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## Changing Patterns of Nuptiality in Germany

### **Introduction**

By way of introduction, allow me to cite *The Economist* (September 9th 1995, pp. 21):

“Governments act in ways that, intentionally or otherwise, affect the family: in this sense, every country has a ‘family policy’ ... In Europe, the most distinctive approaches are those of Sweden and Germany. These start from very different assumptions about what such policy should be, but each acts upon a relatively coherent philosophy. Both manage to do moderately well by their children.

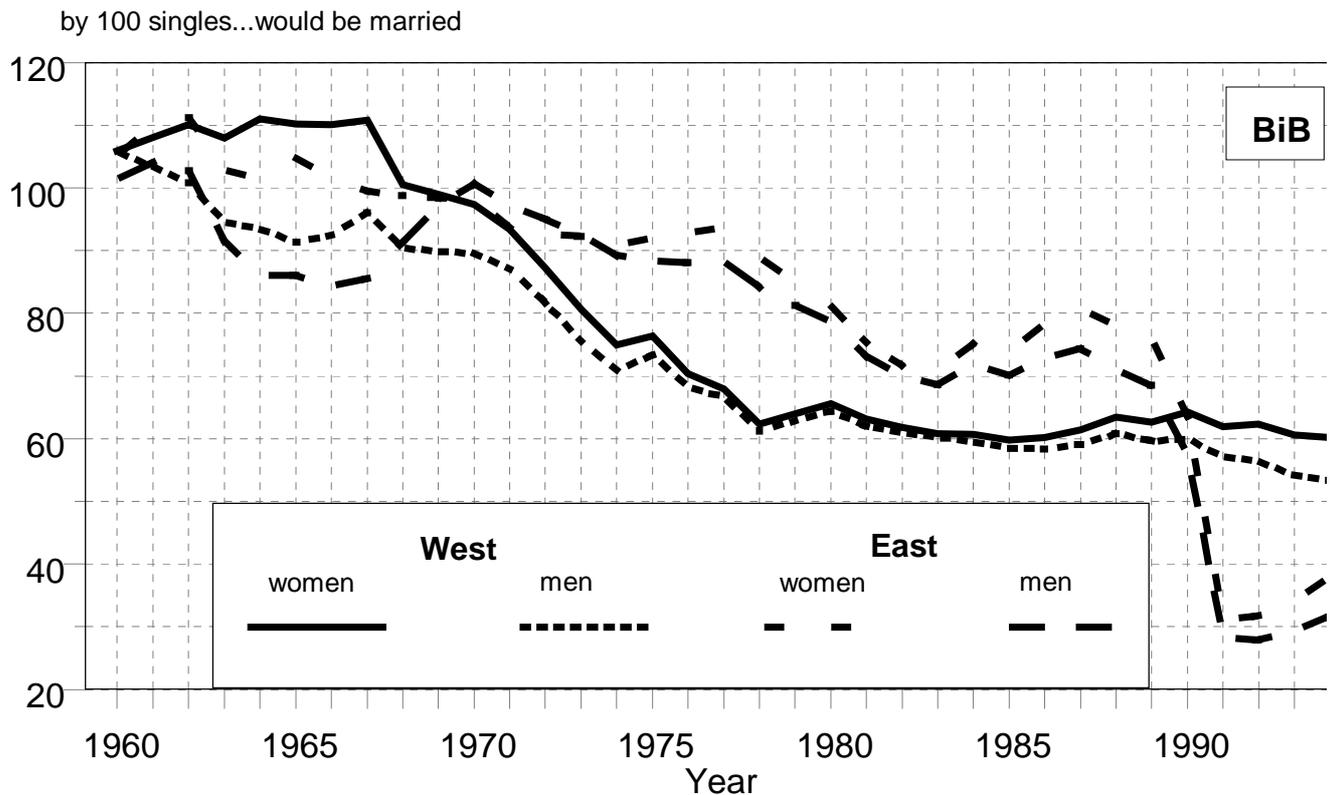
Sweden defines itself as a nation of individuals; its policy reflects that outlook. There is no married-couple’s allowance, no tax deduction for children, no way to file jointly for income tax. Benefits are also assessed on an individual basis ...

Germany, by contrast, is a nation of families. People are legally required to help elderly parents and hard-up family members. There are tax allowances for dependants and a high level of child benefit. A minimum subsistence level for children is exempt from taxation. Marriage is rewarded in the tax code. A parent who stays at home to care for a child can keep many of the perks of her job. And it is, normally, hers not his; the old idea of a woman’s world dominated by „*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*“ - children, kitchen and church - still persists, albeit to a diminishing extent. A full-time parent keeps her pension rights, and cannot be dismissed from their job for three years. When fathers fail to pay up, the state covers the child-support payment and enforces collection.

It is hardly surprising, given its dramatically different policies, that compared to Sweden Germany has: fewer births to unmarried mothers; a higher rate of marriage; a divorce rate a third lower; a smaller percentage of women in the workforce. The gaps between the two countries are shrinking, though. Taxes and benefits have an effect on behaviour, but not a decisive one. If government policy were the only factor in such decisions, Sweden would never see a wedding.”

Nuptiality in Germany underwent a sharp decline in recent decades, and it appears that this demographic process still is going on and has even gained speed since German reunification. The absolute numbers of marriages in eastern Germany decreased by 22.2 per cent during the period 1989 to 1990 and again of 50.4 per cent from 1990 to 1991 (*Dorbritz/Gärtner* 1995, 344). The aim of this paper is to clarify which factors influenced this change.

**Figure 1: Total first marriage rates in the old federal territory and in the former GDR, 1960-1994**



## Results of the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS)

### Data base

The German Family and Fertility Survey is part of the international project “Fertility and Family Surveys in Countries of the ECE Region”, undertaken by the Population Activities Unit (PAU) of the Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) with financial support from the United Nations Population Fund. The objectives of the FFS project are, among other things, to collect comparable survey data on fertility and the family in Europe and North America during the 1990s and to conduct and publish a series of national and cross-national studies on the base of these data.

The German sample contains about 10,000 persons, aged 20 to 39 years, 6,000 of them female, 4,000 male. Half of the interviews were done in Eastern Germany. The survey took place in 1992 and is to be analysed by the Federal Institute for Population Research (BIB) at Wiesbaden.

### Reasons for marrying

Marriage is the living arrangement most often strived for and most often attained following the transition from youth to adulthood. The married couple is regarded as the natural heart of the family. However, the sphere of life known as the family has not escaped structural change nor has its social function remained entirely intact. Following the evolution of the modern family into a conjugal family (*famille conjugale*), as recognised by Durkheim, recent decades have witnessed the widespread growth of the “consensual union” as a living arrangement based upon the mutual affection of man and woman. It is ordinarily a – chronologically precedent – preliminary form of marriage, but is increasingly becoming more than that, i.e. an alternative to marriage. Kant’s appeal to reason: “when man and woman desire the mutual enjoyment of their respective sexual qualities, then they *must* of necessity join in marriage“ (translated from Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, § 24), is not longer accepted. Today, it is not sexuality that distinguishes marriages from other forms of partnership but instead the process of preparing for children. Preferable in both real and ideal terms is a functional distinction between household unions that have children or are child-oriented and those that have no

children and – at least under this form of partnership – essentially do not wish to have (*Nave-Herz* 1987, *Meyer* 1992, *Huinink* 1993, 327).

More and more frequently, “getting married” is “written small” (see *Hoffmann-Novotny* 1996, *Schwarz* 1996). Because the act of marriage should be viewed as a purposeful behaviour, it is clear that changes must have a socio-economic background and they must have taken place in people’s motives. For the purposes of the following analysis, it is assumed that marriage is

- intended to solidify partnerships
- the first step in founding a family, i.e. a partnership for the purpose of biological and social reproduction
- the initiation of a household community
- a major experience

With reference to these aspects, it is appropriate to articulate several hypotheses regarding historical differences and those related to the social system. These hypotheses will then be examined on the basis of the findings of the Family and Fertility Survey (FFS) conducted throughout Germany in 1992. It should be mentioned that the typology presented is not identical with the kind of typology of couple relationships proposed, for example by *Burkart* and *Kohli*. Their distinction among the “traditional support marriage”, the “modern love marriage”, the “modern partner relationship”, the “individualised relationship” and the “temporary love relationship” reflected attitudes and expectations pertaining to these forms of partnership (*Burkart/Kohli* 1989). Although their thought processes quite naturally also touch upon the question of when such partnerships begin, it is important to differentiate systematically between their focus upon general attitudes towards marriage and the issue of motivational factors affecting the decision to marry. The latter one is under investigation here.

### ***Solidifying partner relationships***

The desire to stabilise a relationship in order to ensure its survival even through crises is apparently inherent in every relationship based upon love. Individuals themselves seek relationships that go beyond the sphere of the emotional and the intimate. Their society may foster such efforts, but may also have its own interest in preserving lasting partnerships as a means of stabilising property arrangements and reinforcing the obligations of parents towards children, for example. Lifetime monogamy and a comparatively narrow concept of the family based insistently upon blood relationships and the household community are fundamental pillars of middle-class society. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany places marriage and the family under the special protection of the state (Article 6). The GDR went even further to include “marriage, family and motherhood” under the protection of its constitution (Article 38). Under these circumstances, the norm of publicly affirmed, officially certified marriages dissolvable only by process of law continues to exert a powerful influence. Moreover, church marriages are also customary in western Germany. While this does not demonstrate the presence of stronger religious ties, one may reasonably presume that

- active members of churches live less often in consensual unions (Hypothesis 1) and that
- partners living in more traditional social environments tend to live in consensual unions for shorter periods of time (H2).

Bridal couples are unlikely to give thought to divorce modalities when getting married. Such considerations nevertheless presumably play a major role in a society of increasingly self-determined “living spaces” in the *trajectoires* of *Bourdieu*: When a relationship based upon love is solidified by marriage, failure of the marriage is probably ruled out, but the possibility is still taken into account. Divorce law in western Germany was rewritten during the 1970s, largely eliminating the aspect of fault in favour of the principle of irreparable failure. An even greater degree of relaxation was instituted from the very beginning in the former GDR, where entitlements to support played a negligible role and divorce could be attained, given the consent of both parties, within only a few weeks and required little more than a year in the case of divergent claims. The decline in nuptiality following the political turnabout and the application of western German family law in the East may be the result, as *Schneider et al* have speculated, of the perception of marriage as a “risky decision”: “Today, marriages are viewed subjectively as considerably more consequential, and insufficient understanding of the obligations connected with marriage, together with a lack of clarity regarding the provisions of marital, family and divorce law, heighten the sense of insecurity while diminishing the current propensity to marry” (*Schneider et al* 1995, 13).

Generally, the influence of the stronger bonds of obligation associated with marriage in comparison with informal partnerships should become evident in the fact, revealed in the FFS sample, that partners who were relatively uncertain as to their future together tended to marry later in life. Certain couples may have more substantial reservations about entering into binding relationships. These may be based upon financial considerations or their perceptions of other failing marriages. Such couples may consist of

- partners who are not yet gainfully employed (e.g. school and university students; H3)
- partners with low homogamy characteristics (unusual differences in age, education and income; H4)
- partners who have negative experiences with marriage, either their own or those of their parents (H5)
- unmarried partners living in eastern Germany after the political turnabout (H6).

### ***Founding a family***

Marriages are understood as intended parental unions, as institutionalised preparation for the building of a family including children (see *Burkart/Kohli* 1989, 418; *Huinink* 1995, 335). In addition to the emotional attachment of the partners, obligations are undertaken to provide for one another and to undertake a joint effort to have and to care for children. The partners' origin families are also affected by these obligations. Two previously independent networks and systems for allocating material resources are linked together. As already mentioned, the government also contributes to the stabilisation of the marriage, particularly in regard to its biological and socially reproductive performance, by providing material benefits to marriages and families and support for the education and welfare of children. The extent to which the government relates such support to the needs of children is evident in the institution of virtual equality, if not preference, for children of single parents and in the current controversy over the question of whether non-marital consensual unions with children should be treated as families.

It would be wrong to deny the validity of the principle of intended parenthood simply because people living in non-marital consensual unions also desire children (*Schneewind et al* 1994). Why shouldn't they, after all? Indeed, even children and adolescents express the wish to have children, and the number of children desired remains constant over several decades for most women from school age onward, as several studies of women's biographies have shown (*Hullen* 1995, 28).

The following hypotheses are to be analysed on the basis of the FFS data:

- Impending births increase the tendency to marry (H7). *Blossfeld et al.* (1996) have shown that this tendency is subject to variation even by month of pregnancy.
- Unmarried mothers with younger children are more strongly inclined to marry than those with older children (H8).
- Marriages for the purpose of founding a family have a well-defined place in the life cycle, as they follow school and initial occupational/professional training (H9).
- In western Germany, gainfully employed mothers have probably exhibited a lower tendency to marry due to the anticipation of higher opportunity costs. In the former GDR, however, family-founding marriages were seen as less "risky" because of the availability of special support for women of this category. (H10).
- If the children of non-marital consensual unions were treated in the context of government support measures as the full equals of children of married parents, marriage would be effectively stripped of its privilege of special protection by the state, and the tendency of unmarried parents to marry would diminish (H11).

### ***Forming a household community***

A free interpretation of the remark by *Immanuel Kant* quoted above suggests that in his day marriage also involved the stabilisation of the obligations and responsibilities of each party within the household community. In simple terms, the husband was responsible for the external affairs of the family, the wife for internal matters. This norm continued to exert a significant influence well into the 1950s, that „golden age of marriage“ with its high nuptiality rate, its still rising fertility level and – at least in western Germany – with its normative model, the "housewife and mother" (*Hullen* 1995). Theories about family economy based upon that principle and perceiving the act of marriage as unrelated to the fact that wives would manage the household became obsolete as emancipation progressed and more and more women took up gainful employment outside the home. Presumably, these concepts still apply to families with substantial child-care expenses, i.e. families with several

children. However, that is not yet the crucial issue at the time of marriage – in the chronological sequence of getting married and having children.

Because the potentials have become more nearly equal, the issue of the more efficient use of manpower is hardly relevant at all. Much the same can be said of the question of whether marriage permits a more efficient use of available resources, especially of housing and household furnishings, from the refrigerator and the stereo system to the automobile. Times have changed. Years ago it was necessary to be married in order to occupy an apartment together. It was even illegal to rent an apartment to unmarried couples (there was a “procurator” paragraph in the *German Civil Code*). Housing policy in the former GDR quite understandably gave preference in assigning scarce apartment space to married couples and their families. A relaxation of this policy in favour of young couples had already begun prior to the political turnabout (*Schneider* 1994, 98). Today, non-marital consensual unions in both East and West provide undeniable evidence that a marriage certificate is not a necessary prerequisite for living together. In fact, it could be claimed that resource allocation functions better in such relationships, as the possibility of the dissolution of the partnership is always kept in mind and could be effected in a more objective manner. We are all aware of the tragedies that often unfold when marital households are dissolved.

Thus marriage retains residual advantages under civil, tax and social law: inheritance law affecting married couples, mutual entitlement to support and old-age benefits, including adjustments made during divorce proceedings, the splitting method used in calculating taxes for married couples, automatic insurance of an unemployed spouse under the social security system, entitlements to survivor benefits and widow’s/widower’s pensions, higher unemployment payment amounts for married people, higher family supplements and a larger percentage contribution for medical care for married civil servants. *Schwarz* expressed the opinion that these benefits contributed substantially to the appeal of marriage, even in cases where children are not desired. (*Schwarz* 1996, 141 f.).

This is not an appropriate place for a lengthier discussion of the fact that some of these “advantages” have lost importance as a result of increased employment of women, e.g. income splitting for married couples. Reductions also resulted from heavier weighting of individuals’ own (old-age) entitlements to insurance benefits. Indeed, alternative calculations have now been presented to show that it might well be advantageous for partners, even those with children, not to marry but instead to retain dual households. In this case there would be grounds for reciprocal support claims in the case of unemployment, dependence upon welfare or qualification for education/training benefits. Partners with children could benefit from the advantages originally conceived in favour of single-parents (head-of-household deduction, child-care costs, household aid assistance). In cases where dual households are maintained for work-related reasons, unmarried partners now receive the same tax deductions as married people (see *Finanztest* 4/95, 66-69).

Changes in the significance of resource allocation as achieved through marriage will be examined with the aid of the following hypotheses:

- Couples live in common households (consensual union) more and more frequently and for longer periods of time prior to marriage (H12).
- Marriages more often took place prior to occupation of a shared apartment in the former GDR than in western Germany (H13).
- Unemployed women are likely to have a greater propensity to marry (H14).

### ***The wedding experience***

It is generally understood that for young girls and women, in particular, but also for many men, a wedding represents the most splendid goal in life. This day, “all in white”, outranks all others in importance, not only for the bride or groom but in the eyes of relatives, friends and acquaintances as well. The commemoration of the wedding celebration within the same circle after even only a few years of marriage – in straw, wooden, tin anniversaries and the like – enhances the significance of the marriage rite even in the absence of religious tradition and independent of initial sexual experience.

Marriage once had meaning as an initiation ceremony. The young bride and groom were accepted through marriage as full-fledged members of the adult community. This particular aspect has surely retreated into the background, and it is not the intention of this paper to explain marriage on the basis of such motives. Instead, it seems appropriate to view the act of marriage as a staged experience. Our society has been referred to as the

“experience society” (Schulze 1996), and thus the wedding enters the ranks of such primarily leisure experiences as travel, celebrating, playing sports and submerging in virtual worlds, for all of which the use of the word “dream” is an unmistakable indicator (Fürstenberg 1971). Moreover, a great deal of money is spent in on such experiences, in inverse proportion to their repeatability: “2,000 DM for a wedding dress and all the extras, 800 DM for a tuxedo, 10,000 marks for a reception with music and 60 guests and, oh yes, wedding rings don’t grow on trees, either: 300 DM” (FAZ 16 September 1996, 39). These self-chosen experiences have no mythical significance at all. Mythical enchantment is desired, however, as even the popular television wedding shows demonstrate. Consensual unions have none of this.

With respect to marriages today, it would seem necessary to recognise other motives than those predominant in earlier years: providing for wives and children or allocating resources in a shared household. Oppenheimer has remarked that if specialisation and exchange were to remain the basis for marriage, then marriage would become an increasingly “anachronistic living arrangement” (Oppenheimer 1994, 333; public opinion is highly receptive to such views, as the title stories “The disappearing family” in *The Economist* of 9 September 95 and “Vom Ehe-Leid zur Ehe light” in *Der Spiegel* of 21 October 1996 suggest). Particularly the most recent developments in nuptiality should permit us to pose hypotheses that can be made operative with the aid of FFS data and reinforced by the experience approach. For this purpose, marriage is placed alongside other wishes such as personal mobility through ownership of a car, travel and extraordinary leisure activities. One attempts to stage as many experiences as possible:

- The sequence in which the experiences are sought naturally depends upon whether the attainment of one of the first experiences preserves the option to realise the others as well. In individualised societies, however, a marriages are made at the expense of freedom in holiday planning, for example; a child ties people down, as it were, for decades. In the former GDR, however, marriage brought advantages in terms of holiday and other leisure opportunities (H15).
- People who have married young and divorced soon afterwards are probably inclined to seek experiences they may have missed, such as travel. Their propensity to remarry is likely to be low. Older divorced people, on the other hand, since they are saturated with other experiences, tend to be more amenable to a successive marriage (H16).

### The decline in nuptiality

Nuptiality has diminished rapidly in recent years. As Table 1 shows, the average age of first marriages among the oldest cohorts of males surveyed in the FFS rose by two years to nearly 29 years in western Germany and to 26 years in eastern Germany, increasing among women in western Germany by four years to above age 27. In comparison, the rise of one year to age 22 among women in eastern Germany is relatively moderate. Thus the FFS data provide an accurate picture of the previously identified dramatic decline in nuptiality over the past two decades. Compared to the data recorded in current population statistics,<sup>1</sup> the increase in marriage age among women in western Germany may be somewhat overstated, while the estimate of the rise among women in eastern Germany is possibly too low.

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<sup>1</sup> The ages indicated are cohort values. In contrast, current population statistics show periodic values for the average marriage age of single people. The values for selected years were as follows:

Year	West men	West women	East men	East women
1980	26,1	23,4	23,9	21,8
1985	27,2	24,6	24,8	22,7
1990	28,4	25,9	25,8	23,7
1992	29,0	26,5	27,1	25,5

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Gebiet und Bevölkerung 1994, Tab. 8.8

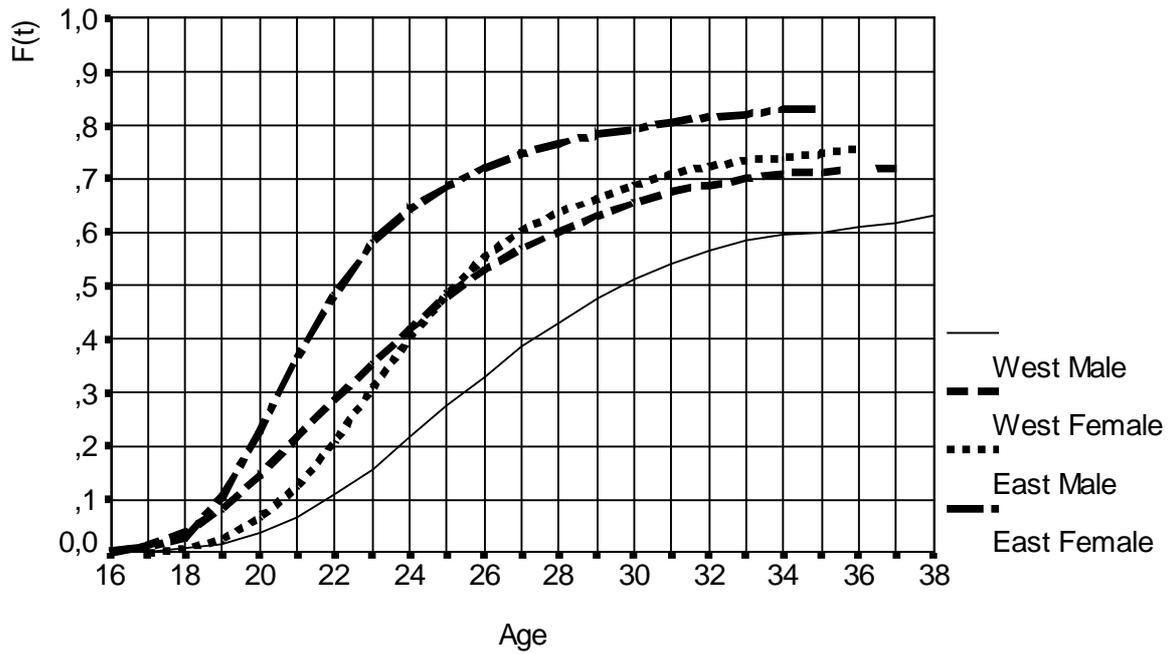
Tab. 1: First marriage  
 Median age (product-limit estimator)  
 and frequency (non-censored cases for 1992, in per cent)  
 by cohort and region of residence at the time

	Average age		non-censored (%)	
	male	female	male	female
West				
1952-57/35-39 years	26.7	23.0	73	80
1957-62/30-34 years	28.8	24.1	57	74
1962-67/25-29 years	.	27.6	32	50
1967-72/20-24 years	.	.	5	17
East				
1952-57/35-39 years	23.8	21.3	82	88
1957-62/30-34 years	24.6	21.7	76	85
1962-67/25-29 years	25.9	22.4	54	72
1967-72/20-24 years	.	.	14	33

The high censoring rate is already evident in the tabular overview. Barely half of the second-youngest cohort and an even smaller proportion of the youngest cohort was married at the time of the survey. For this reason, no further distinction is made by cohort, but instead only by region and gender, in the following figures illustrating nuptial behaviour.

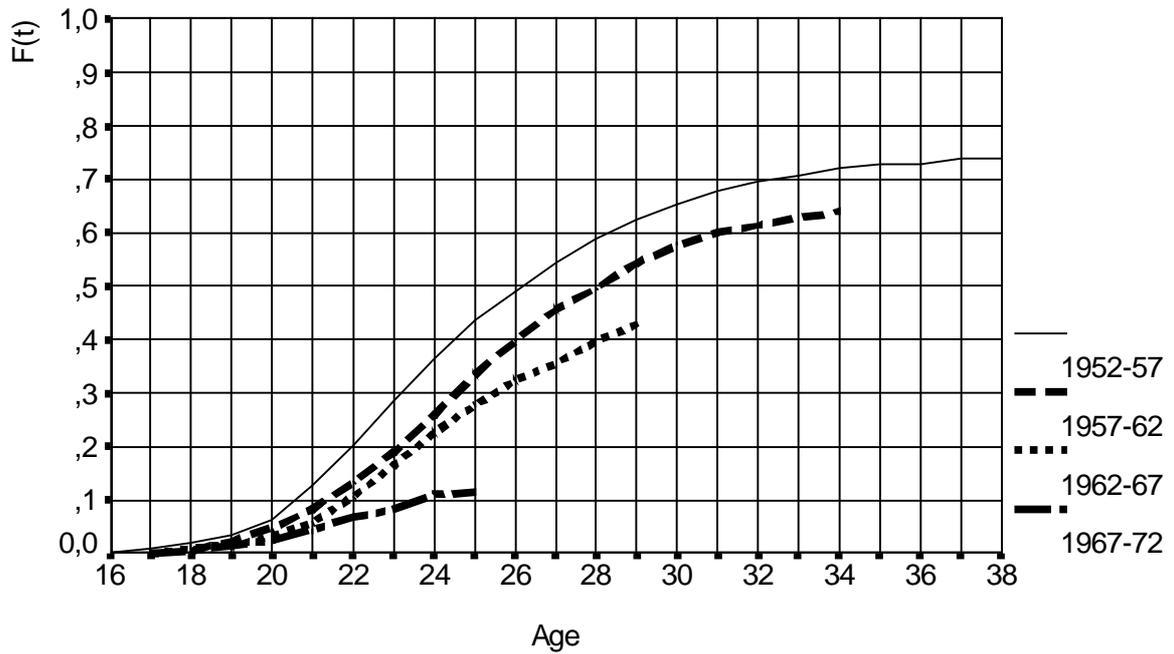
The first of the three distribution functions (Figs. 2 to 4) represents the marriages of the four sample sub-groups. The upper curve showing the highest nuptiality rate pertains to women in eastern Germany, of whom more than 80 per cent are married. The two closely adjacent curves located in the middle relate to men in eastern Germany and women in the West. They show up to 70 to 80 per cent married respondents. The lowest curve provides a clear visual indication that nuptiality is lowest among men in western Germany. Only 70 per cent are married or intend to marry. The two other figures differentiate the nuptiality data according to birth cohorts: Fig. 3 for men and Fig. 4 for women. The decline in the tendency to marry evident in the comparison of these cohorts, which cover a period of only two decades, is quite impressive. Nearly 40 per cent of the men of the oldest cohort were married at age 24, compared to about 25 per cent of the two middle cohorts and only 10 per cent of the youngest. On the basis of these data we cannot indeed rule out the possibility that only 50 to 60 per cent of today's young men will marry (see *Dorbritz/Gärtner* 1995, 348). In Fig. 3 pertaining to women, a similar decline in nuptiality is evident. Half of all women in the oldest cohort were married at age 24, compared to only 40 per cent of the younger birth cohorts, less than 30 per cent of the youngest, in fact. It is very interesting to note the way in which the curve representing the marriages of the second-oldest women's cohort gradually approaches that of the oldest. "Late" marriages compensated their low nuptiality when they were 20 to 30 years old, to the extent that near equality in the proportion of married respondents was achieved.

**Figure 2: First marriage by region and gender**



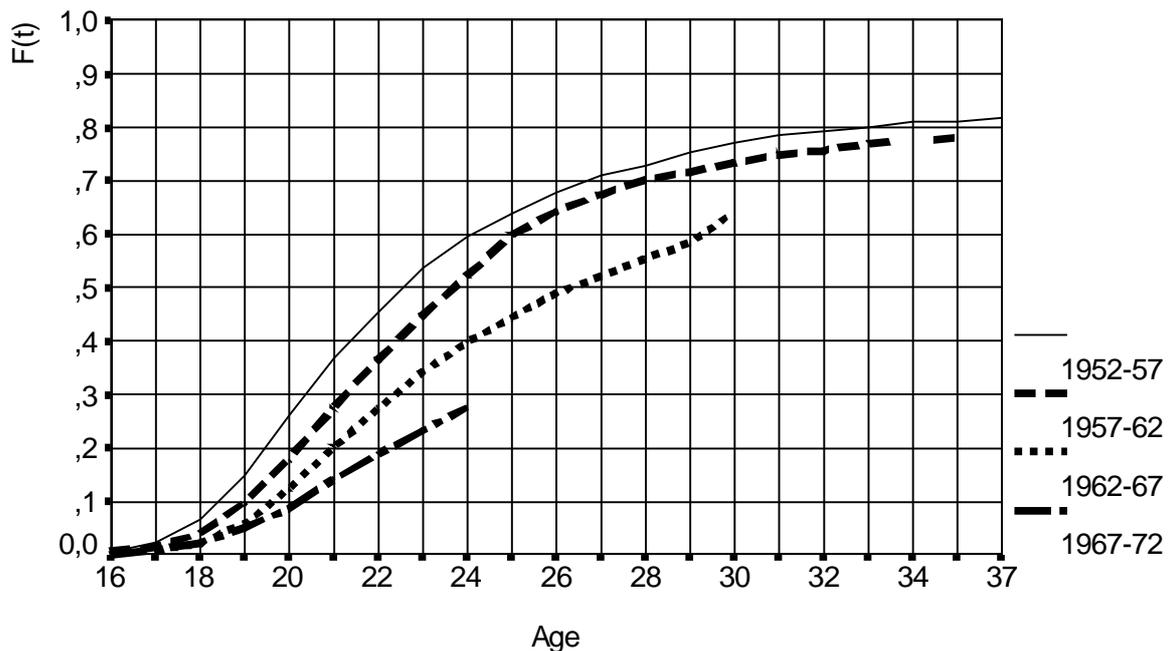
BIB II 1 - FFS - 2311 (Product-Limit-Estimation)

**Figure 3: First marriage - men - by cohorts**



BIB II 1 - FFS - 2312 (Product-Limit-Estimation)

**Figure 4: First marriage - women - by cohorts**



BIB II 1 - FFS - 2313 (Product-Limit-Estimation)

The product-limit estimate itself revealed differences in the marriage behaviour of men and women in the East and the West. Theoretically, it would be possible to examine these differences in the same way for an even larger set of sub-groups. Although such an approach would retain its illustrative character, it would be quite complicated to carry out and would place an incommensurate burden on the database. The event-analysis approach is better suited to the purpose at hand.

Table 2 summarises the results of the event analysis for marriages. This extensive body of statistics probably requires more specific explanation. Five event-analysis models are identified and differentiated according to variables potentially pertinent to the event of marriage. Calculation was carried out with the exponential approach, i.e. a constant hazard rate. The first variable listed are the non-time-dependent identifiers “East”, “woman” and “cohort”. The next group consists of time-dependent variables. The terms  $\log(\text{age}-15)$  and  $\log(60-\text{age})$  are used to model the fact that marriages are possible only after age 15 and become less frequent at advanced age. The variable „East\*after Nov. 89“ represents the influence of the political turnabout in the East on demographic behaviour. “Education” is a proxy for the education level achieved prior to marriage. The terms “education end” and “child/expected child” indicate that persons surveyed no longer have the status of school or university students and that they either have or are expecting a child. “CU” identifies a consensual union, “change residence” a change of residence beyond state borders, “employed” signifies gainful employment up to the time of marriage, “skilled occupation” and “profession” represent occupations requiring either formal training or a tertiary education. Codes showed whether such a skilled or highly qualified occupation, in contrast to an unskilled occupation, was maintained up to the time of marriage, regardless of whether the respondent still exercised this occupation at the time of the survey. Both dummy variables are proxies for income opportunities. “Woman older” is the variable used to indicate that a wife is older than her husband. “Woman higher education” shows that a wife has a higher education level than her husband. The relational characteristics can be determined, of course, for men as well as for women, as can the feature “partner not single”, although only with reference to registered marriages. The terms “siblings”, “size of home community” and “parents divorced” represent three additional non-time-dependent variables. The factor “religious beliefs” is also regarded as related to family origin. Religious affiliation, indicated by the responses “1 Catholic”, “2 Protestant”, “3 other” and „4 none” to the survey question, is a proxy and viewed as an inverse ordinal ranking of religious beliefs. Finally, the decline in nuptiality that understandably accompanies increasing age is differentiated by cohort.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The references for dummy variables were: West, in training, unmarried, no consensual union, no change of residence, not gainfully employed, unskilled occupation, parents not divorced. Cohorts, education, siblings, size of home community, religion and interaction variables generated from these variables are dynamic.

Following the life-cycle events of the end of education, birth/pregnancy, formation of a CU, change of residence and gainful employment as well as the date of November, 1989, the waiting periods prior to marriage were split, resulting in a total of more than 36,000 episodes to be examined.

At the outset it is clear that the estimated hazard rate function improved consistently for both genders from Model 1 to Model 5. This shows that the respective added variables had a significant influence upon nuptiality.<sup>3</sup> The next step will be to describe the direction that influence took and the way in which certain influences changed as a consequences of the repeated expansion of the complex of variables. Influence is measured in terms of change in the “waiting time” prior to marriage.<sup>4</sup>

#### **a) constant characteristics**

Marriages took place at earlier ages in eastern Germany; women married younger, although marriage ages rose from cohort to cohort. A bit more information about this well-known phenomenon can be added at this point: The higher nuptiality level in eastern Germany is well documented in all models; ultimately, the incorporation of additional variables does not cause the influence of the variable “East” to disappear. Thus it can be stated that the specific social system contributed to the tendency towards earlier marriage (H15). Among women, as opposed to men, the tendency to marry rises when the relational variables are taken into account. In this way, the age difference ordinarily present in married couples becomes an influential factor. The younger persons surveyed, men and women alike, married later. However, this cohort influence diminishes with the addition of further variables.

#### **b) time-dependent characteristics, periodic influences education, children**

Beginning with the legally determined minimum marriage age, the nuptial tendency rises until into the fourth decade of life and then – as was presumed here – returns to near zero at age 60. The latter variable has the strongest effect upon the tendency to marry. Its influence diminishes from cohort to cohort, however. This is evident in Model 5, in which the last three variables effect a partial differentiation of the influence exercised by the length of time until the end of the nuptial phase for the three oldest cohorts. The nuptial tendency within the oldest cohorts grew by ten per cent for each additional year, but by only four per cent in the second-youngest cohort. This can easily be understood in graphic terms: The distribution function of marriages reached a higher maximum among the older cohorts than among the younger ones; accordingly, the differential decrease following the maximum was also greater for the older groups.<sup>5</sup>

The incorporation of the variable “East\*after Nov. 1989” is an attempt to take into account the inordinately strong decline in marriages following the political turnabout in the new German states. The event analysis shows that the tendency to marry decreased by more than 30 per cent (H6, H15). It has remained the case, or derives naturally from the age factor, that people generally do not marry until after completing their training or education. The variable „education end“ raises the tendency to marry by about 50 per cent (H3). Only then, when all other characteristics are controlled, is the influence of education level itself reduced to a virtually negligible value. There is a stable trend towards a stronger propensity to marry as education levels rise. This appears to contradict the still widespread view that better educated young people marry less often. Instead, the data support the thesis that the decline in nuptiality is not the consequence of the education level but of the institutional effect of education. The latter factor is identified by the variable “education end” (For examples of the controversial literature on the question of whether the nuptial age rose as a result of “higher” qualifications or only because of “longer” periods of education see *Blossfeld/Jaenichen* 1993, *Brüderl/Diekmann* 1994, *Hullen* 1995 and most recently another contribution by *Diekmann* 1996; on the international comparison see *Blossfeld* 1995, *Thornton et al.* 1995). The effect of children and pregnancies remained highly consistent in all models, increasing the tendency to marry by about 200 per cent (H7).

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<sup>3</sup> The improvement of a model is established by means of a log-likelihood final. The expected value is a figure showing an increase over the previous model corresponding the additional degrees of freedom. If the actual value is larger, the improvement is considered significant.

<sup>4</sup> Positive beta coefficients signify a rate increase and reflect a shortening of the waiting time, negative beta coefficients show the reverse effect. The magnitude of the change can be estimated using the term  $\exp(\beta)$ , e.g. a relative risk of 1.39 corresponds to an increase in risk of 39 per cent.

<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of modelling an initially steep rise in the tendency to marry and the subsequent gradual decline, other hazard rate functions would have been better suited than the exponential function with its constant rate, e.g. the log-logistic or sickle function. These functions could not applied, however, due to numerical difficulties.

### **c) Partner relationships, changes of residence, gainful employment**

The presence of a consensual union exercised an even greater influence on the tendency to marry. This effect, surpassed in magnitude only by the age variable, confirms the common experience that most marriages are preceded by a consensual union (H12). Changes of residence had no significant impact on the tendency to marry, although it must be noted in this context that only moves beyond state borders were recorded. Thus the residence changes involving moves from the city to nearby suburban areas that are so frequently connected with the founding of families (see *Courgeau/Lelièvre* 1992) are only rudimentarily identified. The findings showing that the tendency to marry was greater where those surveyed were gainfully employed are immediately understandable with regard to men in view of the resulting opportunity to solidify partnerships (H3). In the case of women, the correlation can be described in a succinct corollary: Those without chances in the labour market also had none in the marriage market. The extent to which this contradicts the hypothesis (H14) that unemployed women have a greater tendency to marry (for reasons of support) cannot be determined, as no distinction was made at this point between genders. Respondents in skilled occupations or professions showed a lower tendency to marry. This effect is not to be confused with that of longer periods of education. The occupational variables themselves account for an extraordinarily large portion of marriage postponements. Unfortunately, no retrospective data regarding income are available. It appears possible that particularly those men and women who have enjoyed occupational success place a high premium on this kind of personal welfare production and place less emphasis upon the importance of nuptial relationships. To a certain extent, this is attributable to the potential loss of occupational mobility in consequence of marriage (H10).

### **d) relational characteristics**

The influence of relational characteristics is highly consistent. Partnerships in which the woman was older, i.e. in which the customary age difference was not present, led decidedly less often and/or later to marriage (H4). This is true as well, although to a less significant degree, of partnerships in which the woman had a higher educational level than the man (H4). Previous marital experience on the part of one of the partners produced a similar, although less significant effect (H5, H16). Questions arise with respect to this analysis from a statistical standpoint regarding the fact that those individuals surveyed who had no partner were treated in the same manner as respondents with partners in “normal” age, education and marital-status correlations.

### **e) biographical characteristics**

The number of siblings apparently had no impact on the tendency to marry (H2). In contrast, the size of the communities in which those surveyed grew up is highly significant: With each of the eight categories ranging from “under 2,000” to “one million and more” inhabitants, the tendency to marry decreased by four per cent (H2). It is impossible to determine whether the size of the community in which partners were living at the time of the marriage was similarly significant, as no relevant data is available. Respondents whose parents were divorced showed a diminished tendency to marry. Finally, the weakness or absence of professed religious beliefs correlated to a highly significant degree with a reduced tendency to marry; using Catholicism as a reference, the tendency of Protestants to marry was eight per cent lower (H1).





## Summary Interpretation

In summary, the findings support several of the hypotheses presented at the outset. With respect to other hypotheses, the answers obtained thus far are not satisfactory, as information about the previous incomes of those surveyed, in particular, is lacking. Such data would be needed to support statements about the extent to which marriages were based upon material considerations.

According to our analysis, increasing age had the greatest impact on the tendency to marry, the crucial factor being not that of age at the immediate point of marriageability but that of advanced age, expressed here in the number of remaining nuptial years. As this figure diminishes, the tendency to marry also decreases dramatically.

Aside from the importance of age, which was certainly not unexpected, significant cohort and periodic effects were also recorded. The decline in nuptiality over such a short period of time is all the more startling in view of the fact that the birth years compared in the FFS were not far apart, as the study examined immediately successive cohorts of those born between 1952 and 1972, i.e. a total of only two decades. The decline of the marriage cannot be overlooked. Traditional nuptial behaviour tended rather to be preserved in rural areas and environments characterised by the presence of religious beliefs (Hypotheses 1 and 2). The overwhelming cohort influence not to get married is attributable to the process of "modernisation", more specifically to "changing values" (from the extensive literature on this subject see *Meyer/Schulze* 1989, *Tyrell* 1990, *Beck-Gernsheim* 1994, *Beck* 1986, *Lesthaeghe* 1992, *UN* 1993, *Diwald/Wehner* 1996) or to the trend away from the "standard of the male breadwinner" (*Ostner* 1995, 90), once so strongly entrenched in western Germany. It is not possible to examine this issue more closely here, as no questions were posed in the survey regarding attitudes towards marriage or figures on individual incomes. As education and training periods lengthened in the course of educational expansion, marriages were postponed – an indication of persistence of the traditional view that a family could be founded only when earning opportunities were available on a continuous basis (H9). Yet another powerful motivating force is attributable to the occupations in which respondents were engaged. Those in skilled occupations or professions apparently placed little emphasis on marriages as "intended parental unions" (H10); it is possible that people in this category prefer consensual unions, but this will require further analysis. Education level itself had a positive effect, i.e. better educated people married more frequently than the less educated, contributing in this way to the conservation of traditional middle-class behaviour patterns. This is somewhat difficult to explain in light of the findings regarding the postponement of marriage among those in skilled occupations or professions.

It is apparent that the homogamy criteria which dictate that wives should not be older or better educated than their husbands continue to apply unchanged. Such "normal" partner relationships tended to produce earlier marriages (H4; incomes at the time of marriage could not be ascertained; see *Hullen* 1995, *Klein* 1996). Also evident is a traditional or inherited behaviour pattern, often experienced in the divorce of parents, involving the tendency not to seek lifelong binding relationships (H5); indeed, a periodic negative influence upon marriage behaviour may gain strength with rising divorce rates. The positive effects of the presence of consensual unions and children or pregnancies upon the tendency to marry have generally persisted unaltered. In qualitative terms these represent the most influential factors, as everyday experience would confirm: It is generally taken for granted that people living in consensual unions, particularly the younger adults among them, intend to marry, especially when they become parents.

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