluntarily childless persons have consciously selected childless friends, and have decreased contacts to persons with children. In contrast, those who perceive family formation as far in the future report that this network composition has not developed as a result of deliberate planning (regarding parity), but rather because most of their network partners are single and/or are enrolled in education – which makes it less likely for them to think about family formation. So, in both of these networks, it does not hold that "new" information diffuses quickly; instead, both (more or less by choice) do not have access to information that could encourage them to have children. As a consequence, in sparse networks the network composition matters strongly, especially regarding persons with young children. If these persons are present, processes of social learning and social contagion foster family formation. So I would not in general formulate that sparse networks foster fertility postponement, rather, I would say that the influences exerted in sparse networks strongly depend on their composition, that is, on the number of network partners with young children included.

Concerning social support, the statements in the literature are not so clear, and we have indications for social support operating better in dense or in sparse networks – which largely depends on the type of support involved (Marsden, 1987; Kohler & Bühler, 2001; Flap, 2002).

I found that dense networks in most cases are expected to provide considerable support in childcare. Also for this reason, being embedded in a dense network fosters family formation. Respondents embedded in sparse networks vary in their access to support in childcare. Some can expect to receive support, and this encourages them in feeling ready for children), while others cannot expect to receive support (yet), and this encourages them to postpone childbirth and adds to their uncertainty about family formation.[37] Support in childcare is mainly provided by parents and parents-in-law, and is available mostly irrespective of network density.

The following table summarizes how different network types foster or inhibit family formation, as well as the role of network dynamics (Table 12).

[37] These are often persons whose heterogeneous networks have emerged from their own mobility as well as from including persons from various places; they often do not live in the same city as their parents/parents-in-law, and therefore lack an important source of regular and flexible support in childcare.

Table 12: Fertility-relevant network types and their characteristics

	Network characteristics and mechanisms of social influence	Network dynamics	Network type	Fertility intention
Network fosters developing an intention to have a child	• dense network (NW) containing some or many children • social pressure, learning, contagion, support • motivating/ encouraging childbirth	high share of long-term ties and some selection of family- oriented persons	**family-centered**	ready for parenthood (if)
	• sparse NW containing some or many children • social learning, contagion, support • motivating/encouraging childbirth	selection of family-oriented persons	**supportive**	ready for parenthood (if)
Network fosters fertility postponement and the intention to remain childless	• dense NW containing two contrasting cliques • social pressure, learning, contagion, support • influences in opposite directions	high share of long-term ties	**polarized**	ambivalent
	• sparse NW containing few or no children • little opportunity for social contagion or learning	no selection related to family formation (e.g., parity)	**family-remote**	far
	• sparse NW containing some children • some opportunity for social contagion or learning; but little availability of support	no selection related to family formation (e.g., parity)	**non-supportive**	uncertain
	• sparse NW containing few or no children • little opportunity for social learning or contagion; little availability of social support	selection of childless persons sharing similar interests	**childfree by choice**	voluntarily childless

5.3.4 Summary and Future Perspectives

I have identified six network types. In most cases, each network type corresponds to one type of fertility intention. Only in one case can one type of fertility intention be linked with two different network types.

Respondents who intend to have a child soon are either embedded in *family-centered* networks, or *supportive networks* – which hold very different network characteristics (mainly regarding density, composition, and dynamics).

Respondents who postpone family formation are also embedded in very different types of networks; some sparse, others dense; some heterogeneous, others homogeneous: those who perceive family formation as far are embedded in networks that are *family-remote*, lacking network partners who have children or think about having children; respondents who are uncertain about family formation rather describe their networks as *non-supportive,* lacking orientation about how to organize family life and support in childcare; respondents who are ambivalent about having children are embedded in *polarized* networks including one clique of persons who are strongly family-centered and another clique of persons who are against having children (in general or at present).

Respondents who state that they do not want to become parents are embedded in networks I have labeled as *childfree by choice*, because they report that they have actively sought out contact with persons without children and with similar interests, and have decreased contacts to persons with children.

One finding from building this typology is that, in order to analyze the impact of social networks on fertility behavior, one has to combine information on network structure with information on the network composition, and about how it came about (selection effects, network dynamics), with the content of the exchanges between network partners (access to diverse or even opposing information, pressure to conform to different/opposing attitudes or behavior, access to concrete support, especially in childcare).

Despite all the insights that could be gained from this research, I also must acknowledge the two major limitations it faces:

- I cannot say anything about the distribution of the different network types among young adults, given the relatively small sample size and the focus on persons with medium and higher educational levels only. In my small sample, two large groups of respondents either hold *family-centered networks* or *family-remote* networks that either foster family formation or inhibit having children. Additionally, I identified four comparably small groups: the *supportive networks*, indicated by persons who feel ready for parenthood; the *non-supportive networks* maintained by respondents who feel uncertain

about parenthood; the *polarized networks* that are maintained by persons who are ambivalent about having children; and the *childfree by choice* networks, in which persons who intend to remain childless are embedded. It now would be interesting to find out if, in a representative study among 30-year-old respondents, *family-remote networks* have such a high prominence, how *family-centered* and *supportive networks* are distributed, and so on.

- I reconstructed network dynamics and processes of social influence from the respondents' retrospective accounts, but could not capture them more directly with my approach. Additionally, it is unknown how stable the networks I have identified are. Can they change quickly, or only in the long run? Do some network types change more often, or are they more fundamental than others?

In order to address some of these questions, our team has started two additional projects.

The first project is a quantitative study on social networks and fertility, which builds on the insights on mechanisms and channels of social influence I have gained in this research project. Together with Laura Bernardi and Andreas Klärner, I have developed a questionnaire, and 500 face-to-face interviews have recently been conducted, but have not yet been analyzed.

The second project aims at re-contacting the respondents from the present study. This re-contact consisted in a first step of a short questionnaire, designed to find out what has changed in the respondents' lives in the intervening time (distributed in March 2009). In a second step, those respondents who consent will be re-interviewed, drawing on the same research instruments (in an adapted version) as the present study, that is, a second social network will be collected. This will allow us to learn more about the interrelation of network dynamics and social influences, structural constraints, and individual agency.

6 Fertility Decline, Social Networks, and Individualization

Postponement of parenthood, a comparably low number of children, and voluntary childlessness are characteristic features of Western societies (see Chapter 2). Researchers often refer to processes of modernization and individualization when explaining fertility decline. Focusing on a cultural explanation for individual behavior, they describe the modernization process as representing fundamental changes in norms and values, and increasing the autonomy of the individual: individuals are confronted with a growing number of opportunities and fewer restrictions by their social environment, as well as with the increasing necessity to shape "their own life" (Beck, 1995). In line with the individualization thesis the argumentation often starts with the observation that – relative to the past – individuals today are increasingly set free from "traditional" bonds, from social structures common in industrial societies. Note that "traditional" is not defined as classic sociologists would, in terms of religious or estate bonds in pre-modern times, but in terms of class and family bonds as well as gender roles (Volkmann, 2000). However, individuals do not necessarily become disengaged; traditional bonds can be replaced by new types of bonds (Beck, 1986). The increase in individual autonomy has led to a decrease in formerly ubiquitous living arrangements and an acceptance of a variety of different ways to organize one's life. Having children is no longer self-evident, but has become a matter of choice. Moreover, having children is just one option among many others, and these alternatives are often regarded as incompatible with having children.

This release from traditional bonds can be translated in the language of network research as follows (see Chapter 1 on the community question): it is a change from dense networks, including a large share of kin; to rather sparse networks, including more contacts that are "chosen" as friends. My analysis has shown a broad range of network densities (from 0.18 to 0.89[38]), and a large variety in the share of kin (from 0.09 to 0.62[39]) among my respondents. The network

[38] A density value of 0 indicates that none of the network partners is in contact with the other; while a density value of 1 indicates that all network partners are in contact with each other.
[39] In this case, 0 would indicate that there is no relative in the network, while 1 would indicate that all network partners are kin.

S. Keim, *Social Networks and Family Formation Processes,*
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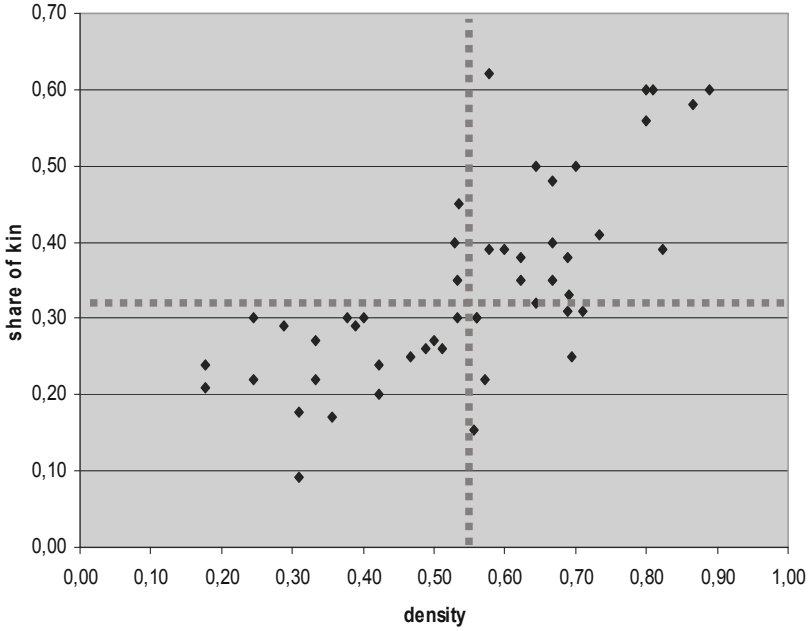
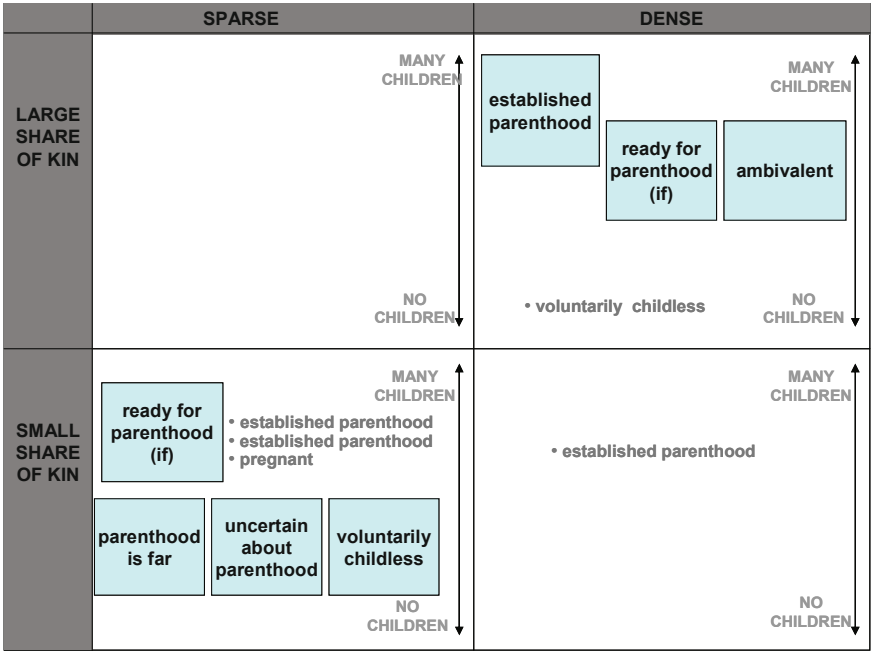
measures, as well as their relationship to fertility intentions, have been described in detail in Chapter 5. Here, I want to put focus on the aspect of being engaged in rather "traditional" versus "individualized" networks. Placing all networks into a coordinate system, designating on the x-axis the network density, and on the y-axis the share of kin, provides us with the following graph (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Distribution of networks according to their density and share of kin



Most networks are either dense and include a large share of kin, or they are sparse and include a low share of kin. Those networks that do not fit into this scheme are almost exclusively located on, or are very close to, a median value of 0.56 for the density and 0.31 for the share of kin (dotted lines). There is only one clear outlier: a woman's network which is dense (density: 0.69), but includes only a low share of kin (0.25). From the interview we have learned that she is embedded in a dense clique of friends, but there are conflicts among her kin, so she did not include many relatives in her network chart. Including the respondents' fertility intentions provides the following compelling overview (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Network density, share of kin, and related fertility intentions



Apart from few exceptions, I have found fertility intentions that are clearly related to sparse networks, including few kin; and other intentions and behavior that are clearly related to dense networks, including many kin. In light of the individualization hypothesis, this would indicate that more traditional networks (dense and large share of kin) are connected with already having children, with feeling ready for parenthood, or with ambivalence about having children;[40] while more individualized networks (sparse and low share of kin) are connected with feeling ready for parenthood, but also with perceiving parenthood as far in the

[40] There is only one exception: one respondent who describes herself as voluntarily childless. Her network includes a large share of kin, including her own and her partner's kin, which form a dense clique. Additionally, her network includes one dense clique of friends and one of colleagues, as well as some dispersed friends, and is very large. The respondent feels currently very annoyed by her kin, who try to exert social pressure and convince her to have a child, but is able to escape this pressure by finding acceptance for her childlessness among her friends and colleagues. This network seems to be very much in transition: kin may lose importance and the structure will become similar to those of other persons who are voluntarily childless.

future, with feeling uncertain about parenthood, or with a decision to remain childless.[41] This finding leads to a number of follow-up questions:

- How are the relationships in traditional and individualized networks characterized and evaluated by the respondents? How traditional and individualized are the attitudes, values, living arrangements, etc., of respondents grouped in the respective networks? Why is it that traditional networks in particular are connected with ambivalence about having children? Especially in this type of network, one would expect that having children is rather self-evident, while doubts about having children should rather come up in individualized networks.
- Is this compelling correspondence between network structure and fertility intention/behavior brought about by processes of social influence, or rather by the selection of network partners?

To shed light on these issues, I will first describe in more detail the traditional and individualized networks, and thereby discuss how *security, maturity* and *priority*, the factors identified as relevant in fertility decision making (in Chapter 3), function in these networks. Second, I will discuss the processes of social influence and selection taking place in these networks. Third, I will conclude with how the analysis of social networks can advance our knowledge of fertility behavior, and what hypotheses we could draw from this research about the development of fertility rates in the future.

6.1 Traditional and Individualized Networks

In this section, we will take a closer look at what traditional and individualized networks are – networks that we have grouped simply according to the network density and share of kin in the network: How do respondents subjectively perceive and evaluate the network structure they are embedded in? Are these networks held by persons with more or less traditional attitudes, values, and living arrangements? Is having children for these respondents more or less "self-evident" or "natural"?

[41] Exceptions: Two respondents are parents embedded in more individualized networks. Compared to other parents, they are in a special situation: the first respondent is a single mother who has no contact to the father and the father's kin. The second respondent is in conflict with both his parents and his parents-in-law, and his friends (except for some befriended colleagues) have little contact among each other. One respondent is currently pregnant.

Traditional Networks

Respondents whose networks can be described as traditional find the relationship to their kin important, they value them highly and are engaged in frequent contact with them. They perceive their network partners – especially the kin – to be very supportive, and often receive or expect to receive substantial support that enables them to establish a secure living situation.

Having a traditional network coincides in most cases with attitudes, values, and living arrangements that can also be labeled as traditional. In the literature, we find "traditional" attitudes and values defined as comprising, for example, the following attitudes: the belief that having children is self-evident, and that a married couple with children is the ideal family model (Beck-Gernsheim, 2006, see also Chapter 2); the appreciation of marriage as an institution (Lesthaeghe & Surkyn, 1988); as well as religiosity, low tolerance of abortion and divorce, and an acceptance of the gendered division of tasks in the family and of male dominance in economic and political life (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Apart from religiosity, I find all of these characteristics among respondents holding traditional networks. Most respondents indicate that having their own children at some point of their lives has always been a self-evident goal for them. They place a high *priority* in life on having a family, and describe themselves as "family people". They consider it to be self-evident that they will have children after finishing education and establishing a stable partnership – or as soon as they have met all the conditions included in the categories of *security* and *maturity,* as seen in Chapter 3. They orient their definition of maturity largely on the conditions necessary for establishing a secure situation: that is, they feel mature as soon as they have finished education, are established in a job, and have found the "right" partner – a definition they share with their network partners. One characteristic example is that most respondents with traditional networks consider the male-breadwinner model to be the only "good" or feasible model for organizing family life, and live accordingly when they have children. They strongly emphasize the role of the "good mother" versus the negatively perceived "(full-time) working mother". The father should be involved in childcare, but mainly provide financially for the family. However, there is some variation: while some favor the traditional male-breadwinner model, seeing the mother as a housewife and evaluating public childcare beyond half-day kindergarten negatively, others favor the modernized form of the male-breadwinner model, with the mother working part-time, and using, or intending to use, (full-time) childcare for both children under age three and school-aged children.

Among the networks that can be described as traditional based on their structure are several polarized networks of respondents who feel ambivalent about having children. These respondents all consider relationships to their kin to be important, value them highly, and are engaged in frequent contact with them. They perceive their network partners – especially family members – to be very supportive, and they often receive or expect to receive substantial support that enables them to establish a secure living situation. While their relatives hold rather traditional values, they are also involved with a clique of friends they value highly, and who hold rather individualized values. They themselves cannot integrate these values, and either give contradictory accounts or try to avoid taking a stand. The most striking and consequential contradiction is between the image of the "good mother/father", which is highly gendered, with ideas on gender equality in all other life spheres apart from the family.

Individualized Networks

Respondents who feel ready for parenthood include more young children in their network than the others. Networks that can be described as individualized are held mainly by persons who are not (yet) family-centered. They include comparably few kin in their networks, are not in contact with them frequently, and do not evaluate them as positively as persons embedded in more traditional networks. They often live in different cities than their kin. They cannot rely on support from their network partners in establishing a *secure* situation as much as respondents with more traditional networks. They also often report a lack of role models for a) judging their own maturity, and b) for learning about how to organize family life effectively.

Having an individualized network coincides with attitudes, values, and behaviors that can be described as non-traditional or individualized. Researchers relating the impact of value changes and the individualization hypotheses to family formation define as "new" or non-traditional the following: the perception that having children is not self-evident, but is rather a choice (Beck-Gernsheim, 2006); the availability of a range of options that lead to a pluralization of family and living arrangements (Zapf et al. 1987); the belief that the goal of forming a family competes with other life goals, which are often considered or experienced to be incompatible with having children (Huinink, 1995); the adoption of post-materialistic values (Lestheaghe & Meekers, 1986, Klein, 1990); the adoption of values such as self-realization and personal freedom (Beck-Gernsheim, 1989; Schneewind & Vascovic, 1996; Ruckdeschel, 2004); as well as trends such as secularization, tolerance regarding abortion and divorce, and gender equality

(Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Respondents embedded in "individualized" networks generally favor these values. They regard having children as a choice they can make, consider alternatives to (currently) having children, do not strongly oppose living arrangements other than that of the married couple with children, and value self-realization and personal freedom, as well as gender equality. Nevertheless, most of them feel that they want to have children, and that having their own family should be among the few goals they place a high *priority* on in their lives (with the exception of the four persons who intend to remain childless). However, before having children, other life interests can take priority, and prioritizing having children does not automatically mean neglecting other life interests. As much as they are open to and aware of the fact that they can choose their way of life, the necessity of choosing also brings uncertainty: they often find it difficult to determine and define the point at which the levels of *security* and *maturity* necessary for becoming a parent are reached, or they feel that they might not be able to achieve a secure and mature situation in an adequate time frame. They share tasks equally in the household before they have children: they believe that educated women should have careers, and that men should wash the dishes. However, when it comes to actually having children, very often their views and plans strongly resemble those of the persons embedded in traditional networks. They feel that a dual-earner couple with children, as well as the model of fathers taking care of their children while mothers work, are not feasible. Thus, despite all their ideas about gender equality, they plan to follow the male-breadwinner model in its modernized form – in part because men generally earn more and women can more easily find a part-time job. For all of them, the gender-specific image of the "good" parent prevails. However, some are still struggling with the choice between family and job (those who are uncertain), or some have decided to give up on having children because they cannot imagine themselves/their partners as housekeepers or part-time workers. Those who feel ready to have a child are less skeptical about public childcare than those respondents embedded in more traditional networks, but they may have major doubts about whether sufficient external childcare is available to enable them to combine family and job.

In sum, the vast majority of those respondents who already have children, or who intend to have a child soon, are embedded in traditional networks, reproducing traditional values; while the vast majority of those who intend to remain childless, who intend to start thinking about family formation at a later point in time, or who are uncertain about whether and when to have children, are embedded in more individualized networks composed of persons who stress individualized values (see Table 13).

Table 13: Traditional and individualized networks

	Traditional network	**Individualized network**
Network characteristics	dense and high share of kin	sparse and low share of kin
Subjective perception and evaluation	high appreciation of kin, frequent contact to kin and considerable support from kin	less appreciation of kin, less frequent contact to kin and less support available from kin
Fertility behavior/ intention	established parenthood, ready for parenthood, ambivalent	ready for parenthood, parenthood is far, uncertain, voluntarily childless
Values	*traditional values*: having children is self-evident, "family person", estimation of marriage, image of "the good mother/father", traditional male- breadwinner model… *somewhat individualized* views on gender, e.g., concerning who changes diapers; modernized male-breadwinner model	*individualized attitudes and values*: having children is a choice, tolerance towards various living arrangements, self-realization, personal freedom, gender equity … *more traditional* views on gender when it comes to having children: (modernized) male-breadwinner model, image of "the good mother/father"

The following question arises: Do traditional networks foster family formation, while individualized networks hinder family formation or foster pursuing alternative life goals? Or is it instead the case that having children or planning to have children soon leads to establishing more traditional ties, while not wanting children (yet) or being uncertain about having children leads to establishing/keeping more individualized ties?

This question relates to the general problem of how to distinguish selection and social influence effects. In the interviews I find accounts of both processes.

6.2 Social Influences and/or Self-Selection?

The correspondence between network structure and fertility intention can be ascribed to two processes: 1) personal relations influence ego and cause her to conform to their beliefs about appropriate attitudes and behaviors; or 2) ego chooses her network partners based on her own beliefs about appropriate attitudes and behaviors; i.e., she selects persons who conform to her belief system. I will now discuss the effects of social influence and self-selection for each network type.

Traditional Networks – Social Influences and Self-Selection

Among the childless respondents with traditional networks, I can find many who indicate that their core network (i.e., kin and clique of close friends) has been very stable for a number of years. Long before they started thinking about family formation, they had established close ties to kin and a dense clique of friends, mostly recruited from their school class. They have experienced that this dense clique of friends has slowly started to talk more and more about family formation, with some trying to have a child, while others have become pregnant (cascading of events). Many respondents report that, through their contact with families with young children, they were able to learn about parenthood, which helped them in planning their own family formation. Additionally, many respondents indicate that, through being in contact with young children, they experienced emotional contagion. At the same time, their kin have started to talk, or to talk more about the topic. Family members have voiced their expectations and desires, and have offered their support, which exerted a certain pressure on the respondents to have children. In addition, the support provided enabled them to establish a secure situation. All these processes of social learning, emotional contagion, social support, and social pressure have motivated respondents with rather traditional networks to think about family formation, to think concretely about what conditions should be in place beforehand, to take action to create those conditions, and, finally, to start trying to have a child. In these cases, I can show that being embedded in a more traditional network, or a network which is strongly *family-centered*, fosters family formation. Apart from the social relations that encourage family formation, traditional networks also benefit from an alignment of individual values and life goals: following traditional gender roles makes it easier for the couple to organize family life and childcare, as well as to negotiate each partners' chores, especially in an environment which institution-

ally promotes the male-breadwinner model by providing few childcare facilities, certain tax incentives, etc.

In the special case of *polarized networks*, a rather traditional structure (high density, high share of kin) fosters fertility postponement. This special network configuration of two opposing cliques with contradictory attitudes and values is very stable due to the network's density, high share of kin, and high share of long-term friendships and single contacts that cannot easily be given up. The only way out of the dilemma is to keep postponing making a decision, which will leave both cliques – at least for the present – content.

Having described how the personal relationships that comprise traditional networks influence the individual's fertility behavior and intentions, I will now turn to selection effects. A number of our respondents embedded in traditional networks live in Lübeck and have never moved outside the city. Having no or little mobility allows these respondents to maintain contact to kin and long-term friends in the same city, but it also provides little opportunity to meet new friends, or to reduce former ties. However, some respondents also say that their networks have changed considerably after having children. Because these respondents are now parents, their interests and needs have changed, and they have also consciously and actively adapted the composition of their networks accordingly from more sparse and heterogeneous, to including more kin and other young parents, and excluding childless persons. That social networks change with certain life events, and especially with family formation, has been shown variously in research. It has been pointed out that these changes mainly entail increasing contact with kin, while decreasing contact to childless friends (Hammer, Gutwirth, & Phillips, 1982; Belsky & Rovine, 1984). But with family formation, not only the network structure, but also attitudes and practices change: the living arrangements become more traditional after having children. Many respondents acknowledge that, despite their egalitarian views on gender roles, for them only the modernized male-breadwinner model is feasible at the moment, and that they therefore accept an unequal division of tasks. This has been described as a "re-traditionalization" process (see, for example, a summary in Rüling, 2007). In western Germany, in the face of social policies that foster the traditional model of the family, young adults have difficulties in establishing an egalitarian division, and instead step into various "traditionalization traps", which lead to a gendered division of tasks (Rüling, 2007) and a rather traditional living arrangement. From a network perspective, it is interesting that getting closer to parents and kin both increases pressure to pursue traditional living arrangements, and decreases access to information on alternatives.

Individualized Networks – Social Influences and Self-Selection

Social relations that foster family formation are not necessarily only those in more traditional networks. In addition, some of the respondents embedded in individualized networks have established ties to persons who motivate and encourage them to have children: they include many persons with young children in their networks, have learned from them about family formation, and have experienced emotional contagion, as well as (more rarely) a cascading of events. To some extent, they also expect to receive support from their parents and/or parents-in-law, and report experiencing social pressure to have children exerted by parents, parents-in-law, and sometimes also siblings and friends, but to a much lesser extent than those respondents embedded in more traditional networks. Persons embedded in individualized networks are more willing to use public or private childcare, and are therefore to some extent able to compensate for a lack of support from kin in childcare. They also often talk about supportive relationships with friends who would provide at least irregular support in childcare. From this we can see that more individualized networks per se do not hinder family formation: although persons in individualized networks are not pressured to have children, they can be motivated and encouraged by social learning and emotional contagion, and a lack of support from kin can be compensated for by public or private institutions and friends. These persons are embedded in *supportive networks*.

In some cases, however, individualized networks hinder family formation and promote other areas of life if they are *family-remote, non- supportive* regarding family formation or *childfree by choice*. First, these networks provide little opportunity for positive learning about having children or emotional contagion – these structures reinforce the idea that family formation is not an issue (yet). The network partners mutually confirm that their current lifestyle is adequate (for their age), and that they should focus on their career and other interests (first); as a consequence, they intend to remain childless or to realize parenthood only at a later point in time. Second, these networks cannot provide adequate orientation. Orientation is fundamentally important for many respondents because they do not perceive having a child to be self-evident, but rather to be a choice with far-reaching and unalterable consequences, and they therefore ponder at length when to make this choice.[42] Additionally, they are torn between their general attitudes on gender equity – i.e., the idea that both women and men should train for and work in interesting and challenging professions – and the image of "the good mother" who at least to some extent sacrifices her career for the sake of her

[42] Not without reason, the "right time" for children is a recurring theme in the interviews.

children. They lack ideas about how to combine family and job, and believe that, by postponing childbearing, they might collect more information, encounter persons who could serve as positive role models, and, as a consequence, make a better informed decision. Third, individualized networks may also hinder family formation because they cannot provide adequate access to support in childcare. Many respondents feel that childcare for children at younger ages is best performed by mothers or relatives, and they additionally perceive that public childcare is not adequate or flexible enough to allow them to combine family and job. However, they lack relatives who would be willing and able to support them in childcare, and they could not imagine any friends taking over this role. Fourth, individualized networks foster pursuing interests other than having children because they are often very much interest-centered, e.g., based on the profession, and the individuals reinforce each other in pursuing this interest. Those who feel that their interests are incompatible with having children may, as a consequence, intend to remain childless.

In contrast to people with traditional networks, many respondents with individualized networks have been rather mobile in recent years, and do not live in Lübeck anymore. Their networks contain friends from various cities (and countries), as well as relatively new contacts centered on a shared interest, e.g., in a profession or hobby. Two kinds of selection processes could be identified from the accounts of persons embedded in individualized networks: conscious and active selection of network partners according to common interests, and a selection of network partners that comes with decisions taken in other areas of life. The strongest accounts of active selection of network partners are provided by respondents who intend to remain childless. Almost all of them have more individualized networks with a low share of kin, and a high percentage of persons who share similar interests. Some networks are rather small because the respondents indicate that they focus on a few very important persons who are not (yet) willing to have children, and that they have lost contacts to former friends after they had children. Other networks are rather large, and the respondents report that, although they lost touch with some former friends after they had children, they have also made new friends along the way who share their professional or artistic interests. Both have established themselves in "niches of childlessness", in which their attitudes and behavior are accepted and supported. This selection of network partners based on their interests can also be found among persons who are interested in family formation, and who, in order to learn more about family life, and also because they enjoy being with children, increase their contact with persons who already have children. The second type of selection process is indicated by persons who have decided to pursue further education after being trained in a job, and who, therefore, are currently enrolled in education, or

who have started their first job only recently. While their schoolmates have established themselves in jobs, they are enrolled at university. At university, they made new (younger) friends with similar interests (e.g., in the profession) and reduced contact to their former friends. As a consequence, when their former friends became parents, they were not in close contact with them anymore. Instead, they found new friends who, like them, do not want to start a family until they have finished their studies. Because their networks are childfree and their families are remote and do not induce thinking about parenthood, the respondents feel that, for them, parenthood is far in the future. This shows how a decision in one area of life (such as professional development) can have consequences in other areas of life – also via the social relations an individual has access to. The following table summarizes the differences between traditional and individualized networks, and the respective effects of social influences and selection.

Table 14: Social influence and selection

	Traditional network (NW)	**Individualized network**
Ego's characteristics and tie characteristics	• no or low mobility, attached to home-town • many long-term, stable ties; many kin and ties formed through common activities in the past (e.g., school class)	• high mobility, countrywide but also abroad • many recent ties, considerable fluctuation in network composition; ties related to ego's interests
Social influences	• *fostering childbirth:* social learning, social pressure, social support, social contagion in a homogenously family-centered environment • *fostering postponement:* special case of polarized network	• *fostering childbirth:* social learning, contagion, support in an environment that accepts public childcare • *fostering postponement:* little access to (pro-) child-related information and support (and rejection of public childcare), little opportunity for contagion; access to information on alternative areas of interest in an environment that perceives parenthood and other interests as incompatible
Selection	• increase of contacts with kin and friends with children when having/planning own children (e.g., by moving into parents' house or by using childcare) • transformation from an individualized NW to a traditional NW with becoming parent	• access to persons with children can depend on educational path chosen/ other life interests • conscious selection of persons who do not want to have children, or at least do not want to have children at the moment

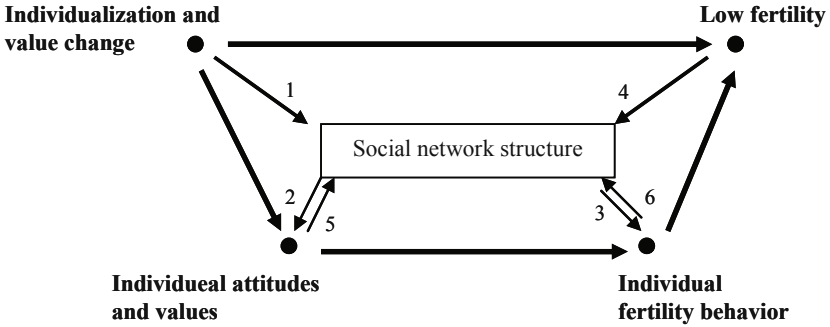
We find processes of social influence and (more or less conscious) selection of network partners in both kinds of networks. But especially in traditional networks, it is difficult to a) give up old ties and b) find new network partners. The respondents are inhibited in fully giving up contacts to long-term friends, despite diverging interests and views, because these friendships are considered to be valuable as such; embedded in dense networks, they cannot simply give up single ties because this would imply losing a whole clique of persons these single ties are connected with; in dense networks, they also have little access to "new" persons, and thereby find it harder to establish new friendships. But also in

individualized networks, respondents do not change their ties easily: they also value long-term friendships, despite diverging interests and views.

6.3 Social Networks as Mediators on the Meso Level

Having had doubts about the relevance of personal relationships for fertility decision-making in Western countries (see Section 2.4), my analyses have shown that, not only are personal relationships in general relevant, and exert social influence on fertility decision-making in various ways, but they also do not seem to lose relevance with current modernization and individualization processes. Researchers stressing the individualization thesis on the one hand describe a disappearance of traditional bonds, but on the other hand they stress that individuals do not necessarily become disengaged; traditional bonds can be replaced by new types of bonds (Beck, 1986). In my sample a large part of the social networks I have analyzed are not structured in a way that could be described as traditional (dense and including a large share of kin), they are rather sparse and include many ties chosen based on similar interests. Nevertheless, I was able to identify various processes of social influence going on in this type of networks – although the mechanisms of social influence differ somewhat to those common in traditional networks. Therefore, a network perspective on fertility behavior continues to be relevant, and can help to provide a critical look at the concrete bonds individuals are embedded in, and how they are related to societal institutions at the macro level, and to individual behavior on the micro level. One schematic way of presenting these three levels is to relate them to my example of individualization processes and fertility behavior in the following graph (Figure 26). This graph is based on the micro-macro model by Coleman (1986) and a similar model by Burt (1982), see Section 1.2.

Figure 26: Micro-macro model of low fertility including social networks



Adapted to the topic of social networks and low fertility, based on: Coleman, 1990: 8 and Burt, 1982: 9.

The modernization process often described as increasing individualization, and including changes in values, affects the structure of the ego-centered networks individuals are embedded in (see Arrow 1 in Figure 26). Wellman (1979) has formulated three hypotheses on the consequences of modernization processes on social relations/personal networks. First, social networks may become sparsely knit, including rather weak ties (and few kin) that provide little support, and thereby bring social isolation (community lost); second, despite modernization processes, networks may also remain dense, include strong ties and a high share of kin, and continue to be supportive (community saved); and, third, networks may change in structure but continue to be supportive: they are then sparse and spatially dispersed, and include strong and weak ties, but not necessarily to kin (community liberated) (Wellman, 1979). My analyses have shown, that among my 30-year-old respondents with medium or higher levels of education, the two types of community saved and community liberated prevail (see Section 5.1.4). In my further analyses, I have labeled them "traditional" and "individualized" networks (see Section 6.1). Conceivable alternative network structures – for example, a dense network with a low share of kin (including mainly one or few cliques of friends), or a sparse network including a rather high share of kin (theoretically one could imagine that, if there are family conflicts, the kin may have contact to ego, but little contact among each other) – are rare. Based on the small sample, I cannot say anything about how representative this result is, nor do I know if more traditional or more individualized networks will prevail, and how frequently divergent networks can be found. However, the clarity of the finding that most respondents belong either to more traditional or more individualized

networks in this small sample allows me to assume that a domination of these two network types – at least among 30-year-old western Germans with medium or higher education – can generally be inferred.

From a social network perspective, the networks mediate social institutions on the macro level to individual behavior on the micro level. How an actor perceives and deals with societal phenomena depends on the network an individual is embedded in. Embedded in a "traditional" network in which traditional values are highly appreciated, an individual perceives these values to be "normal" and desirable and acts accordingly. In contrast, an individual embedded in an "individualized" network whose members mostly hold rather individualized values perceive these values to be "normal", adequate, and desirable; and thus acts accordingly. The correspondence between the type of network and individual fertility intentions/behavior can be explained by either effects of social influence or by selection effects. Considering both social influences and selection helps us to integrate the interrelated concepts of structure and agency. Via processes of social influence, the network structure may affect individual attitudes (see Arrow 2 in Figure 26), as well as behavior (see Arrow 3 in Figure 26). In my analyses, I have identified how the functioning and effectiveness of different mechanisms of social influence are connected to network structure. More traditional networks foster family formation in various ways:

- conformity in family-centered attitudes and behavior is enforced by social pressure;
- motivation to have a child is fostered by social contagion processes that can lead to a cascading of events;
- these networks provide various forms of social support which can ease the transition to parenthood; and
- individuals draw orientation from how the (rather homogenously family-centered) network partners think and behave.

However, in the special case of polarized networks, being embedded in a more traditional network can also hinder family formation. The special network configuration of two opposing cliques with contradictory attitudes and values is due to the network's density, high share of kin, and high share of long-term friendships; these are very stable and single contacts that cannot easily be given up. The only way out of the dilemma is to keep postponing the decision, which will leave both cliques – at least for the present – content. The small group of ambivalent persons is very instructive because it is located at the point at which individualization processes meet traditional structures and values. Individuals

who are ambivalent about family formation strongly experience a clash of the image of the "good mother/father" with ideas about gender equality.

Being embedded in a more individualized network does not foster family formation as effectively as traditional network structures do, but implies many restrictions that encourage postponement:

- Individualized networks do not allow for much social pressure to have a child, due to the heterogeneity of network partners and the sparse network structure.
- Access to social support is often restricted – e.g., due to regional mobility – and, as a consequence, couples cannot rely on the help of grandparents in childcare. The exchange of social support is also not self-evident: rather, individuals need to find out and negotiate how much support they can expect, and their access to support largely depends on the actor's ability to establish and cultivate supportive friendship ties. This observation regarding the individual's ability to establish and cultivate supportive ties was also made in other studies (e.g. Hollstein, 2001). However, individuals embedded in more individualized networks are, due to their more "modern" attitudes, willing to use public or private childcare, and are therefore able to compensate to some extent for a lack of support by kin in childcare.
- Social contagion processes cannot develop their full potential up to a cascading of events due to the sparse structure: if a network partner who is not connected to any other of the network partners becomes a parent, this may have an influence on ego, but it does not influence ego's other network partners.
- In a rather heterogeneous network, the pieces information about family formation and organization of family life received are also very heterogeneous, and sometimes even contradictory. Moreover, in a network which is not family-centered, the transmission of information of family formation may be rare because only a few persons already have children. Therefore, it is more difficult for the individual to find orientation, and uncertainty often characterizes their fertility intentions. This finding is in line with the argumentation in the individualization hypothesis, which states that an erosion of norms and a pluralization of family forms and lifestyles lead to a lack of orientation (Beck,1986; Zapf et al. 1987). Additionally, in heterogeneous networks, social learning leading ego to adopt alter's attitudes and behavior often centers on the common profession and/or common leisure-time activities, and fosters, for example, career aspirations or plans concerning the common leisure time (e.g., travels). Thereby ego and alter encourage each other to pursue a career or to share leisure time activities, but do not share

information about family formation. However, individuals embedded in more individualized networks – if they are in contact with persons who have children and value them positively – are subject to processes of social learning (and also social contagion) that can foster family formation.

Hence we can see that more individualized networks do not foster family formation as strongly as traditional networks, but that they also do not hinder the transition to parenthood per se: although persons in individualized networks are not pressured to have children, they can be motivated and encouraged by social learning and emotional contagion, and a lack of support by kin can be compensated for by public or private institutions and friends. Also, due to their sparse structure and their stress on individual agency, allowing the individual to increase/decrease, establish/end certain contacts, individuals are free to choose more family-centered ties when they are interested in family formation, and can thereby even change their more individualized ties to more traditional ones.

However, more individualized networks in a societal context – which is characterized by an increasing age of parents at the birth of the first child and a rising number of childless persons – translates into social networks that often include only a few persons with children (see Arrow 4 in Figure 26), and can have an accelerating effect on fertility postponement. Meanwhile, individuals embedded in rather heterogeneous networks that include few persons with children provide little opportunity for positive social learning about having children or emotional contagion; two mechanisms that are extremely valuable in individualized network for promoting family formation. Instead, the network partners mutually confirm that their current lifestyle is appropriate for their age, and that they should focus on their career and other interests first, and keep postponing family formation.

The fertility behavior individuals display can reproduce or modify the social structures they are embedded in (see Arrow 5 in Figure 26): my data (based on retrospective and subjective self-reports of network changes – with all the limitations this includes) indicates that, with transition to parenthood, traditional networks are reproduced, while individualized networks can turn into rather traditional ones.

In contrast, through fertility postponement or by remaining voluntarily childfree, individualized network structures are reproduced, and it also appears that traditional networks may turn into more individualized networks. Voluntarily childless persons may, for example, perceive that many people consider it to be the social norm to have children, but they have established themselves in a niche of acceptance, embedded in a network of friends who accept their decision to remain childless, and who, in many cases, have decided to do the same.

However, network structures are also reproduced and challenged, not only by the behavior displayed, but also by the attitudes and values formed (see Arrow 6, Figure 26). Based on Festinger's dissonance theory (Festinger, 1954) we can argue that individuals who want to escape cognitive dissonance react to conflicting attitudes by either changing their attitude or changing their network partners. Decreasing contacts to some network partners, while increasing contacts to others or establishing new contacts, is easier in sparse networks not containing many durable ties, and is most difficult in dense networks containing long-term ties to kin and friends, as the example of the *polarized networks* shows.

This theoretical framework takes into account the complex relationship between structure and agency by stressing that individuals are able to change structural properties, and that they are subject to processes of social influence. Social networks take an intermediary position, bridging the macro level of societal institutions and the micro level of individual action. Applying this framework to the topic of family formation takes an interesting new perspective on a phenomenon that is mostly analyzed from either a macro level of societal institutions (e.g., social policies, labor market conditions, social norms, and values) or a micro level focusing on individual behavior (e.g., relying on a rational choice approach). From a network perspective, fertility behavior is neither only structurally predetermined, nor a fully autonomous decision in an individualized society; and taking this perspective helps us in identifying how social structures affect individual behavior, and how individuals can shape the structures they are embedded in.

6.4 Diffusion of Fertility Postponement and Voluntary Childlessness

Taking a network approach to individual fertility behavior and showing how networks mediate between the macro and micro levels, the question arises as to what we can learn from this study on fertility development in general. While recognizing the need to be careful when generalizing from a small and selective qualitative sample (especially considering the rather high educational background of the respondents), I would like to make four major assumptions about the diffusion of fertility postponement and voluntary childlessness.

First, fertility postponement is attractive, and is encouraged by social network effects in a low and late fertility context – especially among groups that can be regarded as individualized (in the values they hold, as well as in the network structures they are embedded in). Childfree networks in a low and late fertility context multiply postponement of family formation (low fertility trap). My

analysis could clearly show a low fertility trap for persons who are embedded in childfree networks. Not being exposed to persons with children, they lack one important motivation for reflecting on their own desires and intentions, or making plans for family formation. Mutually reinforcing each other in their attitude by not talking about the issue, and therefore lacking access to potential "new" information, postponement of family formation multiplies in these types of networks. However, although I cannot say to what extent this type of network is distributed in the whole population, among my respondents it is frequent but not dominant; moreover, it is found mainly among one special group: single males with higher education who are not established in a secure job at age 30. Therefore, I assume that this multiplier effect, although I was able to show it, is in general not (yet) strong enough to have a major impact on fertility rates on the macro level, though this could change if childfree networks were to become more common. A more widespread effect centers on the clash between modern gender roles and the image of the "*good mother/father*". Most persons in my sample lack access to positive information on how individualistic values and "good parenthood" can be combined. Not knowing anything about the long-term costs and benefits involved when trying not to follow traditional family models, they postpone family formation, hoping to receive more information in the future (e.g., vicarious experiences, when friends have children). Or, at least – if a re-traditionalization as parents is inevitable – they postpone this step as long as possible in order to first realize their own interests before becoming parents. How long they feel they can postpone is connected to the highest possible age they set for having the first child. Currently, the idea predominates that both men and women should not risk being called "grandparents" when their children go to school, or should not be retired when their children leave school, which sets the highest age well below 40. However, some also stress that they "feel much younger than they are", and therefore would set their personal latest age for becoming parents rather high, which can lead to further postponement beyond the threshold of 35/40.

Second, voluntary childlessness diffuses as "new" living arrangement that fully supports individualized values against the background of a society in which traditional living arrangements with children dominate. The diffusion of "new" forms of fertility behavior has been analyzed previously regarding the use of contraceptives and its consequences on fertility rates in developing countries. Bongaarts/Watkins (1996) state that desiring the approval of others is likely to be a critical factor in maintaining the "old" behavior, and that, during the early stages of fertility change, social pressure hinders the adoption of "new" behavior. However, once fertility decline has started, the direction of social pressure appears to shift from discouraging to encouraging the adoption the "new" behavior.

Montgomery and Casterline (1996: 156) stress that deviant minorities may eventually influence majority members, and thereby foster social change. For the diffusion of childlessness, Dorbritz (2008) postulates that, for western Germany, this change has already occurred. He argues that not only the realized, but also the desired number of children has fallen in western Germany. Data from the Population Policy Acceptance Study (PPAS) conducted in 14 European countries in 2004 show that western German women want only 1.73 children, and western German men want only 1.59 children; 16.6% of women and 27.2% of men intend to remain childless in western Germany. Desired fertility is lowest in western Germany in comparison with the other PPAS countries (Dorbritz, 2008: 583). Dorbritz concludes that, at least in western Germany, a "culture of childlessness" has emerged. My data showed that individuals who are childless are able to establish themselves in "niches of acceptance" of childlessness – despite perceiving some negative reactions to their voluntary childlessness: they are able to incorporate into their networks a large number of persons who, at least currently, also intend to remain childless and support or at least do not question their choice. Interestingly, in contrast to findings for Italy (Bernardi, 2003), all the respondents who intend to remain childless talk openly about their intention. They are aware that they may be thought of as selfish, unwilling to take on responsibility, or emotionally cold, but have a strong argument with which to counter these criticisms: because they know that they could not live up to the ideal of the "good mother/good father", they are responsible and empathic enough not to have any children. With this argument, they are in agreement with many people, and can, together with them, turn on the least accepted group of persons: dual-earning couples, who – in their view – do not take proper care of their children.

Third, a "culture of childlessness" is not inevitable. Dorbritz argues that decision to remain childless, which was rational given the prevailing restrictions (i.e., difficulties in combining family and job), has become a "generative culturally-independent pattern" and "desired childlessness has today become a part of the lifestyle" (Dorbritz, 2008: 580). Hence, he argues, the decision not to have children cannot be changed by family policies. My study, which zooms in on young adults around age 30, showed that childlessness at this age – at least among persons with university education – is considered to be rather normal, even though most women also mention their "biological clock", and feel that they should get started with family formation before age 35 or 40. An extended phase of childlessness is part of the lifestyle for persons with individualized values and networks. This is very much the case for persons who perceive parenthood to be far in the future. However, especially those childless people who feel ready for parenthood, and those who intend to remain childless, make ra-

tional arguments for their choice, and many of these arguments center on combining family and work life. In addition, those who feel uncertain about having children are not unsure about having children per se, but are uncertain about how to effectively organize family life, i.e., how to combine family and job. I would therefore stress that better social policies, especially a better public childcare system, could provide them with rational arguments in favor of having a child, and therefore reduce fertility postponement. I have no doubt that decades of family policies in western Germany fostering the traditional male-breadwinner model have built up a very traditional and gendered ideal image of the "good mother/father", and therefore I would also assume that – looking at mid- and long-term effects – family policies that are better suited to individualistic living arrangements could gradually change this image. This is increasingly important for persons who lack personal ties which could provide support in childcare, especially among people who have been regionally mobile, who moved out of Lübeck in order to pursue their studies or their professional training. Currently, this lack of support cannot be compensated for by public or private childcare services because they are insufficiently available, not flexible enough, and/or are expensive. Moreover, the lack of affordable and flexible childcare cannot be easily compensated for by the mother giving up her job, especially because persons embedded in these types of networks have more egalitarian ideas about the division of tasks in the partnership, and reflect at length about whether, when, and how to take a break from their jobs, and how to organize family life. Since they lack support in childcare, they only have two options: a traditional arrangement of family life (that is, the mother stays at home with the child), or remaining childless. Indeed, many persons in my sample have undergone a process of re-traditionalization after becoming parents or (among those who intend to have a child soon) plan – after a long period of trying to find a way to combine their ideas on gender equity with prospective parenthood – to shift to a more traditional living arrangement when they have the child. Recently, we have witnessed several political efforts to modernize family policies in Germany, such as the new *Elterngeld*[43], guarantees of a kindergarten place, or a better supply of childcare below age three. Whether this is enough to solve the problems of combining family and job is, however, doubtful: for example, public childcare for school-aged children remains rare.

[43] Since January 2007 the parent staying at home receives 67% of her/his former net-income for a period of 12 months. The other parent may stay at home for two additional months under the same conditions. The *Elterngeld* amounts to at least 300 euros, but not more than 1800 euros per month. This new policy started after the period in which these interviews have been conducted. Nevertheless there has been some public debate on the issue during the time of my interviews and some respondents were aware about different possible models of financial aid. Before January 2007 the *Elterngeld* amounted to 300 euros for two years or 450 euros for one year.

Fourth, currently social networks multiply mostly negative experiences with external childcare, but the same mechanisms could – given an increase and amelioration in external childcare in western Germany – also multiply positive experiences. A negative evaluation of external childcare (by non-kin) is currently multiplied in social networks because individuals a) have little experience with external childcare because the mother is the main caregiver, or b) often have negative experiences with external childcare, perceiving it to be inadequate in many respects (e.g., opening hours, flexibility, holidays, quality, price, access, and reliability) and c) perceive that it is a sign of low income and low social status if both parents "have to" work and the child therefore "must" be taken care of by "somebody else" (see Chapter 4). If external childcare became more attractive, the same mechanism could lead to a more positive evaluation. Additionally, if the use of external childcare became more common it would loose the stigma of supportive institution for people with low social status. If we take a look at the situation in eastern Germany for example – and this also the eastern German part of the comparative project this study is embedded in shows – external childcare, which has been well organized and highly frequented since decades, is perceived as "normal" and the positive effects on children's development (learning from other children etc.) are stressed by the interviewees. I found in my interviews that individuals who evaluated public childcare services very negatively were those who strongly supported the image of the "good mother" as the main caregiver for the child, and the "good father" as the breadwinner, and vice versa. Based on this close link, I would assume that one could induce changes in the image of the "ideal parent" by increasing the quality and availability of public childcare services. The more women practically rely on public childcare and experience it as positive for the development of their children, the less they will believe that children whose mother is not staying at home with them are socially deprived. In addition, other policy measures, such as the recently introduced paternity leave, may help in changing this image. In my interviews, the major concerns expressed by men about taking over the role of the caregiver, even temporarily, included worries about whether a) the family would be able to manage on the salary of the mother only, and b) whether the father would be able to communicate to his boss and colleagues that taking a break does not signal a lack of interest in his career, and that he would not run the risk of being the first on the list if layoffs became necessary. The newly introduced regulation on *Elterngeld* and parental leave offers protection against both of these fears, providing financial stability as well as good arguments for taking the break. Similar steps towards modernized family policies – if they are, indeed the first steps, and others can be expected to follow – have the potential to help individuals formulate and realize their fertility desires, as they are no longer necessarily in compe-

tition with their other interests in life. Social networks can work as multipliers, as more individualized living arrangements with children are diffused, and the evaluations that are reproduced will change to more positive ones.

7 Summary

This research project has set out to investigate the role of personal relations and social networks for individuals' family formation processes. In light of the individualization hypothesis, whether and when to have a child is conceptualized as a decision made by a couple, which is to a large extent set free from biological inevitability, traditional values, and normative constraints. Following this approach, the intention to have a child is often modeled as a rational decision, weighing benefits and costs of this life course choice at a given moment. In this perspective, relevant factors in the decision-making process are individual characteristics (e.g., education, employment), individual perceptions of and reactions to public systems (e.g., tax system, childcare system) as well as labor market conditions, individual values (e.g., self-realization), and individuals' perceptions and handling of potentially competing life goals. This emphasis on the individual's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in fertility research is fostered by the prominence of an economic approach to fertility behavior that relies on a rational choice model, as well as by theoretical approaches that describe processes of modernization and individualization which are thought to increase individual autonomy and make individuals less reliant on societal norms and traditions. Personal relationships do not play a role in these approaches – rather, they stress the individual's independence. However, various studies on personal relations and social networks in contemporary societies have shown that personal ties are not meaningless today; individuals are still embedded in various types of personal relations, even though the network structure and composition may have changed (see, for example, the community study by Wellman, 1979, as described in Chapter 1). In family and fertility research, the interest in social interactions has gradually increased over the last 20 years. Various studies have dealt with the roles played by personal relations, social interactions, and social networks in family formation in developing countries and Eastern European countries. These studies show that personal relationships do have a considerable impact on individuals' attitudes towards having children, their fertility intentions, and their behavior. Studies in developing countries focus on the diffusion of contraceptive use, while studies in Eastern European countries center on social capital. Studies on social influences on family formation in Western countries are rare, and little is known about the relevance of social relations in Western contexts, including

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the channels and mechanisms of social influence, and how exactly personal relations and social networks affect individual decision-making on family formation.

The case study presented in this work was designed to enable us to learn more about the importance of personal relationships and social networks as individuals think about family formation. I formulated three major research questions:

- Which factors are relevant as individuals make decisions about family formation?
- What are the channels and mechanisms of social influence?
- How are network structures and fertility intentions related?

Relevant Factors in Family Formation Processes

The qualitative analysis revealed three main categories that are relevant in the decision-making process (see Chapter 3): the respondents feel that they need to establish *security* before becoming parents, they want to have reached *maturity*, and they need to place a high *priority* on having children. The factors included in these categories operate on different levels: they can be subject to individual characteristics and actions on the level of the individual (e.g., having reached an adequate job position that provides security), they can depend on both partners' situation on the level of the couple (e.g., having established a mature and durable partnership that provides maturity), and they are influenced by the structure and quality of the personal relationships an individual has on the level of the social network (e.g., mutual reinforcement with friends who also feel that career has priority over having children). The many factors included in these categories have been identified using the same or similar terms in various other studies on fertility in western Germany or other Western countries – but largely without considering the relevance of personal relations for the meaning these factors have for the individuals. My findings show that the perception and evaluation of the factors necessary for having children, as well as the access to resources, are strongly influenced by personal relationships. Personal relations can affect the intention to have children rather directly in three ways:

- They are a source of social support that can enable or facilitate the couple to create the conditions they feel are necessary for having a child. For example, for some respondents, being provided with cheap housing by their parents was one factor that led them to try for a child earlier than they would have if they had had to find and finance adequate housing beforehand

themselves. Personal relationships can help in establishing *economic and financial security*.

- They transmit and can enforce social norms and behavioral models that can provide orientation as to whether, when, and how to realize family formation. For example, for most respondents it was clear that they would have a child only after they have completed education. However, some respondents, embedded in networks that include persons who had children during education, as well as persons who they expected would not oppose having a child during education, were more open to this option. Personal relations can provide *security in planning and acting and* a *feeling of maturity,* and they can affect the *priorities* individuals set.
- This is also because they offer access to information that can provide orientation, and also motivate people to start a family. One example is the information that some people have been trying for a long time to have a child, which motivated one couple to start trying much earlier than they actually wanted to, out of a fear that they might end up being childless if they waited too long.

Additionally, personal relations affect fertility intentions indirectly, because they have an impact on the factors I identified as relevant in fertility-decision making. This impact can occur in three different ways:

- Personal relations have an impact on individuals' definition of factors, such as an "adequate job" or an "agreeable living situation". I found, for example, that the definition of an "adequate" job encompasses concrete ideas about a career path, and high ambitions for respondents engaged with network partners who homogenously value the career highly; while it includes only minimal salary requirements for persons who are engaged in networks in which the main priority is on having children, and for whom a job is seen only as a means of realizing the goal of family formation.
- Personal relations have an impact on the meaning that certain factors have in individuals' personal decision-making process: while some people insist that a "long-term, durable, mature, and future oriented partnership" is an absolute must before deciding to have a child, others (who personally know single parents and evaluate them positively) could imagine becoming a parent with a partner he/she only recently met, or while in a partnership that is unlikely to last. Similarly, while certain life goals (e.g., pursuing a career/having a fulfilling job and having children) are seen as compatible by, others feel they are incompatible. As a consequence, some feel the need to

choose one (a decision which includes high opportunity costs), while others expect that they can combine both life goals.

- Personal relations also affect how individuals evaluate to what extent they have already met certain preconditions for starting a family. I found, for example, that when evaluating their own maturity for having children, the respondents often turn to their network partners and compare themselves to them. The more network partners with children, or with a current desire to become parents, they have, the more likely they are evaluate themselves as mature enough to have children.

After showing that personal relations matter in the process of thinking about family formation, I have turned to a detailed analysis of the functioning of social influences.

Mechanisms and Channels of Social Influence

In the interviews with young adults who have grown up in the same western German city, I was able to identify four major mechanisms of social influence: social learning, social pressure, social contagion, and social support. These mechanisms, often described in studies on developing or post-socialist countries, are at work in our research setting, a western German city – despite access to information via mass media and Internet, access to public services, and the perception that modernization and individualization processes lead to a loosening of traditional bonds to kin.

The major channels of social influence include: the partner, the parents, the parents-in-law, siblings, cousins, friends, acquaintances, and groups of reference. Five channels stand out in this list because they are often underestimated. These are the parents-in-law, who hold a vital supportive role, and who can step in when the respondent's own parents are not able or willing to provide support; the cousins, who can be similarly relevant as siblings; and, finally, acquaintances, who are a very valuable source of information. Up to this point, the channels of social influence I have described have been single persons in a certain role relation to ego. The interviews revealed, however, that many respondents are not only influenced by single persons, but also by groups, and that the influence a group exerts functions in a very specific way. These groups are often labeled "my circle of friends" or "the people around me", but there are also special groups, such as "my former schoolmates", "my colleagues", and "my fellow students". These groups mainly consist of people who are the same age, and who often also have a similar education and partnership status as ego. Looking at

these groups, ego builds an imaginative scale ranging from "most of the members of this group are childless", "many are starting to think about family formation", "some are having children", "many are having children" to "most are having children". Accordingly, ego can be early in having children (when most do not), or late (when most already have children); ego can be somewhat in line and conforming, or deviant. Considerations on the timing of childbirth and the perception of personal readiness often include this kind of evaluation.

Network Structure, Fertility Intentions, and Network Types

Describing the functioning of the channels and mechanisms of social influence gives only a rather scattered picture about the impact of social relations. The strength of the network approach, however, is to consider not only singular ties, but also the patterns they form, which affect the functioning of the mechanism of social influence and the relevance of certain ties. My analyses revealed six network characteristics that are highly relevant in connection with fertility intentions: density, share of kin, number of young children in the network (especially among the strong ties), availability of support in childcare, number of cliques, and network dynamics. While some of these characteristics describe general properties of the network structure (density, cliques), others refer to the network's composition (share of kin) ,or to certain characteristics of relevant ties (having children, providing support). Grouping my networks according to these categories, I was able to identify six types of fertility-relevant networks.

The type containing by far the most respondents was that of *the family-centered network*, which can be found among persons who already have children, or who feel ready for parenthood. The other network type that strongly encourages family formation is the *supportive network*. The remaining network types foster fertility postponement or encourage childlessness. They include the *family-remote networks,* which are prevalent among persons who perceive parenthood as being far in the future; the *non-supportive networks,* in which persons who are uncertain about parenthood are embedded; the *polarized networks,* observed among respondents who feel ambivalent about parenthood; and the networks that are *childfree by choice,* which are found among respondents who intend to remain childless.

Fertility Decline, Social Networks and Individualization

The last chapter discusses the empirical findings on social networks, processes of social influence, and selection of network partners against the background of modernization theoretical explanations for fertility decline, and ends with four major assumptions I want to present here in a summarized form:

1. Fertility postponement is attractive and encouraged by social network effects in a low and late fertility context, especially among groups that can be regarded as individualized (in the values they hold, as well as in the network structures they are embedded in). First, childfree networks multiply fertility postponement because they do not provide access to information motivating and fostering the transition to parenthood. However, this mechanism does not (yet) seem to operate very often, but can rather be found among certain groups (single men with higher education who are not established in a secure job at age 30). Second, a more widespread effect centers on the clash between modern gender roles and the image of the "good mother/father". Lacking networks that provide access to information on how individualistic values and "good parenthood" can be combined, the only solution – if a retraditionalization as parents is inevitable – is to postpone this step as far as possible.
2. Voluntary childlessness diffuses as "new" demographic behavior. Individuals who are childless – even though they violate the norm of having children and are aware that other may regard them as selfish – are able to establish themselves in "niches of childlessness", surrounding themselves with persons who share their views and hold similar values in life. They additionally have at their disposal an argument that even people who evaluate voluntary childlessness negatively cannot disagree with: if you cannot live up to the ideal of the image of the "good mother/father" (that is, a gendered division of tasks in the partnership in which the mother handles most of the childcare while the father is engaged in working to provide the family income) you had better remain childless – otherwise the child will suffer.
3. Fertility postponement and voluntary childlessness are reproduced and multiplied by the development of a certain dynamic, but they are not inevitable. The difficulties of combining family and job are one main obstacle to becoming parents, difficulties that are encountered by men and women if they do not intend to organize their family life along the traditional strongly gendered paths. Several decades of family policies that fostered mainly traditional living arrangements, and did not help in establishing "new" paths relevant to societal individualization processes, led to a polarization in

childbearing behavior (Huninik, 1990): young adults either placed a high priority on having a family, and generally had two children, or they decided against having children. Recently, we have witnessed several political efforts to modernize family policies in Germany, such as the new *Elterngeld*, the guarantee of a kindergarten place, or a better supply of childcare below age three. Whether this is enough to solve problems of combining family and job is, however, doubtful: for example, public childcare for school-aged children remains rare.

4. However, these steps taken in family policies – if they are, indeed, the first steps, and others can be expected to follow – have the potential to help individuals realize their fertility desires, as well as to formulate their fertility desires, as they are no longer necessarily in competition with their other interests in life. Social networks can work as multipliers in this case. Currently they often reproduce a negative image of working mothers and of (full-day) public childcare, but as more individualized living arrangements with children are diffused, the evaluations that are reproduced will change to more positive ones.

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