



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth



2007 — European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

20 Year Old **Women** and **Men** Today

Life Plans, Role Models,
Attitudes to Gender Equality

Women

Role Models

Men

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Life Plans, Role Models,
Attitudes to Gender Equality

**A Qualitative Survey by Sinus Sociovision for the
Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women
and Youth**

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I.

Introduction

The 8th March is International Women's Day; 2007 also marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Federal Ministry for Women's Affairs (Bundesfrauenministerium) in 1987. The anniversary is also an occasion for a little stock-taking in our own backyard: how do today's 20 year olds see themselves and their role in society? What do career, partnership, family and children mean to them and how are they planning for their own future? How do they view the changing relationship of men and women across the various phases of the post-war history of the Federal Republic of Germany and what prospects does it hold for the future? How do today's 20 year olds view the development of equal opportunity and gender equality?

Providing answers to such questions is the aim of the present exclusive report commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and based on a qualitative ethnomethodological survey. Group discussions lasting several hours were used to profile the 20 year olds, and great care was taken in group recruitment and composition to ensure that the overall sample contained young adults with all levels of secondary school educational attainment, with various social backgrounds and with a broad spectrum of current social status and educational paths (voluntary year of social service [FSJ], jobbing, training/apprenticeship, university/college).

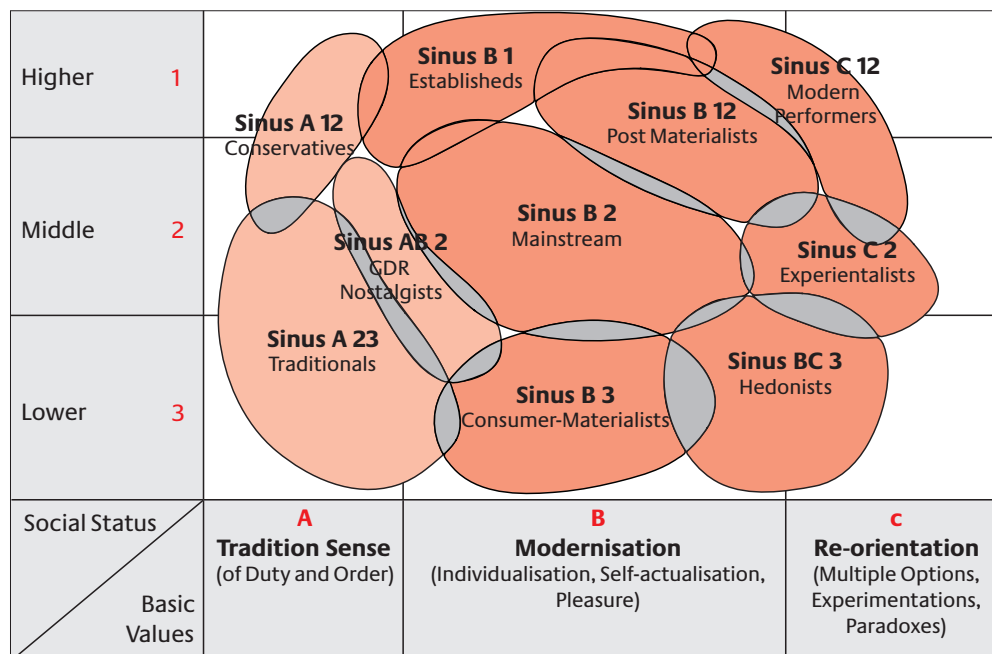
Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the first results of the qualitative analysis was to show that there is no such thing as **"the"** 20 year olds. What we have instead is a wide variety of attitudes and motives, some of which are diametrically opposed to each other, and which all demonstrate the great diversity of life perspectives and perceptions among 20 year olds. In descending order of importance, the differentiation factors at play here are:

- I Gender
- I Education
- I Social milieu (own social milieu, parental milieu)

In terms of gender identity and role models, there are not merely the “divisions” between men and women one might expect but also differences in attitudes to, and visions of, gender equality between “A-level” school students (Abiturienten) on the one hand and school students from more vocationally oriented schools (Realschule/Hauptschule) on the other. Secondary education is a key differentiation factor. A life world depth analysis suggests that the reasons for this are to be found in the influences exerted by the social milieu of the parents’ house and in the gradual formation of a fixed social milieu among young people.

The graphic below offers a model of the social milieus prevalent in Germany¹ highlighting those milieus in which the majority of today’s 20 year olds are now living or into which they are being socialised.² The broad socio-cultural spectrum is very striking.

Focal Social Milieu for 20 Year Olds



1 The model of the so-called “Sinus-Milieus®“ is based on continuous social scientific research of life worlds in Germany. The theoretical and methodological background of such research into the interaction of basic values, life styles, and social status is informed by ethnomethodology, social scientific hermeneutics, semiological analysis of popular culture and analysis of social structures. Milieus bring people of similar views and styles of life together. Analysis equally takes account of basic values and popular conceptions of work, family, leisure time, money, and consumption. Thus Sinus milieus take an holistic view of individuals and all the reference systems of their life worlds and can offer more information and better tools for decision-making than traditional target group approaches. Sinus Milieus are the result of nearly 30 years of research in the social sciences. Since its conception the model has been continually adapted to meet the changing cultural conditions and sociodemographics of our society. Currently the model is subject to assessment on an annual basis with several hundred qualitative explorations and more than 60,000 representative interviews in numerous independent samplings.

2 The Sinus Milieus „Conservatives“, „Traditionals“ and „GDR Nostalgists“ have a very high age composition and comparatively few “new young people”.

To gain an understanding of young men and women's "natural view" of the society in which they are living, it is helpful if we first understand in which stage of post-war history these young men and women were born. For them the 1968 generation, the progressive and emancipatory movements of the 1970s and the ecological movement of the 1980s are all so much ancient history. The social and cultural policy issues thrown up by such movements are now so many givens, nourishing the ground on which this young generation stands, and from which it seeks new perspectives and orientations.

The "Post-Materialist" and "Modern Performer" social model milieus have a particular relevance in terms of gender equality policy-making and practice. This is where the visions of gender equality are embedded, and where they form an integral part of their vision of the good life and a just society – which women associate with a great deal of optimism and independence. Women are the prime movers and multipliers of the gender equality policies of tomorrow. Even so, we should realise that for them gender equality remains an abstract value as they have hardly encountered specific instances of discrimination in their lives and have never had to fight for gender equality or push it through.

Nearly all young adults today attach a huge importance to the "family". There is a very marked desire for a lifelong relationship and family. It is a vision young people cling to precisely because they suspect that it will not always come to fruition.³ Women and men have clear ideas about the shape their future family lives shall take. Yet when it comes to defining what constitutes "a good mother," "a good father" and a "successful partnership" their perceptions can widely differ. In this respect, even though gender equality policy-making has achieved much, the fact still remains that in many milieus – not just in the social underclass but also in the mainstream of the middle-class centre and especially among young men – the traditional division of roles is still highly pronounced. On the other hand, public espousal of "gender equality" and viewing its goals as both just and good still remains an undisputed and socially desirable norm.

³ This is the generation for which divorce no longer meant the scandal of a social stigma and failure in terms of personal life history, but was rather seen as a wide-spread phenomena as many of them had seen their own parents separate or divorce. This is yet another reason for the high value currently attached to marriage and the family.

II. Key Findings

Gender equality between men and women is a basic tenet for today's 20 year olds which they view as a significant social and (family) policy-making achievement. Yet in their everyday parlance they do not speak about "gender equality" which is a strange and rather stilted term for them. They speak of "equal opportunities" and mean equality of treatment both before the law and in everyday life. If they think about it more closely, they are certainly aware of the gap that exists between legal aspects and reality. Yet this is precisely the point at which another key finding manifests itself: such differentiation has no personal relevance for them because they have (yet) to engage with gender equality in their everyday lives. They are at a stage of their life histories when they (still) have not experienced any discrimination due to gender. Forming a partnership, founding a family and starting a career are all stages that lie ahead of them.

Today young women and men take it for granted that they all enjoy the same starting conditions and rights! This was by no means self-evident twenty years ago. Rather it elicited the normative and moral response in women (of higher education) – women are entitled to this too and we need to fight for it!

Yet the remove of their life worlds to the theme of "gender equality" is only superficial. Beneath the seemingly indifferent surface, each sex harbours an acute sensitivity to the self-images and ambitions of the other. Furthermore, women and men have different ways of perceiving themselves and others both on the emotional and on the rational level.

A closer analysis also reveals deep fractures in the acceptance of social and political gender equality. Attitudes to the outreach attained by gender equality differ according to gender, education and social background. Whilst women of higher educational attainment consider that the process of equality between the sexes is still by no means at an end and obviously wish to see it continued, particularly men of lower education view it as having long reached its goals. In their opinion many of the present efforts overshoot the mark, are superfluous or even futile. This suggests that in terms of subjective sensibilities there is a broad spectrum of meaning between assertive self-awareness on the one hand and defensive fear of loss on the other.

Women with Abitur (A-levels) demonstrate a self-confident gender identity. They embrace an optimistic view of their own professional and private prospects and develop their life plans according to their chances and options. They neither have a militant attitude **against** men (as the first generation of the women's movement had) nor do they allow themselves to

be unnerved by potential hurdles and barriers. These women are not “grateful” to the emancipation movement, they do not see themselves as the successor generation in the women’s movement nor do they identify with it, rather they take the rights and opportunities enjoyed by today’s women as their own birth right. For them they are part of the normal fabric of everyday life and need neither to be questioned nor justified.

At the same time they have a positive appreciation of gender equality policy-making as this has broken with traditional taboos, liberated women from discriminatory structures and gender roles and placed such moves on a solid statutory basis. Yet for them all this belongs to history. Today – from their individualistic, libertarian perspective – every individual woman is alone responsible for asserting her own rights in her relationships, job and leisure time as well as in her dealings with the other sex. These women do not seek to delegate such issues to some instance of state authority, but rather wish to shoulder their own responsibility for them and see them through with full confidence in their own abilities, intelligence and perseverance. They also have a clear view about only wanting to be together with a man who shares their idea of an equal partnership – whether it be in terms of employment or raising children. They have recognised and accepted that perfect equality is an unrealistic and unsound utopia. They neither see themselves as (potential) victims nor in terms of effective traditional role models.

These women have a playful attitude to the clichés of emancipation, juggling with traditional stereotypes of “being a woman” and “being a man”. In their speech acts it is not always readily apparent whether they are merely playing with these clichés, or seriously identifying with them or distancing themselves. The key element here is their self-confident and uninhibited attitude to “equality” and “gender equality” which allows for no subjective barrier and poses no problems. These women assume optimistically that a good education (especially higher education) will be the gateway to a successful professional life and career and that if a child comes along they will share housework, raising the child and work with their partner on an equal basis. Yet they do not yet want to commit themselves but rather keep all their options open: multi-optionality.

In marked contrast **men with the same level of education** (their potential partners) feel a deep ambivalence. On the rational and ideal level they embrace and subscribe to the tenets of gender equality, whilst at the same time they are plagued by a deep sense of insecurity with regard to their female coevals who are attractive to them and yet also objects of suspicion – precisely because they have such unbounded self-confidence, identify with a modern role model and (no longer) display weaknesses. In terms of their own “new gender identity”, on the other hand, these men lack **positive** role models with which they can identify.

They were socialised by their experience of growing up during the 1980s when the father was the main bread-winner but where the mother could also assert her right to employment and indeed go to work. They conceptualised this as a **loosening** of traditional gender roles, not as their **complete dissolution**. Their – standard and normative – perspective is that women gained new chances and opportunities which did not create drawbacks or new duties (in terms of housework or child care) for the men (their fathers): women were raised to the level of men without the men being curtailed in any way.

The men of higher secondary school education wish to free themselves of the (semi)traditional role models of the kind experienced during their childhood; they are searching for a new kind of flexible role identity that goes against the grain of their own experience of socialisation. In searching for a balance in this process, they experience women of similar educational attainment (their potential partners) as “extremely” self-confident and tough.

Even so, a partner with a traditional understanding of gender roles hold no appeal to them; what they are rather looking for in a partner is a modern, intelligent and independent woman with whom they can hold a conversation on an equal footing. Quite apart from the emotional ups and downs of their relationships, their previous experience with girl friends is coloured by the impression that they have been “taken over” and “patronised” by them. For instance, men reported that in their own subjective view of the relationship it was their girl friends who made the decisions, with them assuming a passive role.

Men of average education, but especially those with **lower education**, also feel anxieties with regard to the opposite sex. But such uncertainties are of a different kind to those experienced by men with higher education. One reason for this is that these men have different views on women. On the one hand they see the superior students (the later “business women”) to whom they feel inferior both in terms of verbal skills and social status, whilst on the other there are the women of a comparable level of education (their potential partners) who are now bitches, now bimbos – but who can always tailor their feminine characteristics to meet particular situations and needs.

In contrast to men of higher educational attainment who contemplate a permanent arrangement of a partnership of equals, the anxieties of men of average or lower education are limited to the phase of finding a partner and forming a relationship. The main thing for them is finding a woman, once they have “got” her, they feel certain that a traditional, to them more conducive kind of distribution of roles, will take over. They themselves have no desire to be pushed into the kitchen or over to the diaper changing table. What they are looking for is a modest, modern, independent kind of woman who naturally as a mother will gladly take over the (“nature-ordained”) tasks of housework and child care, and, if at all possible, will also earn a few pennies on the side. These men are unable and unwilling to see themselves later on as staying at home to raise their child. They would rather give their own child into the care of their parents or in-laws.

In terms of employment too, they see further moves towards greater equality as being totally absurd. When contemplating women as welders, engine fitters, road workers, roofers etc., they highlight the physical difference (strength) on the one hand, whilst on the other they see a privileged masculine sphere of influence which the admission of women would only disrupt or disturb with demands for special rights (such a view is reinforced by erotic innuendo and fantasies of the kind “women in spaghetti straps on the roof” or “women with sweat soaked tops on the factory floor”).

Women with average/lower education feel comfortable about their prospects within a relationship. They see only advantages in nearly all areas of life: a free choice of profession and career for women, equal rights to money and power within a relationship and so on. “More equality” appears dubious to them because they have no goals in this respect, and suspect that further steps in this direction could lead to additional burdens on women. It would also pose a threat to their own life model (part-time worker and mother) or force them to adopt new roles with which they might not be able to cope (career woman with child).

In the age group of 20 year olds gender equality is understood as a topic by women for women. Gender equality brings with it tangible benefits for women as it removes earlier forms of disadvantage (e.g. the same wage for the same work, equal career opportunities, the opportunity for self fulfilment in both professional and private life). “Men” and “women” both have a premonition that this will have implications for the way the sexes live and work together – only so far neither have had specific experience of this nor of the barriers and conflicts it might give rise to. In contrast to the women, the men feel themselves to be highly unsettled and on the defensive. The reason for this is that they see dynamism, power and assertive self confidence only on the part of women, whilst the positive role they could play in this process (still) eludes them, and they (still) have no positive vision of the role they could play as men.

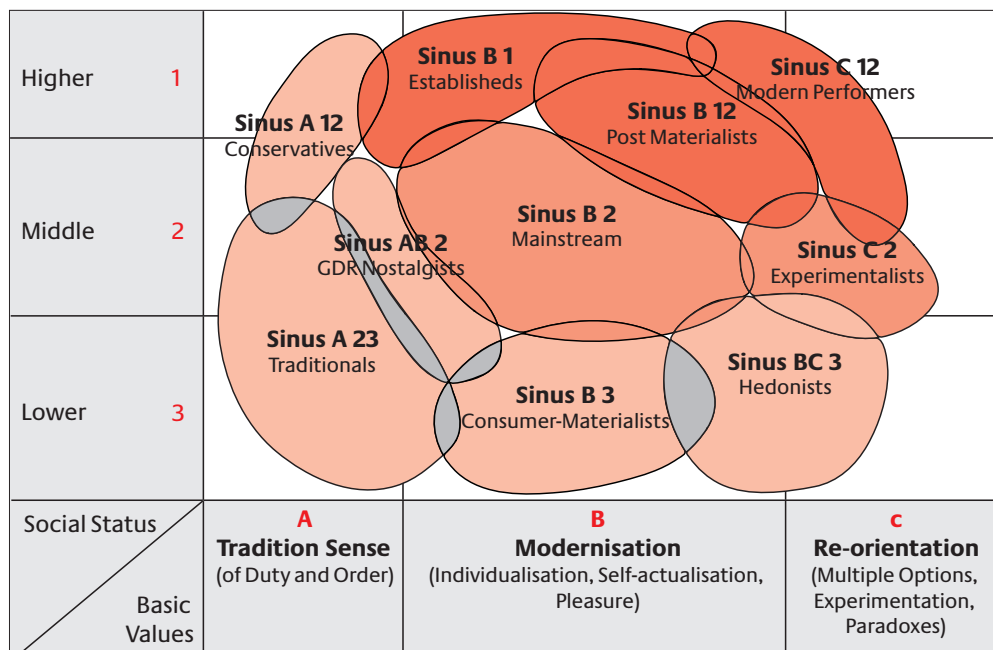
Gender equality policies are still perceived as repair and support policies for **women**, not as policies addressing both sexes and not as a creative shaping force. Thus in the perceptions of twenty year olds gender equality policies address inequalities and have so far failed to focus on men as their target group. Against this backdrop, the message is that that gender equality policy-making still has important and specific tasks to address in the future – both in terms of structures and in terms of the communication of gender equality aims and goals.

III.

20 Year Olds with Higher School Education

20 year olds with higher schooling (Abitur, university entrance qualifications) have a clear life world focus in the Sinus social milieus “Established” “Post Materialist”, and “Modern Performers” whilst a few of them are situated in the „Experimentalist“ and “Mainstream“ milieus.

Focal Social Milieus for 20 Year Olds with Abitur



3.1 Women

Freedom, Self-confidence, and Optimism

What are the current topics of pressing concern to 20 year old women who have taken their Abitur (A-Levels)? School is now behind them and a new major phase of life begins when they enter university or take up their training. They see themselves on the threshold of real life, as designers actively engaged in laying out their own future and their own paths to it.

What is striking here is their sense of optimism and eager anticipation at finally being able to take control of their own lives in terms of periods abroad, choice of career, leaving home, making new friends etc. They show a marked confidence in their own ability to cope with all these ventures. Although they do display certain anxieties about the future, these are mainly

focussed on the fact that as yet they still lack a specific career objective. These young women frequently have a keen awareness of their own interests and talents yet are uncertain about into which form of career, study course or professional training their abilities should be directed. Even so, such fears and anxieties are never overwhelming nor coloured by self-pity. Typically they are projected onto the women from their immediate environments where in particular their teachers and parents have more anxiety about the future than they themselves do.

- ! *“I think that very often it tends to be your teachers and your parents who put you under pressure and make you anxious rather than you yourself.”*
- ! *“Sure you’re always hearing about the huge numbers of academics in the dole queue but that’s not something that should put you off. When you have a clear idea about what you want, you should go ahead and do it and never mind the gloomy forecasts.”*
- ! *“You’ve got to be prepared for some pretty tough going but if you start stressing yourself out, that’s not very helpful. Being frightened is the first step to being a loser, losing your motivation.”*

Their overarching goal is to live a satisfying, fulfilled, self-determined life full of variety. These young women are open for what the future might offer them in chances and opportunities and wish to be flexible in their responses. Unlike previous generations of women, they have no fixed and predictable path marked out for them.

Life Planning: Career first, Kids afterwards

Young women with Abitur self-confidently expect that later on in life they will be working in an interesting job. “Work” for them mainly has positive connotations – it is much more than “merely” earning money. They want a good professional qualification and/or a degree and then to find a job with good promotion opportunities, creative freedom, and opportunities for personal development, and that also brings a certain social status along with good remuneration. The majority of young women would also like to have a family – for them children are part of “the good life”. Even so, they deliberately postpone any decision about family planning for an unspecified time in the future as they are aware that returning to work after having had a child is much easier for women once they have reached a certain level in the company.

Confidence in the Compatibility of Career and Children

These young women are very well aware of the challenge involved in reconciling the demands of family and career. They understand this challenge, however, not in the terms of a social and political agenda, but rather as a **personal** issue for which each man and women must find their own private solution. When it comes to planning their own future, these women do not insist on and reckon with fixed statutory rights (parental leave etc.) but rather draw up their own individual life plans. A “life-long partner” is generally lacking but these women have an unshakeable sense of optimism and self-confidence that when the time comes they will negotiate these issues on a basis of equality in their relationship.

On the whole they see a broad range of possibilities for women of their generation to plan a life with children, and show a high degree of tolerance for different individual solutions from „full-time mother and housewife“ and part-time worker to „career woman with her own housekeeper“.

! *“We need different kinds of women. We need emancipated women who go out to work, but we also need women who stay at home and bring up their children in the right direction.”*

! *“Either I can have children or I can have a career, because children are such a huge responsibility, and I don’t know whether I’d be able to cope with it and if I couldn’t cope it would always be to the detriment of the child.”*

! *“If I didn’t go out to work, I believe that I would be missing something. When I’m happy, it’s better for my child than if I just stayed at home.”*

No matter how open these women are and how confidently they talk about their career aspirations – the idea of going back to work shortly after giving birth and leaving their child in the care of someone else elicits in all of them a spontaneous defensive reflex. They want “for the time being” to stay at home when the children are there, but at the same time to return to work “soon”. Their ideas of the period of time involved here are rather nebulous and lack clear outlines. The women are not aware that the words “staying at home and bringing up the children” could in fact involve a very protracted time frame, within which limitations could well be placed on their own personal freedom and autonomy, leaving them less independent and less able to decide for themselves than now.

What is the reason for such limited awareness of the problems involved? To answer this, it would be helpful to glance into the young women’s life histories. Although they all come from homes where their own mother went out to work, only in exceptional cases was the mother engaged in full time employment; in general the mother’s working hours coincided with the young women’s school hours. Thus although they knew “theoretically” during their childhood and adolescence that their mothers went out to work, in practical everyday life the mother was always fully there for her family.

Furthermore, on the emotional and preconscious level, these young women have only a vague notion about their mothers as **independent people**. They might have a very thorough knowledge of their parents’ life histories, yet in these their mothers are principally perceived in their function and role as family carers and the person to run to when you have problems. They appreciate and praise her for all the benefits she has given – but within the strictures of a narrow focus on the mother role. They either ignore or take scant account of any inner conflicts the mother might have experienced, personal crises due to abandoned career aspirations or contradictory feelings due to acting a variety of different roles.⁴

4 We need to ask here how mothers present their “life stories” within the family. Are they personally satisfied with their families and role models? Are there possible reasons for dissatisfaction? Did mothers have other aims in life – in terms of the organisation of family, work etc.? Do mothers try to hide their own feelings for the sake of their children and the well-being of the family when they are dissatisfied with the allocation and distribution of their roles?

A Positive Vision of Motherhood

Being a “good mother” is important for these young women, but in our modern times it is a notion that is no longer self-evident. Whilst they have only vague ideas about many issues they shall have to face in the future, they have a very precise image of what it means to be a mother: someone who is caring, who spends a lot of time with her child, who is there for it, who teaches it values (**tolerance, charity, faith, self-confidence**) and opens the door to much important experience („*I want to be the one who shows my child the trees and animals in the forest.*“).⁵ This is a romanticised and ideally optimistic image of motherhood onto which the young women project themselves full of energy and ideas with clear educational goals and reflective pedagogical styles.

- I *“When I have children, I shall stay at home, there’s nothing wrong with that. I don’t want to hand my child over to a child minder, I want to bring it up myself. That’s another reason why it’s good that there are two sides to women.”*
- I *“Nowadays there are plenty of families where both parents are in full time work and the child has a nanny. I want my child to grow up in my care so it’s me who teaches him the basic essentials of life and not some woman I don’t know.”*

Expectations about Partners and the Father of their Children

Looking for a partner is not a mine field for these women (as it is with men of higher education) but rather something they see will simply happen sooner or later. They definitely view living together with a man in terms of a partnership where major matters like housework and bringing up the children are shared between the two of them. They wish for an understanding partner who supports his wife when she wishes to return to work after her period of parental leave and who, on his side, is also prepared to cut back on his career aspirations and take part-time employment that enables him to also play his part in bringing up the child.

Even if the image of the ever-present mother figures strongly in the imagination of young women, the image of the **ideal father** for the child also involves the same degree of physical presence. Both partners make an equal contribution and are equally available for the child, which not only benefits each of them but the child as well. Yet although child raising shared equally between the two partners is an ideal aspiration for these young women, it is not a basic condition when it comes to choosing a partner!

- I *„I think it’s great because the child gets a great deal more out of it because it gets two points of view.“*

What is interesting here is that these women perceive this field as one which they can shape and design according to their own individual volition. They are confident that they will be

⁵ Young women with Abitur have a contemplative disposition and wonder critically whether “having children is at all worthwhile” in the world such as it is. The decision to have a child is a conscious one; children offer them an opportunity to pass on their own values and goals. Against this background, they attach a fundamental importance to education, already having ambitious educational goals not just for the development of their own child but also for the development of culture in our society. Only from such a perspective can their wish for children and their idealised conceptions of motherhood and education be understood.

able to negotiate these issues with their future partners “on an equal footing”. They see themselves as being fully liberated from the dubious cultural legacy of history (i.e. traditional role definitions) as well as from structural constraints and framework conditions.

Role Models

Young women with higher education dispose of a catalogue of model characteristics that go to define what being a modern woman means: intelligence, self-confidence, strength of character, perseverance, discipline, an unconditional advocacy of their own opinions (the “power woman”). These key inner values are complemented by external attributes. In this respect the young women engage actively with the ideals and dictates of the beauty industry to which they oppose the attributes of charisma and naturalness which they hold dear. They counter the drive to a lifestyle aesthetic exerted by the media (long hair, slim figure, impeccable skin, immaculate appearance, exuberance and joie de vivre etc.) with their own individual self-images. The current emphasis on the importance of outward appearance and the diktat of popular ideas of beauty holds a potential conflict for these young women: on the one hand they have no wish to slavishly adhere to such prescriptions, on the other they cannot quite elude their influence.⁶

As a counterpart to all this, what makes a „great guy“? What is striking here is that in answering this question the young women do not specify any typically male or female qualities, but rather sketch the portrait of a “person” they find intriguing who has a strong character and who is intelligent, self disciplined, self-confident and forceful. Just as they sketch the ideal portrait of a woman with classical male **and** female qualities, for their ideal image of a man they evolve a profile of qualities which blends masculine strengths with attributes that used to be the exclusive domain of women in the classic division of gender roles: beauty, emotionality, sensuousness, gentleness. In this respect such role descriptions are markedly different from those given by young women with lower education.

What is noteworthy in them is the way that certain attributes from the set of traditional masculine values are no longer considered as being “exclusively masculine”: self-assurance, professional competence, success, dynamism, purposefulness, a strong will, efficiency. What we see here is a partial adoption of these qualities for the modern ideal of what it means to be a woman. Today’s young women lay claim to such attributes as a matter of course.

Retrospective

1940s–1960s: Proof of Independence, Backslide into Disenfranchisement, then the big Break-through

Young women with Abitur have a much more differentiated and specific view⁷ of the 1950s/1960s than all their other counterparts. They see the strict hierarchies in society, the family and within relationships – and they are aware of the restrictions and limitations such

⁶ Young women disapprovingly notice that men of this kind frequently fail to notice such charisma and tend only to find the standard outward attributes of femininity attractive.

⁷ What is decisive in terms of the analysis of the retrospectives is not whether such descriptions are historically correct but rather which development stages they take account of, which breaks and development high points they identify and what meaning such a reconstruction of the history of gender equality has for them today.

hierarchies entailed for women. Yet they also see the historical background which nourished the emancipation movements – World War II and the post-war period – as a time when women of necessity had to take up “men’s work” and found and feed their families during the difficult times of housing shortages due to bombing, mass expulsions and the economic reconstruction of the country. In those times too, women took on the “independent role of a man” and displayed “male virtues” like force, foresight and responsibility as a matter of course. What is intriguing about this perspective on the past is that the main image shaping and colouring it is not the conformist housewife and mother of the 1960s but the Trümmerfrau of the 1940s – the female pioneers of post-war reconstruction clearing away the bomb damage.

The 1950s and early 1960s are seen as a time of retreat when men began once more to subject women to massive regulation, undermining their independence, leading them into social and financial dependency and limiting them to a handful of tasks and duties centred on the home and children. This perception of historical processes is interesting precisely because it is predicated on a view of women that naturally assumes that men and women are both equally competent in mastering the complexities of life!

The late 1960s are seen as a time of great upheaval and transformation not only for women but for society as a whole. The Woman’s Movement is seen as a marvellous achievement of the women of that generation who were no longer prepared to accept male supremacy as part of a natural order. It was a movement of **women for women** – directed against a world of men who were not prepared to surrender their privileges without a struggle. The self-emancipation of women is a motif firmly anchored in the consciousness of young women today that also feeds their confidence that they too shall be able to successfully assert their needs as women vis-à-vis men – especially as they now enjoy more auspicious start-out conditions than those given to women in the 1960s.

- ! *“Never in a month of Sundays would a man back then have hit on the idea of saying to his wife, ‚Hey, why don’t you go out and get a job and I’ll stay at home and look after the baby’.”*
- ! *“They knew that they (Note: men) couldn’t cope with it, couldn’t deal with taking over the housework and taking care of the baby, it was easier for them to go out to work for eight hours a day.”*
- ! *“Then there was also the fear of seeing that women in their professions could be just as good as men or even better, the fear of being outstripped by the weaker sex.”*

The 1980s: More Freedom for Women

In their retrospective the 1980s are seen as a time of relative tranquillity. The trench warfare of the emancipation movement had been fought and more markedly reciprocal relations between the sexes had grown out of the hierarchical order. It was “accepted” that women went out to work but it was by no means normal and still did not constitute a social norm for women themselves. The majority of women were in poorly paid jobs with few prospects of

advancement through professional qualification. Yet at the same time the new hard-won status of women manifested itself in terms of outward appearance: they were no longer baby dolls and dolly-birds but rather **self-confident, sexy young women**.

The Present: Gender Equality as a Global Challenge

Gender equality is still an important issue today as in Germany there is still a discrepancy between its enshrinement in statutory law and everyday reality. Only the focus has now shifted – back to issues of gender equality from a global perspective: it no longer concerns the implementation of women’s rights in German society but rather concentrates on issues like women’s rights in Islamic countries and China, female circumcision in Africa and so on.

It is significant that women put their main emphasis on equality of **opportunity** (i.e. the statutory framework) rather than on gender equality (its specific implementation and practice). Such a perspective is informed by their sense of confidence and their libertarian view that even though the individual needs the political and legal framework, in terms of private life it is she herself who is largely responsible for implementing or asserting such rights. In terms of their private life (relationships, child raising) they are adamant that they shall not allow themselves to be oppressed, nor let anybody prescribe to them what they should do nor let anybody take away their chances. They display a high confidence in their own ability to shape matters in their immediate environment according to their own ideas and to push them through in the teeth of opposition.

Yet they display a more sceptical attitude when it comes to contemplating structures in the world of work. Even though increasing numbers of women are now working in professions that previously were the exclusive preserve of men, and taking over managerial positions on boards where men still form the majority, they still see the way ahead for women as a long and thorny road. Young women see a massive inequality in terms of remuneration: women in the same positions are still paid less than their male counterparts. Yet discussion of such issues is still underpinned by the optimistic belief that here too a change shall soon come about with a further impetus removing the last false attitudes and unjust structures. What is particularly striking in this context is that young women are decidedly hostile to women’s quotas which have their historical *raison d’être* in first helping women to establish themselves in the enterprise sector. Today’s young women wish to be employed for their own skills, abilities and professional qualifications, not in fulfilment of some quota.

! *“A woman wants to be taken on her own terms, but if the only reason she’s employed is because they have to take a woman to fulfil the quota, well, I just don’t know.”*

Gender Equality Policies

“Gender equality” is perceived as an awkward, artificial term with the negative connotations of rigidity, standardisation, hierarchy and heteronomy. Even though they understand gender equality as the practical implementation of equality of opportunity, they have no wish to see such a condition artificially produced and promoted. In their view total gender equality of women and men would create stereotypes and eliminate the interesting differences between the sexes, and is neither desirable nor reasonable – both from their personal standpoints and in terms of their experiential horizons.

On the other hand, these young women see clearly and critically that there are social structures, trends and media-driven scenarios that lead young girls in the 10-16 age bracket in particular back into the traps of handed-down elementary role stereotyping. Key examples of this include the reduction of a person to her outward appearance, a conspicuous body-oriented eroticised self presentation (as clones of pop stars but also as “normal” young girls as shown in „Deutschland sucht den Superstar“, the German TV format of “Pop Idol”); the way fashion increasingly lays emphasis on female attributes with body-hugging skimpy tops and ultra-miniskirts; and the trend among very young girls to take up make-up – to mention but a few.

However, a note of caution should be sounded here as such impressions should not be construed as constituting a well founded critique of culture. Such criticisms voiced by 20 year olds about the “young generation” are always also a celebration of their own superiority. They do not view such phenomena as posing a real threat to the achievements of the women’s movement and gender equality nor as constituting a setback to the advances made thus far.

The expectations they have about the role to be played by gender equality in the future are not posed in terms of further initiatives from the state but rather of a more private, socio-economic and socio-cultural nature: acceptance of women in certain professions (such as in the technology and scientific sector), acceptance of the physical differences between women and men, abolition of sexual stereotyping in key areas of life (work and personal relationships), equitable division of labour in housework and child care, and professional opportunities for both partners within the relationship.

They see gender equality policy-making as being called on to address existing inequalities in pay between women and men. However, beyond this they have scarcely any (specific) notions as to what the areas of responsibility and aims and goals of gender equality policy-making could be in the future. Policy-making in the past has done a great service in establishing equality between women and men on a necessary, comprehensive but also largely sufficient legal basis. It is now up to society and to each individual in society to put such policies into action in their own lives.

There are grounds for supposing that such an attitude shall change the moment the women move in with a partner, have a child and establish a family, take maternity leave from their job – and are then first confronted with the reality of inequality. Conversely it must certainly be seen as an indisputable achievement of gender equality policy-making and the gender equality culture in general that young women today tackle their gender equality future with such a high degree of optimism and self-responsibility. This is both an “asset” and a resource on which further initiatives of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs (BMFSFJ) can build.

3.2 Men

Little Optimism – much Anxiety and Stress

Young men with the Abitur in their pockets find themselves in a phase of orientation where they are confronted by sets of contradictory directions and bedevilled by their own antagonistic sensibilities. On the one hand they are eager to finally take control of their own lives, to evolve their own goals and try out different life styles. On the other, excessive expectations placed on them by their professional and private environments make them feel anxious and place them under massive pressure.

They see themselves in a decisive phase of life where they should be plotting a course for their futures and where they need to take great care not to make a wrong decision. They show no trace of the easy-going imperturbability that characterises young women with the same level of education. On the rational level these men know that decisions also mean opportunities, yet at the moment their outlook is dominated by a need to avoid risks and mistakes.

On the surface they enjoy the freedom they have after taking the Abitur yet they are also keenly aware of the reverse side of such liberty – the need to take decisions in a very short space of time. This is now the crunch point that decides on the rest of their lives! At the same time their families, friends, teachers and the media all seem to suggest that the way ahead won't be easy. Which profession should they choose? And what chances will it offer on the job market? How much competition will there be? Given the employment situation at home, wouldn't it better for them to go abroad? Hanging back and dawdling, changing tack and taking up a course of training as a way of testing themselves and becoming better acquainted with their own aptitudes, following the wrong path and making mistakes – these are all things that – in their view – nowadays nobody can afford to indulge in.

At the same time they are also making the experience that nobody can really help them with the decisions they have to take. They feel themselves very much left to their own devices and under enormous pressure to make the right choice of profession, to complete their studies in double quick time whilst also collecting all the practical work experience and foreign stays needed to give them a chance on the job market. They describe their perspectives as being “by no means rosy”, in fact as rather depressing. They search for security, guidance and help in making decisions but they hardly find it.

They are aware that many of their counterparts are in a similar situation. Thus they do not see their situation as being their own personal “fault” but rather understand it as being the fate of their generation. Their group of friends at school, which used to be such an important network, has broken down into a set of lone warriors. Everybody is on his own searching for a solution for his future. Even though most of the young men are in a similar situation, there is no longer any way for them to offer each other mutual support. Comfort and consolation can be given but not help.

! *“There’s not really much time to do any thinking, at some point you’ll suddenly find you’ve missed the boat.”*

! *“I’m really very worried about how it’s all going to work out, about whether I’ll get the job I want and what the future will bring.”*

! *“There really isn’t any proper information getting through to our generation.”*

At the same time young men see themselves as having to comply with the social model of remaining “cool” and “laid back” no matter how high the pressure, of being the type of guy who demonstrates optimism, flexibility and mobility, who easily masters any problems and views his life as one great opportunity.

! *“Nowadays you’ve got to be a dab hand at selling yourself, there’s no room for that kind of “couldn’t care less” attitude.”*

“Setting a course for a future career” is such a pressing necessity for these young men that any thought of founding a family is postponed for an indefinite future point when they’ve found their course and are steaming ahead on the right track.

! *“You can only start thinking about having a family when you’ve got your life worked out.”*

Retrospective

1950s/1960s: Restrictions that also lend Stability

When grappling with time pressure, performance expectations and a sense of insecurity, these young men look back at the 1950s and 60s and see that “life was much simpler then” Their immediate positive response is that fixed sets of rules and a clear division of roles lent structure to everyday life and security to the individual. Men went out to work, women stayed at home and looked after the children. There wasn’t a need back then to argue and negotiate every single point. Partnerships generally were lifelong affairs. And life itself was a lot more predictable, and less full of insecurity: *“You couldn’t do all that much wrong”*.

Young men today are certainly aware of the downside of gender division, the restrictions it means for the individual and the heavy hand of social control. In terms of what young men today miss, need, and aspire to, it is highly illuminating to see that the 1950s and 60s function for them as screen on which they can project their wishes and aspirations. Despite all their zest for freedom, these young men (in marked contrast to the young women) clearly suffer from the complexity, unpredictability and dynamism of present-day society.

60s to 90s: Emancipation, Stagnation, New Horizons

After the huge impetus of the emancipation movement in the late 60s and the women’s movement of the 1970s, young men view the 1980s – the period of their early childhood – as a time when there was relatively little change in men and women’s lives. In their view it was first the onset of the 1990s with increasing acceptance of day-care for children in western Germany that enabled more women to go out to work and take up certain professions.

The Present: More Freedom for Women – more Insecurity for Men

From their own perspective these young men consider that women now have more freedom and greater opportunities in nearly all areas of life than they had in the 1950s. This is a development they view as necessary and just, and to which they give their unqualified support.

Yet they are also at pains to emphasise the ambivalent nature of emancipation. They emphasise how important it is whilst also highlighting the downside it entails for them personally. They see the improvements it brings for women – but fail to see any positive aspects it brings for men. On the contrary, men today are not only plagued by anxieties in terms of choice of profession and the employment market but also have lost all sense of security in their private lives.

Self-confident, educated women who wish to pursue a successful career after having children now have less incentives to remain in a relationship. They are more inclined to take the initiative and end an unsatisfactory partnership – even when children are involved. For men this brings a very marked sense of personal insecurity. From their subjective standpoint relationships and marriage are now a lifelong risk.

Being a man Today: A Wide Choice of possible Roles

The current notion of the politically correct and modern man is one who is readily willing, and who has all the intrinsic motivation needed, to take an active part in bringing up his children, who is prepared to stay at home and share raising the child with his partner, give up on his own professional ambitions for the sake of his family and perhaps take a part-time job.

At the same time among their friends and in society these young men still feel how the traditional male role model shapes the expectations placed on them – the man as mover and shaker, strong, determined, tough, successful, striving for power and status yet also laid back, cool and unruffled even under great stress.

Which way should they turn then? Should they drive for a successful career only to give it all up in an act of altruism after the birth of their child – with the not inconsiderable risk of being labelled a “wimp” by other (successful) men; later only to be left by their partner (the high divorce rate is a cause for alarm) to whom they then have to pay alimony (which they couldn’t do anyway if they’d given up their well paid jobs)?

When they contemplate the future, men are uncertain which role(s) women expect them to play, and they see themselves as pressurised to perform the whole range of tonalities that go to make up “being a man”. They see themselves under a high pressure to perform, to respond flexibly to all the demands now made of them. They should be understanding feminist partners, machos with gym-trained bodies, pram pushing dads and go-getter careerists. The dilemma is that whatever role they opt for, success (especially success in the partnership) is by no means guaranteed. On the contrary: men today fear that in reality it’s the women who take all the important decisions and that they (men) are no longer needed. They have a great fear of “being left in the lurch by their partner” (the passive voice is significant!), without objectively, having put a foot wrong. For young men today a partnership is a risky venture that they are

sure to embark on – only unlike in earlier times a partnership now brings higher hurdles for men whilst still remaining unpredictable and of uncertain outcome.

! *“Today I might be there at 35, my wife’s left me and I’ve got two kids to bring up. That wouldn’t have happened earlier.”*

Yet no matter how much they might lament their feelings of insecurity, these young men have no real wish for a return to traditional role models. What their complaints do, however, is to document just how insecure the whole of life appears to these young men from their subjective perspective. And that is an important finding in terms of policy-making for youth, and family but also in terms of concepts of gender equality.

Ideals of Women

Many accounts of women show that the other sex is (still) largely terra incognita. When men talk about women they readily turn to the stereotype of the emotional woman, incapable of any rational decision and consistent (logical) course of action who uses a woman’s weapons to manipulate men and get her way. In this scenario too men see themselves as victims of women who artfully use their feminine charms. A closer scrutiny of the stereotype also reveals its root cause which is justification and legitimation of the men’s own victim mentality. In real life, however, young men’s aspirations are set on a completely different type of woman:

- ! Woman as friend: she gets on well with all her partners’ male friends, goes with him to all the parties and allows him all the personal freedom he needs.
- ! Woman as (ersatz) mother: she takes on a pedagogical role, puts the man in his place if he “steps out of line”. In this role the woman can and should be dominant, answering the man back and “giving him a kick in the pants”.
- ! Woman as lover: naturally attractive and beautiful, slim, long haired, feminine and highly presentable.

However, from the present level of experience young men can see that their relationships (adolescent affairs) can be of short duration, are frequently terminated by the women and that they themselves fail in them. Their notions about the expectations women have about men and relationships are mainly vague and so they have a latent fear that they might not in fact be capable of sustaining a relationship.

Women’s Expectations not understood by Men

What is striking here is that young educated men have a high level of anxiety about whether they are ever going to live in a stable long-lasting relationship. Uncertainty manifests itself in terms of the expectations women have about men both as partners and fathers. Men work on the assumption that women are the decision-makers in a relationship: they are the ones who decide when the relationship begins and when it ends; they determine how leisure time is spent, how the home is to be decorated, how the children are to be brought up and so on. Here again the (narcissistic-paranoid?) victim mentality of young men today manifests itself. The lack of almost any reciprocal perspective on the subjective sensibilities of women in

earlier periods is most striking. Men suffer in their subjective sensibilities and feel themselves on the defensive. They see women as the ones who write the script and distribute the roles; the man is a mere actor whose only mission is to fulfil the role assigned to him.

This is brought grotesquely to the fore in the ironic question: will men become superfluous one day if more and more women enter and make their careers in men's professions so that men are no longer needed as partners and bread-winners? One consequence of this could be that marriages become more seldom and relationships ever-shorter in duration.

Whither Relationships?

In terms of their expectations for a partner and a long-term relationship, young men today are on the horns of a dilemma.

On the one hand they wish for a partner on an equal footing with them, who is determined, intelligent, clever, independent and equal. They want their (future) partner to have the right and the opportunity to take up a profession in line with her high professional qualifications. Balance in a relationship and being there for one another are key aspirations for these young men.

At the same time they also want a partner who is prepared to dedicate herself totally to the children. The vast majority of these young men have been raised by women who they see as having passed the test of raising children "with flying colours" whilst also being in part time employment. Yet – in the eyes of the young men – their mother's first priority was always the family and child-raising.

! *"When children come, the wife should also come to terms with her role as a woman."*

But they are also equally aware that nowadays men can no longer expect their partners to stay home after the birth of a child as a matter of course. Women are entitled to require that their partner takes over part of the work involved in child care. Who stays at home after the birth of a child and who continues in full time employment must now be the subject of open discussion and negotiation. Whether the woman should stay home with the children or return to full time or part time work or whether the man should take parental leave are all issues which men would be glad to discuss within an equal relationship – even though they have the feeling that it's the woman who will have the final say in the matter.

These divergent ideals for a partner (on the one hand the mother taking full time care of her offspring; on the other, the modern woman pursuing her career path with her own independent life) are contiguous yet totally separate. There is a clear incompatibility in the images of women held by men together with a lack of any clear notion of how the demands of family, housework and raising children can be reconciled in a way that is satisfactory for both the man **and** the woman. Thus men draw up two different images of women but cannot reconcile them neither on the rational nor the emotional level.

Young men identify with contradictory ideas of a partnership. On the one hand they are strong advocates of child raising work being allocated to women; on the other they propagate flexible role models with the man naturally sharing child care and household duties with the woman.

Gender Equality Policies

Men believe that *“It can’t go all that much further with gender equality”*. They welcome the continued existence of typical professions for women and men and they are optimistic about social equality for women who shall increasingly come to take top managerial positions in business and assert themselves, finally winning the day against opposition from the conservative camp of men who will not relinquish the field without a struggle. Like their female counterparts, young men with Abitur are adamant in their opposition to a “woman’s quota” in business and public institutions. The job should go to the best person for it, no matter what their sex might be.

In general the issue of gender equality is still at a great remove from their everyday lives. One of the reasons for this is that the men view themselves as being “liberal”, *“I would certainly say that I understand what emancipation is all about”*. Thus they do not see themselves as the “target audience” to whom gender equality policies are addressed. Another reason is that for them there is no area of life in which emancipation, gender equality and equality of opportunity is either manifest or of any importance.

! *“At the moment I just don’t see any way this could be important to my own life.”*

! *“It’s just not an issue in the areas I’m involved in. It makes no difference to me whether I work with a woman or a man.”*

! *“It hardly concerns me at all in my private life.”*

! *“I don’t have any problems with it so it’s not something that I have to think about. It’s more an issue for people who can’t cope with it.”*

! *“Anybody today with the slightest liberal outlook would hardly give it a second thought.”*

To specify more concrete aims and objectives for gender equality, 20 year olds would need a greater experience of life and conflict situations. Thus – as with young women with Abitur – they draw up an abstract idealised scenario where women and men have complete parity of status, where women partake of male, and men of female characteristics, and where both men and women behave the same. According to this logic, both sexes perform all manner of tasks and duties. Men also raise the children and women soldiers must also go to war. The picture it paints is minatory because it eliminates the interplay between the sexes, the positively charged relationship between “men” and “women”, and replaces it with bland relationships between “people”. It is a caricature that equates gender equality with egalitarian levelling – in a defensive reaction.

Young men see the key goals of gender equality as having been achieved, *“It was good for its time but now there’s enough”*. The tenor of such remarks is that policy-making in the field of equal opportunities and gender equality between women and men has been necessary and sufficient, the point now is to implement such policies throughout society.

■ *“The politicians have already done a great deal, now gender equality’s in the public eye so it’s now a question of putting into practice what’s written down on paper.”*

■ *“It’s also very good – it’s a truly wonderful thing, equal opportunities in society. There are really only single isolated cases where there are problems now, otherwise everything’s OK.”*

Even so, young men fear that gender equality policies are going a step too far which could lower public acceptance and lead to a lack of implementation of vital aspects in everyday life. In this respect they have (oversensitive) antenna for current policy measures. For instance, they take a critical view of the recently introduced parenting benefits (Elterngeld). According to their way of thinking, this new law is not designed as an incentive for more men to take charge of child care in future, but rather as state-sponsored backsliding on the gains of emancipation:

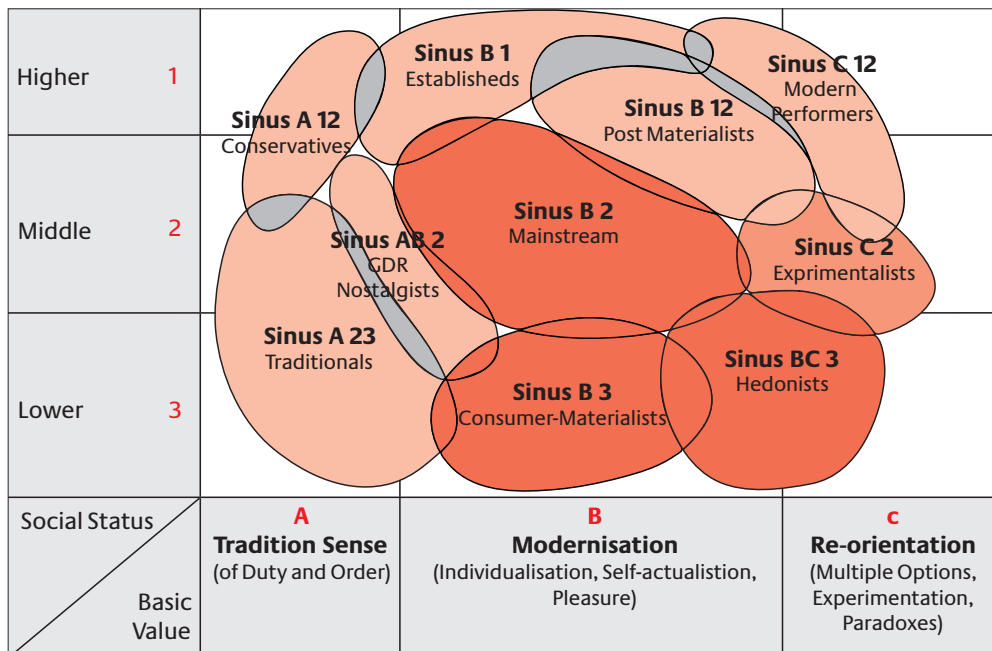
■ *“It’s a deliberate countermove because the government has noticed that not enough children are being born.”*

IV.

Year Olds with average or low Education

20 year olds with average or low education have their life world focus in the Sinus social milieus „Middle-Class Centre“, „Consumer Materialists“, „Hedonists“, and „Experimentalists“.

Focal Social Milieus of 20 Year olds with Vocationally-oriented Schooling



4.1 Women

Entertainment, Security, Family

20 year old women with secondary school leaving certificates (Haupt-/Realschulabschluss) are in a transitional phase of their life histories, moving from their training/apprenticeships to the world of work. The everyday demands placed on them by their vocational schools and apprenticeships figure largely in their lives, taking up much time and bringing anxieties and uncertainties. Against such a backdrop, issues like “relationships” and “founding a family” seem at first glance of secondary importance. However, a closer look reveals that they are already fixed pillars in life-planning about which the young women have relatively clear ideas. These young women live in the hope and expectation of finding a steady partner in the next few years, with whom they shall move in and found a family.

For the moment, however, work-related issues take precedence. Should I change the course I have now taken? Will the company I'm with give me a job once I've finished my training? These young women are keenly aware that given the horrendous unemployment figures – particularly among young people – they need to do very well with their training if they are to get a job.

! *“There's nothing worse than being unemployed.”*

They show little sign of an ambitious, forward-looking career orientation as is prevalent with young women with Abitur. Rather their sights are set on getting a steady job, that doesn't overtax their abilities, that allows them to get by financially and that offers a good working climate. They show little interest in a career perspective as a means of self-realisation and personal development. Work for them is not an end in itself but rather a necessary means for achieving material and social independence from their parental home. For the next few years their aim is to earn enough money to satisfy their own personal consumer wishes, possibly a little flat and a small car.

! *“My goal is to be self-employed, earn a lot of money and be independent so I don't have to work so much.”*

One attitude is particular to young women from the **“Mainstream”**. They also find it important that their job brings social status with it and realistic promotion opportunities that would enable them to achieve a certain level of prosperity. They associate this with their own house and garden for their family – their fundamental aim in life.

Yet they also fear that such goals will be extremely difficult to achieve with the level of income they might expect. Young women from the social mainstream are aware of a huge gap between their own aims in life and their perceptions of what can be realistically achieved under given social conditions.

! *“Employers are always cutting back on wages. You have to be 35 before you can start earning proper money.”*

! *“My dreams are a long way away from being realised. It would be great to build a house and drive a smart car. I want to start a family and offer my children a good start in life. On the other hand I don't want to wait till I'm 35 to have a child, I want a child when I'm 25.”*

Even so, this is not to say that their outlook is pessimistic. Despite all their immediate anxieties, they still remain confident that somehow they will still achieve their aims in life. They do not see this as something they can accomplish by themselves. Rather they have an unshakable faith in finding a like-minded partner with whom they can tackle the “Family and House” life project hand in hand. And they are confident of getting help from their parents, in-laws, and grand parents. Here too the ideal and practical value the “intact family” holds for these young women comes to the forefront.

I Emotionally charged notions of an ideal home and family are also displayed by young women from the **consumer-materialist milieu**. They have often grown up with few material resources and in an impoverished cultural environment. Their parents live in a traditional relationship model where the wife takes care of the housework and children and the man is the „boss“. He has the role of the main bread-winner – yet many of them are unemployed.

For a great number of young consumer materialists the fact that both their parents are (long-term) unemployed is a standard fact of life. Many of them develop marked “loser symptoms” very early on and feel themselves to be “hung out to dry” – just like their parents. On the other hand – similar to young women from the **hedonists milieu** – they display an unmitigated zest for (cheap) lifestyle consumption and “liven up” their everyday lives with entertainment electronics, mobile phones, fast food and theme parks. These are symbols of their dreams of a better life – even when they suspect that the better life will remain illusionary.⁸

Precisely because professional training means much work and time, stress and pressure, they do not want to do without their friends, night life, shopping, fashion etc. What is important for them is **to get some fun out of life** right now for as long as they can before starting a family. They have an unquestioning certainty that later on it will be them doing the housework and taking care of the kids. Against this backdrop, their present phase of life represents a respite which they mean to enjoy.

On the other hand they show no interest in issues related to society, the family, education, and culture nor in economic and legal matters. The attention they pay to political events and happenings is scant and mainly reduced to an acquaintance with newspaper headlines. This shows a specific outlook on the world that takes social structures as fixed and given. It is the expression of a sober realism that assumes that each and every individual must find his or her own way with what society offers and demands. In this sense it is understandable that the young women do not engage (critically with the wish for active change) with “soft” issues like traditional or contemporary role models or inequality between women and men. From their standpoint there are few chances of changing anything for themselves personally, whilst there are acute risks of encountering incomprehension and hostility in their own social environments and the risk of failure is high.

Retrospective

1950s/1960s: Hierarchies – Hermetic Systems – Harmony

The picture young women with average or lower education paint of the everyday life of men and women in the 1950s and 60s is extremely thin, nebulous, undifferentiated and riddled with stereotypes and projections.

⁸ One highly significant finding of the social scientific group discussions with female representatives of the middle and lower social orders is that the way in which women from the Mainstream rapidly identify themselves as having the same views, wax lyrical about their goals and values and reach agreement on the normative role models they all share in a discourse that also includes a vigorous critique of women from social classes above and below them who embrace life models at variance with their own (comp. pg. 32). This is a phase of the discussion from which the young women from a lower social order withdraw: they have a keen awareness of such signs of discrimination from the middle-class Mainstream and can clearly recognise prejudices against the social underclass.

When they contemplate these decades, they see that life for both sexes was highly prescribed. Women were materially and socially in a position of dependence, subordinate to men in both cultural and legal terms. The unconditional acceptance of prescribed rules, the importance of manners and decency, the innate duty of a woman to serve her husband selflessly, the husband's undisputed status as "boss and bread-winner" – such aspects of the rigid hermetic systems of the social order all seem absurd and antiquated in their eyes.

- | *"Men were the boss in the home."*
- | *"Women had to wait on their husbands and take care of the children."*
- | *"They had some kind of handbook called 'The Ideal Wife'."*
- | *"Women had to ask their husband's permission to go out to work."*

Influenced by TV docu-soaps such as the current „Bräuteschule“ (a format set in a girls boarding school in 1958), the young women are excited by the idea of taking a virtual trip back in time as an experiment to move for themselves through such an exotic world. However, in this they are more motivated by a search for "kicks" rather than by any historical, cultural or social interest in comparing women's sensibilities then with those of today.

For these young women hierarchy and hermetic systems are the key negatively connotated aspects that dominate their view of the 1950s and 60s. However, they also see other important positive aspects such as strong family cohesion and stable long-lasting marriages. Both these aspects gave a stable foundation to life - the present lack of which they regret.

1980s: Liberation and new Perspectives

Their view of the 1980s (when they born) is much more specific. They see this period as a time of massive upheaval which liberated women from traditional authoritarian constraints and opened up new perspectives for them to the world of work:

- | Women didn't have to wait on their husbands any more;
- | More and more women claimed the right to work.
- | *"Women wanted to go out to work, otherwise they'd get the feeling they were suffocating in the home."*
- | *"Twenty years ago equal opportunity was mainly a matter for law-makers. Lots of laws for women have been changed. The issue of abortion has been settled too."*
- | *"Women had much more of a say in things, but not an awful lot's changed for the better for women."*

Nevertheless the young women view the way their mothers (generation) "asserted themselves" as being comparatively faint-hearted and defensive. Today in marked contrast young women are very confident in asserting and claiming their rights, secure in the knowledge of having the law and social acceptance on their side.

The Present: from living side-by-side to living together

For 20 year old women of average or low education the aims of the emancipation movements and the practical goals of gender equality have by and large now been achieved. The statutory framework now empowers many women to pursue a career and take up top positions. This comes to expression in such statements as:

- *“Today women and men no longer live side by side as they used to do 40 years ago, they now live together as a matter of course.”*
- *“Friends, hobbies and other issues are much more closely interrelated than they used to be.”*
- *“Women now have both feet in life and nobody’s going to take that away from them.”*
- *“Having an abortion is now no longer such a scandal and it’s also not as difficult as it used to be.”*

Even though all this is viewed as an important achievement of the emancipation movement by young women of low or average education, it is also an achievement which has little personal impact on their lives as the careers and top positions now open for women in general lie quite beyond their horizons.

A Patchwork of traditional and modern Role Models

In terms of politics and business, these young women still see men as being the more serious and more capable sex: in the eyes of young women of low education men have clearer powers of judgement and more determination whilst also being less emotional and more robust. They feel that men are more capable of taking momentous decisions on the stage of world politics. For them men still remain the “strong” sex – the movers and shakers of our society. It is a state of affairs of which the young women approve. Prominent women in similar positions (Merkel, Rice, Thatcher) still remain honourable exceptions even though they cannot escape the taint of having something of the “typical man” about them because it is not through exercise of their feminine qualities that they have made it to the top.

They have no wish to venture into such areas themselves, being willing to leave them to the men and the few (superior) career-driven women with university degrees.

- *“It’s true that with Merkel we have a woman as chancellor, but the American president and all the other heads of government are nearly all men. Being a leader in politics and in business too is a job for a man. Men are much more clear headed and determined to see things through to the end.”*

In this way they reproduce the schema of a traditional distribution of jobs and roles and justify it with the attributes of **masculinity**: strength, assertiveness, toughness, aggression, and superiority to all of which they give positive connotations.

However, they have a different approach to the attributes of **traditional femininity** with which they can no longer unreservedly identify – gentleness, self-negation, selflessness, dependency, motherliness, sensitivity and understanding. As modern young women they feel they have moved beyond such traditional perceptions of women.

They engage in a kind of **playful coquetry with role stereotypes** in which a narration of a mantra of traditional images of men and women can be heavily self-ironic. A modern self-confident woman can certainly admit to her own “weaknesses” and strong points, and it is perfectly legitimate and “smart” to make use of all those advantages a woman can enjoy with traditional role behaviour.⁹ They can switch from being the assertive modern young woman to the emotional “little mouse” in need of protection according to the situation and the type of benefits to be derived.

Yet these young women no longer have any real faith in handed-down sexual stereotypes. Their own experience has taught them that men are not better at driving cars, that women are fully capable of hammering a nail into the wall and that in their working lives they also need skills and organisational ability to manage a family and home at the same time.

These findings show that changing roles in the 1980s and 90s have led to a fusion of role models (“a new flexibility of roles”) for women in this social segment.¹⁰ However, this is not to say that they have turned their back on traditional notions of gender roles. These young women play the whole tonality of traditional models – as long as these are of practical benefit to them – but also engage with modern roles and typical masculine attributes.¹¹ A patchwork of traditional and modern role types that can be freely extended to cover specific situations is highly attractive for these young women as it allows them more liberty and a wider scale of options.

The Modern Part-time Worker and Family Guide

In terms of work these young women have no aspirations for a career as young academic women do. What they mean by “career” is something quite different – to find a job with a certain status, moderate remuneration and a high level of employment security. What is essential for them is that work can be reconciled with the demands of family life.

In this model for life, which most of these young women saw lived out by their mothers, marriage and founding a family have central importance. For most of them it is perfectly self-evident that once they have established themselves in their job and found a partner (joint flat, steady income) they will want to have children and stay at home initially to look after them. They expect their partner to help them with childcare and certain household duties in the evenings and at weekends. In terms of work they are looking for part-time employment that will allow them much time to be with their children and encourage them in their schooling.

9 What is striking in this context are the very fixed notions young women of middle and lower education have about “typical professions for men” (engine-fitters, roofers, road workers etc.) and “typical professions for women” (teachers, florists, shop assistants etc.).

10 Comp. Flaig, B.B. et.al. (1993): *Frauen-Lebenswelten: Rollenwandel und soziale Milieus in Deutschland*. In: Reigber, Dieter (ed.): *Frauen-Welten. Marketing in der postmodernen Gesellschaft – ein interdisziplinärer Forschungsansatz*. Düsseldorf. pp. 201–227.

11 Examples of ironically communicated gender stereotyping include: women can’t change a car tyre, can’t replace window wipers, can’t top up the oil. At the same time women enjoy enormous advantages over men: they are desired (for their bodies)/get into discotheques more easily whilst the men are often turned away for no reason at all by the bouncer/men can never admit that they can’t repair something or can’t cope with a particular technique/men in typical women’s professions run the risk of being labelled as “gay”.

I This aspect is particularly pronounced in women from the **Mainstream**. They want to give their children the very best start in life, and see to it that they have the best education because the expectations placed on children at school and in professional life are so high that parents need to give them additional support. And that involves time and money.

For them founding a family involves a good deal of responsibility. They take a critical attitude to women from the social underclass who “just have children” without any thought for the material future.

Young women from the Mainstream justify this attitude by saying that a woman first needs to have completed her training/apprenticeship so that she can “offer her child something” in the shape of material security and education. They embrace the ideal of the well-heeled petit bourgeois nuclear family.

The Ideal Husband: Main Bread-winner and Household Help

Their image of men as husbands is well defined. The husband is the main bread-winner; his is the obligation and burden to find a professional situation and position that brings his family long-term financial security. Yet the women are equally well aware that nowadays there are no guarantees for lifelong employment and that pressure of work means that men have to work much longer hours than those laid down in collective bargaining law. Thus many women release their husbands of their part in bringing up the children – even though they would like to see their children brought up by both partners. Yet these young women see that their husbands simply can't afford to stay at home or take up part-time work “just” to take care of the kids – they'd risk losing their jobs.

The consolidation of traditional role models this gives rise to is of no concern to the young women – on the contrary, it is necessary to safeguard their own life model. Even so, they would like to have a partner “*who naturally played his part in bringing up the family*”. This might seem to suggest a division of labour based on gender equality but closer investigation and specific inquiry reveals that a marked separation of roles is still uppermost in their minds.

It is a socially effective norm that “*dad takes the kids to the playground*”, “*changes the baby's diapers from time to time*”, and “*also does a bit of shopping*”. Such formulations serve to highlight the fact that for many activities concerning children **the woman still remains the chief responsible actor** whilst the man offers her **regular breaks with his help**. 20 year old women with lower or average education do not place any demands on their partners in the sense of a genuine division of housework with the aim of equality of employment opportunity. In terms of housework all the man has to do is “help out”. His role is limited to ancillary work.¹²

¹² These young women are far from saying that housework is their own domain which is no place for a man. That would contradict their own normative view of a “modern partnership”. After all, these women are pleased when their husbands take some of the housework and childcare duties off their hands and give them a little more (free)time for themselves. This is what distinguishes “a modern man” for them.

Such notions of partnership and parenthood are not informed by a particular concept or ideal but rather spring from a robust sense of pragmatism,: *“At the moment it’s better if I do this and you do that and each of us is satisfied”* – the best solution for the moment.

Between Traditional Housewife and Career-obsessed uncaring Mother

In the **Mainstream** people with no form of gainful employment are considered as “lazy” and “out of tune with the times”. It is a social norm for young men from this milieu that mothers will go out to work at some point and not just – after the difficult first years – make themselves cosy at home. Women too have a responsibility to bring home income.

On the other hand the mother who returns quickly to work soon after the birth of her child and lets day carers, kindergartens and day schools take care of it (**note the passive form!**) is considered by the Mainstream as the very incarnation of the “uncaring brute of a mother”. Thus social demarcation is set against both superior and inferior social echelons:

- I** A critical social distancing from those women lacking personal maturity and without a sense of responsibility, with hardly any ideas about how to raise a child, with no stable social environment that empowers them to bring up their children in a modern way. Young women from the Mainstream see the consequences of this in the form of children who are no longer taught any values, who are just “parked” in front of the TV, and who have no idea how to behave properly. The reflex of such demarcation is that the young women place themselves under tremendous pressure as modern women must be seen to be making a much better job of bringing up their children than these women from the social underclass!
- I** Moralistic distancing from “career-obsessed” mothers. Such women are alleged to have no real desire to deal with the child, and to accept their estrangement from it as they motivated by pure egotism and only wish to follow their own self development. Here too their lack of responsibility is one of the reasons why there are so many neglected and emotionally underdeveloped children in our society (who also pose a threat to the young women’s own children!).

In the view of the Mainstream a woman should not value her personal career aspirations above her family. The image of the successful, status-oriented, established or post-materialistic woman induces feelings of uncertainty along with a latent sense of envy. The defensive mechanism to ward off such feelings strengthens the young women’s own position and serves to confirm their own view of the world.

Their notions of what constitutes “a good mother” are clearly outlined – and have a superficial similarity with those of young women with higher education. Their role model here is frequently that of their own mother who easily reconciled the demands of housework, employment and child care and who displayed special personal qualities: caring, loving, setting limits, affectionate, respectful of others, a good wife and someone who was always there for others.

! *“My mother brought me up and was always there to help me in every way she could. She’s a very caring, very loving person. There was no kind of situation she couldn’t deal with, she raised two children, went out to work and did all the housework. (...) She gave me her support in every kind of situation. I’m glad to have a person like my mother because she’s exactly the kind of mother I want to be for my own children, exactly the kind of friend and exactly the kind of wife.”*

Gender Equality Policies

In terms of the family idyll they aspire to the young women are satisfied. The positions are clearly allocated whilst at the same time numerous benefits are to be had from the key achievements of emancipation: women today can be a lot more self-determined, independent and assertive in arguing their own positions whilst also enjoying a secure framework in which to shape their lives.

Subjectively too they see themselves in an auspicious start-out position. They may but are not forced to take (full-time) employment. Total gender equality and a flexible role model is no utopia for them but rather strange and threatening to their social cultural perceptions. Thus they relativise and check such trains of thought with examples designed to highlight the senselessness and grotesqueness of total gender equality. Such reactions are informed by the anxiety of being physically unable to cope with work and of being at a permanent disadvantage vis-à-vis men, but also by the fear of being socially and emotionally isolated as the only women in a domain reserved for men – and thus a victim.

! *“Women as road workers or coal miners are at an intrinsic physical disadvantage to men. And I wouldn’t want to be the only woman on a factory floor full of men. That would be a total nightmare for me.”*

Their thinking goes no further than this point. These young women do not question the notions they have of gender roles and they lack any socio-political motivation to seek to change role models and put an end to discrimination. Their view of the world is largely coloured by an attitude which says you must come to terms with the structures, opportunities and hurdles that you find, and cope with them as best you can. **Pragmatic shrewdness in dealing with everyday life** is their key resource. Under the surface these women have a keen awareness of the opportunities and boundaries in their lives. Their guiding principle is not to change social and economic framework conditions and socially conditioned notions of gender roles, but rather to accommodate themselves with given structures and make the best of them.

4.2 Men

Fun, Friends, Employment Security

Young men’s lives are largely focussed on the here and now: time-out, being on the road, sports, music (playing and listening) and above all having fun. The key element is their group of friends: playing a part in other people’s lives, doing things together, sharing hopes and fears.

! *“Friends are the most important thing in life, you can talk to them about everything that’s important to you at the moment.”*

! *“I can’t talk to anyone as well as I can talk to my friends.”*

When talking to one another they like to play the tough guy untouched by any anxieties about the future. Under the surface, however, there is evidence of fears about what life will bring and whether they will have a steady job and financial security. However, such fears are not as critical as they are with young men of higher education. A closer scrutiny reveals significant differences between their various milieus:

! For young men from the **Mainstream** their training/apprenticeship is the hub around which their daily lives revolve: the chance of finding a job in the company, writing job applications, goals for further training. Having fun is also important for them but their main priority is set on putting their working lives on a steady keel. And it is striking that generally they only talk about this with their close friends.

! **Consumer-Materialists and Hedonists** deliberately exclude such aspects and display an egotistical orientation to the here and now which enables them to arrange their lives as comfortably as possible and pursue the satisfaction of their immediate needs without let or hindrance.¹³ Satisfaction of their immediate needs is more important to them than any (purposeful) striving to secure their future place on the job market.

As long as possible they’re glad to live at home with their parents because their parents take good care of them. They see no reason to leave home and stand on their own two feet in life. An apprenticeship or job in some far-off place is the only pressing reason that would make them leave home. These young men have an obvious welfare mentality whose root motive (convenience) they dress up and hide with reasons of practicality.

! *“It’s really much more practical and much cheaper.”*

! *“I don’t earn that much as an apprentice. If I live at home it means I have enough money for myself. After all, I don’t have to pay anything for the rent.”*

Their interests are strongly focused on their personal milieu. They do not follow political events and are mainly indifferent to economic, social and environmental matters. They are aware of these shortcomings and readily admit them (with an air of self-assurance):

! *“I know that I’m not exactly an expert in that field but to be perfectly honest with you I must say that I’m simply too bone idle. Other things are much more important to me at the moment.”*

! *“With those things I’ve got a real couldn’t care less attitude, perhaps that’s not so cool.”*

¹³ A case in point is offered by the statements of a young hedonist in the group: after half-heartedly completing his training as a salesman, he is now unemployed. He views his present situation as “cushy”, after all, his parents take care of him and he can do just what he will – sleep in late, go out, go to parties and so on. His own professional (and long-term) perspectives do not trouble him in the slightest.

A similar attitude to that of young women with the same level of education is shown here – an interest in politics and other social matters isn't "worth your while", only makes you realise how helpless you are, is really exhausting, means that you have to have a lot of prior knowledge and is just a drag. Politics is something other people do! You yourself have to "carry the can" for the decisions others make and in any case you can bet that "the politicians" ("them up there") don't give a damn about what really interests you.

The Dilemma of Role Distribution

Divergent Images of Women: Bimbo or Business Woman

Young men today can observe a plethora of types of women and roles for women that are frequently "acted out in front of them" by one and the selfsame woman. Coping with this and keeping their bearings is no easy matter for the young men. It puts many of them in a high state of irritation. Frequently they find it difficult to distinguish between what is play and what is for real, between what is authentic and what is only acted:

- I One of the types of women they recognise is the "**businesswoman**": women of higher but also of average education who wish to prove that they are just as good as men in areas of work that used to be male-dominated. Women are now politicians, managers, sports journalists and talkshow hosts. Women now have entry to all the important and well paid professions and are also largely instrumental in shaping them. In such contexts women often act "like a man"; they have to be strong, courageous, self-confident, assertive and tough.
- I Young men see the way young women of the same age group and education behave as increasingly unpredictable. Sometimes women want to be sheltered, falling back into traditional women's roles and expecting the man at their side to be a strong, protective, caring, sensitive, charming gentleman who holds the door open for them, pays for the pub and the cinema, brings them home, defends them, and also understands their sudden swings of mood. But then these selfsame women manipulate their men and make shameless use of their arsenal of female weapons to get their own way. The men's descriptions of women and the ways they behave make easy use of standard stereotypes: women are referred to as "bimbos" or "bitches". They spend hours each morning making themselves up and styling their hair, they love to go to parties, to go out shopping, and spend hours gossiping with other women. For these young men this is an alien world.

Yet they also enjoy trading such stereotypes of women with their friends. It is a way of dealing with their own anxieties.

Even so, when they come to contemplate the kind of partner they would like to be together with in future, they wish for a woman with whom they can talk about everything, who's sensitive, clever, understanding and the reverse of temperamental. In such wishful projections they draw up the image of a woman who partakes neither of the business woman nor the bimbo. It is the image of a woman of a kind they are not likely to encounter often in their everyday lives and yet they still live in hope of finding her.

These men have a deep longing for a harmonious and stable relationship – over and beyond the awful news of climbing divorce rates and the usual stereotypes of modern women. It is a longing for a partnership that lasts for the whole of life – even when they suspect that this might not be possible.

What is noteworthy here is that these ideals of a lifelong partnership and family are also shared by the young women of the same level of education. But between the sexes runs a broad divide in terms of different perceptions of self and others.

Tactical Revaluation of the Family – and Housework

Even though the young men paint a picture of the independent woman with freedom to go out to work even when children are there, it is a picture that remains strangely pale, stereotyped, and ultimately lacking in authenticity. These young men are unable and unwilling to see themselves as staying at home to change the babies' diapers, take care of them, bring them up and do the cooking.

■ In an ideal scenario it is the woman who does the housework and takes care of the children. The man is a kind of useful ancillary who takes the kids to the playground or the zoo or swimming pool at the weekend.

■ Fun and a voluntarist approach: a man doesn't want to be chained to the stove every day. At the most he might volunteer to do the cooking at the weekend – if he feels like it.

These young men are at pains to emphasise that as “areas of work” gainful employment and housework are of equal importance. Housework and raising children are also difficult and deserve the same recognition as a job “outside”. Even so it remains self-evident for these young men that it's the kind of work that somebody else – their wives – should do.

Thus the argument of a revaluation of housework and child raising is speciously tactical and serves only to ensure that such duties remain delegated to women.

In this image of the family the women take up and continue in the role of the mother with which the (majority) of the young men are familiar from their own homes where their mums take care of them, cook, clean their rooms, do their washing and are always there. It is a state of affairs the young men wish to preserve and see continued in their own relationships even if they're aware that nowadays they can't be too vocal in demanding it.

■ For young men from the **Mainstream** their goal in life is being the bread-winner for their own family. This is a model for life which many of them saw played out in a modern format in their own homes and which they themselves now adopt practically wholesale. It offers the image of a man as the family bread-winner who puts all his abilities, feelings and time into the family. The modern man can no longer be reduced to the role of bringing home the family income. These young men now unreservedly aspire to sharing more time with their partners and children than their own fathers did – whom they mainly experienced as absent from the home. However, they do not go as far as to seriously imagine a genuine gender equality in terms of work and childcare or even a reversal of roles.

I For young male **Consumer-Materialists** and **Hedonists** the moderate, balanced life model of Mainstream is daunting and scary as it lacks clear lines and fails to take account of male strengths. Raising children and taking over household duties are alien concepts for them with potential negative connotations. They would feel themselves estranged and lost on foreign ground nor can they imagine such a total negation of their desires. The thought that precisely this has been the fate of countless women over the years and is still the fate of many today hardly occurs to them. The “solution” they propose is to push responsibility – including responsibility for their own children – onto someone else.

I *“Then gran comes to baby-sit.”*

I *“It’s fine by me if my wife goes out to work. I spend the whole day in front of the box and in the evenings my wife comes home with a hundred euros and then we go and have a party.”*

I A somewhat different facet is shown by young men from the Sinus **Experimentalists** milieu whose views of women are less stereotypically cemented. They too enjoy playing with standard stereotypes and provoking. In terms of partnerships and the family, they tend to be more willing to share roles and workloads. The main reason for this is that the experimentalist milieu looks favourably on breaking taboos and striking out in new directions. However, it remains to be seen when it comes to the crunch whether such propensities translate into actual behaviour.

Retrospective

1950s/1960s: Nostalgia for “the good old days”

For these young men an engagement with the development of men and women’s roles in society and private life brings no practical benefits whatsoever in terms of their own present lives. Similar to the young women with the same level of education, the picture they paint of those years is highly undifferentiated and riddled with clichés.

Life in those times seems to them prescribed, regimented, hedged in, and the people “one-sided” and lacking any appreciable opportunities to break out of such structures. They contrast such “disadvantages” with a few “advantages” such as the existence of set roles where the men were bread-winners and the women housewives and mothers. They have scarcely any notion of how women at that time might have felt or of what forms of discrimination they were subject to, preferring instead to focus on the advantages such gender division brought men: the men brought a steady income into the home and in return were tended to by the women. Such projections reveal present-day motifs: men enjoy not having household duties, love being waited on and cooked for by their wives, and love finding their drawers always full of freshly ironed washing.

The 1970s and 80s: Drugs and Free Love

These young men have few specific notions and mental pictures of what life was like for men and women twenty years ago at the time they themselves came into the world. They superficially associate the 1980s with a kind of transitional phase in emancipation when “women didn’t only just stay at home”.

Their own early childhoods in the mid 80s were mainly coloured by their experience of a classical distribution of gender roles between their parents. In terms of raising children and housework the father tended to be the peripheral figure as he was usually never at home. Raising the children was done by women – by their own mothers or grandmothers.

! *“Dad was out at work from morning to night, mum brought me up.”*

! *“Granny took care of me. Mum used to come at midday and cook.”*

! *“When I think about it it was really my mum who was always around – dad was at work during the day.”*

The hedonists find the 1970s a much more interesting time. Its (seemingly) boundless freedom and fun-seeking, “free uninhibited love” drugs and never-ending parties are more in line with their own aims, goals and aspirations than questions of emancipation and gender equality.

The Present: Equitable Gender Relations – women have the upper hand in private life

In terms of the present day, they are persuaded that men and women both have equal rights and opportunities. This is a development they take for granted and also welcome. If women nowadays occupy managerial posts in leading companies and are more active in politics than ever before, they view this a logical development of emancipation.

Yet it is a perception devoid of any passion or commitment. Such a development neither touches nor concerns them. All those ambitious and sophisticated women politicians, lawyers, doctors and so on are at a great remove from the world these men move in and are hardly to be encountered in it. And even less do such women come into consideration as potential partners.

Most of these young men are trained in manual or technical trades: mechanics, electricians, mechatronic engineers, lathe operators, landscape gardeners, fitters, roofers, central heating fitters, varnishers etc. In such classical male professions the only women they are likely to meet are office workers. And that’s a different kettle of fish. They don’t really consider such women as their “mates”. As “men” they are unwilling and unable to see a woman on the factory floor, on a roof or working on the roads as a realistic proposition. At this point the old sexual stereotyping comes into its own – women are too feeble, not at all interested in engineering, don’t want to do such work – and ultimately are unwelcome in such a world of men.¹⁴

¹⁴ Some of them find the idea of a woman on the factory floor very alluring – precisely because they associate it with the erotic charms of a (single) woman. In this instance, erotic fantasies are mixed with exotic charm: a pretty young woman in a loose-fitting, sweat-soaked top, dependent on the help of some man ... Yet they soon break off from such daydreams, partly because they’re embarrassed, partly because they are aware that in this scenario a woman has penetrated a protected area, exclusively reserved for men.

Gender Equality Policies

Young men of average or low education have neither a vision of gender equality nor any specific notions about it. For them it remains an obvious social norm which should not be called into question or even criticised: women should have the same rights as men.

At the same time “equality of opportunity”¹⁵ remains an abstract concept for them. Whether women sit in top managerial positions or whether it’s a woman or man as head of state has no meaning or value for them personally.¹⁶

Nevertheless “gender equality” is a theme that arouses latent diffuse fears in them, expressed in the anxiety that the self-image of the sexes and their (power) structures risk being “*turned completely upside down*” on a long-term basis by “*overdone efforts at emancipation*”.

From their subjective perspective these young men believe that equality of opportunity and gender equality have been achieved. They might not be acquainted with any specific laws, but they have the general impression that everything meaningful in the realm of the possible has already been accomplished. Men view the gender relations of men and women as being equal given the indisputable fact that men and women are basically different.

At most they have vague notions that women today do not receive the same pay for the same work – but they have no specific knowledge about this issue and anyway it doesn’t really interest them. Even though they are against the inequality of men and women, they suspect that gender equality policy-making can veer too much on the side of women which ultimately means a disadvantage of them as men. The young men already see that women are now being more strongly supported or even “hyped” as they put it.

! *“In my everyday life as I live it I can see that women today certainly are equal.”*

! *“Women get much more favourable attention. If a woman’s good at her job everybody thinks that’s great. If a man is they just say he’s obsessed with his career.”*

! *“It sure is true today that women everywhere get all kinds of help.”*

They understand gender equality policy-making not as policies equally aimed at women and men but rather as promotional measures aimed exclusively at women.

¹⁵ The term „gender equality“ is totally strange in this context; they say „equal opportunities“ when they mean “gender equality”.

¹⁶ Various examples make this clear. For instance, when asked if they’ve ever heard anything about Alice Schwarzer, they reply as with one voice that she must have been some kind of “queen of emancipation”. They have no idea about „when she lived“ or who she is exactly. Their knowledge is extremely threadbare and imprecise.

V.

Overview of Methodology

An Extended Creativity Group (ECG) approach was adopted as the methodological basis of the survey to capture all the relevant – manifest and preconscious – layers of attitudes to the theme. An Extended Creativity Group session lasted for about three hours enabling an in-depth exploration of the theme. Discussions were focussed on particular themes, allowed to develop in a non-directive manner and utilised associative, projective and expressive survey techniques to also take account of preconscious and latent attitudes.

The findings of the survey are representative in the sense that they cover all relevant attitudinal dimensions and facets of perception in the target groups under investigation.

The present survey is based on:

- | 4 group discussions with 20 year old women and men.
- | Recruitment of typical representatives of both sexes in terms of different social status, levels of education and social milieus (using the Sinus social milieu model).
- | Two weeks before the group discussions the candidates selected for them were given an empty “diary” entitled “Role Models” and invited to put down whatever occurred to them about “Role Models for Women” and “Role Models for Men” in writing, drawing or as a collage.
- | Group discussions were steered by researchers of the Sinus Sociovision Institute. A woman led the women’s group and a man the men’s group in an endeavour to avoid gender-related inhibitions and social desirability effects.
- | Group meetings were recorded on video and audio; selected passages were transcribed.
- | The diaries which were presented, commented and discussed in the group meetings, the ECG transcripts, and all products produced during them (mind-maps, psycho-drawings, sortings etc.) were assessed and evaluated by a team over an eight week period. Assessment was informed by the methods of semiological and hermeneutic text interpretation (where “text” and „data“ are also the usual forms of behaviour of the group members and their interactions with one another), and was structured in several phases. It was oriented to the following levels of interpretation:

- | Communicative-oriented interpretation: what was said? What was not said? Semantic analysis of manifest and latent meaning

- | Functional-oriented interpretation: Which aims are the group members pursuing? Which views of reality are they intending to produce? What purpose does this serve? Analysis of manifest and latent reasons and motives

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